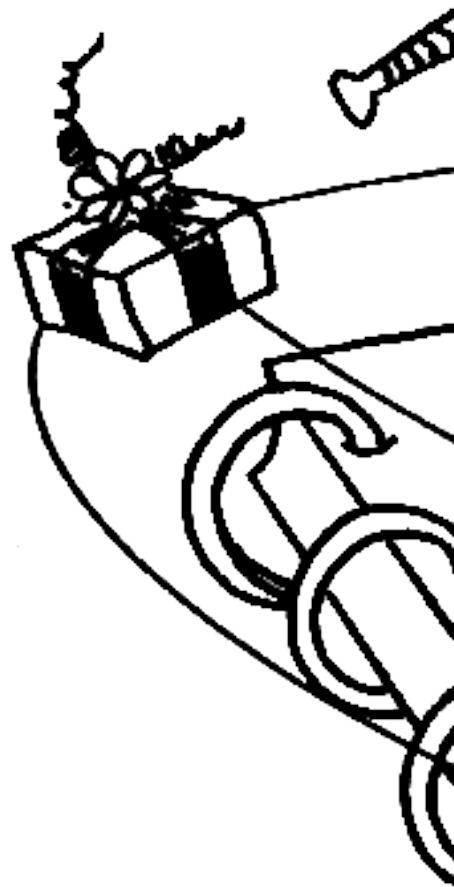


design your dream job!

Get inspired by 10 amazing women who did just that—the winners of the REDBOOK/Silpada Design Your Life Awards.

Wouldn't you love to have work that gave you flexibility *and* fulfillment? Bonnie Kelly and Teresa Walsh created exactly that for themselves when they launched Silpada Designs, a direct-sales jewelry company, in 1997. And today, Silpada is a \$235 million business that teaches and encourages thousands *more* women to find the balance that's right for them. To celebrate the leap of faith women take every day to do what's best for their families and themselves, REDBOOK and Silpada teamed up, issuing a call to women to tell us how they found a way to make the most of both work life *and* home life. As we pored over story after story, we were amazed at all the creative and enterprising women who wrote to us—women who won't settle for anything less than everything they've ever wanted when it comes to reaching their professional and personal goals. "These stories prove that with a passionate dream and a sincere desire to live the life you love, anything is possible," say Kelly and Walsh. "You can design your life *your* way—all you have to do is dream big." Read about these 10 women—entrepreneurs, artists, visionaries—and get inspired to design a life you love! ▶





*"I learned that having it
all just didn't matter."*

—AMY KNAPP

RESETTING GOALS

AMY KNAPP, 42, KALAMAZOO, MI

I used to think I had it all—my own company, a good marriage, and two kids. I didn't realize "it all" was not a static state. But then my daughter, Natalie, contracted meningitis when she was just 2 months old. And when my husband, Dave, and I learned she would have long-term medical complications, having it all just didn't seem to matter. So I sold my advertising business to stay home to manage



Natalie's medical needs and also to care for my son, Kyle, who was 2 at the time.

After resetting my personal compass, I realized how tough the stay-at-home thing really was and began searching for an organizer that would help me structure my time. Not finding anything, I created a system in a spiral notebook—not pretty, but very functional. My friends were amazed at how useful my to-do lists, menu-planning charts, and weekly and monthly calendar grids were, and just like that, Amy Knapp's Family Organizer was born. Now, it's a best seller at stores like Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Waldenbooks nationwide. The best part is that I can do it all from my home office. I can work with the kids' schedules (Natalie's 12 now, and Kyle's 14), keep up with the laundry, and be there for the inevitable (but occasional) "Mom, I forgot my gym shoes! Can you bring them?" type of phone call. I travel about once a month for work, and I've learned to use the downtime for me. Friday night in New York City means room service, a glass of wine, and a good chick flick. I never would have thought I'd find balance out of my daughter's diagnosis, or that struggling through my own challenge would help thousands of families manage their own busy lifestyles.



COOKING UP A NEW IDEA

VERONICA BOSGRAAF, 37, HOLLAND, MI

Three years ago, when my then 6-year-old daughter, Anna, decided to become a vegetarian, I began researching recipes and nutrition. At first it was frustrating trying to find healthy, nutrition-packed food that she liked and would eat—even as I was learning the benefits of vegetarianism. I was being challenged in the kitchen and was constantly on the hunt for convenient packaged food that was healthy (virtually impossible). Finally, I began experimenting with making healthy, portable snacks in the kitchen and created a recipe for a bar made with organic ingredients that contained omega-3s and protein—it tasted great! At the same time, I was looking for a professional challenge after being a stay-at-home mom, and I thought there might be a need for this product.

"I think it's good for my children to watch me build a company."

I was right! After a year of making my bars for friends and family, I took a leap of faith and launched the Pure Bar. Now, two years after its launch, over half a million Pure Bars have been sold nationwide. To keep a balance, I do the bulk of my work while my kids are in school. I believe so strongly in what our company does to promote healthy organic food, and I think it's good for my children to watch their mom build a company. I'm thankful—and amazed—at the door my daughter opened for me!



NETWORKING TOWARD SUCCESS

ELEANOR CHATTO, 47, SOUTH PORTLAND, ME

When I was pregnant with my son, Sam, I put together what I thought was a reasonable plan to return to work as a business manager at an investment firm. But once my son was born, I realized my true dream was to be able to stay at home with Sam while still pursuing some sort of productive work. I began networking to see where I might be able to fit my skills with my schedule. One of the managers at my former employer was the treasurer of a local nonprofit and asked if I'd be willing to volunteer to help them with some accounting problems. After a few months of volunteering with my son in a backpack carrier, I was hired as a contract bookkeeper. I only worked about five hours a month, but that was the start of my bookkeeping business. In the meantime, I slowly added to my client list by letting friends and acquaintances know what I was doing. I kept my expenses at a minimum by perusing the classified ads for a well-priced, barely used laptop, and my desk was a folding chair. The day I purchased my first new computer for my business was a landmark.

"Quitting my office job turned out to be the best thing I ever did."

Last year, I grossed about \$45,000 a year for about 20 hours a week of work. Quitting my office job turned out to be the best thing I ever did. I was able to raise my son, plus I had time to exercise and volunteer. Now, I've begun thinking about that day in the near future when my son heads off to college—he's 16—so I enrolled in a course in forensic accounting and fraud examination to expand my business as a certified fraud examiner. I'm looking forward to the next chapter in my story and plan to continue to make my dream work for me.



*"I've let go
of the guilt."*

TAKING A LEAP

HEIDI HELLER NIEHART, 41, SAN DIEGO

Seven years ago, when I was pregnant with my first child, Taylor, I came up with an idea for an interactive, educational children's television program. I was running an event business at the time, but when I became pregnant with my second child two years later, I decided it was time to see if I could get the concept off the ground. I contacted a local public access studio to see what resources were available, and found the people I spoke with were just as enthusiastic about the idea as I was! I approached a friend who had a background in theater and child development and asked if she wanted to partner with me. She said yes. We moved into a professional studio after three episodes, with the end result being a fantastic children's DVD and craft-kit series called Tot-a-Doodle-Do! Now, two years later, the products are sold online and at boutiques nationwide. ►

The 10 things that pulled me through the launch are:

1. A great husband who shares 50-50 in the house and allows me to use our life savings
2. A home office that keeps me accessible to business and my family
3. A work schedule that allows days in the office and days with the kids
4. A good, trustworthy babysitter
5. An elliptical trainer in the guest bedroom to keep my mind and heart healthy
6. A group of girlfriends to play mah-jongg with once a month (an excuse to decompress and laugh!)
7. Supportive parents and mother-in-law
8. An ever-sharpening intuition that lets me know when my children need more time and when my business needs more time
9. Letting go of the guilt
10. Knowing there will be good mommy days and bad mommy days—and hoping I know the difference!

BECOMING THE BOSS

KATHY CROWDER,
44, NEWPORT COAST, CA

When I was 25, I was laid off from a financial business-analyst job. It was tough, but I knew one thing for sure: I never wanted a “job” again. I wanted to start my own business. I started looking into everything from retail stores to Taco Bell franchises. Through my research, I discovered I wanted a business that was only open daytime hours during the week, since I knew I wanted to have children in the future and didn’t want to have to worry about the business on nights or weekends. As I found potential opportunities that fit my criteria, I discovered a roadblock:

“I didn’t want a ‘job’—I wanted my own business.”

Even though I had great credit, I didn’t have a lot of money. I applied for a Small Business Administration loan but was turned down due to lack of experience.

At that point, I persuaded the sellers of one franchise to finance the purchase of a Molly Maid home-cleaning business. I figured when I paid off the loan, I would be my own boss and make more money than I had working 45 hours at my previous job. Today, I own one of the largest Molly Maid franchises in the world. On the family front, after two failed adoptions, I used a surrogate to have my daughter, Savannah, who is a year old. Now, I only work two days a week so I have time to spend with her—not to mention the triplets I’m about to have via the same surrogate!



PRIORITIZING HER NEEDS

DONNA AUCOIN, 38, LAFAYETTE, LA

I began my career as a psychologist in 1998, working full-time for a mental-health agency. I married my husband, Preston, a year later, and we had our first child in 2002. Shortly after, with my increasing work and family demands, I began to feel ineffective at keeping everything together. At one point, I remember staring down at my son, Preston Neil, and wondering how adding one little baby could cause so much havoc in my

life! Looking for guidance, I met with a life coach who helped me create a mental picture of what I wanted: I wanted more time for my family and for myself. I wanted to attend parties at my son’s preschool without a major production. I wanted more time to create, exercise, paint my nails, and be with friends. She helped me recognize that I had the power to make changes.

“I wanted more time to create, exercise, paint my nails, and be with friends.”

I realized I’d have to open up a private psychological practice to have the flexibility I needed. Still, it was difficult to make the leap from a predictable paycheck to a fluctuating income. Furthermore, I was daunted by the expenses that were sure to go along with office overhead. So I began collecting inexpensive furniture from secondhand stores, hitting sales for computer equipment, and paring down personal expenses—I remember my husband once asking me at the grocery store if we could afford pickles!

After a few months, I found an office suite and invited another therapist to join me in the practice. Now, we have a waiting list! I work a flexible schedule three days a week—on those days I’ve enlisted the help of my sister-in-law to prepare and deliver three healthy and delicious meals to our family at a reasonable price—and a part-time in-home assistant helps provide child care for Preston Neil and my daughter, Allie. I’m living my dream!



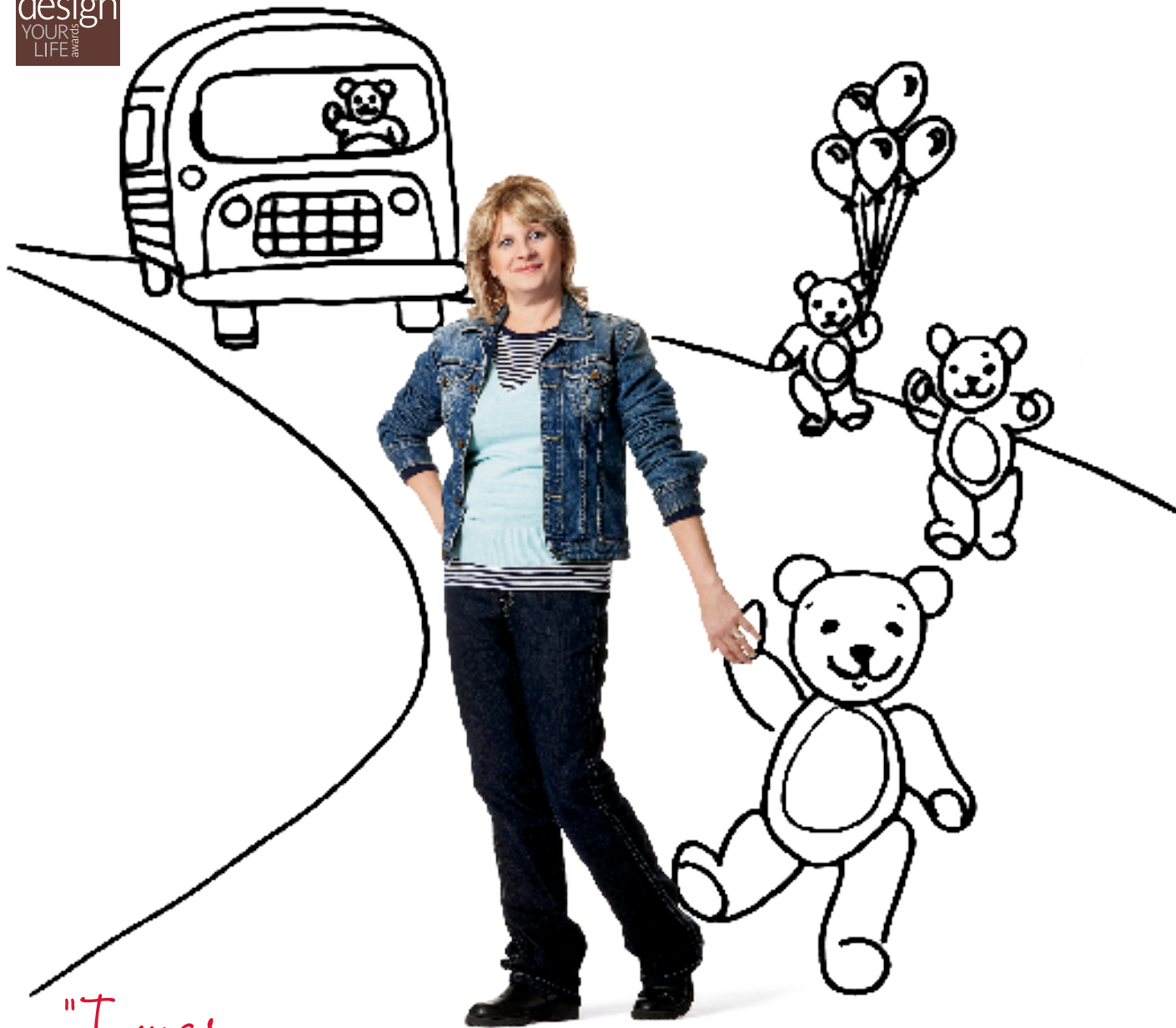
CREATING A CAREER

LEAH JACOB, 31, MASON, OH

It was always my intention to create a life that allowed for a balance between my work and family. Even when I was 14 and realized I wanted to pursue the goal of being a classical cellist and teacher, I knew that I also wanted to make enough time for my future husband and kids. Right now, I have three children—including my daughter, Elena, born just this past November. As a cellist, I balance 30 private cello students, play in the local symphony, manage a wedding trio that plays on weekends and run a camp each summer called Cellissimo.

“My job is so much fun it feels like me-time!”

The best part? I do all this without spending more than \$80 a month on babysitting. I stay home during the day with my kids, and some of my teenage students babysit in the afternoon in exchange for private lessons. My job is so much fun it feels like me-time! My husband, Craig, enjoys spending solo time with the kids while I’m performing at weddings, and we still have plenty of time as a family to go to the park, go on vacation, and eat dinner together five or six nights a week! ►



"I was capable of juggling, but I never felt inspired."

FORGING HER OWN FUN PATH

LISA ELLIS, 45, CLIFTON PARK, NY

I was a single mom to two girls and worked three jobs for four years, and although I was capable of juggling, I never felt inspired—more like exhausted. When I met my second husband, Andy, an accountant and coworker at a food pantry, things began to settle down. At the time, I also owned a store in the mall that had a build-your-own-stuffed-animal component. It was a popular spot for kids' parties, but parents hated that they would have to leave the store and finish the party elsewhere. One day, a customer asked if I could bring everything to her house, so I went off with my animals and stuffing in the back of my husband's truck. A few days later, after hearing how well the party went, my husband drove home a little yellow school bus and the Bear Bus was born!

We started working at fairs and festivals during the summer and on weekends, as well as parties. My daughters were 12 and 10 at the time, and they would come with us, helping the customers for a bit and then exploring the fair. Now, they're 19 and 17, and I still enlist them to help me with birthday parties. Last year, I sold my first franchise of the Bear Bus, and can't wait to see where it goes next. Right now, my mom is in a nursing home, and I am so thankful that my business gives me the flexibility I need to spend special time with her. ▶



PURSUING HER PASSION

PASCALE WOWAK, 34, BEN LOMOND, CA

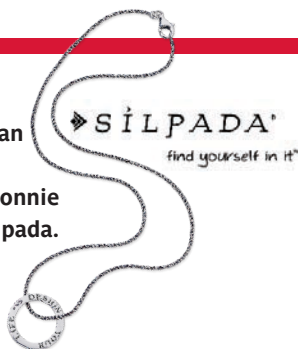
Pre-kids, I had an exciting career as a police officer and firefighter. It was the only job I had ever known, and I defined myself by it. Then, I became a mom. After I made the decision to stay home, I struggled with the loss of my identity and the boredom of staying at home versus having a stimulating career—not to mention the financial hardship that comes from relying on only one income! I wanted to work in some capacity, but I was afraid that because all I'd ever done was public safety, I was incapable of doing anything else. I had always liked photography, but after my son was born, I found myself really wanting to capture his milestones and his essence on film.

"I had no idea I would be so good at something that was so different from everything I've ever known."

I immersed myself in photography books and began relearning the basics to try to get in touch with the artistic side of photography. When my daughter was born two years later, I started my own business. I discovered I have a natural aptitude for capturing people, babies and children in particular. My focus has always been to catch the loving relationships and funny moments that naturally occur within a family, all while doing so in such a technically sound manner as to produce amazing results.

Now, three years later, the business is successful—I'm booked months in advance! I plan most of my shoots in the evening, when my husband is home, and work late at night editing images. I can take on as much, or as little, work as is needed by my family at any given time. I had no idea that I would be so good at something that is so different from everything I've ever known or done. I realized you can, with hard work and perseverance, create the situation you want in life rather than waiting for it to appear.

Congratulations to the winners and a special thanks to Silpada, which provided each woman here with a Design Your Life necklace and a custom sterling silver jewelry look. To read Bonnie and Teresa's story, go to redbookmag.com/silpada.



CARVING OUT ME-TIME

LEANITA RAGLAND-BROOKS,
46, WINNETKA, IL

"I don't even know how you do it!"

There isn't a week that goes by when someone doesn't say this to me. I'm a vice president at JP Morgan Chase, where I'm responsible for a \$2.8 billion portfolio, but I'm also the editor of my daughter's school memory book, a room mom for my son's Sunday School class, a sustainer director at the Junior League, and a member of the Winnetka Women's Club. I also display and sell my own jewelry at several art galleries around town.

I've always been busy, but it wasn't until I had my children, Brandon, 12, and Alex, 8, that I truly learned the value of balance. When I was pregnant with my daughter, I took a sales leadership position and moved my family from Chicago to Dallas. My husband commuted from Chicago weekly during the three years we lived in Texas. During that period in my life, I realized life is a marathon, not a sprint, and that's what's kept me going.

Now, since I travel 40 percent of the time for work, I add me-time in the form of visiting a museum or seeing a play to the front or back end of a trip to prevent burnout. I create opportunities to spend meaningful moments with my family and friends. In the mornings, I enjoy the sunrise as I walk an hour along Chicago's North Shore. My daughter and I design jewelry together and on weekends we get manicures and pedicures. My son and I play video games and read, and my husband and I enjoy art fairs and socializing together. At the end of the day, no matter how hectic, I revel in living in the moment! 