

Jane Doolan

Ajò let's go...



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The Triumph of Experience - when I reflect on this phrase it quite accurately describes how I have tried to live most of my life. I learn by doing, and I have always trusted my instinct. When I have not listened to that inner voice it has not gone well. That is not to say I don't take advice, I do, in fact I'm a compulsive sharer and love to bounce ideas off third parties, but at the end of the day I trust my gut.

I'm impulsive by nature, endlessly optimistic and curious. As a self-employed film producer and distributor, my whole working life has been balanced rather precariously on my belief in things turning out well. If I were to look too far ahead, I wouldn't get up in the morning.

One of the more radical impulses I've acted on was to pack in two full-time jobs I was juggling, pack up my three children, rent my house and take off to an island in the Mediterranean. An island I had visited only once, a month prior to departure and chosen because it was recommended as cheaper than Tuscany and with the best sea in Italy.

Sardinia offered a year of freedom with my partner and our three children, a chance to step off a wheel of non-stop work, which had me constantly getting ill and grumpy (not sure if the grumpiness has been entirely eradicated). We had no sooner set foot in Alghero than the writing/directing partner got offered a job in South Africa. Six months' work directing a TV movie in South Africa is not turned down when your other half has just packed in the day job and decided to take a year out! So off he goes to earn the crust and there I am: not a word of Italian and with the three young ones aged 8, 4, and 2.



We attempted and failed with one week of home school and I decided against 'try again, fail again, fail better' - so we went to the beach. Eldest girl was never without a good book, sorted, and the younger two were still below official school-going age in Italy. And so we learned a lot - how to be together, how to fish badly - and excelled at how to chase the two-year-old who never stayed still. It was generally a good thing that English was not widely understood as this rather dishevelled Irish woman roared "*I'll murder you, batter you and break your legs*" at the three undeserving urchins. I was lonely; this was life before Skype and smartphones so there was the odd fraught call to South Africa. I seriously questioned my sanity, why I had left a comfortable home surrounded by a family support system. We carried on regardless, well, we had no choice and I soon realised that I had had so little time to actually be with myself or my kids in Ireland with the pressures of work. I became more gentle with them and myself. I still occasionally threatened them!

After four months our adventure continued to South Africa where we spent another five months, which was an altogether different experience. Starting with the 14-hour flight and the winter vomiting bug. I arrived in South Africa thinking of *Out of Africa* and wildlife, only to be disappointed by traffic and the Waterfront in Cape Town, which may as well have been the Financial Services Centre. Suddenly we were in a luxury apartment on the fourth floor with the Duracell two-year-old and wrap-around low balconies. We decamped to Camps Bay and the following four months were a full immersion in South African life. I put the kids into a school, as you can't just hang out in South Africa, it's organised and you spend a lot of time looking over your shoulder.



It was an amazing time and we did get to experience Karen Blixen's wildlife, we even swam with penguins in Simonstown. However, it was apparent if we stayed there for longer (we thought about it as there was a thriving film community) we would be conditioned into a way of living and a concept of freedom and equality that could easily get twisted. We had to follow rules: I had been told never to get out of my car late at night if there was anyone suspicious hanging about. I was coming home late with the kids one night, and there were two guys beside where I needed to pull in to get in the hall door. I circled the area once, twice, but they didn't leave. I then went and found my partner who was working late and he came home with us. The two guys were still there. We drove around once and then finally said, "*fuck this*" and got out and lifted three now sleeping kids into the house. The guys kept their distance and nodded. We closed the door thinking we had safely avoided a carjacking. The next morning when we went out to the car there was a note on it, *Hi, we are your neighbourhood car watch for Kloof Street*. That did it for me, I couldn't stay: I had been suspicious of two guys who had been doing nothing, because I had been told to be suspicious. Maybe they could have been carjackers, but they weren't; that was enough for me, I couldn't live like that.

And so we came back to Sardinia. I'm not really sure why, but Ireland was about to go into economic collapse, it was 2007, and our year away had been a bit fragmented and felt unfinished. A bit like film development, who says 12 months is enough, a year, two years, what defines the time? But unlike life, a film demands closure and ultimately production. I began to produce again and found projects connected between Ireland and Italy that resonated with my Irish and new found Sardo sensibilities.



It has been tough continuing to work across two countries, but I do it with a new perspective. I think I frame what is important with a keener sense of purpose. I am still dismayed as I continue to see young women struggling with careers and childcare, we still have a long way to go to ensure we are giving everyone the right work/life balance and opportunities. In our digital world with its endless appetite for speed, which so often defines efficiency, I have come to believe the opposite. I am with the tortoise not the hare. Why the rush?



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***Jane Doolan** has worked for over 30 years in film. She began her career in advertising, producing commercials for Saatchi and Saatchi, and went on to become a producer with Little Bird and producer/distributor with her own company Mammoth Films. She has produced and distributed films with credits from **Into The West** to **Trainspotting**, more recent credits include producer of **L'Accabadora**, **Citizen Lane** and **MAZE**. Jane continues to live and work between Ireland and Italy with her partner and their now grown-up and bilingual children.*
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