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Key to a happy family life? Embrace “less is more”

Instead of divorce papers, struggling couple signed something else – a one-year lease in Italy

NEW YORK – For even the most stable of couples, the daily pace of American life is often enough to shake a loving foundation. Cell phones ring at dinner. Emails demand a response. Kids need driving to school, soccer, SAT prep classes. Why is it that the closer we get to the American Dream, the further we drift from each other?

Tired, empty and disillusioned after 18 years of married life, Susan Pohlman was ready to call it quits. But in her new memoir *Halfway to Each Other: How a Year in Italy Brought Our Family Home* (Guideposts, September 25, 2009, \$22.00, Hardcover), Pohlman tells the story of how her broken marriage received the healing it desperately needed – after she and her family left their busy lives behind.

As soon as she and her husband wrapped up a business trip in Italy, Pohlman planned to break the news that she wanted to end their marriage. But as they walked along the coast during their last day, Tim, her husband, put forward quite a different idea. “We could live here,” he said.

At first, Pohlman dismissed the notion as nonsense. “I had invested too much time and pain in my decision,” she said. “I was not going to be derailed by some romantic stroll along the sea.”

Despite her initial resistance however, Pohlman soon felt an overwhelming urge to give their marriage another try. “Setting all logic aside, my husband and I made a most unexpected decision fueled by faith, grace and hope. We moved our family to Italy,” says Pohlman. “Our marital therapist called it an elaborate scheme of avoidance at best.”

Within two months, she, Tim, and their two children (Katie, 15, and Matt, 11), were riding up a tiny elevator to their new home: an internetless, phoneless, and television-less apartment in Nervi, a small village on the Italian Riviera. Upon arrival, their children were less than impressed – even experiencing tears and panic attacks. But slowly, as the family slipped out of the constraints of their fast-paced American lifestyle, all found something far sweeter: having traded in the American Dream, the Pohlmans created a dream of their own.

“I could see, with sudden clarity, the downfalls of all the ‘stuff’ we had surrounded our children with at home,” says Pohlman. “Matt couldn’t hide in his PlayStation. Katie couldn’t insulate herself in a world of instant messages. We did not have the resources or the wherewithal here to make decisions about each child’s ‘uniqueness.’ I hadn’t realized that that was a privileged way of life.”

By actively simplifying their lives, struggling to learn a foreign language, and navigate their new Italian lifestyle, the Pohlmans learned what it felt like to be on the same team again. “You don’t need to go all the way to Italy to learn these lessons,” says Pohlman. “But I learned that overplanning our family’s life was stifling the fun of discovery. Now, instead of viewing life as a series of achievements, I cultivate adventure wherever I can.”

The remarkable story of an ordinary family who start life over, *Halfway to Each Other* offers hope to readers who yearn to listen to their hearts, and embrace a rich new beginning.

Susan Pohlman is an educator and freelance writer. She lives in Scottsdale, Ariz. with her husband and two children. To learn more, visit www.susanpohlman.com.

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To schedule an interview with Pohlman, or to receive a review copy of *Halfway to Each Other*, please contact Tolly Moseley at (512) 478-2028 ext. 213 or tmoseley@phenixpublicity.com.