

LateFIRE - The Beginning

This post marks the start of a new series and a new voice to the GYFG community. We all come from different walks of life and each journey is unique. What brings us together is the common goal of financial independence, whether that be LeanFIRE, FatFIRE, or FlexFIRE (I just made that last one up for those of us who want to work forever, but not because we have to). I realized a long time ago that not everyone can relate to my story for many reasons, a gap in age being a big one. Nonetheless, I constantly remind people that it's not where you start in life but where you finish that counts.

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” – Chinese Proverb

The good news for the GYFG reader- regardless of age – is that here we preach the “get rich fast” philosophy, which hopefully provides some hope and relief for the older crowd, who are feeling the crunch of a disappearing runway into retirement, fearing that the light at the end of the tunnel may just be an oncoming train! These are people that are finding the FI movement later in their life (in their late 40's and early 50's). This is a new FIRE on the scene, called “LateFIRE.” Since I don't have the perspective of what it's like starting this journey later in life, I've asked a relatively new friend to share her family's journey in this new monthly series.

Think of this new series as a column in a newspaper or magazine. If you find it funny or odd that I liken this to a column in a newspaper, it's likely because you are part of a younger generation, post-Generation X. Those in Generation X or older likely find this analogy to make perfect sense: without blogs, growing up and early in their careers, they got a lot of the information they consumed from newspapers and magazines (e.g., Jonathan Clements' long-running column in the Wall Street Journal 1994 - 2008 was incredibly influential in the personal finance world, and he now writes over at www.HumbleDollar.com). I imagine a recurring column is where they would have followed along with a story like this.

It takes a lot of courage to open yourself up like this and so I thank Lin, our new regular contributor, for stepping up to share a new perspective and her family's unique journey to FI. We can all learn from each other. Comments are appreciated,

especially helpful strategic comments, and of course it goes without saying...be nice!

Well...How Did I Get Here?

Any Talking Heads fans out there? Right on. Well...how *did* I get here?

At a small business seminar, listening to a “financial advisor” speak, my husband and I weighed out signing on the dotted line or not. Suddenly, a tiny spark of good sense ignited: google this guy. By a circuitous path, I found a review of him on a site called www.WhiteCoatInvestor.com. Because of that review, we did *not* sign on the dotted line.

But the best part about that search is the whole new world that opened up to me via WCI: there are financial *bloggers* out there! People, smart people, writing on many topics within this niche! I dove in deep...and promptly began to drown.

I have always enjoyed reading about financial themes ([The Millionaire Next Door](#)[✖], [Dave Ramsey](#), [The Richest Man in Babylon](#)[✖]) and fancied myself somewhat knowledgeable. But this was next level: people two to three decades younger than myself maxing out retirement accounts early in the year, investing beyond that, back door Roth-ing it, creating personal investment statements. They were well on their way to “Financial Independence, Retire Early,” aka FIRE.

Did you catch the “two to three decades younger” part?

I knew things were not optimal for us; although my husband and I have been working very hard all these years raising three kids and running his business, we have done many things simply by the seat of our pants. There was no overarching financial plan beyond taking care of the people who depend on us and trying to “get ahead.”

We have done ok, year to year. We’ve been able to provide for our family through some pretty tough situations that required us to dig deep. Many times we were the “go to” siblings on both sides of our extended family, providing financial assistance in acute times of need. We donated to our church and other causes and people we believed in. We stayed – mostly – out of consumer debt. We bought our own houses and even “flipped” a couple. Somehow this all worked...I think by brute force, really. We always had reasonable cash flow from the business which made it possible.

But we have had some major reversals, too: getting swindled out of most of a six-figure inheritance by someone we did NOT google, paying for a child's addictions and mental health issues with both our heartache and pocketbook, buying our "big" house in 2005 and watching 50% of our equity evaporate by the time we sold it in 2010. Oh, and then paying to settle a lawsuit waged by the new owners against us (it's costly to fight, even when you're right).

And as far as an organized budget or plan for the future? Not so much. For most of this rodeo ride, I really never even knew how much we spent - or made - in a year. Retirement accounts? I thought we had started a couple of IRAs, but knew we didn't regularly contribute. Obviously no pension as self-employed, but didn't I have something in a State Fund from the 2.5 years I had taught public school before having babies? Didn't know! Health savings account (HSA)? Yes, but we always spent whatever we put into it. Life insurance? Disability?

We worked with a financial advisor early in my husband's career who had set up a few things for us, but I remembered that we had tapped into at least some of it to buy that big house, and I really didn't even know what was still in place or how much was there.

The tide of day to day life spent on the sidelines of soccer games and dance recitals, summer camping trips and school years filled our days and years. It went fast. **So fast.** And when I stopped to look up...there we were, middle-aged.

By the time I discovered the world of financial bloggers and the concept of FIRE, we were well into our 50s. The "E" train of FIRE had left the station long ago.

What did I really *really* know about all this? *Sh*t*, that's what. Talk about a humbling experience. I didn't even know what the starting point was, let alone how to chart the course or aim the vehicle.

Humility is the beginning then. Humility and insomnia.

Although it may seem obvious, it must be stated: a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The first step on this journey was actually first-step-minus-one: deciding to take the journey at all. Deciding to take action despite being terrified of what I would find out, despite fearing I was too late to make a difference. Leaving behind the paralysis of shame. Embracing the raw fact that I didn't know what I was doing and I needed to learn more. Deciding to quit living each day swept

up in wasteful busyness that consumes the only minutes (1440) and hours (24) available to me each day to do my part to get our um...situation...together.

Now the actual step one: I had to figure out where the heck we were. What accounts did we have, and what was in them? What was our total picture IN THAT MOMENT of any retirement accounts, debt, savings? What did we spend on a daily, monthly, yearly basis? What was our true income? We seemed to always have enough, but **how much** did we have?

In the beginning were the questions!

Bottom line: what were our assets (the monetary value of what we had) and what were our liabilities (what did we owe)? Most of the years of our married life, my husband had paid the bills and done the heavy lifting in getting our “planner” filled out for our accountant to prepare our tax return. My role in that was to assemble information he asked for as best I could, and make myself scarce as he wrestled the numbers. But that arrangement wasn’t going to suffice for this endeavor. We needed to take action like the grown-ups we were.

My record keeping (or lack thereof) was ridiculous. With some really *really* busy family years and four moves in recent years behind us, I had often employed the “pile” method of record keeping: opening and piling the mail (taking out the bills to pay), and later shifting the piles to another room, or ultimately a big Rubbermaid container. Now I had all my mother’s paperwork as well: when her Alzheimer’s Disease progressed, I took over her monthly bill paying and moved all her personal information to my house.

So embarrassing. The room designated as “office” had started to look a little scary. Not like an episode of Hoarders, but just saying... The ice cream cone of shame: I’ll take a triple please. Action step number one: I hired a professional organizer. Took us five days, a few tears (going through stuff like old paid medical bills can take you back, and is surprisingly emotional) and a second shredder, when the first one burned out. (I actually found over \$6000 during that process, but that’s another story.)

Then it really began. Writing down all our liquid accounts and credit cards. Finding the investment and IRA accounts, and what was in them. Inputting all of those into a [Personal Capital](#) account so I could see our actual net worth.

Reading and reading and reading. Reaching out to smarter, more experienced people in the financial blogging world for help (brilliant youngsters like Dom@GYFG), learning from the forums and trying hard not to compare, to not play the regret game of “if only we had started this years ago,” which is usually accompanied by a special flaming dance of foot-stomping and hair-pulling. Measuring every expenditure with a new eye, cutting what we deemed unworthy of our dollars (I’m looking at you, \$1500/year cable bill). Reassessing habits to wake up a new consciousness as spenders, so that what we did spend on was truly meaningful and valuable to us. Acknowledging what of our adult children’s expenses belong to them, and not to us.

So here we are.

We aren’t at the middle, or even at the end of the beginning. We may be late to the FIRE party, but we’re here. We are traveling forward together. We are LateFIRE.

- Lin



Gen Y Finance Guy

Hey, I’m Dom - the man behind the cartoon. You’ll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I’m a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)

