

KATHY SLACK ENGLAND

After ditching her high-powered career, Kathy found her ikigai through her passion for food.

I WORKED IN ADVERTISING IN

London for 12 years and while the job had a lovely pay cheque, it also had long hours and lots of international travel. Some people find that thrilling and glamorous, but I found it soul-destroying. I don't know if it was the jet lag or long hours, but I had a breakdown by the end.

We had moved out of London to the Cotswolds five years earlier. I had been commuting to London and that was the nail in the coffin. I quit my job with no idea what to do next. I was financially secure as I'd saved a bit and my husband was working so I knew we weren't going to be on the breadline. I had no plan and no expectations. I wasn't worried about money because I was just trying to get out of bed in the morning.

I just started doing what I enjoyed, which was spending time in my vegetable patch and cooking. I started writing a blog called 'Gluts & Gluttony' about the food I was growing, and eventually started working for a vegetable grower at an organic farm near us. I worked in the farm shop and then in the cookery school and kitchen.

Suddenly I had time, space and no agenda. That was hugely liberating. Having something that I loved doing was very restorative. I felt like I was building myself back up into something different, having been taken apart.

When I think about ikigai, I think that the more of those principles you can tick off, the more fulfilled you feel. I was pretty good at advertising and I got paid nicely, but the two most important bits – what you love and what the world needs – were missing. With 'Gluts & Gluttony', I've got a better balance. It may not change the world but the world needs it, I love it and I think it's the only thing I can do. The "getting paid for it" bit is perhaps something I need to work on a bit more! But you make a choice. I'd certainly rather be happier with a small pay packet than miserable with a big one, because I've tried both. And this way is much nicer. glutsandgluttony.com



Brit Kathy Slack began working with food during a career break. She found the change therapeutic and has made the switch permanently. "I'd certainly rather be happier with a small pay packet than miserable with a big one," she says.

Discovering your Ikigai

At the heart of the Japanese concept of ikigai is the idea that a life worth living is found in the intersection of passion, mission, profession & vocation. MiNDFOOD speaks to four women from across the globe who have found this elusive balance.

AS TOLD TO LINDY ALEXANDER

The Japanese idea of ikigai is a powerful way of explaining our purpose in life and our reason for being. Ikigai has four overlapping qualities or principles: what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs and what you can be paid for. At the

centre is your ikigai – the convergence of your values, passions and talents that make your life worthwhile.

Although ikigai derives from Japan, it's an idea that resonates deeply with many people globally. Four women share how following their passion led to their ikigai.

Ikigai has its origins on the Japanese island of Okinawa.



Jacky Habib has turned 'voluntourism' on its head, helping visitors learn from locals and challenging what they think they know about the developing world.

JACKY HABIB CANADA

Media trainer Jacky felt there was something meaningful missing from overseas volunteer programs. She decided to flip the usual model on its head to benefit both volunteers and locals, and in the process, she discovered her ikigai.

I WAS WORKING AS A MEDIA trainer for Journalists for Human Rights in Ghana in 2013-14 and I started thinking about how lots of Westerners volunteer overseas in developing countries, but often just end up feeling sorry for the people they are helping. I felt like there was an opportunity to develop something that was better for local communities and travellers. I wondered if I could solve the problem by running socially conscious, 'reverse volunteer' trips, where we learn from locals rather than help them.

I started New Lens Travel, where we run storytelling trips to Ghana and Kenya. We partner with African media professionals and creatives such as filmmakers and journalists on the ground. These are really incredible people who are bright thinkers and know what's happening in their local communities. It's an opportunity for participants to think differently about any assumptions they might have had about the continent previously,

and to actually see and experience something for themselves rather than taking whatever news or pop culture presents about this part of the world.

When you look at ikigai, you think, 'What a sweet spot to be in that centre!' And it really is if you manage to find all of those things and blend them together in your work. Because it's more than just your work, it becomes your life. My work is my life in a good way, because I really love what I do. But I don't want to present things in a perfect light. I don't walk around thinking, 'How lucky am I that I'm getting paid and doing something the world needs?' I've been guided by certain values that are really important to me, and I've made decisions based on my priorities.

New Lens Travel combines the things I love, which is travel, working with people and making a social impact. It's been really affirming speaking to storytellers in Africa who say, "Yes, this is what's

Ikigai, pronounced "ee-key-guy", roughly translates to "reason for being".

"My work is my life in a good way because I really love what I do."

JACKY HABIB

needed to shift the way that people think about Africa and approach travelling to Africa".

I think it's much easier to find something you love, that the world needs, and that you're good at. The paid-for part is quite tricky. I intentionally created a social enterprise. I didn't create it in the charitable model because I didn't want to have to ask people for donations and create that dependence from the very beginning.

I believed that ikigai was possible even if I didn't have a word to describe it. Deep down, I wanted and thought it was possible to find something that I loved, that the world needed, that I was good at, and that could make me money too.

I think because I had such a deep, firm belief in that over the years, I have trained myself to look for opportunities and seek out the places and people that would support me in getting to that sweet spot. newlenstravel.com

Finding your ikigai is rewarding, but not the end of hard work, says Kathy Fray: "I have always told our kids that finding their purpose will fill them with happiness, but they also realise it's not an instant entitled occurrence."



KATHY FRAY NEW ZEALAND

Being broke with three young children to look after forced Kathy to re-evaluate her life and eventually, unearth her ikigai.

MY KIDS WERE LITTLE WHEN THE New Zealand economy plunged and it became incredibly tough for my carpenter husband to find consistent work. He ended up taking on a long-term contract, which meant he was out of town Monday to Friday for the next two years.

I had suddenly gone from being a high-achieving, frequent-flying travel industry executive living in our dream home, to being flat broke with three pre-schoolers living in a small basement flat with a tiny kitchenette. Life officially sucked. During those depressing years, the two constant

joys in my life were my solid marriage and three healthy, happy kids. But motherhood was hard. Rewarding? Yes. Fulfilling? Yes. But it was tougher than I had ever imagined it was going to be. And all those pious and 'perfect mother' craft guidebooks really annoyed me.

I was lonely and bored in the evenings so I began to write. It was cathartic at first, but over many months I realised I had actually written a book. My first book, *Oh Baby ... Birth, Babies and Motherhood Uncensored* (2016, Random House), was published

just before I made the Mount Everest-challenging move to start a midwifery degree with three young children.

During my third pregnancy I remember telling people, "I know what I want to do when these babes are a bit older – I'm going to become a midwife."

My life is now entrenched in everything maternity-related. I'm a senior midwife who has caught about 500 babies. I'm a best-selling maternity author and I'm also a founding director of the global inaugural conference on integrative maternity healthcare.

"The more I learn about ikigai, the more I realise it has played out so specifically in my life."

KATHY FRAY

The more I learn about ikigai, the more I realise it has played out so specifically in my life. I love helping mums-to-be learn how to become informed and empowered by the birth process instead of uninformed and scared. And the world needs more old-school, wise-woman wisdom passed onto mums who are so socially connected but physiologically disconnected with their own uterosexuality.

You hear people tout, "Do what you love and you'll never work another day in your life", but I feel that is over-simplifying reality. I have always told our kids that finding their purpose will fill them with happiness, but they also realise it's not an instant entitled occurrence.

It has taken nearly two decades for me to forge a career that truly is finally something I love that I'm good at doing, which is also an expertise the world needs and is prepared to pay well for.

If you asked me two decades ago what job I never want to do, I would have replied, "Anything to do with needles, blood or hospitals". Well, how wrong we can be about ourselves!

Twenty years ago I hadn't yet gone through the freaking awful journey of "losing the lot" in order to "gain my lot". kathyfray.com

To help find your ikigai, one recommendation is to stay active and not retire.

RENEE CATT AUSTRALIA

When Renee started sharing the lessons of her stressful divorce with others, she stumbled upon her ikigai.

MY TSUNAMI OF A DIVORCE LED me to discover my ikigai. After my divorce, I found myself helping people going through similar situations and someone said that I was the “divorce go-to girl”. That’s when I realised there was more to what I was doing than just listening to people. I had been through the whole system with lawyers and court and it was highly stressful. I really believed there was a different way that two people could separate.

I started my blog, ‘Divorce Go To Girl’, which was a sassy but practical look at divorce.

One day my lawyer suggested I study mediation. I had never considered it before. So I studied mediation and family dispute resolution and started Separation Success, which is a business built on doing the healing first because I know hurting people hurt others. I wondered what would happen if you could stop the hurting right at the start. My business is all about coaching people to separate from a place of kindness.

“The world needs this. Divorce is one of life’s most stressful events.”

RENEE CATT

Ikigai and the intersection of what you love, what you’re good at, what the world needs and what you get paid for describes my life 100 per cent. The world needs this. Divorce is ranked as one of life’s most stressful events. I help change that and bring in love and kindness. Once you can deal with the emotional side of divorce, then you can get through everything else. And I see the change in people. Their lives change and their separation outcomes are different and that just lights me up.


It’s never been about the money for me, although when you’re in business, you do need to be in it for

Ikigai: The Japanese secret to a long and happy life (2017) is an international bestseller.

prosperity. People don’t tend to value free things anyway. You’ve got to put a price on it. Everything I do comes from a place of love and I align my values to everything I do.

I’m the right person for this because people can hear my passion and purpose and they can see that I really want to help. People tell me that they can relate to me because I’ve been through divorce and have empathy, but I’ve got professional credentials as well.

I am pulled to do this work. I feel excited by it and know that I’m making a difference. Whenever I’ve heard about finding your purpose in life, I always thought that was for rock stars and the sporting elite. I

never thought that a girl from the suburbs could have a purpose, but I really do. divorcegotogirl.com 



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Find out more about the Ikigai way and how to integrate it into your life. Ken Mogi, author of *The Little Book of Ikigai*, shares his wisdom. mindfood.com/ikigai



Renee Catt helps others deal with the emotional side of divorce. This new direction has helped her find her ikigai. “I never thought that a girl from the suburbs could have a purpose, but I really do,” she says.