

Interview with Sandra Holmes

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Classic 264

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Sandra Wolod Holmes, called Sandy, called mom, called grandma, is a remarkable woman full of many interests and talents. 62 years old, Sandy has two daughters, Michelle and Rebecca, and four granddaughters, ranging in age from 9 to 21. Sandy was married at age 19 ½ to Cabot Holmes, and they had their first daughter, Michelle, when Sandy was 21. Sandy has an associate's degree in nursing, and is currently a few years away from retirement. She grew up and lived in Michigan City, Indiana for most of her life, with a recent move to Albuquerque, New Mexico for a new job and because Sandy and Cabot share a love of the mountains and culture. Sandy is a runner, a dancer, a cook, a wife, a friend, and the woman I call Grandma. The interview started in the evening, after Sandy's day had finished, and she was relaxing with a glass of wine. She greeted me over the computer with a smile on her lips and a slight bit of trepidation on her face. "This isn't going to be anything to do with testing my knowledge, or history, or anything is it?" After a slight bit of reassurance that, no, she would not need to know who was president in 1922, she began to tell me about her life.

Sandy's day begins when she wakes up around 5:00 A.M.; her first alarm goes off at 5:30, with a second at 5:35, just to make sure she's up. The first thing she does is to make tea and coffee, "Both," she says, "Then I shower after my coffee, then I iron my clothes- iron clothes for myself and for my husband." Then comes breakfast, "I make oatmeal every morning, fresh Irish oats, porridge if you will, with soymilk and these wonderful fresh walnuts. Then I turn on the news, or read the newspaper." Then she's off to work, which starts at 7:30, which means the drive is, "Through a good amount of traffic. I usually take a cup of coffee in the car, which often spills over the front seat." Then up the five flights of stairs to work. "My morning ritual is I take the stairs 5 flights up every day."

Sandy's work, from 7:30 to 4:00 P.M. every weekday is what takes up most of her day. "Right now the majority of my work is with Medicaid, working with people to see if they need to be transferred out of state for an organ transplant, or for better health care, and to see if people meet the requirements to get into a nursing home." At lunch time, "I drive to a church parking lot to eat lunch, weird, I know." Then at 4 P.M. the work day is over, and Sandy gets her workout clothing she'd packed that morning, and go and walk or run down by the river for a half hour. Sandy, at 62 years old, still has a very active physical life, including not only her daily half hour run, but "I do NIA [an hour long movement/dance based workout class] 1 or 2 times a week, and try to do weights 3times, although I only do it 2 times a week sometimes." She takes health supplements to, "try to avoid prescription drugs, and because at least they make you think you're healthy." Many of the supplements are for her high cholesterol, which is, "really my only health problem."

Most days, or whenever she can, Sandy takes care of her flowers and birds after work and working out. She waters her little seedlings, "Hoping they'll grow, because even if they sell them

here doesn't mean it's right for them!" Her garden includes zinnias, cosmos, and poppies, and "Whatever I can," and of course bird feeders. Humming bird feeders with, "nectar- or that sugar and water stuff, you know," and oriole feeders- platters of grape jelly, water, and fresh cut orange slices, "the oriole feeder is like a feast!" Sandy not only prepares feast in the garden, but in the kitchen as well, although not always as happily as for the birds. "The most irritating thing, and something I should probably not do, is pack my husband's lunch." She says that she spends an "awful lot [of money] goes to food. If I lived by myself I think I'd make up a big pot of soup at the beginning of the week and just eat that."

*What else do you around the house?* "I do the dishes, some dishes at least. My husband is getting pretty good at doing stuff around the house, we share responsibility. I guess cleaning the bathroom is my responsibility. I had no responsibility when I was little. When Sandy's own daughters were little they had more responsibilities than she had as a child, but, "They definitely should have had more responsibilities. Ideally they kept their rooms picked up, helped with the dishes, in the kitchen, some cooking... although that was usually stuff they wanted to eat, like pudding..."

When I ask what makes an ideal woman verse and ideal man, Sandy ponders for a while, shaking her head- "I don't know that it's [being a good woman] and different than for a man... honest...trustworthy...loving...respectful...caring...independent, or capable of independence. [A good man is] Pretty much the same--" A slight pause—"No, no, I don't even want to go there..." after slight prodding she eventually goes on with a rueful smile on her face, "They should be able to fix things, at least at the level of minor repairs I guess. And thinking of my own deficit, I guess women should be able to sew... It's better to be a woman, there seems to be a lot more pressure on a man to be a particular way, particularly for a teenager—a young man is expected to be a macho guy. And they seem to be more critical of other men. Women have more choices, especially about who they want to be, and when women perform well it's like a bonus."

*Is there anything you can't do because you're a woman?* "I guess I've never really felt that way..." but after a little though she continues, "I guess I wish women could compete at a higher level athletically, at a higher skill level."

Sandy's transition into the world of adulthood was scary and hard, "It was very chaotic and scary. All of a sudden I had a husband, all of a sudden I had a baby, and I don't know if I was even an adult at that point. I was still very dependent on my mother. I do have a level of regret, I was unprepared. Don't rush into things... relationship commitments... take advantage of having no responsibilities. Enjoy it while you can, travel, stay open to new things, don't get drawn into things that may not be as rosy as they look." After some thought, Sandy comes to the decision that girls become an adult, "when she makes choices like an adult, and has adult responsibilities. In some ways when they become independent of their parents, and have a certain level independence. Girls should be very open with their feelings. It's very important to make decisions based on what makes you happy, and be selfish with your decisions. It's okay to be a little bit selfish sometimes. But I don't know if that's a girl thing over a boy thing. [Boys] just really need to have a respect for young women." Sandy believes education is important; she has an associate's degree in nursing, but believes in as much education as possible. "Definitely a bachelor's degree, hopefully a master, as much as possible."

Holidays in the Holmes family are chaotic: one year the thanksgiving feast ranged from vegetarian to vegan to Atkins to omnivorous. “We always get the family together- whatever family is around, and try to make food that everyone likes. Paella, apple pie, lemon pie—normally a pie. And we always play baseball, even when we were little we played bad mitten. I miss when you girls were little, even when Kate was little, and Nanny and Aunt Peggy and aunt Dolly were around. I miss that time.”

When Sandy was little, she remembers that with her older sister Dolly, “It was almost like I had another mother. I was pretty much raised with Dolly’s children. I feel like I had an especially large amount of motherly love. And maybe the opposite too—I know one of my sisters was especially resentful. I came at a good time, I was able to have lessons, Ballet, piano, guitar, I was able to have things that maybe weren’t available for my sisters. I miss my lessons. Some of the best times recently have been when I was taking Spanish and guitar at the same time.” After her recent move to New Mexico, lessons stopped, and things are a bit different. “Things have a ways to go to be what I want them to be. It’s been different, it’s been a challenge. The hardest part is being away from your mommy [her oldest daughter, Michelle]. I have my moment... semi-freak-out, but I’m okay.”

At the end of a day, Sandy turns on the news again, reads a book, and listens to music, accompanied by a glass of wine, “If I have two glasses, or even if I have to full of a glass, I wake up with a headache...” before turning into bed around 9:30 or 10:00. “And that’s pretty much what I do...”