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MANHASSET

Living



TAKING STOCK:

Why A Manhasset Homecoming Proved
The Best Investment In The Melvin Family's Future



Best Version Media

Cover photo by Ashley Fairfield Photography



TAKING STOCK: Why A Manhasset Homecoming Proved The Best Investment In The Melvin Family's Future

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You could sit here for hours—maybe even days—examining the statistics involved in how many people reared in Manhasset ultimately return to raise their own families. Given the large number of multi-generational clans populating the homes along our beautiful, tree-lined streets, the calculations would probably be staggering. For a self-professed “complete nerd who loved to take a math test,” like J.P. Morgan Private Banker Courtney Melvin (née Celebre) and her husband, Ryan, Head of DCM for Municipal Finance for the Royal Bank of Canada—both of whom hail from Manhasset—those stats could understandably be a big part of the equation when it came to deciding where this math-minded couple would settle for good.

But rather than studying charts, crunching numbers, and analyzing data to choose a base for themselves and their growing family, the Melvins made a decision more from the heart than the head two years ago: they would leave New York City and move back “home.”

“My husband and I grew up here,” begins Courtney. “I went to Sacred Heart, he went to Chaminade. And it’s funny because I loved living in the city—I had to leave kicking and screaming—but my husband wanted to move to the suburbs years ago. Once we had our third kid though, we were like, ‘Okay, we definitely have to get out.’ It made sense [to move back to Manhasset], because my in-laws are here and so are my parents. But I actually love being here, too. We lived in Munsey Park [growing up] and now, we live about three blocks from my childhood home. We didn’t venture very far, but that seems to be the norm in Manhasset. I think everybody on our block has some relationship to growing up here. My sisters are like, ‘I can’t believe you moved back, right to Manhasset! And I’m like, ‘I know!’”

For the Melvin family—now a party of six with Ryan and Courtney’s four kids, Charlotte, 8; Madeline, 5; Jack (“the only boy!”), 2; and Amelia, who recently turned 1—the adjustment to suburban living has been happily seamless. “I wasn’t sure how the kids were going to adjust moving from the

city to Manhasset,” Courtney relates, “but it’s been so natural and easy because we have family here, as well. I have two sisters who both stayed on Long Island—one’s in Garden City, one’s in Dix Hills. My husband has three siblings, and his brother lives in Manhasset, too. So, we have both grandparents and [our extended family]. In the city, it was great, but here, we get to see everybody practically every day.”

Which has also proven itself to be a huge logistical bonus for these busy parents when it comes to achieving a harmonious home/career balance. “As a working mom of four, it really helps to have the support of all of our family here,” Courtney allows. “We do rely a lot on my parents and my in-laws to help with driving and things like that. But we also have a great nanny who I couldn’t survive without.”

Helping things, as well, is the fact that Courtney spends the majority of her work week right here on Long Island. “We started the [J.P. Morgan] Private Bank in Greenvale; it’s about nine minutes from my house, which makes my life very easy,” she smiles. Like Ryan, whose job takes him into Manhattan each day, “I also go into the city, because I have a lot of clients there. I try to do that once a week and then I go into my office in Greenvale the other four days. So it’s very convenient. I still get my city fix ... and now I get my workout with the Long Island Railroad steps, which is my only workout of the week!”

Much like the Melvins’ resolution to return to their hometown, Courtney’s decision to choose a career in private banking had so much more to do with human connections than facts and figures. “I have a very quantitative background,” she notes of her higher education, which includes a BA in Math from Holy Cross University and a BS from Columbia University in Engineering Management Services (“a fancy way of math modeling to make things run efficiently”). “But what I love more is people and problem-solving. That’s sort of how I got into the business that I’m in today. I love math, but I am passionate about people and getting to know their stories and helping them problem-solve.”

So, while in layman’s terms, “I work with families, endowments, and foundations and I advise them across their balance sheet, my job is to get to understand the



family, understand their goals and what they're trying to accomplish and come up with a plan to help them achieve it. I work with clients on everything from banking to cash management to investing, lending, and insurance ... and then help them transfer wealth from one generation to the next in a tax-efficient way. But it's very personalized, very customized. We deal with clients with very complicated balance sheets. But it really comes down to the people. As an advisor and a banker, I often say that I'm a 'financial therapist,' because money is very emotional. So, it's really getting to the emotional side of people on the investment side. I deal with such interesting clients. And I like the educational aspect of it, like making sure the next generation understands how to manage wealth, as well."

Courtney notes that she and Ryan adopt a similar personalized approach when it comes to teaching their own children about financial responsibility. "My oldest daughter, Charlotte, she kept all of her money in a pocketbook in her room," she says. "Her younger sister would sort of 'steal' it, so I was like, 'We have to open up a bank account for you! That's what I do for a living! I'm going to teach you the basics of say, how you can be a partner in a company and watch that money grow.' She likes Barbie, so I said, 'Let's look at the company that makes Barbie and we can buy their stock.' In this day and age, it can be hard, because

we don't really use cash a lot. We either pay with our phone or our credit card, so for kids growing up today, I don't think they understand money as much. It's really important to spend time with children and help them understand the value of money—how it's created, how to spend it, and how to grow it. Just different lessons like that, which I think are so important to instill in kids these days."

A large part of that mindset comes from the work ethic that both she and Ryan developed at a young age. "I've worked since I was 11 years old," Courtney shares. "I was a babysitter. I used to work at St. Mary's Rectory and answer the phones. 'May the peace of Christ be with you; this is St. Mary's Church. How can I help you?'" she laughs, recounting her required phone greeting. "I worked at Hollister—I had so many jobs! My husband, too—he worked at the TCBY that used to be in town, he used to work at the country clubs—different things like that. We want our kids to understand the value of money and obviously, a great way to do that is to give them chores and let them accumulate their own money. So that when they go to the store, instead of buying them that Barbie doll, you talk to them about the value of money including how much they have so they think about how to best spend it. I like that my kids see me working. I think it's great to have working parents because they have a good work ethic instilled in them."



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This is not to say that Courtney or Ryan spend the majority of their time lecturing their kids about the value of a dollar—far from it. Life in the Melvin home is, in the simplest terms, happy. “It’s funny because I never thought I’d have four kids,” she muses, “but I have to say that their interaction is almost like back in the old days, where the older ones help with the younger ones. Their favorite thing to play is ‘Family.’ They’re obsessed!! The two older girls will have the two younger ones in little doll carriages, and they’ll be pushing them around. Or they’ll be dancing around doing a performance and then my 2-year-old watches them, and he literally dances just like them. He has copied their moves so much. It’s just so funny to see.”

Outside of the house, in addition to spending time at Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, sports are the primary extracurricular activity. “I am probably the only person who grew up in Manhasset and never picked up a lacrosse stick,” Courtney laughs. “But my husband was determined that the two older girls would be motivated

to play, so he coaches them. I think the only reason why they want to go to lacrosse is because their dad coaches them! I like to play tennis. I don’t have as much time for it now, obviously, with work and the little kids, but that was always the sport I played. Right now, with Jack, in terms of activities, he does soccer.

He was literally dribbling the ball as soon as he started walking. So maybe he’ll be super-athletic and a super soccer star—who knows?” As for little Amelia, “She is so cute and easy-going,” Courtney says. “She is so smiley all the time and she just has such a good nature.”

The Melvin children are also gourmands in the making. “We love to cook,” she nods. “My husband is a grill master. My kids have become little gourmet eaters. If you asked my daughters their favorite foods, they’d both say, ‘Sushi, soft-shell crabs, lobster al Toscano...’ And I’m like, ‘Oh, great, we’re creating little monsters here!’ But they’re very into food. I think it’s because we’ve always cooked. And, when we lived in the city, they would come out to dinner with us all the time. Now, even with all four, we do take them out to dinner here.”

Among their local faves are Sandro’s Italian restaurant. “We’ve done a lot of family parties there and they’ve always done a great job; plus, we love their pasta. We also love to sit at the bar at La Coquille.” On Plandome Road, it’s Gino’s for pizza—“although, I love Salvatore’s [in Port Washington],” Courtney grins—and “for breakfast, we are definitely Manhasset Deli egg-sandwich people; either that or Buttercooky. If I wasn’t a private banker, I always wanted to open a coffee shop in Manhasset—a really cute one. That was a dream of mine, so maybe one day. My husband’s always saying, ‘Let’s revitalize the bowling alley that used to be here!’ I think there’s a lot of opportunity in Manhasset, the town itself.”

With all that is going on in their lives, Courtney admits, “I honestly don’t think I believe in a work/life balance. I think it’s more of an integration. My colleagues know my children—they often come to the office—and my clients know my children, too. In Manhasset, a family of four kids is very common, but in the corporate world, people look at you like you have five heads when you tell them you have four kids. But I have a very close relationship with all my clients. I think it’s helpful for them to see my whole life, as well. I know their kids, too, and I think that’s important.”

Recently, they really felt the love of the Manhasset community as they coped with the sudden loss of their nephew, Hunter. The community shines in tough moments and it solidified their decision to move home.

“We do love living here,” she continues. “My mom was involved in things like the Newcomers’ Club, and it instilled in me what a great community Manhasset is. After we moved back, I remember walking through Munsey Park School, and it was such a time warp because I went to school there. And my daughter’s first-grade teacher [had been] my teacher, too! I didn’t recognize her because she wasn’t married back then. And it was the same thing with Manhasset Bay [Yacht Club]. Growing up, we went there as kids, and I did the sailing program. And now, watching my kids do it—it’s such a funny circle of life, I guess. I grew up right by Copley Pond, so that’s the pond we always went to; we never really spent time at Polliwog Pond. But it’s so close and my son loves going there to watch the frogs and the turtles, so it’s great. We really love our block; there are so many young families there. It’s so easy for the kids to go outside and have a lemonade stand and play. I always think of that movie *Now and Then*, where the kids are out riding their bikes together. It’s so picturesque. We are really happy where we are.”

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