



C. W. GRIFFIN/HERALD STAFF

**CHANGED CAREERS:** Tiffany and James Grippando put security aside and left their established careers; their new ventures allow them time for their kids.

## Two dreamers have it all — all over again

At first glance, they seemed to have everything, the high-powered lawyer and rising retail industry star.

James Grippando was a partner in the law firm of Steel Hector & Davis, practicing commercial litigation. Wife Tiffany, at 28, was a general manager at the Lord & Taylor store in Boca Raton, the youngest in the company's history. Theirs was a life in which, as James puts it, "we were starting to cash in on the sweat equity that we had already put in."

Then the Grippandos dropped it all to pursue their dreams. Now, James, 42, writes full-time. *Under Cover of*

*Darkness*, his fifth book, was released this month by HarperCollins. Tiffany, 33, owns The Red Apple Children's Store, a popular shop in South Miami.



ANA VECIANA-SUAREZ

How they got out of the fast lane turns out to be a tale of two dreamers who believed in their work, seized unexpected opportunities and weaned themselves off steady

paychecks gradually.

James began writing at 9. "I dreamed of being a writer, but I didn't think it was attainable," he recalls. "It takes a lot of confidence to believe people want to read something you write."

Besides, as a history buff, he had his heart set on law. And that's precisely what he did for 12 years at Steel Hector. During four of those 12 years, however, he spent evenings working on a first novel that nobody wanted.

His agent, however, urged him to

▶ PLEASE SEE COUPLE, 2E

# A couple of dreamers enjoying career changes

## ▶ COUPLE, FROM 1E

try again. He did. *The Pardon*, his second book and the first to be published, was written in seven months. HarperCollins bought it at auction and it became an alternate selection of the Literary Guild, the Doubleday Book Club and the Mystery Guild.

"People automatically thought that I would leave law after that," he recalls. "There was this belief that nobody writes books unless they want to get out."

Not true. He loved lawyering. But to write another book, he decided to go part-time. At this point, he was a newlywed and Tiffany's star at the 63-store Lord & Taylor chain was shining. She had just received a big promotion to manage a store in Boca. Though she toyed with the idea of having her own business, she knew it wouldn't be for a long time.

Besides, how could she leave everything she had worked so hard for?

"I loved what I did. I loved the people I worked with, the management. It was great," she says.

Then she discovered she was pregnant, and morning sickness began to take its toll. It was particularly difficult because she was driving 60 miles to Boca, then working 12 hours. Eventually, a heart ailment and orders from the doctor sidelined her.

In the meantime, James's part-time arrangement at Steel Hector was not panning out. He knew he had to decide what he wanted to be — a full-time lawyer or a full-time writer — and with a baby on the way and a wife at home he was leaning toward security. But just when he least expected it, his agent got him a multibook contract that would mean more money than he made as a

partner. "To this day, I never resigned from Steel Hector. I took a leave of absence," he says. "I know this is what I should be doing now," Grippando says.

Tiffany's chance came on New Year's Eve 1999. The wife of one of James's former Steel Hector colleagues was thinking about selling The Red Apple store. Though she had two young children at home, Tiffany decided to try it out for six months.

"I learned the ropes and I loved it," she says. "I thought it was a great opportunity." She bought the store outright about a year and a half ago.

Neither regrets the decision to leave behind the security of established careers. Why should they? James's books have become bestsellers, and he has been featured in *People* magazine. His next book, *A King's Ransom*, sixth in six years, will be published in Jan-

uary.

Tiffany's store is having the best year in its history, with sales up almost 10 percent, and she launched a Web site this week for online shoppers.

The best part of their new careers, they say, is more time with their young children — Kaylee, 4, and Ryan, 22 months. That special time served, in part, as an inspiration for Grippando's just-published thriller, the story of the head of Seattle's most prominent law firm and what happens to his life and relationship with his young daughter when his wife vanishes.

"It's a perfect life," Tiffany says. "We're both doing what we want, and we have time and flexibility with the children."

James Grippando will read from *Under Cover of Darkness* at 8 p.m. Wednesday at Books & Books, 296 Aragon Ave. in Coral Gables.