
Streaming
Thoughts

IDEAS ABOUT MOTHERHOOD & LIFE

Blogs by Sharon Girodo





Regrets Only

Those who say “I just wanna live my life and die with no regrets” sound like smooth talkers. They lull me in with their idealism exposed as realism and I find myself nodding in agreement. On the surface it sounds so totally possible and plausible, why not do it today or sooner, I can take this on too. After all isn’t that the life I was meant to lead? Isn’t that what life is all about? Isn’t that so easy?

And then I look at me and who I am and wonder who I think I am. Because when it comes right down to it, I am full of regrets. I regret something about nearly everything I’ve touched. I regret big things and small things and things that matter and things that don’t. But then who am I to evaluate what things are big and what are small or what matters or not? Because those things in the blink of an eye can really just make the big switcheroo. What seemed big is no longer, what doesn’t matter now does. And really when does the trolley on the spectrum slide to the other side? And the speed in which it does is important too. And so it catches me knowing very little.

And as time marches on things change, people’s perceptions change. What did not appear as a regret initially now tops the charts. I totally, wholeheartedly regret everything I fed my kids. I did what it seemed everyone else was doing, I built their toy collection from McDonald’s. After all a new toy or two a day is the pinnacle of the happiness mountain. And nuggets and fries easy, efficient and effortless. Everyone eats, everyone plays, everyone gets where they need to go and the price is right. Cashwise maybe, but it’s a high price in health and nutrition and habit.

Maybe if my hindsight was more often my foresight, I could set up my life of no regret scenerio a little better. Initially I thought it was so important to give my

kids opportunity to learn and discover themselves and their abilities so they could survive and thrive as they approached and entered their adult life. And so as soon as they could walk and talk, I set out to find out what in the world they were good at. And so began the activities...swimming, soccer, gymnastics, dance, homework club, t-ball/baseball, basketball, guitar, piano, trumpet, clarinet. Surely if they turned out good, actually excellent, in everything, they would conquer the world. But in my enthusiasm, there was money constantly flowing out of every orifice, and that I regret.

I regret being an older mom, even though it's helped me with patience and wisdom and strength. But because of age, it wasn't fun for me to sit on the floor and play with my kids. Playdoh and finger painting and cutting and pasting were no longer my forte. I knew better than to make a mess I alone would have to clean up. I regret that I miss those special times and memories because of the extra attention I would have to pay and the workload involved.

I regret that I had no interest in school or homework or projects. I regret that once the kids got to third grade I was sick of helping them with homework. I regret that they had to help each other with projects and at some point I started going to bed before they were through. Actually. Or do I? Hmmmm. All five became excellent students, they enjoyed working with each other and helping each other, they are close as siblings can be. They are individuals, but they are part of a sibling gang highlighted by their own talents and personalities.

Sometimes, the things I regret have turned out all right. And maybe I should not regret it so much. Maybe some of the things I regret, I can still turn around. Maybe regrets, like guilt, are useless emotions. Or regret might just be a way to better steer the ship. It may be useful for that.

As for regrets? I can't imagine a life without them.



A View from the Far Side

When I watch young moms frustrated with young children, I can feel backward to the angst and the indecision and aloneness I felt. I watch these new moms and it roller coasters me back a dozen years or so to those days in my life!

I read a blog posted by a mom of young children. She was flustered and frustrated and lost in the long moments of tyranny. I definitely could relate and almost wished that I had authored that. But what I found two days after reading the post, was a subtle, gentle, but steady shifting of my thoughts and reaction to her writing. She was so eloquently in the moment with a description so perfectly pitched, so perfectly real that all of us moms out there think this is my life, this is it, that is me. This happens to me all the time. Nobody knows what it's like. And yes motherhood is a new discovery every minute of everyday, year to precious year and season to season. And so I want to offer perspective from where I'm at, presumably down the road about a decade and a half. My thoughts are swirling, there's so much to say and so many years in between.

Let me start with...and don't take this lightly...but there's no job in the world like motherhood, not fatherhood, not management, not nothing. And there's no person in the world like a woman turned into a mother!

My husband loves to talk about a conversation we had when our five kids were at their youngest 0-8, 1-9, 2-10ish. Life was hard He had a demanding, draining, massive job and he'd come home to a loud, manic house and an old wretch of a

wife. He tripped through the toys in the nuthouse to the kitchen where there was no hot meal waiting and no hope of one either. And he's saying what have we done? What have we gotten ourselves into? How do you do this? How are we going to get through it? And in one brief snap of clarity, I responded. "This is as hard as it's ever going to be. From here on out it will only get easier."

It may be a few years, but soon we will only be cutting our own 20 nails, not an additional 100 nails a week. They will be able to dress themselves and carry themselves and pursue those things that interest them. They will be able to drum up their own fun, root for their own food, stay home when we run to the store. We might even be able to go out to dinner alone without having to pay \$100 for a babysitter. I didn't even provide the description, he saw it all in his own mind with those simple, but oh so true words..."This is as hard as it's ever going to be. It will only get easier." I remember aspects of those days so vividly in spots and so cloudy in others like flying through a fog with splotches of bright light, but the fog keeps moving and the clarity keeps changing. As time passes, we forget the intensity and helpless, hopeless, desperation we once felt. We look back and see ourselves in the picture, but somehow it's calmer, more manageable. A lot of the emotion of the moment are gone, whatever we were worried about or trying to accomplish are no longer relevant, that part of the scene is wiped clear.

When my kids were babies, the doctor might say, oh that problem may be all gone in 3 months. 3 MONTHS! That's a long time, I can't wait that long. And then the doctor says, but it could take a year. Oh no, that's forever. Or says the doctor, in some kids it lasts 10 years or longer. Eternal, it will never change. With little ones, life roars to a crawl, a turtle pace. Everything takes forever.

With my first baby, I offer... here take the rattle. That baby couldn't even find his thumb, not a chance would he grasp a rattle and hold the weight. So every week I would try that rattle and I'm wondering, why do they make these things. This baby can't lift a finger, just eat, poop, and cry. What seems like decades later, he finally snatches that rattle and tries to guide it to his mouth. Eons later, he fi-

nally sits by himself. And then a loving relative who hasn't seen him in 5 months comes in and says, "oh my he's grown so fast".

These are the dog days of child raising where you think nothing will ever change. It will be that way until the end, this is my life the rest of my life and I will slog through it.

And then miraculously the five slowest years on the planet melt away and suddenly you are grasping your child's hand into kindergarten. Some moms cry, some take pictures, all are there to measure the moment. Cause we never thought we'd get there did we? If you still have little ones at home the significance of that first school day diminishes, the workload and commitment are still stifling. For me, it wasn't until I took the last one to his first day of school that I realized, my oldest was starting high school and the years were GONE. I mean like head twirling gone.

Now as my 5th child lunges for the finish line of 5th grade, my 2nd child gets ready to graduate high school and leave for college. The child numbers in the house ceased to grow years ago, but now they are dwindling. Soon my husband and I will be staring at each other in a suddenly large, utterly quiet, empty house and wonder. What happened? Where did the time go? Can I have some of those precious moments back? (yeah, now they're precious) The toddler who pulled the pickle jar off the shelf in the grocery store, broken all over the floor might be a law school graduate this year. The baby who had me in the doctors office five times a week for the first years might be beginning a physical therapy career. The one who projectile vomited all over the lady behind us in line may have her own fashion design business. The drama queen who threw the temper tantrum store goers are still talking about may be the new model on the cover of Seventeen. The one who for years refused to be potty trained could be a professional football kicker. Well you never know, right?

And as proud of them as I am and as much as my love for them has grown and enriched over the years and as relieved as I may be that they are all okay. I can

only look at you in the store and say, “these are the best years. Enjoy every minute of them.” There is no job like motherhood. There is no way to explain that. There is just nothing in life that takes us over like that. It's an about face. It's a searing, jaw dropping expanse of experience that all mothers share, but feel unique in. It's a demanding, disturbing, paralyzing job full of opportunities, discoveries, regrets, indecision, pleasure, purpose, pain and immeasurable joy. Essentially we give up everything we've ever worked for or thought we were and cast it aside for an infinite time in order to love and care for, teach, fill, create and let go of another human being, one that is so like us and so unlike us we can only shake our heads at the miracle of it all.

There are no personalities like women. We tend to think we're the only ones who've ever experienced an experience. We feel deeply, we think deeply and though trillions have marched before us in similar circumstances, we think we are unique. We are totally demoralized if our sense of perfection is ever called into question. And although we may cherish our friendships with other women, we'll snatch ourselves away if they don't meet our expectations. Instead of reveling in the help of those who've braved this road before us, we choose to wave them on and go it alone, thinking we can light a better path and cast a brighter shadow.

We live in the moment. Then we live in the next moment and then the next like leaping onto completely different lily pads that have no relation to each other. Then suddenly we are on solid ground gazing at those lily pads and the total picture of our lives and our contributions, the cost and the reward all blend together and at last we can see the forest through the trees, the rhyme and the reason, the why and the wherefore. Wisdom. Well earned. Now cherished. Ready to share. Make it easier for the ones still behind hopping the lily pads. But can they see through the mist, can they hear through the haze? Can they take it in? Or are we only able to hop alone. Singing our own song? Can we hold hands and hop together? Can we do it for our kids and for our daughters who will be mothers? At some point (if I live long enough) I count on being able to look back and say, I've weathered the flurry and the storm of motherhood. I gave it my best and it actually worked. Why would that be the most important thing for me to say? Genera-

tions! We want to lift our kids on our shoulders so they can see farther and do more than we were ever able to. And we hope that our kids will see it the same, that they will lift their kids onto their shoulders.

As moms, it would be nice if we could do that for each other too. So in answer to the mom who wrote *Carpe Diem*. . . It will happen, more quickly than you could ever imagine. You will become the old lady. You will have traveled that road. You will become that old lady and you will be so very grateful for the journey. Not today. Not tomorrow. But in the end.



As the Child Grows

I'm pretty sure that even as I age, I remember it right. And what I'm sure of is that I did not think anything about what it would take to raise kids. During my pregnancy all I could focus on was healthy, normal, boy, girl, what's going on inside me this week, when will it move, is it moving enough, what does he/she look like, when's the due date & can we move it up.

When it came to kids issues, I was still worried about my own issues and at that stage when it came to babies, it was diaper changing and bathing that freaked me out. After all what else is there?

So I got into motherhood, probably the same way a lot of us do, focusing on me and not giving a whole lot of thought into what was to be. What I had yet to realize is that my issues, my life would fade in comparison to their issues and their lives. That's a rather brilliant part of motherhood, allowing your own selfishness to sink in order to pour yourself into your child.

For me the hardest part about a new baby is bringing them home from the hospital. It shocked me that while they seemed to sleep so happily at the hospital, once home they immediately went on guard, awake and screaming. And hungry! The key to helping your milk come in faster is malt, so splurge! At some point from the first baby to the fifth, I just gave up that first night or two and rocked the baby...bonding. It was less frustrating I think for both of us!

On to toddlerhood where uh-oh what are we going to do about discipline? Hadn't entirely thought that one out, but you gotta have some guidelines, they don't know anything until you teach them. So not wanting them to begin a life of running rampant we worked on a discipline structure that fit for both my husband and me. Now we've done a lot of altering to that along the way, but we never underestimated the importance of discipline. Two important thoughts here...we must be fairly consistent in identifying the crime and administering the punishment...and we gotta agree. Nothing worse than arguing with your husband about when and how to discipline when something needs to be done fast. And we certainly didn't want them to see us struggling with that.

During the grade school years, it was hard for me to understand how they could be perfect little angels at school and hellions when they got home. I wanted to share a little bit at least in their good side! But I had to understand that being good in school for eight hours around other kids that might not have been so good was hard work. They were tired when they got home and I had to learn to give them a little bit of room to act out.

The thing about middle school and the pre-teen years I've found is that it's just plain an awkward age. Kids are developing at all kinds of crazy rates, too fast, too slow, their moods and emotions are at a fever pitch and the road can once again be rocky. They are changing, everyone around them is changing, and the way they look at things is changing. And to me this is why you've paid attention from their babyhood all the way to now. Now they need your love and security, but in a much more private and subtle way. I've always tried to respect their relationships and not try to embarrass them around their friends. I know parents who want to be their kids best friends and keep tight tabs on them, but I've found it works better to be a bit elusive. Let them come to you and when they do, be interested, engage.

There are a lot of things to think about when it comes to high school and again I do believe that success depends so much on the foundation you've been building until now. Do your kids know who they are? What your family stands for? Do they know why some decisions are bad and some are good? Hopefully they have pride in themselves and strength in that pride! That is a beautiful thing to see in a teenager. I've heard it said and I believe it completely that the books you read and the people you associate with will make you into who you are. So that's what I watch. And that's what I do too. Pour in the positive and hang out with people with character. Set an example you want them to follow, because it's not so much what you say, but what you do.

I'm still struggling with exactly when a child turns into an adult, but I know when they do the hardest and most important thing will be to let them go, let them struggle and let them live their own life. We always think that we can save them and I think we can help them along the way, but the struggle is an important part to shaping their character, their determination and how hard they work in their life. If we continue to helicopter parent, they will always need us to hover. When they're ready to leave, they should also be ready to achieve.

We begin our relationships with our children in love and I think the key to all stages of their life is to show them that love, love them through the hard times, the good times. Share what you know along the way without the lecture. Love them more, bad or good. Discipline in love. Teach in love. Live in love. Because we all want to be loved and we will be drawn to those who love us most.



Who's Changing My Schedule?

Today, my morning looked clear, I still had deadlines a day or two off. Most kids still at school, well at least until noon when the high schoolers are scheduled to return, but basically a quiet, open morning to write. Yesterday I had focused on all the small, tedious, but necessary tasks to be done. That I did, thinking my mind would be clear and I'd be less apt to procrastinate over something tweensie!

And so as everyone else in the family set out on their day, my husband realizes, oops I forgot to pay a bill and I forgot to pick up something I need right now. Can you do that and I'll come home at noon and get it. And that reminded me that I also had an errand to run for my oldest son, even though he can drive, he has a car, he knows where to go and he could do it. Still I knew I would do it and already I'm connecting the three errands into one.

Then my middle school daughter, the one who leaves last comes down to the kitchen just 5 minutes before bus time asking me what she can pack for a lunch? Pointing out that we have cheese and fruit and these granola things all of which she scrunches her nose at, I mention how about peanut butter & jelly? Where's the peanut butter she wants to know (it's only a 64 oz jar), oh and that jelly is old! It's not old and it's not like it's been sitting out and open forever. C'mon. We're out of small ziplock bags, she argues. Here use this I say.

How come you're taking a lunch anyway? Did you forget field trip day to the aquatics center! Ahhh, that's right. Just another change up in the end of the year schedule. Good thing my husband spent all his money on water, at least she'll have that to take...hope it's cold! I hear the bus drive by. You're gonna have to take me to school mom! Yep, yay!

So now my wide open couple hours has closed to about half and I find another task to fill that time. I love being there for my husband and kids. I love being able to make their day a little easier and a little more pleasant. Sometimes I wish my entire day can be spent that way.

The funny thing is everybody in the family thinks that is all I do and that I have all this free time for fun and games in between. Oh were that to be true. So I laugh and pretend that that is the way things are. I have no deadlines or due dates, I am here to take your requests!

The funny thing that all moms know (and it seems to be our little secret) is how long it takes to do nothing! All day long I could pick stuff up off the floor...trash, laundry, shoes, toys, school papers, underwear, towels. If I ever come to the end of that, somebody walks in the door tossing backpacks, jackets, bobby pins, jewelry, water bottle...or the dog throws up!

Forget the 10 loads of laundry today. They would have used that towel again anyway, or slept on those sheets another night (of course). Or worn something else.

And though housecleaning is not my cup of tea, sometimes it's hard to tell that the furniture that's covered with junk is actually dusted underneath. But even so, if I didn't do any of these things, we would notice. Right? Wouldn't we?

Another day, half gone by, small missions accomplished. Missions so small one could not even write them on a to do list. Missions so small that if you did put them on a to do list, it would take all day to write it out.

Missions so small, so full of love, so important and so unnecessary! I need no reminders that I'm a mom!



A Little Touch Up

There's nothing quite like the feeling of fixing things up, whether they need to be fixed up or not, that gives you that sense of exhilaration, frustration, anticipation, elation!

Painter Dave is here painting...yes...painting, only two rooms, but the whole house is a disaster! And I've wondered more than once why are we doing this again?

It's like a series of dominos. Our youngest two kids who share a room are growing up. They look gigantic in their little twin beds. My husband's daughter has two small kids who need beds. So maybe this is a good time to pass those beds along and get new queen size beds for the kids. Beds that are theirs for life, that they can take with them or leave, when the time comes (hopefully it's a very long time from now!). "But can we get our room painted too?" they ask. A boy & a girl, their room was painted half blue & half pink. Now they want half yellow & half green. "Oh sure," we say to ease the transition.

"I want my room painted too!" another daughter pipes up. "Ewww and paint that awful pink bathroom," my husband adds. (He forgets he picked out the color himself!) Not to mention the kitchen that we hope to remodel soon, if we paint

that, one step will be done and paid for. Well I guess the new appliances was the first step. Anyway...step two!

Oh and the living room walls are too blue for me after about five years or so. How about painting one of those walls a lighter color. (I like light, cause I always like to be doing something, but everybody else likes the dark, cavelike feeling).

So you can see how this has escalated. Painter Dave comes to tell us if we can afford it or not. Ok, I think we can. Now the furniture has been moved to its new home. The kids room is bone empty awaiting the new furniture we picked out. The furniture is adorable, all in black, which must be the new thing...is it? Each bed is different, but they look perfect together in the room. My son's bed has drawers underneath to keep all his clothes in and shelves in the headboard for books and trophies and things. My daughter's bed by contrast looks lighter and more feminine. And she proudly owns the new dresser with mirror. It all goes together perfectly with their ages and personalities.

But back to the painting. We're waiting with an empty room for furniture to be delivered. Please painter Dave, it's totally empty, please come and paint it one of these three empty days! "Too busy now," he says, "but I don't mind taking down all the furniture and wrapping it up, I do that all the time." Something inside of me screams this is a bad idea, but I can't argue, after all the guy is trying to make a living, who am I to push, push, push!?

Once the furniture arrives, it looks great to me. I'm not so interested anymore in painting and even the kids don't seem to remember! Days go by, weeks go by, months? Well one or two. Finally painter Dave calls, I'm next up. But we have a nephew in town for spring break week, not a good time for disruption! Next week we say. Next week Painter Dave is sick, busy, bothered. No problem for me, I'm not really ready for the mess anyway...put it off another week!

That weekend we take a quick trip to Vegas. Spend way too much money. By Sunday night when Painter Dave calls, I'd rather not paint at all, but okay I'll be ready.

Now what are the colors again? Oh you kids like that pink bathroom, no changes, okay that's perfect.

Oh other daughter, you cleaned up your room once for the painting, but you'll be gone in a year anyway so why paint it now? Why clean up again?!!

And can't any of you see why painting one wall of the blue living room a lighter color will brighten the room, huh, you like it the way it is?!!

Well now the only rooms left are the bedroom with the new furniture and the kitchen. The kitchen could wait, cause the remodel is a ways off and I was just throwing that in anyway cause Painter Dave would be here. And oh how I hate thinking about moving all that bedroom furniture. So I worked myself into a totally reluctant attitude to this painting. But what the what, it's only two rooms, at least this way it won't be so bad.

Painter Dave arrives Monday morning. Looks at the colors I've chosen. Likes the yellow & green. Gives me some advice on the light kitchen color. Gets me all excited about new colors in my house and heads out to get the paint. "I'll be back early tomorrow," he announces. "Take everything down that you can reach, I'll get the high things."

Next day. Where's Painter Dave? Two hours later he's telling me the paint got mixed up wrong about 100 times. The wait was excruciating! I could say the same.

But now it's down to work for Painter Dave. Move the bedroom furniture & pile it up in the middle of the room. Wrap it up. Tape, cover, wrap. The hallway is stuffed with stuff, oops forgot about that discomfort, which we wouldn't have had when the room was already empty. Now I can hardly get into my own bedroom cause there's a mattress in the way!

Move on to the kitchen...move more stuff around...tape, cover, wrap. In comes the sprayer. Oh I can't wait to see these colors! He paints the baseboards. "Ok now I gotta let that dry so I'll be back in the morning."

That's how painting goes. It would be so much slower if we did it ourselves. Ok it would not happen if we did it ourselves. We can't even bring ourselves to do the touch-ups!

It takes forever for Painter Dave to arrive on Wednesday morning! I just can't wait to see how those colors look on the walls! Oh and I need him out of the upstairs by noon the next day for the carpet cleaners who are scheduled. But then it's more taping and wrapping and covering in both rooms. By 4:00, still no paint colors! In comes the hose and up goes the paint...minutes later there are colors. Whew the smell, I can't even go in and see them. Well how do you even walk in, the doors are wrapped? But Painter Dave has a door built into the wrapping. That's cool. I take a quick look and duck out before I pass out...it's dinner all the way out tonight!

Day 4, Painter Dave promises the upstairs will be done by noon when the carpet cleaners are due. I sure hope so cause mattresses cover the upstairs carpet. Wall hangings lie still for the tripping. Books, accessories, clothes, baskets, etc are all over the place including my bedroom. My husband says the kids room (yellow & green) looks like an Easter egg! Well at least we're in season. "It'll look good with the furniture," I am positive!

My peach kitchen is gone. That is bad & good. Bad because nobody in this house embraces change, good because I'm not sure I ever liked the color. I wanted peach, but you know how it goes with the different light during the day, sometimes it looks pink and sometimes it looks orange. All I know is it would have been a disaster next to the new stain we want on the cupboards. But I'm looking at the new color and loving it. Everyone else just shrugs.

It's ten to noon and Painter Dave is off to get some brackets and more paint. There is very little carpet upstairs to clean right about now. I hope they're running behind. I have laundry going and need to get that to a point where I don't have to run it up & down the stairs.

Friends are coming over Saturday. I can't wait to cook. But the kitchen's out of commission (we can't even let the dogs out the back door) and that's Painter Dave's next mission. Kitchen stuff is all over my living room and dining room and on the center counter all wrapped up. I have major clean up to do. The clock ticks. Why do we always make things more stressful? I think I have some answers.

Earlier in the week when Painter Dave took my fake flowers and lovely decorations off the tops of the kitchen cupboards he very diplomatically mentioned that I might want to update those. I took a second look at my dusty fake flowers, even though I just cleaned them a month ago and popped them back up there and realized...yes, some things must be updated and definitely that must be.

So now added to this scenerio are new decorations. I'm finding some fun things. Excited about purchasing, but not crazy about spending the money. After all this is just to look at...not to use. And as I just discovered, this stuff ages. Yuck!

I'm stuck at home hurrying the laundry when I should be out shopping! I'm waiting for carpet cleaners who are thankfully late! I'm wondering if I'll be gone before the kids come home from school or if I'll (heaven forbid) have to take them with me. No one's here and I'm stressing! I picture everyone else in this picture totally relaxed, hey why not, life is good. It's all good as my kitchen wall hanging states! I meant the food. HA!

We all think back to five or so years ago when Painter Dave last painted. He painted every stitch of the inside of this house, closets, pantry, ceilings, whatever could be painted was painted. At the same time, we had tile put in downstairs. What an adventure! We didn't call it that then as the painter & tiler had to work around each other and most of the house we were still living in was unusable. Everything was emptied out. Even the toilets were off. We'd huddle together in whichever bedroom was half together, eat our dinner and hang out or hang on! Every day was painfully more painful until at last, like 2-3 weeks later, they were all gone. The house looked fresh, smelled fresh and we could stretch out again. All that pain is back with just two rooms in transition. The forgotten memories are back like a slap.

When it's over, we'll forget again. And eventually we'll be ready to repaint, re-fix, redo. And at the end, bask in all that newness & freshness. It won't make our house any more valuable in the housing market, but it will add some life and some fun to the house. I like that!



What Are We Thinking

I have the TV on today and it's making me a little bit crazy! We're in the aftermath of the tragic shooting in Tucson. Just a shocking, horrific moment that will forever be part of our memory, our hearts and our history. I'm not going to talk about the event, because it's being covered by every news organization everywhere. And that's kind of what's annoying to me.

Go back a lot of years to a very young adult me. I'm working in the promotion department of a news oriented local station. We're #1 in the market and well respected in the community. I'm assigned to promoting news among other things. And thus begins my question as to what constitutes news. I still don't know the answer to that question. My opinion is that news should be more completely rounded to cover triumph as well as tragedy. I've always felt that stations are happy to focus on the worst stories and ignore the best.

I remember the first of thousands of times I was approached by the news department to produce a proof of performance spot for, say, a murder they covered the day before. The belief from the news department was that they had better coverage than any other station. I set my 22 year old heels in the ground and with all the arrogance of my age and exalted position said no. I am not going to take advantage of somebody's tragedy to "sell" our competence.

Marching back to my office, I'm met by my boss who calmly says, "You gotta do it." Fortunately in those days I was allowed to rant and rave about the travesty of it. My boss heard from me, the news producers heard from me, the news director got a double dose from me. And we reached a compromise. I could at least write it the way I wanted to write it. I turned the braggadoccia into a message of comfort, ran it as little as I could and tossed it after it ran its short course.

I remember being on a business trip in Chicago and waking up to the radio alarm tuned to news. It totally freaked me out. I was afraid to get out of bed. What kind of city is this? Murders, fires, car chases, madness & mayhem. No music now...we gotta prepare you for your day! One of those memories (feelings) like it happened yesterday, still so very vivid.

I've always been bothered when you hear on a newscast, "Good morning everybody, and now let's join reporter X on the scene of the murder. Good morning X." "Good morning...we're here..." C'mon it's not a good morning. Come up with another line! Quit acting so happy just because you've got a good tragedy to bring me!

Goodness and badness are both a part of life. While the badness always makes me gasp and wonder, I think it's the goodness that gives me guidance and ideas. Or should I take my guidance and get ideas from all the badness that's reported?

While yes, as a mom, and a curious, wondering person, I do wonder about the 22 year old killer in Tucson. Who are his parents? Couldn't they see any signs, signals, inappropriate attitudes? Did they love him, pay attention to him? How did he get like this? Surely if other people saw trouble, they must have. Did they not care?

Okay, I can look around on the internet if I really need within myself to re-search this. I do not need his horrifying photo popped up on every channel on every TV screen all day long. As though he's a role model to follow. You know there are people out there who will idolize him, look up to him and want to imitate him. You know there are people out there who would just like to be famous like him. They may not be bad people, but they want their day in the limelight.

Why can't we give the limelight to good people? To 22 year olds who are achieving, leading, doing the right thing. I know they're out there! I will find them for you. Why are these people not interesting to us? Why are they, in fact, boring? Why when we find people like this, do we put them on the air and try to ruin them or make them look bad?

You know this happens. It makes me crazy. Why do we support this? We let it happen and encourage it to happen by our interest and lack of interest. Why isn't good, smart, able...interesting and gripping and something we want to emulate?

There's another big story in the news about a mom who wrote an essay for the Wall Street Journal called "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior". It's gone very viral. I read the article, but believe it or not, I haven't read a single comment. While I'm not the same kind of mom she is, nor will I ever be, I agree with her line of thinking for the most part. And the reason I agree is because it's very clear to me that she loves and gives love to her children, with the strictness comes love, love that they can see. They also have her full attention. These are things kids need. While they need to learn how to make decisions, they should not make every decision for themselves. They are too young, they know nothing!!! Kids should not be in control. That's another reason why moms are so important. If kids could raise themselves, who would need a mom!?

I saw the mom who wrote this essay on a morning show today. She was smart and articulate and caring, she sure seemed real to me. While my parenting doesn't mirror her style, I can't say she was wrong, yet she was being interviewed in a negative, badgering way. She was being forced to defend her point of view rather than explaining it.

So essentially all morning long I'm looking at this 22 year old killer in Tucson, his terrifying picture and thinking how did this happen. I hear the TV personalities basically wondering the same thing. And then in the next news segment one of those people is attacking a mom for what she (and perhaps others) thought were too extreme measures in trying to raise good children.

Why did they try to tear a mom who cares apart? Her kids are good. They are successful. It's working. And then, though they don't mean to, they glorify the kid who's a killer. Do you see that? Do you think about it? Does it make sense?

What does a good kid look like? I fear we only see them if they are in the midst of a tragic moment. For me, that's not enough. Maybe I need to watch more news. Maybe I need to turn it off!



Reunited With Mom

As a mom, I can't leave this one alone. The homeless man with the golden voice who hadn't seen his mom is 20 years was reunited with her. They were interviewed together on the Today Show and many other programs.

My husband & I, like many others are fascinated by this story. As Ted Williams life unfolded before us yesterday, we couldn't help but wonder why he was alone. Where was his family? He admitted that drugs and alcohol had brought him down. So it made a certain amount of sense that the family would have to let him go in order not to enable him.

So when the son couldn't wait to see the mom, of course we couldn't wait either. But mama was...well some mama! I think of what I would do in that situation. And well, I would pick, pick, pick. What's right, what's wrong, woulda, shoulda, coulda, teach, teach, tell, tell. Isn't that what we do? Tell & fix. And she did. It got me laughing a little. That's mom!

"Please don't disappoint me," she says. Is that us? Do we worry that our kids will disappoint us? Their school grades or their messy room or the way they act in the store?

“I go to one of the nicest churches in Brooklyn,” she says. Is that us? Do we think because of where we send our kids to school or church, that that’s the answer to perfection in them?

“All I ever got was promises,” she says. Or is that us as we promise things to our kids that maybe we can’t give? What do they learn from us?

“He’s easily pulled into things,” she says. Is that us? Do we tend to label or judge our kids based on what we think and believe?

“This is the last thing. How can you do our family like that? To think of my son putting up a sign and my family seeing all this,” she says. Is that us? Do we criticize the way our kids go about things, when they’re on the right track toward achieving something? Do we pick the wrong things to worry about?

Ted laughs, “She didn’t seem to feel as bad about the theft as about me holding the sign.”

You just gotta laugh. As smart as we think we are, we’re just moms sometimes fumbling our way through it all. Hopefully helping and hopefully not inflicting damage.

I think she must have done good, her son sure seemed to want to please her. After all. Finally.

Keep at it moms!



Homeless Sensation

The biggest viral sensation! The story of a homeless man with a God-given voice. An amazing voice. The voice thousands of companies spending countless hours search for every day. He's been out there for 14 years with this great voice that no one knew about or paid any attention to.

And then he got discovered. A newspaper reporter with a camera took interest in him and shot some video from his car. He put it up on his newspaper's website and within 2 days, the world knew him and he had offers of work from hundreds of companies. Major companies. High profile. He's on the Today Show. It's the American dream come true. We cheer for him in a jumping up and down sort of way. We talk to others about him and his unbelievable story. We are happy for him that he's pulled himself out of ruin. We are totally on his side.

The Today Show anchors are worried about him. What's different this time? Now that you have this great fame, will you go back to the things that ruined you when you only had a modicum of fame?

Whatever happened to him over those years on the street where he found faith and hope, you can only hope, that this discovery was made in God's time. And that all that he went through has prepared him for this. That now is the time.

But we are crabs in a pot. If you put one crab in a pot, he'll climb out. The sure way to keep the crab in a pot is to put another one in with him. If one tries to get out, the other one will pull it back in.

If Ted Williams becomes too successful, or more successful than we think he should, will we hound him and hound him and pull him back in the pot where he's equal or lower than us? Will we, even in our excitement, let him have success?

Concurrently, there's a story running about a weather anchor in New York who claimed she was attacked in Central Park. According to my memory of the story, it turns out she made it all up. The story held talk that she would never work in that city or probably any city as a weather person again. How could anyone trust her?

I'm sure many people felt the same sentiment for the homeless man as well. Yet time heals, lets us change and grow and start anew. Let us let that happen. Call off the hounds. May we all move on.



The Thing About Christmas Cards

I am the chief procrastinator in the world. Just ask anybody who knows me well. Sometimes I mean to be and sometimes I don't. But why do what you can put off, has always been a big problem of mine.

Tolerance. We are so focused on being tolerant of people. Of saying oh, no problem, it's not your fault, I'll except that.

I'm talking a little bit about Christmas cards. Surprise.

People can't get to Christmas cards, so they send a new years card or a valentines day card or something else down the road. Now that's okay with me cause I like to hear from my friends any time. And it makes me think maybe I should send out a mid-year card too to my friends, just to keep in better touch. Wouldn't that be nice?

But what really bothers me is when people say, well I just can never get to those Christmas cards, I'm too busy. What that really says to me is that I'm not important enough to them. I mean really. Did you really not know that Christmas was coming? It comes at the same time every year. These are the people who complain every year that people start to prepare for Christmas too early. That you shouldn't think about the whole thing until sometime after Thanksgiving.

Well I don't know about you, but holidays are kinda easy. You have your tradition which you can add to or subtract from. You basically have your list of things you do for the holiday. Ok now back time. The big day is Dec. 25. How long does it take to decorate, outside & inside? How many parties will you have and go to? How much time does that require? Put it on your calendar. Who are you buying gifts for, how much and what are you buying? How much time shopping, wrapping, organizing? Where's the Christmas card list and how long will it take you to pick out cards, take pictures, write a family letter, whatever makes you happy? What is your faith commitment? How many cookies will you bake, with whom & when. How long does that take? Add it up. You've done all those things before. Now subtract it backwards from Christmas day. If you want rest days or fun days or don't want to be over stressed, subtract out more days.

That's how you get your Christmas cards out in time. Everybody's busy. You are not special. You cannot get busier and specialer. Trust me on this. Next year don't be surprised about Christmas, it'll come whether you're ready or not.

Just sayin'.



In Life In Death

And so we get ready to go to another funeral this weekend. Another heartbreaking, soul-shaking celebration of a life taken from us too soon. Another chance to look at a life and a death with a sense of awe and wonder. The beauty of life and the glory of death. What must the kids think about it all.

I remember their questions about death, coming from them at such an early age. An age where at the time they had no experience of it yet. No surprise. No loss. No finality. Yet aren't those the important moments when you take the time to explain your beliefs and the wonder of salvation. And the beauty of heaven, the afterlife, that comes to sustain them now, that sustains us all now.

For this friend of ours, David, we were asked to put together a video of photos. Our two oldest kids, who've recently learned to edit, contributed the lions share of the work. Their dad a seasoned pro at putting music and video together worked with them. What a thrill to watch them absorb and learn from his talent. What a thrill to watch as they chose simplicity over overdoing and came up with an amazing tribute to a friend. What an amazing process to watch your kids enjoy the opportunity to contribute. To do something completely for somebody else. To stay up late at the end of a long school day and use their youthful energy to recharge ours, and still to get up early to start it all again.

I watched till it was done and threw in my own two cents, then went up to bed while they compressed and copied and all the rest that finishing takes. I didn't really expect to fall asleep, too much on my mind, but I must have drifted off. Suddenly clear as a bell I'm hearing the second to last song and then the last one playing. I'm enjoying the music and watching the images in my mind and at the same time struggling to stay asleep. I don't think caffeine works hard enough to keep me awake during the day, but it sure does at night and pretty soon that music won't leave my mind, that last song is playing over and over again in my head. My husband is now in bed and asleep and I'm awake with the music going inside me and thinking about life and death and how little I understand it.

And so I reach for my iPad and begin this blog.

We are all destined to die. It's our fate from birth. We just don't know how long we have. I believe we all have our earthly missions to fulfill no matter how big or how small and some of us finish sooner than others. Then I guess it's time. It's strange to think that these earthly bodies of ours are just shells that our minds and soul have been put into and yet we put such stock into our appearance and how others look. Not that that's wrong, it's just meaningless in the end.

The other thing that I find interesting is how we choose to fill up our lives. We are busy. We drop one activity and pick up three others. We are so busy, we really don't have that much time for our family and friends. I wonder if we let our looks and activities define us when really what defines us is something so much deeper. Do we ever let ourselves discover that? And how do we use our time on earth to make a difference?

We don't live our lives thinking of ourselves as terminal, I guess that's why death always surprises us. It does take away some of our innocence. But it should leave us with a sense of gratitude for each day that we have with the people we love. Let us put our effort into making the best of that.

Days have passed. The funeral is over. And my husband asks, "Have you noticed how the kids are staying close to me? I jump in the car and so do they. I can't shake them. I know that won't last, but I'll enjoy it while it does."

Stay close and love as much as you can while you can.



Observations on the Road to School

I know...Abraham Lincoln walked 100 miles to school each day...(and so did my parents...) and I know that walking or bike riding is quite healthy...but!

I'm just not so sure. I worry about the kids that go on foot or scooter or bike or long board or some other way unaccompanied by a parent.

I'm lucky enough I can walk with my son. And everyday that I do, I'm glad. Not only do I have a few good moments to connect directly, find out about his plans, his day, what's on his mind...but I can shudder through the heavy drafts left by the cars racing by. It's not supposed to be a busy street. And it's definitely not a major thoroughfare. It's just a simple road getting people out of the neighborhood and on to work. Aaaah work...the place everybody is always late to!

So on the first half of our short walk, the cars are generally zooming. The second half gets us closer to school. Unfortunately on the side we approach from there is no 15 mph sign to slow people down. The 80% who are dropping kids off at school slow down to make the turn, but they too are in a hurry. And those fleeing the neighborhood who don't have to make the turn...they swerve toward oncoming traffic to avoid the potential lineup for the turn.

Just seems like too much chance for error for me. I'm not so much worried about predators as I am about drivers. I also like the assurance that my son gets to school safely. Because I've seen how careless kids can be.

Before any of my kids went to school, that's about 20 years ago now, perish the thought, I was driving past the same elementary school that my youngest attends and all his siblings before him. School had just let out so I was driving by very slowly. I was watching some kids head home on bikes and they were all racing and fooling around and happy to be let out! Quick as a blink one of those kids fell off his bike right in front of my car! Because I had my eye on those kids and I was driving slowly, I was able to stop. The kid got up, jumped back on his bike & caught up with his friends. But I was shaken enough to remember the incident crystal clearly all these years later.

When I drive to the middle school to pick my daughter up there, I am reminded of that time. There are kids riding bikes out of every orifice of the school, as fast or crazily as they can. They aren't looking forward...or even sideways most of the time, they are looking backwards to find their friends. I breath a sigh of relief when I'm done with that pickup, which happily I don't have to do very often. But I always wonder...do parents know what this after school scene looks like? Do they worry the same way I do?

Or am I just a worrier warrior? An over-protective, helicopter mom?

I'm walking now in the mornings. I drop my son off at school and walk on and around the larger part of the neighborhood. It's a good little walk in the cool of the day. It's fun to feel the hustle & bustle around me and not to be so much a part of it. On the other side of the school the 15 mph sign appears along with

some crossing guards. Today as a couple cars zoomed by, I commented to the crossing guard that it didn't look like 15 mph to me. She called it the "audubon crossing". And further down, the other crossing guard was chatting to a friend a half a block away from the crossing. Not that there were walkers in danger, but I'm just saying!

I totally understand how both parents in a family have to work these days. I may not be far from that reality myself. But if it happens, I'll figure out a way to make that commute as safe as possible.

It may have been dangerous too in Abraham Lincoln's day. Walking through the woods with bears and beasts and bugs, we probably still have it pretty good.



Reading is Me

I've been on a bit of a book binge lately. Pretty much I'm guessing, to the chagrin of all around me...including me myself. I can't get enough. I'm trying to swallow up all the books of the world. If I just finish this one, I'll be done, I can get back to the work I'm supposed to be doing. It really doesn't help to be in the middle of four books. Then I finish one and open another one to replace it.

It seemed to start innocently with me reading a few pages before I fell asleep. Then we started to get up earlier to workout. Never having been one to want to wake up to (hurt myself) workout, I decided I would wake up for a good book. So now I pump the pedals of the exercise bike, book in hand. Works like a charm. Trouble is...it's hard to let it go for the day.

There are still some days I have no choice. There are places I need to be and things I'm obligated to do. And so the book sits for a while. But on the days where there are moments of decision...clean something up, write a blog, put something together, do some research...it's too much of a decision for me. Too much to chip away at. Back to the book.

I'm not worried about this tiny little obsession lasting forever. Too much of a good thing is always too much of a good thing. Something else will surely come along to capture my interest and pull me away to a little more logical amount of time spent. But I love to read and in the early days of marriage and raising kids,

there were actually years where I read nothing at all. Now it's time to make up for lost time. Time to enjoy a good story, good writing, new ideas and thoughts that have real meaning for me.

I think I was born a reader. I learned when every other kid learned in first grade. I didn't learn quickly, but I do remember when I first caught on. I remember the feeling of discovery. One of the first things I did was teach my younger sister what I knew. She learned much faster than me, but I still cherish that memory of her discovering alongside me. Back in the day we didn't have a video game in sight, there weren't always a lot of choices for fun. But there always were a lot of choices for books.

The library was a magnificent place! I loved wandering the aisles and reading the backs of books to see what interested me. Every time, I left with as many books as they'd let me leave with. I loved the smell, feel and texture of the books. I loved the anticipation of what the story would bring.

There was a time when I would read any book that I could get my hands on. Today, I'm much fussier. There are just too many good books, to waste time on one that doesn't appeal. Now do my kids follow me on this? Did they inherently inherit my love of books? Nope. Not at all. They go to the library, bring home books and rarely look at them again. Between my 5 kids, maybe one book got read this summer, and that's being generous. Maybe I just didn't read enough in those days. Maybe I didn't read enough to them. I do remember trying to read to them & putting my own self to sleep, I was just so tired. They didn't have a good example. That may be part of it. That may have something to do with it. But I'm not totally convinced. I think loving to read may just be part of the personality you are born with. Just like being born with a natural athletic ability, or a natu-

ral talent. There are a lot of things you can't teach. You can't teach a kid to be Brett Favre, that's a birthright and he got it.

So I guess you expose them, give them opportunities and let them be themselves, reach for the stars that feel good to them and live the life of their choice, not yours.

So while I would like to share my love of reading with my kids...they're not picking up on it...and I'll try not to force the issue. We all are who we are. And they're still perfect to me.

Meanwhile...where's that book? I'm finished here.



Back to School Again

The kids went back to school today...or was it yesterday?

Actually it was last week, but who's counting? Going back to school is a big deal. No matter how hot it is, summer is over. Everything is new. Shopping. New clothes, shoes, school supplies, hair thingies, jewelry, makeup, calculators. Everything changes. New classes, new friends, new schedules all around. There's a bit of magic around starting a new "schedule". It feels good after the freedom and randomness of summer vacation to tighten up and know where to be when!

So you have the excitement of shopping & stocking up on new things, the excitement of seeing old friends again, the excitement of new (schools), classes, friends. More than any other time of the year, I think, it's a time for renewal, reinvention, growth. Whatever you did or did not do well last year, you can fix, adjust. Whoever you were or weren't or however you acted or didn't act, you can adjust, reinvent yourself, become somebody different.

I tell my kids...the slate is clean, the characters are changing. Whatever you didn't like last year, whatever didn't work for you, whatever you want to do differently...you can do. You want to have more friends...be outgoing, talk a little more. You want to get better grades...pay attention, work on details, do what you're supposed to do. You want to have more fun...get involved in new activities, go to some sports events.

It's good to be able to draw a line, set new goals and decide who you are and what you want to contribute. Even though it's been decades since I've been in school (my kids would call it centuries), so many of those feelings are the same for me, as a mom sending off all 5 of my kids back to school. What will I do? Who will I be? What will I learn? What will I contribute? How will I make the most of this time I now have? Granted it's not very long before the pick ups and drop offs and additional schedules start, but there is some time.

My biggest problem, then & now, is that I always want to do too much, my eyes are bigger than my stomach. I think I can cook & clean & do laundry, as well as work & read & write & workout. I think I can meet all my commitments, set new ones and still have time left over. Why is it we are always overfilling the available time? What happened to swinging on the porch swing watching the cars go by. Sometimes I find myself moving so fast I forget to cut my kids fingernails. I forget the most basic of things.

Just before school started back, my daughter with eyes aglow asked, "Aren't you excited for us all to go back to school mom?" Just like she'd gotten the inside scoop from the moms club or heard me or some other mom saying so on the phone. I'm not even sure what I replied back, but the truth of the matter is that yes, 10 years ago, what a relief to send them back, have a little more time, have the weight of 24/7 lifted a little. But today, I'm not as excited for myself. I'm excited for them and the experiences they will have and the things that they will learn that will mark them and prepare them for their future.

As for me...I will miss them. They don't need me as much anymore, they don't take my time and attention in the same way. I love their stories and perspective on things. I love their humor, I love to hear them talk, I love to know what they're excited about.

What's the most exciting about them going back to school...having them come home and sharing that important part of their lives, letting them go and getting them back again. I can't take that for granted. It's just one more thing I'm thankful for!



Grocery Store Antics

I'm still laughing! And I laugh because it all happened to me in the not too distant past. I remember like it was yesterday, but I'm glad it's not! When it happened to me of course it was not really funny. Laughter was the farthest emotion. So here's what happened...

I was in the grocery store picking up a few items for dinner. During the little teeny bit of time that I was choosing out canned pineapple slices (not chunks or bits), this mom passed me with her cart and two pre school girls. The girls are sniveling. The mom is 3 levels down from hollering. "Ok now you're getting a nap too". The two girls get louder. "Ok you're going to nap for a whole week. And I'm taking away your game...for another week". The girls cry harder. "And I'm not going to let you go to Ashley's house". Even louder crying. "And if you don't stop right this minute you won't have a birthday party...AND vacation". By now the girls are near to screaming. "And Christmas". The mom is now leaning over grasping an arm of each of them. "I'm going to count to three and you know what will happen". This too does no good. I hear a new threat and I marvel at the huge long laundry list of things we think of to torture our kids into behaving the way we need them to. Keep in mind, this was all in the space of a fraction of a minute.

When I was a kid we would have been wacked four times and thrown in the car to sit until mom was done. Nowadays if you wack you go to jail, and the same

thing or worse will happen if you leave them in the car. These are not parenting options any more. Yet what I find so hysterically funny is the universal need to throw out every threat in our arsenal as fast as we can speak. And as I watched that poor mom and her poor kids, it was crystal clear to me that the threats and punishments were working counter to her purposes. Instead of calming them down, she was ramping them up. And the louder they got, the more frustrated she got. A vicious circle where nobody's happy.

I could go on to talk about discipline, but that's not the point here. The point is our shared experience...in the moment and viewing someone else's moment. As moms we have all been there, some of us more than others. How we handle the situation really sets us up for our next time around that same event. I suppose it sets up our kids for how they feel about shopping with us. Is it pleasant or frightening? If it's unpleasant, it's setting them up for the same behavior.

Is there any good advice to give? We all are on different paths with different obstacles and different small decisions. Planning could be a key. Whenever I scheduled to get my kids portraits taken, I was always very careful to do it far away from nap time, so they weren't tired. And very careful to give myself enough time to get them ready, so that I wasn't in the panic zone. It's just so easy for them to pick up on our stresses.

I also tried to be careful to plan smaller outings, just as we don't like to be bored, they don't like it either. I prefer to look toward rewards as an incentive rather than punishments. Hang in there with me and we'll drive through for a happy meal. Or let them pick out a new coloring book or a small priced item that they can look forward to. Life is all about negotiation, even with our very perceptive youngsters.

By opting to run errands late at night when the kids were sleeping and my husband or another family member could be home with them, I could give both the kids and me some relief. They don't need to be dragged everywhere, scheduling can prevent many problems.

And yet even with all the purposeful planning, you will find yourself (or somebody else) in the moment. And I think in both cases a little sympathy, forgiveness, encouragement and a smile may all be in order.



Cooking at Home

So I've had this ongoing argument with myself. It has to do with meal preparation vs drive through, pick up or any other way I don't have to create it myself. Obviously in everybody's view including my own, cooking at home is healthier. Everybody, except maybe me, thinks cooking at home is cheaper too! This I'm not sure about. If I drive through and pick up super meals for everybody in my family, it comes somewhere between \$30 and \$40. I can go cheaper than that at some places and go greater than that upscaling just a bit and...voilà...my variety! The serendipity is that's all there is, like it or not you're done, no second helpings! If you've bought yourself a lot, hurray, that's lunch tomorrow. Works well!

My friends think I'm looney tunes, nod like yes we keep hearing this from you, it may sound all good, but you're wrong!

They must be right of course.

So then I go to the grocery with my ingredient list in hand. I really am totally capable of shopping for what I need and getting out of the store without buying more. Not that I always do that, but mostly I do. Check out and guess what? \$40 or \$50 or more, sometimes less! Read my coupon queen blog to learn I'm not hellbent on that! But I am focusing on off brand or sale items. Now I go home and spend the rest of my day cooking. So why wouldn't I drive through or order ahead and pick up?

And that's been our life up until recently! I'm not a bad cook, just a reluctant one. Holidays are my fun time for cooking. Cooking for a crowd is great. Make a huge variety of foods and who cares if somebody doesn't like something, somebody else will. So I wear myself out and then rest for the rest of the year! Until recently, when I consciously decided to offer some recipe ideas on the momtime tv website.

That got me started shopping and chopping, baking and roasting. Getting out of my comfort zone in the kitchen. Having to put up a new recipe everyday didn't seem so difficult at the outset, but whew, did it turn into a challenge. But the challenge turned out to be a fun thing for me. And now I'm actually enjoying my time in the kitchen and making new recipes I never would have given a second thought to. And the chore of chopping an onion is no big deal anymore. I'm trying to cook healthier, but still throw in those "treats" for the kids.

And it was funny too. At first my family begged for those days that I would succumb to the drive through. But now they can't wait to find out what's coming up next. That hasn't stopped them from that restaurant mentality of thinking though. They want choice and they don't want leftovers! On normal days when I'm cooking, there is no choice and I'm trying not to over do it so there are less leftovers. I can't eat everything after all. It's funny finding the things they like! I can never go wrong with a dessert! Salads are always touch and go! And they don't like fruit on their lettuce. And they don't like all kinds of lettuce or all kinds of dressings. They will argue vehemently, but I think it's good to try new things...to stretch your taste buds a little. Oh and if you wonder where my husband stands with all this...he's 100 percent with the kids. They like what they like.

The good news as well as they bad news is we are on the cycle of new every night, so if they love it or hate it, they probably won't see it again for a long long time.

I missed the movie "Julie & Julia" but I read the book. And while I wasn't all that enthralled with it, I find myself feeling similar to how she must have felt and challenged in some similar ways. Even though my recipes are leagues easier, I find myself less reluctant to stretch a little more. All in all I'm loving this adventure!

Life is phases. What works at what time. This too is a phase. And I like it.



Mother's Day Revisited

I know I know, it's been over now for over a week! Most people have totally forgotten it by now, but I've still got Mother's Day on my mind! I think my husband read my blog and totally washed his hands of the whole thing. That's my blog about how maybe we should take charge of Mother's Day ourselves and not wait for our husband's to guess what we might want out of that day. He seemed relieved and anxious to give it up, like I was going to learn a lesson.

Well I still think it's a good theory, but the plan was flawed. I did accomplish some of the things I set out to do the week before. I got the mani/pedi, got the new tires for the car, even bought myself a new purse. Hallelujah! But I was still planning on my husband to make exciting plans for the day...

But when he asked me on Friday what I wanted to do on Sunday, I realized we might be in trouble. My thought was to try a "new" restaurant for brunch. You know, someplace we'd never been before, someplace we weren't likely to ever drive through, someplace with a little adventure for us.

That was the first big miscalculation! How on earth had I forgotten that the reason we never go out for Mother's Day is that everybody in the world with a mother or even hopes of being a mother goes out on that day during that one small time slot! So I call to make reservations at a restaurant we thought would be

fun. They laughed. Not one seat available at any time that day...or the next!
What??!!

So ingeniously...I googled restaurants around me! And I found a winner! The menu looked perfect. The location, spectacular. High atop a hill with gorgeous Arizona spring views. A place close to home, but a place we hadn't been. Reasonably priced, it wasn't their "top of the rock" restaurant, it was their #2 restaurant. It was picture perfect. Who would think of going there?? Not me! So I call for a reservation. They were mostly booked, but they could get the 7 of us in at 12:30. That was the perfect time for us! Mission accomplished!

And so the glorious Sunday of Mother's Day begins. We work out, go to church, get our family photo taken and head out to "brunch"! Halfway there, my husband asks, "now where is this place?" I, who have no directions because I knew he'd been there a bunch of years ago, have to re-explain where we are going! We head up the hill as our reservation time clicks on the clock. And then we stop mid-way! We are at the end of a long line of cars all going to the same place. Uh-oh!

The delay is due to the valeting of cars! Lots of kids jumping into people's cars and taking them who knows where. My husband and kids see the "Top of the Rock" restaurant and ask if we're eating there. "Oh no!" I say, "We're eating at the other one. The cheap one...but it looks nice."

"I want to go to the 'Top of the Rock' on Father's Day!" my husband says! So they drop me off and I dodge the speeding valets to get into the hotel's restaurant. I finally figure out where to go as the rest of the family walks in. Well it's down a few stairs! But the room is very beautiful. We check in. They look at my husband & 5 kids and ask, "how many moms?" (I would think that would be obvious!?) Just one we say. So they hand me a rose and we follow them back through the

beautiful restaurant. There are empty tables, none of which had 7 chairs though. And I notice there are huge parties of people with all generations of moms in them. There are windows all around with lovely views. And we are led to a door...the back door. She opens it and ushers us outside.

We are now in a narrow walkway with 4 or 5 empty tables set up. Ours had 10 chairs actually where we sat down. We are the only ones out there. There are walls of rock in front of us, the restaurant behind us. No view whatsoever! I'm starting to panic, because I can never eat outside in spring in Phoenix...my allergies will kill me!

We sit there alone, the 7 of us. Me with my rose and all of us with no menus! We sit there wondering what is on the menu and me assuring everybody...oh there's good stuff on there, you will love it. So finally a waiter comes out and gets everybody's juice orders and a mimosa for me. I debated on that, but it's my day after all!

So we sit and wait for our drinks...still no menus! Hmmm. At last all the drinks are poured and we stare blankly at our waiter who immediately tells us we are welcome to start the buffet. Ewww!

Well it is Mother's Day. It will cost us a little bit more, but how bad can it be? \$150 probably. Oh well, live & learn. The kids are now in motion, thrilled by the idea of endless eating! We can barely get out of our chairs cause we're so squished in that small space with giant umbrellas in the way trying to cover all of us! So now the 7 of us blast inside, into shelter, into coolness, bliss. As our eyes try to adjust to the light we miss entirely the breakfast room and head instead to "dinner" where there's lamb and beef and a spaghetti typish pasta and chicken nuggets, mac & cheese, mashed potatoes and all that stuff. Not what I wanted, but ok.

We fill up our plates, shuffle past the happy, cool people inside and settle back in outside. Geez it's hot! We shake our heads, laugh as we eat, just our family alone outside. Are we not dressed right? What did we do wrong? Do we look that bad? Can't they put two of those smaller empty tables together for us...inside?

My son jumps up, "I'm ready for more." The door opens and we feel the cool inside air. "hold that open a minute" one of the kids says!

I don't know how many plates my son was holding when he returned, but he'd found the breakfast area and had an omelet, a waffle and a big bit of everything you can imagine. "Where was that?" the rest of us say?

We all go back in, one at a time so we can hold the door open more often. I graciously pass on a 2nd mimosa. But the breakfast part is great. We sweat as we eat. Oh yeah, there are no misters like we have everywhere here in Phoenix, everywhere food is eaten outside. Just a couple of those umbrellas jammed in next to us!

The desserts look amazing. "This is almost as good as 'Goofy's Kitchen'" the kids chime. "We love that place!"

The bill comes & I ignore it, thinking I know what vicinity that's in. I let the waiter pour me more mimosa. He just seemed compelled to do that after leaving the bill. And he wasn't grabbing at it either to add it on. Hmmm.

We are starting to open the door, not to go back inside, but just to get a shot of cool air. “You can’t do that,” my husband says, “you’ll disturb the people inside.” What like we’re not disturbed?!!

The kids are wearing out from dessert eating and start to investigate “where those stairs go.” We’re still the only ones outside. We can’t see the inside through the windows, but we are totally on display to all those inside. Some of the kids are off. My husband picks up the check, stops breathing for a minute, then starts to laugh. Or was that choke? I snatch it out of his hand. \$359.00! \$50 per person. Plus the 20% tip for the waiter was already added in. Good thing for him, because I wouldn’t have left 20% for a buffet, where I’m doing 90% of the work.

My husband passes the bill around to let all the kids observe (probably what a great Mother’s Day I had set up for myself). We’re laughing because you can’t really cry at a Mother’s Day buffet. The waiter must have been watching us, cause he comes out and is sure to let us know that he didn’t charge us for our youngest child. I didn’t have the heart to ask if that was because of the crummy seating or the fact that our skinny 9 year old can’t eat \$50 worth of food in a week. He asks if I wanted more mimosa. Everyone screams “yes”! I took it realizing that we probably paid for unlimited mimosa for all!

“I don’t think we’ll eat at “Top of the Rock” for Father’s Day,” my husband quips!

The rose was deader than a door nail! I try to get a new one on the way out (through the delicious inside), but they look at me like I’m a lunatic. And maybe I am after 3 mimosa’s, sweating outside and a bill greater than a week’s worth of groceries. I walk out with my dead rose and my laughing family. We laugh all the way home as my husband, the comedian, relives every moment of the meal.

Thank God for family, a family who always looks at the bright side of things. For me, it will be another century or so before I venture out for another Mother's Day feast. We'll pick another day to celebrate!

In fact, it's not too early to formulate a new plan for next year! After all, I surely am the only one worrying about that one!



Texting While Driving

Ok, Oprah probably started this whole craze and coined it...the “no phone zone” in your car. Otherwise known as no texting and driving. Fortunately in all my multi-tasking life, I know my limitations when it comes specifically to texting while driving. Though this may be fueled by the fact that I can’t see far & near at the same time, so it’s a lot of rigamarole for me in the car! I’m not even a good phone person, so really I already rarely talk on the phone in the car. If and when I do, it’s always short!!!

Millions of people must text and talk on cell phones in their cars to bring all this to the loud forefront. But really there are so many other really difficult things people do while driving in their cars. Eating is a big one. I mean how does anybody eat a double big whopper while driving a car? As a mom, how can you concentrate on the road when all your little kids have their food in the car and you’re trying to pass it out. And they’re fighting over who gets what and then someone stabs the straw in the drink and the bottom pops out.

What about people like me with allergies who are fighting off 20 sneezes and grabbing to reach the constantly moving tissue box?

What about the kids fighting and beating on each other and listening to the tone of the screaming and crying rapidly accelerate?

What about your two year old climbing out of his car seat and standing up behind you! Or screeching to go potty now! Or the toy truck that comes flying at your head?

We can get into some real motherly scenerios that make texting look tame! And these are from good kids!

What about those who dress & put on makeup while driving? Or writing checks? Or business reports that are due? What about driving too fast in bad weather? No wonder people think they can text at the same time!

I'm not discounting the importance of what texting and driving mean when they go on at the same time. What I am saying is we all need to take into account all other driving distractions and try to alleviate all that we can. Accidents occur in an instant, an instant too late. We should all be aware of our own distractions.

Texting is one of a myriad of things that happen while driving. What's the strangest thing you've done or encountered behind the wheel? What are your driving distractions? There's always something!

Can you learn? Can you change? Can you do better?

Can you get a chauffeur?

Oops that's our job!



Celebrating Mother's Day

It's mother's day week and nobody in my family is into it but me! Maybe they're waiting to surprise me on Sunday like "oh wow I didn't know it was Mother's Day!"

Now why is that? As a mom of 5 in the active stages of motherhood, one day of celebration (if you can call it that) just doesn't seem like enough.

What's wrong with Mother's Day? That's easy! Dad has to get it right! That's a gamble! He basically has to read our mind and determine what it is we expect from that day! Even if he gets it right one year, chances are it'll be a long time before he gets it right again. And when you're mothering all of the day and most of the night to toddlers and babies, fat chance of them shopping for the gift of your dreams. Or planning the big day you've been looking forward to. Fat chance of really any other form of gratitude coming from them. And there's really a huge, gigantic, enormous chance of you working your butt off on Mother's Day catering to them!

And who says your husband shouldn't cater to you because you're not HIS mom? You are the mother of his kids and I think that's enough! I think that makes you top mom!

The problem with Mother's Day is that dad is in charge. Now what does dad plan? Other than things for mom to do? Isn't it always mom that plans the vacations, the sporting events, the dinners out, the dinners in, parties, gatherings, get togethers... anything involving more than one person being in one place at the same time.

And being humble or feeling undeserving (not really) of attention, we moms stand back and wait to see what wondrous thing our family plans to surprise, amaze & delight us with.

Big, huge, gargantuan mistake. We gotta take back our day. Love it. Enjoy it. Revel in it. Hey we're moms, we gave birth to these bundles of joy that don't clean their bedrooms. We did the work, we do the work everyday to raise them, teach them, direct and cherish them. And even when they're grown and go away and do their own thing and live their own lives and think you haven't ever done a thing for them. They still have your constant love and care and concern. Even if they never ask you for a shred of advice, you bite your lip and share all you know with them in the corner of your mind. When a child grows up in your jurisdiction, they may reject you, but you never reject them, they are just as needy (just in other ways) as that newborn or teenager you sacrificed for and adored.

And see that's why that one day of recognition means so much. Our lives more than any other has been unalterably changed when our children come in our lives. No matter how old they get and how far away they move, they are still our top concern. We look forward to them graduating, moving out and moving on, and they do...but we don't. The investment we've made in those kids continues. You don't know that (really) until you let them go.

So back to Mother's Day. How do kids learn? From example! So if they're watching Dad plan for Mother's Day, what does that mean for their future? Maybe it's time we moms got involved. Maybe we should plan our day like we'd like it! Put it together the way we want to spend it. Now that makes sense!

And the way I look at it, is you gotta start early. One short day to eat, get your back rubs and foot rubs and rooms cleaned just goes way too fast. Cause you know when you drop down into bed on Mother's Day, it's over for another year. So I'm asking for my back rubs early while they're working up to the big day. So far, it's not working, but it's got me thinking. I can do a little something for myself each day, make it special, take better care of myself. Get something I've been wanting. Monday I bought a new pair of tennis shoes (it's been 5 years!)

Tuesday netted me a manicure, pedicure.

Wednesday, maybe a new purse before the handle on the one I have falls off completely.

Thursday new front tires.

Friday...a good housecleaning.

Saturday...a long workout, a good book and dinner out with my hubby.

And Sunday, my big gift from all (which actually is a really big one this year), church, breakfast someplace where we'd never otherwise go and dinner, hmm, maybe bratwurst on the grill and snuggling back up at home would complete the week!!!

Dad's not always a failure at making Mother's Day great. But his success in making us happy has everything to do with our attitude & expectations. We maybe need to help a little bit with that!

PS. I can't say I'm the best Father's Day planner. I got my husband luggage one year and wine glasses another. None of which he appreciated or enjoyed. He's actually already shopping for his Father's Day gift!

Another good thought to the week would be to try to make somebody else's Mother's Day special, even if she's not your own mom. There's still time left for that!

Now take the time and do it right! You do for everything else! Happy Mother's Day!



Coupon Queen

It's one of the many big wonders in my life! All the people cutting, clipping, ripping coupons and really truly getting a break on the price tag?!!! I've tried it I admit, grudgingly. So yes the commitment is barely there. But every time I dip my coupon clipping toe in the water, I'm flooded with trepidation & questions & doubt!

And here's why! I don't trust those companies. I totally believe they've set this whole scheme up to get the best of me & my money.

Let's talk about Costco. It's a whale of a store. Who can't love traipsing through there? With a list or without...you gotta come out with a little bit more than you expected! Make that an extra grocery cart more!!! And how about those extra big portions? We have a big family so it makes some sense. But even we, have not been able to go through (in a decade) that big bag of almonds I bought for Christmas cookies. My husband did have one allergic episode after eating them like popcorn one day! But that's another story. So I go to Costco to buy a few things for a few dinners and \$500 some dollars later, I'm squishing giant stacks of food into my car. I fly home hoping the trunk doesn't pop open from the pressure and positive I must have saved big money. Of course the kids are still in school, so alone I lug in the 4 tons of food I've just purchased. 20 minutes later the first kids rush through the door and immediately follow the food trail. Yahoo they say and set in to whatever rips open the fastest. 2 days later, I'm back where I

started. Those coupons always look good, some of them are even for things I need, but most of them are for things I think I need or things I'd like to try. But here's the thing. When you look at the coupon, it's good for 5 or 6 of the items. And they're all big. But how can you pass them up?

I'll clip coupons. I'll separate the ones that interest me out of the weekly direct mail envelopes I receive. No way can we eat that much. Turns out to be a big mess in my house...lots of piles. So ok, I'll just put them in my car so I have them when I need them. Uh-oh, now the junk pile is in my car. So I'm getting the pizza. Hold on I know I have a coupon. Oh no, all 6 coupons are for different pizza places. Dum me! But if you think my car is bad or my house is bad...you should see my purse! Problem is... when I nice and neatly organize them, they're gone and I forget to look for them. So they're either out and a mess or lost somewhere, or they're neatly categorized and long forgotten. And the thing is nine times out of ten the coupon is for something I never use or even occasionally use is not an inspiration.

And how many rewards, awards and clipper cards do you carry? My wallet doesn't even close all the way because of them. But geez, if I already shop there, how can I pass up the great deal of buying 20 and then getting one free! When it comes to that, I usually end up starting a new card every time, which simply adds to my problem.

I like the companies that record your purchase amounts for free dollars off somewhere down the road. I used to like the dollars off coupons sent to me by Best Buy, but now the only way to get those is to go to their website and somehow find it. I'm computer savvy enough to figure it out, but at what cost of my time? Even when I do manage to receive a \$10 coupon, I still have to have it with me when I shop there! Sometimes this little perk operates like frequent flyer mileage.

You have to have a whole lot of usage to get a little amount and then if you don't get to the magic number in a year, you lose it all and start over. Don't you love incentives?

So I am still coupon fascinated. To me it's like trying to figure out how a TV works. Somehow it gets there and it's lovely, but I don't know how it actually happens. Yesterday I watched the real "coupon queen" in action. She was challenged by a reporter to shop for items on the same list and come up with the lowest cost owed. The coupon queen was loaded with her (organized) coupons and she grabbed a mailer on the way into the store. Net net at the end, the reporter owed \$80 some and the coupon queen owed \$1. Now really how does that work? If you get \$1.50 off for a package of toilet paper, you still owe more than that! The best coupon I've ever seen is \$5 off a \$20 purchase. So even then, it's still \$15.

Ok so I'm no coupon queen, no math queen, too lazy to clip, remember and save...but getting to that \$1 price tag amazes me. I can't let it go.

As the world goes on to give us
more economic strife;
I'd like to be a coupon queen
sometime in this life!



Breathe Deep...And Sneeze

There are tears streaming down my face and I'm apparently helpless to do anything about it. When I'm at home alone, I just let them go, but when I'm out, I dab away at them. Does anyone even notice? They are more of a bother to me than anyone else.

Yes, it's allergy season and there's all this yuck moving around inside, willing to take any available outlet to explode on the outside. We allergy sufferers have instant and complete sympathy for anyone else who's afflicted. But people who don't have allergies, haven't a clue. They must think it's attention getting drama on our part.

But the truth of the matter is it spins my world. All the things that were simple and reasonable to do cannot be done. Oh there's a soccer game? How long am I going to have to sit out in that? Pool party? Outdoor mall? Picnic in the park? Hiking? Biking? Take a walk? Are you crazy? Nope, I'm in my house, shut in like Anne Frank. And still sneezing! There's no hiding.

Where's the relief? Surely there is something to do, take or apply that will calm the storm! Surely something has been invented that works. Ok so I'm not

much of a doctor happy person. I'm like the dog laying on the nail, complaining, but not irritated enough to get up and do something about it.

But I do talk to other allergy sufferers and I ask a lot of questions. I try and pick up on the things other people do that seem to help. But nobody has a lot of ideas. People take different things, some work better than others. Some people have taken the weekly shots, but that only seems to make it worse. The theory behind that I think it to give you so much of what you're allergic to that you build up an immunity. But walking around with an epi-pin and a wing and a prayer doesn't appeal to me.

Allergies are not a new thing. I remember my dad used to have them bad. My mom would get all us kids pulling the weeds in the yard so my dad wouldn't have to suffer as much, but even so, I remember him missing some of those fun family things we would be doing. Now it's me missing things. Missing spring. Missing the best weather we ever have. Missing the beauty of rebirth. Because that is out to kill me.

The drug companies have a lot of options out there for us to take and we take them all. So little relief. Their pockets are filled with our money so they are happy. We are not. We suffer. Our lives are stalled. We lock ourselves in and hide away pretending we are normal. It is my belief that there is no intent on the part of drug companies to give us relief...only the need to take more of what does not work for us. Keep suffering America and we'll keep taking your money.

So we continue to blast out mind blowing sneezes and wheezes and coughing, choking, snot blowing til our noses are raw and we pray for heat. And fast!



Watching TV

What's up with people? Why do so many insist that watching a little TV is going to ruin their kids? I don't understand that and so far no one has even presented a reasonable argument against it.

I mean all I really hear from people is that they limit the TV viewing their children have or they use TV viewing as a reward if all their tasks are done or they don't have a TV or certainly NOT a TV in every room. I don't know why they think this is a good thing. Do they think that they and their child will be in front of the TV every second of every day?

That might be bad. Too much of a good thing probably does make it a bad thing. Probably too much lettuce is not good either!

And yes, I did spend many years in the TV industry, specifically in TV promotion. I guess you could say my job was to get people to watch more TV. That's not what I'm writing about though. I don't care if you watch or not. What I like about TV has to do about story, creativity, production, information and life.

I love to read. Why? Because I love the story, the way words are put together, the way emotion is evoked. It's the same with TV...every show has a story, sports have a story. Video has always been accused of taking the imagination out of the

book. Somebody else chooses the outfits for the characters, the setting, the angles, the characters characteristics. Uh-huh. But every time I go back to the book, I still picture it back in the setting of my mind, not what the movie has shown.

I think TV offers opportunity for children to learn creativity, emotion and the way things work in life. It gives them ideas and dreams and direction. It took all of those things to get the program on TV. Certainly we can glean those out and learn.

People complain that when the kids are in front of the TV, the moms aren't interacting with them enough. What I love about TV is that so often it brings our family together. Now most of our kids are at the age where they enjoy watching American Idol. We look forward to it and gather together with our dinner plates and critique and cheer the performances. It's a chance to discuss everything from lifestyles to talent to dreams in life to tattoos, hair styles, clothing choices, and how people treat other people. The conversations are spontaneous, but our kids learn a lot from us just sitting with us. And because it's fun, everybody wants to be there.

The same things happen with sports programming. It draws us together on a Sunday afternoon. It's fun, it's a party, it's togetherness.

Do you use your TV to your advantage? Do you really think it's a bad thing? Or do you just tell people you do because it seems like the right thing?



Life and Death

How did I get to this age already? Is it a matter of age or is something else going on? I know that death is a part of life. But I liked the part of my life where so much death was not involved. It's been a tough year.

We lost another friend on Saturday. Cancer. A nearly 3 year battle. And the whole time, I didn't want to believe it, all I wanted to do was hope. Hope that there was a treatment that would work, hope that there would be more years of quality time. Hope.

Hope. But in the end, it's inevitable, it's ending at 55. My husband got to be part of a group of his friends who took him to Vegas. They drove there, like kids heading out after a graduation. At that time Mike had one week of life left, but nobody knew that at the time. He had cancer, he was in pain, the trip wasn't easy for him, but he got out to experience life one more time. He put the car window down and let his head rest to feel the wind on his face. Think of all the times he'd felt that wind, but now it must have meant more! They went out for a meal of a lifetime, one my husband and the other men will never forget. They watched the musical light show in downtown Vegas. It rained the whole way home. And it was still raining when they brought Mike home. By the time they turned the corner to drop the next guys off, it was sunny & dry. Meaning.

Yesterday my good friend's sister passed away. In her 50's battling cancer for many years. She has it, she's cured, it comes back & then regresses and then takes hold & never lets go. This is my friend who's always there for everybody else, how can I be there for her? What good can I do?

Not 5 months before, we lost another friend, age 40. Happy, healthy, training for a marathon. Wife & 6 kids. Out running, a piece of plaque loosens, jams in the artery and it's over. He never knew. Never had a chance. The pain of loss and the inability to believe it's happening. And the difficulty of watching a family struggle to understand and put their lives back together.

One week later another wife loses her 40 year old husband to a car accident. We know her, but not as well. They live across the country.

Less than 2 months before that, a young woman my husband works with gave birth to her first child. No one had picked up the heart defect in the ultrasounds and after carrying her baby to term, the child died the next day. Another co-worker lost her son years after an accident that took away all quality of his life.

My husband lost his mother in November. We have so many friends who lost parents this last year. And we have so many friends trying to care for aging parents. And how do you say goodbye to a parent who has given you life and cared for you and taught you and loved you unconditionally. Life is tough.

What do you do? How do you help? It seems like what one person needs, another wants no part of. So here we are, we hug, we bring food, we give them space. We continue to be their friend without always looking at their loss.

Life is meant to have a medley of feelings. If there were no lows, there would be no highs. The lows are bad. But without them, the highs wouldn't be so good. The roller coaster is a greater thrill than the straightaway, even though your heart is in your stomach half the time.

I believe in heaven, I believe that God has prepared a perfect place for us, I believe that through Jesus' death & resurrection that every believer will go there. Yet even in the belief, even knowing that our loved ones are no longer sick & in pain, it's so hard to be without them, it's so hard to think about their family going on without them. And yet we do. We go on. We laugh. We cry. We get in trouble. We get out. We do. We set goals and turn a corner and survive. And we remember.

And we hope! We hope that we were all that we could be to each person we run across in life. That we love and care, take care and take notice whether that person is an acquaintance, co-worker, friend or family. We only have so many days together, can we make the best of them?



Making Sense of the Tiger Woods Ordeal

Tiger Woods spoke today for the first time since he's been found out! And as a wife, mother and woman, I am trying to sort out my feelings for all of this.

Crime vs punishment. The public hero vs the private man. What to know and where to let go. I imagine everyone has an opinion on this. And I imagine I have mine as well. Mine yet is not so self defined and that's why I want to write it out...to find out. (I've always believed that if you're willing to take the time and write your feelings, they'll eventually sort themselves out on the page...we'll see). The media is obsessed with the "fall from grace". I think to a tremendous extent, they create the monster. It starts with a person with unusual talent. And as we can witness all this week and next at the olympics, talent is not enough, an incredible need to achieve through hard work and dedication takes that talent to the top. You don't get there if you don't really want it or work at it. So Tiger became a legitimate hero. And the media loves to love somebody. The frenzy begins. They want to be associated with the hero. They want to be the first with the hero news. They want the hero to be there for them. And there's a lot of media. Think about it. All the TV, all the sports talk shows radio and TV, magazines of all shapes and sorts and specialties, newspapers in city after city, advertisers who want to capitalize on the hero's popularity, social media, paparazzi and all of us individuals with our phone cameras, etc. And that's really just the tip of the iceberg!

It's like watching a video game where the media is pumping, pumping, pumping to build a person up as high as they can possibly go until whoooooosh...hey look at that guy free fall. Wow! Let's do it again! That's what I see. And that's what I see

with Tiger Woods. He's just a man. He's just human. Yes he's talented and hard-working, an amazing golfer, but he's just human like you and me. He's not a god and we shouldn't make him our idol whether we're in the media or listening to the media. But everybody wants to be Tiger. Beautiful wife, beautiful life, lots of talent, lots of fame, lots of money! Tiger, you have so much, we insist that you share it all with us. What the media didn't like about Tiger is that he didn't share much at all.

So Tiger got caught and his path of destruction revealed, bit by bit, to the world. Do I need to know all this? Do my kids who watch way to much Sportscenter need to know all this? Is it now in my best interest to know all the gory details? What good will that do? What is the redeeming goal? Or is that proper punishment? Does he deserve that? Is that the way we say, "hey you were great. You were the best. You were my idol. But now you're the worst." Is that the way we level out the playing field? I'm just curious that's all. I'm certainly as appalled and amazed at the behavior he managed to hide from the world for years on end. Can you imagine escaping all that media attention for so long? When Tiger Woods confessed today, he made it a point to say how he felt entitled, how he put himself in another league, in another world where maybe behavior like this was okay for people like him and now he realizes that that's not okay for anyone no matter how adulated or ignored you happen to be.

We hold our heroes to high standards, but yet because of who they are and where they are, they are in a place where they are given a lot of things. People and companies are eager to be seen and appreciated in their presence and strive for their attention. I can see where a celebrity would get the impression that they are entitled. It would be hard not to when the world seems to be handing you that right. Where a woman who might not notice you as an ordinary citizen sees your celebrity and views you as a prize. I blame Tiger, but I also blame this worldly world. How would you do in that setting? It's good gossip. No it's great gossip. How can you not talk about it? How can you not want to know. How miserable is his wife, really? How ashamed and sorry is he? Will he do it again? What about all those other women? Look at his crushed mother watching on. Can't wait to hear every detail of their stories. Again, I think it's human nature to paint ourselves al-

ways in the best light and cast others in the worst light. So even if you get the “real story”, it's really suspect anyway.

In a radio discussion I listened to yesterday, Tiger was criticized for not coming out as a man and meeting the media and confessing his wrongs. I don't agree or like what Tiger did, but I don't like living his pain on the TV screen either. I guess it's pretty good punishment. But when you get to that place, time with the media couldn't possibly help in the PR area, no matter which way you go, whatever decision you make it will be wrong. This discussion I was listening to moved on to his wife and whether she would be standing at his side or not? If she was going to be there, it would be wrong of him to ask that much. If she was not...oh bad news for him. Speculation. The fact that Tiger didn't talk to anybody after the revelation may have been a good thing. It might make him more honest about his resolve to change if he goes out and works on himself first.

What surprises me most? Everyone acting like this has never been done before! Like no other (entitled) celebrity has ever cheated! Give me a break! It's more likely that they're all doing it! There are a lot of feelings, beliefs, questions I have about so many things, but one thing I'm pretty positive about. The person you are today is a result of the books you read and the people you hang out with. What you put in your head and what other people put in your head **MATTER!**

I hope Tiger's marriage gets back on track. I hope he can win at solving his personal issues. I hope wounds can heal. And I hope the media will find a more important issue to put their resources to work at. When it comes to judgement, I really don't want to be involved. And as it so eloquently states in the bible, “he who is without sin, cast the first stone.”



What About College

The question is...is college still valuable in today's weirdly changing world? Now I'm not really asking this question solely out of the hope of not having to pay for college as my kids line up to go through for the next 12 years. I don't take that lightly though, because if they each take 4 years, that's 20 years of college we'll pay for. And yes, we should have been saving all these years, it just seems like it should have taken longer to get to this point.

But all along I've been setting them up for 2.5 years and they'll have to get it done in that time. I think it's possible. They are smart, I think they can get their degree quickly. And then maybe they can continue on for more. At least that's my husband's hope.

But how important is that college education? The debate is on!

It's a badge of honor.

Too many companies won't look at you or promote you without that education.

It gives you a longer time to get used to independence & grow up before you go to work for the next 40-50 years.

You have internship opportunities.

You might choose to travel or go to school abroad.

You might find a spouse.

But here are the things that worry me about college.

Getting the wrong degree.

Getting through college and never using the education in the type of job you get or don't get. If you have a vague major or don't go into a job in that field you're highly likely to end up in a dead end job. I'm now a stay at home mom, however before I got married I did work at jobs in my field for many many years. But what about women who get married so young, maybe work a couple years and come home to be with their kids. They've never had the work experience to carry them far. By the time they (& I) get back in the workplace, it's changed so much, we are all antiquated! Then we have to go back to school for another (useless?) degree.

I shouldn't even mention party time, drugs, over-liberal professors!

What about professors with no literal experience in the workplace? Wouldn't it make sense if we're putting all these people in the workplace to get some practicality from that? I think apprenticeships should come back. I would love for my kids to learn from what my husband does at work and what the people around him do. That's value! I'm not talking internship, I'm talking apprenticeship! How retro!

But most importantly, this world is changing so fast. By the time you get in & get out, the things you were majoring in are no longer the buzz words. All the outsourcing out of the country has to be affecting what jobs are reasonable & feasible. What about technology & creativity. Is there room for creativity in

schools where it's a world of right answer, wrong answer? Is the world changing faster than all these colleges can accommodate? Are they really able to set up our kids to handle the world they will come out in?

And if they can, how does a kid who's never thought about work pick the right path? I'm guessing college can cost upwards of \$30,000. Right? That's conservative. What if it doesn't work?

Now that we're looking at sending a child to college, you can't help but wonder how to guide them so they really do get the most out of that education, so it truly does make a definitive difference in their life, so it's not for naught, and so it sets them up for success for a lifetime.

And of course the other question is...will they listen?



The Doctor is In

Not! Ok here's my complaint...

Why do all doctors of all kinds maintain the same hours that most people work and most schools follow? 9 to 5 with an hour, maybe even two hours off for lunch!!! (Well I'm pretty sure the doctors aren't off for 2 hours, but their phone is!)

Ok it makes perfect sense if you're a stay at home mom with pre-school age kids, but otherwise we are so out of luck!

First of all does the doctor ever just want to see you once? NO. No matter what your illness, they want follow up after follow up to make sure you're as ok as you can be.

And this is a whole other gripe that I have. You get really bad, really fast service all to get you back so you & your insurance company can be billed all over again.

But what I'm really wondering is why am I the only one who's ever tried to figure out a better schedule for doctors. Don't they know that most people don't get sick Monday thru Friday from 9 to 5? Last Friday night my daughter casually mentioned that her ear hurt. I casually ignored it.

At 2 AM Saturday morning she woke me up to tell me the pain in her ear was so bad that she couldn't sleep. I gave her 2 Ibuprofen's and gave her the thumbs up to read a book. She eventually fell asleep. In the morning we rearranged schedules and I woke her up to get her to urgent care when it opened at 9. We were out with prescription in hand by noon. Knowing that it would take another hour to get the prescription filled, I began to wonder for the umpteenth time why the growing pediatrician's office didn't offer some doctor time on the weekends. Recently they've

hired so many young doctors, that we never even see the same one twice. Why couldn't one or two or three of them work nights & weekends? This can't be a new idea.

At the same time I find myself constantly doing battle with the orthodontist's office and the eye doctor, the dentist, the pediatrician, the cardiologists and every other type of doctor the kids need to see because...when do they want to schedule you? “We only have appointments from 9 to 2 available, which time do you want?”

“I don't want any of those times, this isn't a serious issue and I don't want to take my kids out of school.”

“Oh but you'll have to or you won't be able to get in...let me see” they flip through their book, “for another six months!”

Why oh why can't these offices extend their hours...earlier in the day, later in the day, weekends? It's a big world out there and we're tired of arranging our lives around your comfy schedule!

And here's the other thing! How would you like to be a business owner of any size and have people taking off during the day to go to their doctors appointment or take their children to the doctor? How productive is that? And the doctors office isn't down the hall, it requires usually a distant drive!

I think it's crazy. I think it's wrong. There's got to be a better way. And I don't think it requires a brain surgeon to figure it out!!!



Barking Dogs

It's 4 AM in the morning, why are the neighbors dogs barking? Matter of fact, why are there so many dogs barking at the neighbors house? Why does somebody have so many dogs? We have two dogs and they don't wake up until we do. Then they go out and we let them in again...no barking required! Why are those dogs still barking? Is nobody home in the still middle of the night? Who are those people who live in that house?

Why so many dogs? And why are they so big sounding? What could they possibly be barking at at this time of day? Hmm they were barking last night when I fell asleep.

Thank goodness for that boring book!

Ok, now I'm awake and my mind is starting to think of the 12,000 things I've been putting off and haven't done. My bed is still comfy so I really don't want to get up and do anything. I did do that once and only got one thing done before all the rest overwhelmed me. The challenge every night is to be tired enough not to wake up and think about things. Those barking dogs are no help in that area. They are really annoying. How can I solve the problem of the barking dogs without getting involved?

One more thing to think about!



How Much

Help! How many times do we ask for that? And in how many ways during our lives?

We all need help in one way or another every day of our lives. Whether it's help cleaning the house or choosing the right outfit to wear or what to make for dinner, whether it's help with homework or a business decision or fixing the broken down car, or whether it's help with choosing a career, finding a job, making a major purchase, where to go to church, or how to raise your children...we're always seeking, asking, hoping, praying and finding ways to get help. No matter how small you are or how big you are, you need help.

I remember several times being stranded on a freeway or other busy road or even in a parking lot with a car that won't go and nobody to turn to. And people stopped to help.

Sometimes I knew them and sometimes I didn't, but they saw a need and made an effort and every time I was so thankful they were there.

I remember when I was a girl scout a hundred or so years ago and one of the moms organized an activity to help us get a badge. And I can still hear my mom's words to me. "Always remember that somebody helped you and you should remember to help someone else when you can."

I remember so many things that so many people have done to help Mom Time TV become a reality.

But I remember through each of those things, the tremendous effort around all that help that I put in myself. That the responsibility belonged to me. That I needed to work and research and be there to do what needed to be done.

When it comes to your kids, how much help is the right amount to give them? When they are babies, you give them absolutely everything and then fret that it's not enough.

But you do, you give up sleep and work and relationships even, to give them what they need when they need it. They can't do, so you do!

Pretty soon they take on some things on their own. They start to walk and you help by letting them hold your fingers and walking behind them. And soon they're happily off, walking, running on their own no help from you.

Then it's school and homework and projects. And at times it seemed like I did ALL their homework for them (I could because it was 2nd grade or less), but they watched and I explained how I got that answer. I showed them how to put all those words and pictures on a poster to show to the class. And I wondered if I was going to be back in school for another long bunch of years. But like walking they learned and they took off with the homework thing and now if they ever even ask, it's more for advice. But I love to watch their creativity as they go at it on their own.

Now we're getting to the age where it's time to think of colleges and careers and eventually moving away. How much help to give? How much advice? How much money? And how much hinges on what you have to give? We don't have all the information in the world and we don't have all the money in the world either. Even if we did, are we helping them by giving it all to them? And if we don't have knowledge or money to share and they have to figure out how to do it on their own, I'm sure there are still other ways to help. Encouragement, love, and letting go all come to mind.

My parents helped with college, but they let me pay some of my own way which I absolutely wanted to do, I wanted to earn it. They didn't help me find a job, but they did share a car or gave me a ride. They weren't always thrilled with

the career path I chose, but they were supportive. I knew that I was responsible for moving on and that it wasn't up to them to provide for me any more.

It's that difference between letting your children start out on the bottom rung or lifting them up on your shoulders and letting them reach higher or farther than you every could. But how much do you help?

There's the story of the caterpillar that spins his cocoon, but then when he begins his struggle to get out, the child feels sorry for him and opens the cocoon so he doesn't have to struggle anymore. So the beautiful butterfly comes out, but he can't fly because his wings didn't get the exercise needed in opening the cocoon. The butterfly was too weak to survive.

But then there's the picture of being able to lift your child up on your shoulders and let them see and reach and achieve at a much higher level than they ever would be able to do standing on the ground.

But can you do that? Is there a way to do that without weakening their wings?

Is there an obvious answer or is it a delicate balance?

How do you decide when to help or when the greater help is to let them do it on their own?

Minutes ago I heard this quote for the first time. I don't know the author of it but it seems to be a timely ending to my questions. Give it some thought!

“There's no more difficult place to be than under the mouth of the horn of plenty.”



Credentials

I learned something today! Whack!

And it should have been so obvious. Uh-huh an ah-ha moment!

Chatting with a friend after church today and another friend comes up. We have a quick conversation about whether we are still Packer fans. Then as she's leaving she says, "Hey I need to talk to you and get your credentials. You wrote a quote for somebody and I need your credentials."

"And I know you have a long list," she adds. I look helplessly over at my other friend who's smiling and nodding.

And I've been telling everybody I talk to about Mom Time TV that I'm "a mom". And they look at me like "SO WHAT!!!?!"

Well a lot of moms know that's a pretty hefty qualification for just about anything. But I don't know a single mom who will give herself credit for what she does and what's expected of her each day. I don't think moms get any credit in the world outside the home!

Forget that it's a 24/7 job, and covers all subject matter available. We are specialists in everything from doctoring to teaching & preaching to organizing to counseling to budgeting to fixing to finding to positioning and building and directing and structuring, not to mention cooking and cleaning and driving and volunteering (for things that are needed and not necessarily our forte) and packing and diagnosing not only our kids symptoms, but the pets too, hitting every birthday on time

& with the right gift, shopping and having every possible supply not only in stock but available on a moment's notice. We have to be able to handle & motivate all the different personalities in our household, we have to look good & smell good even after the baby has thrown up all over us. We're on time and accountable to everybody's schedule and the schedule is never the same! Ok you get the jist, this is only the beginning. I could go on!

So why is it that in doing all this, the world looks at a mom as insignificant, as somebody who has given up (stupidly) an opportunity to **WORK** (for pay). And because she's done that, she's not too with it! She probably has very little talent or skill. And heaven forbid, if she's out of the workplace too long, she won't qualify for anything.

And why is it that when we're moms and we know what we're capable of, that we believe "the world", that we believe "we are just moms?" How crazy is that?

Oh, and my credentials all took place before I had kids. And it includes an awful lot of very busy years in the TV business working of course in the one & only position that deals with every aspect of station business (training for motherhood I think).

In Malcolm Gladwell's book, "Outliers" he talks about the 10,000 hours to success. Those who've put in the 10,000 hours are then in the position to have success, that is if opportunity knocks, they are able to achieve. So yes, I put my 10,000 hours of training in on the television, marketing, production side of life. And yes I put my 10,000 hours of training into my job as "mom".

You want credentials?!!!

Bring it!



Intuition

Intuition! What is it?

What is that still small voice inside you guiding you? And what about what happens to that voice when you try to ignore it? For me, it gets louder. Sometimes until it's shouting. Still why is it that you want to continue to ignore it.

Cracks me up to even think about that war within. And it really grows until you don't know which screaming voice is the intuition and which screaming voice is really what you want to do.

Or does it come down to split intuition. And is that meant to confuse you?

I was walking down a road when the scenery suddenly changed. Suddenly I wasn't so sure I still wanted to be on that road. But I kept walking. There were other roads merging in that I could take, but I was already on a good road, or was I? There are still possibilities on this road, right? Even though I'm not sure I like where I am? Some days I feel good about this road and some days I wonder. There are new roads ahead, maybe one of those are better, but I'm getting close & I don't know if I'm ready to make a choice. What is it within me that is suggesting that this road I'm on isn't what I expected it to be? Why am I having doubts? I come to the fork in the road. As I'm about to continue on, flowers rise up along the side of the road I'm already on encouraging me on and I take a step forward.

Suddenly a tree falls on the road blocking my way and I notice it's raining further down the road. I look down the other road, it looks free of obstacles, I see new possibilities. Is it time to switch roads? Where do each of them lead? What will happen along the way? Why am I thinking about this so long.

So what now, which is which? Why has the other voice gotten so loud? How can you make the right decision? So what good is that still small voice now, when both voices start to sound the same?

Does the intuition pat you on the back when you go with it? Or does that good feeling of making a decision mean you followed your intuition?

Thank God for that voice. I just wish sometimes it was more of a crystal ball!



Vanilla

They have cotton candy, but they don't have vanilla! We're talking ice cream here.

A funny thing happens when the kids & their friends learn to drive! They can do the things they want to do without YOU! And the thing they wanted to do is run for ice cream at Cold Stone. Magically, mystically money always appears for these things!

So the big kids took orders from the small kids and took off to get the goods. And here's the conversation buzzing around me when they got back!

“Matthew they didn't have vanilla!”

“They didn't have vanilla!”

“No so we got you cotton candy”

“Why’d ya get that?”

“Cause they didn’t have vanilla!”

“They have cotton candy, but they don’t have vanilla?”

LOL. Even the simple things in life are hard to find.



Three Consecutive Saturdays

When you think about how life can be confusing for kids, just think how quickly life can change for them. I'm thinking about three specific Saturdays that happened this month in my 8 year olds life.

It's Saturday November 14, 7:45 am. Matthew is out on the field with his soccer team warming up before just another soccer game. My husband and I are cuddled up on our chairs on the sidelines with our hot chocolate and coffee and me with my knitting, him with his cell phone! We could just feel the beauty of the day. It was the magic hour of light. The temperature was perfect, not hot, not cold. And we commented to each other how great it felt to be out, to relax, to actually take in the moment, to see & be in the day!

The game starts. Matthew as he always does is testing his way on the field. Who can he beat? Who can he outrun? Which moves work best? After about 5 minutes on the field he gets his chance, he has a breakaway with the ball and he's running full out toward the other team's goal. And there's no doubt, in just seconds, it'll be him & the keeper! But suddenly from each side two kids from the other team are running straight at him. They hit him at the same time. Fractions of a second, yet in slow motion, I see Matthew rise into the air and fall like a tree on his head. At the moment of impact one of the kids ran over the back of his hand cleating him.

I've been a soccer mom for 15+ years. Never panic, this is part of the game. Great fall! My husband whose mom was in bad health at a hospital 2 states away was on the phone getting an update from his brother in law. He looked over at me and said, "he hit his head." Matthew was still on the ground. They stopped play while the coach went out and drug him back to the sidelines. I mosied over to check on him. He was devastated about his hand. I took him back to my chair and sat him on my lap. He was uncomfortable, wiggly, "I can't see," he said. "What do you mean you can't see?" "I can't see." By now other moms were gathering around. "I'm going to pass out." I laid Matthew on the ground and put his knees up. I thought about his 2 open heart surgeries and multiple cardiac cath and started to worry if one thing could affect the other. One of the parents called an ambulance.

They were there in seconds it seemed. Now they're testing out an 8 year old. They jabbed a finger in the back of his neck and asked if it hurt! Yes he says. So now they strap him to a gurney. And now I can tell he's starting to freak out. So Jim & I are telling him. You are really ok Matthew they just want to check you out and this is how they do it. I rode in the ambulance with him & Jim followed. You answer millions of questions and fill out piles of papers. Nobody offers any information!

At the hospital, people come and go. It takes a long time. The doctor comes. Matthew's absolutely fine.

Net net. Don't send your kid to soccer without a little breakfast first. When the kid cleated his hand, the pain made him dizzy. Low blood sugar. Why do parents have to think of everything?

Now it's Saturday November 21. Jim & I & Matthew & Samantha are going to the Heart Ball. It's the 2nd biggest event every year in Phoenix. It makes millions of dollars for the heart association. We are not even close to that class, we would never be able to go. But my husband knows people at the heart association who know about our two kids and all their open heart surgeries and so because it's the 50th year, they decided to do something different and they invited the 4 of us to attend. The first time any kids were invited!

I shopped for a dress for Samantha who swore she'd wear it again for her 8th grade graduation! We rented tuxes for both boys. It was nip & tuck whether we'd really get there or not. The night before, Jim got the call that his mom probably wouldn't make it through the night. But when morning came, she bounced back, was watching football and griping about the bad quarterbacking going on!

So we dressed up and set out for the best location in town, the Phoenician. We got our picture taken and then helped out greeting people who had contributed and supported the heart association by attending. They wanted to show that with increased technology they were saving lives. And we had two lives that had been saved...Samantha's & Matthew's. And this was an opportunity for us to say thank you. We enjoyed a lovely dinner and the kids got out and danced. Witness the miracle of survival.

From gurney ride to heart ball!

Now it's Saturday November 28. Our car is stuffed full of our 5 kids and Jim & I. Jim is driving and the rest of us are keeping occupied with all our "things to do". We are on the 12 hour drive home from Grandma's funeral in Trinidad CO.

None of us believed it. Jim's mom was 92 and though she wasn't sprinting around anymore, none of us ever remembered her sprinting anyway! She was totally involved in all the lives around her. Mainly her 4 kids. Her 16 grandchildren. Her 20 great grandchildren. She knew what everybody was doing, she never missed a birthday, never missed a beat. She loved everybody. Nobody in her family was ever wrong! She was able to successfully lure everyone home to Trinidad every Labor Day weekend and loved the noise & activity that buzzed around her.

Television was her constant companion. Her favorites: The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune & Deal or No Deal. And anything football, especially the Broncos. She saw more plays than my husband. She'd call every time something good happened. She loved to sing and would often sing to her kids over the phone and they would sing back to her. One of her favorites was "You are my Sunshine". But she had many more! Last Labor Day all the kids sang and performed "Sweet Caroline" another of her favorites to her.

Grandma's going along & going along until one day she feels weak. Instead of going to the doctor they decide on taking her to the hospital. Now it may be that living alone is probably not the best for her. What to do? The family talks and figures it out. But now that's not enough, she's not well enough for that, she'll need more care. But she's not well enough yet for that. She's not going to leave the hospital. 12 days later her spirit departs. She's with the Lord. She's reunited with her husband who she's spent the last 30 years missing.

At 92 you know you have more years behind you than ahead of you. It should be easier to lose a loved one who's had a long life. The problem is they've been in your life so much longer. You're that much closer. You have all of these experiences. Daily conversations. They are the rock you lean against. It's never easy to lose a mother!

Death. The kids have seen it. Many of their friends have lost parents. They've been there to try and help, give them a lift. So it wasn't entirely new. What was different was they were a part of all the ceremony, the funeral home with open casket, the rosary, the funeral service where their dad did the eulogy, the burial. They were all there, they all took part and they all handled it with the reverence and dignity that was so well deserved. And from youngest to oldest they did it.

So we're on the long days drive home with our memories.

From gurney ride to heart ball to the funeral ride home. Three consecutive Saturdays in the life of an 8 year old.



The Time Traveler's Wife...Or Date Night

It's the biggest topic on my mind today other than Mom Time TV and I just can't wait until tonight! My favorite book of all time comes out tonight in the theaters. It's "The Time Travelers Wife." And I hardly know where to start to talk about it!

The Mom Time TV show that's airing this very day is "Date Night." It's a powerful show that reminds us why we got married in the first place. And most importantly how to protect and enhance that beautiful relationship. So often when we become moms we let our kids take over our lives and we forget to take care of the marriage and relationship that started it all. I guess when you're dead tired, it's easy to go off track!

So tonight will be "date night." And by my choice, we get to see "The Time Travelers Wife." Other than being a spectacular story, the whole premise advocates a marriage relationship that just grows stronger and stronger throughout the years.

This is the book that when I finished the last page, I just turned back to page one and started all over again. I couldn't put it down. And the second time was better than the first. It's a touch complicated with the time travel that goes backward & forward in time. It's not a book where you can read two or three pages at a time, but since you can't put it down that's not really a problem.

I guess because of the time travel nature of this book, it would be classified as sci-fi. But in my book, it's part love story, part adventure. Sci-fi means something entirely different to me. So if you're not big on sci-fi, don't skip this movie because of that.

Back in the day, the rights to this movie were purchased by Brad Pitt & Jennifer Aniston. At the time, I thought they'd be the stars. One of our Mom Time TV editors read the book and tracked down the author to buy the rights, but Brad & Jen already had them. Interesting, huh?

I'll get back to you after my date night movie!

Ok I do totally recommend you see "The Time Travelers Wife"! How do they take all those pages from a long book and reduce it to a 2 hour movie? And still keep so many of the story points! I loved it. I love that it's a movie and more people will be able to see this story. At first I wasn't sure if they got the point across, the important point, I thought, of how the love between them continues to grow. But now as I think about it, they did do it, they just didn't beat you over the head with it. You have to look at the stages of love and of their relationship and how yes they gave things up for each other, compromised for each other, and when life got tough (as it does) they did their best for each other. And that's love growing!

My husband grunted and groaned throughout the movie. The time travel was driving him nuts! But then as he started to put the pieces in place and started to follow it all and it made sense...the power of the story totally turned him around.

See the movie and let me know what you think!



Back to School Expectations

As school begins this week for all the year around schools in our area, I can only shake my head. Where oh where did the summer go?

My kids are a week and a half away from starting themselves and all back to school activities are in high gear. Yesterday we picked up books, lockers, id's and all sorts of stuff for high school. The kids have their schedules in place and a little bit of time to think about it. Oh cool, its a fresh start, the slate is clean! My son's competitive nature is taking hold. And my daughter who has her own brand of competitiveness appears up for the challenge.

As a mom (I'm so glad I'm done with school) I'm just proud of the kids for anticipating and making the effort it takes to do well and achieve. It's not easy. There's a huge group of really smart, diligent honor students and then there's an even larger group of kids who don't care. I'm proud of my kids who set their own course for success and go after it in their own ways, not worrying about what the others are doing. To me, that is the greatest lesson in schooling and will do so much to set them up for the rest of life. I'm definitely not one to ignore all the other things learned in school. The details of math and science, language and history may go away, but the character stays and the life lessons (though they may not see them at the time) will strengthen and grow.

Next week, our two middle school kids will be picking up their classes and information. A new dynamic and closeness will happen to them as they share this year in the same school. That will be fun to watch. I wonder if what they learn in school will be as memorable or as important as the memories of the time they share. And our youngest, still in grade school will for the first time be the only one from his family to attend there. He'll have his own school! We're anticipating he'll get the same teacher his oldest brother had the year he was born. She held him when he was a baby and will hold a piece of his future throughout the year.

So school is about to begin. It costs a fortune. But we'll muddle through because we too went to school to get a good job.....

Where oh where did the summer go?



Renewal

No it's not a new skin care system fighting off wrinkles and other bad things (though that's nice too).

It's the renewal of living in the desert and waking up to steady rain. Feels so good and clean, like putting on a new pair of contact lenses. Everything becomes clear, everything stands out. You look through new eyes. Looks good.

Funny how a change in weather can change your energy. My memories are of sunshine coming after the rain, and that being the energizing force, gloominess turning to light, energy. I didn't expect to feel this energizing force coming from the rain, but I like the cleansing nature of it. Like a shower after a workout! Clean, fresh, invigorating!

New energy. I can set a goal, give it a go and put some power behind it. Is it the change that renews us? Or renewal that changes us? Some of each I suppose, one thing leads to another. All you have to do is pick up on it and let it work for you.

Take a cleansing breath. It's a new day. Time to step forward and accomplish something good!



My Morning Mail

I'm here at the mall getting a little work done. The mall's not open yet so I can't do any damage shopping. But here I am watching the power walkers getting some exercise in. Now there are those who are really here to do it, you can tell, they look like they're in a race and they don't look too comfortable. And then there are the strollers, out with a friend or two keeping their bodies and lips in motion and looking like they're having some fun. I could almost join them! What are these people with backpacks doing in the mall? Do they live here? Or are they trying to fill it up and run?

The person I'm most interested in right now is an older lady knitting at a table in the mall. She has tattoos circling around her calves, both of them. So I wonder about the story behind that? You see young people quite tatted up, but not too many grandmotherly types.

I'm not a fan of tattoos. You would have to work really hard to find good clothes to match. If they're too obvious, I still don't think you could get a decent job (unless you're an NBA star, in which case you'd have to get tattoos all over the place, because what else are you going to do with all that money?) they just take all the attention away from who you are as someone else wonders...what do those things say about you?

A knitting granny wrapped in tattoos. It's the beginning of a novel in my mind!



Hot Dogs and the 4th of July

If it weren't for the boys in this house...I would get through the fourth of July, being blissfully unaware of the hot dog eating contest that takes place every year! But no, all TV's are tuned to this famed event with all the hoopla a big day like this can muster!

And it is a true sporting event, short as it is. You've got the crowd of thousands. The hyped up intros of the contestants and boom the clock starts and the hot dogs go down the hatch! In all my long years of life, I have never eaten a hot dog like that. One plain hot dog, nothing on it, a dry bun and I'm done!

These guys dunk the buns til they're disintegrating and shove about 4 in at a time, followed by the same number of hot dogs. I couldn't tell if they chewed them or swallowed them whole. I cringed most of the way through, hands over my face half the time wondering what would motivate normal human beings to stuff their faces like that for ten minutes. However, I probably have eaten like that a few times when I've been hungry. And my kids probably eat like that sometimes. Hmmmm, maybe it's time for some manners in my house.

Being a mom, you wonder at times what your kids will do in life, what their interests are, what special skills they have, and where they'll go with those things. I sincerely hope when I wake up to the hot dog eating contests on future July 4th's, that my kids are not contestants on them. I hope for more.

And here's the other thing...out of all the 20 or so people shoving down hot dogs, there were only two worth watching, no one else was in the race. And the winner, Joey Chestnut, won again, setting a new record and having a little distance between himself and #2. So why do the rest of those people compete? Why do they torment themselves when they have no chance of winning? I have no answers to that! Only a vast need to teach my kids better manners.

I think I gained 10 pounds watching that! I know I will not eat hot dogs today. And I am no longer hungry!

Let's go to breakfast!



Joining the Jon & Kate + 8 Debate

It's 9AM the day after a busy and productive weekend and I'm on my 3rd load of wash, I've taken my daughter to summer school, taken out the trash, battled with the print scanner, shopped for pens (the kids are home and they walk off with them), driven across town to pick up a scanner, and for the first time ever saw part of an episode of Jon & Kate + 8!

I've been fascinated by the idea of Jon & Kate + 8, but aside from seeing a cool billboard for their show when I was in NYC, never paid too much attention. With 5 kids of my own at home and 2 bonus kids in their own homes, the idea of hyperventilating over someone else's 8 kids wasn't exactly what I was looking for.

But since the media started a frenzy over their lives and everyone, even us moms, have things to say about this, I'll take my turn.

What is the point of the big Hollywood production! The kids are the only ones acting real and they spent the whole show trying to make them act like they wanted them to act. I got to see the whole craziness & zaniness of a multiple photo shoot of all 10 of them. They shot photos for a magazine cover and to accompany the story about the family in the magazine.

We saw a very boring interview with Jon & Kate narrating the day and complaining about how hard it was! Surrounded by an entourage of every possible category of worker to keep them happy and make things easy...nobody was happy. The unhappy couple smiled for the cameras, but looked perturbed for everything else. Don't know about you, but if my family had this much help and attention, we would be smiling and laughing about it all for months!

Everyone was immaculately dressed with different outfits for different photos. And someone was actually thinking about how to set them all up properly for the photo of a lifetime. Not the two rows our families would do! Based on what I saw, I'm pretty sure that the kids were dressed by experts other than their mom who was probably being primped and decorated by her own handler!

Neither parent seemed too interested in the kids...or each other for that matter. Okay, tell me the point of this show that is supposed to reflect the real life of real people with 8 kids, when nothing they stage is real life? You could put actors in these roles and get the same thing. I found it more interesting to watch the entourage behind the scenes setting up everything that was going on.

Maybe real life is too really boring for us to watch. But after seeing this show, I just felt like the point was pointless. And I came out empty handed and empty headed, feeling sorry for the loss of a family, the loss of a childhood for those kids, and the wealth and perfection that carries it's own ho-hum brand of boredom.

Wherever they're going with their lives and family, whoever's doing what to who, who's the good guy, who's the bad guy...you gotta go back to the beginning, back to your dream and your values and yourself and back to the basics of life...to have a life. Good luck with that!

And now, on to load 4 (of laundry) of course!



Bristol Palin Thoughts

Ever since Bristol Palin made the TV rounds a month or so ago advocating abstinence, I've had her on my mind.

Why is she doing this? Is this her punishment from her parents? You made a mistake so go out and teach other kids not to do what you did.

First of all since she's surrounded by the love and support of her parents and living at home with a large family to help, she hardly reflects the dire circumstances so many other unwed, pregnant teenagers find themselves in. But what really astounds me is how do they really expect her advocacy to work? First she's interviewed talking about how hard motherhood is (and I'm in her corner there), and then telling teenagers not to do what she did, but to wait until they're older and through school and ready. And then these interviews are finished up showing her in photo shoots cuddling and cooing with her adorably cute baby.

What little girl wants to pass up on that live doll opportunity. Here's a role model teenager happily oohing and gooning with her very own sweet baby. It even made me think twice about another! She says one thing...she's doing another and which direction are teenage girls going to take after seeing that? I think they're going to want new live, doll, toy babies too. That was my reaction.

Last week my 15 year old and I were in line at the grocery checkout. I, of course, was scanning all the headlines on the rack. And out blurts my daughter, “Oh look mom, there’s Bristol Palin and her little baby,” in just that tone of voice (can you hear it now). My head did a 360, I didn’t even know she knew who Bristol Palin was, much less talk about her like she’s Hannah Montana.

Life is full of surprises.



Countdown to Mom Time TV On the Air

After years of thinking and visualizing Mom Time TV on the air. Obsessing, planning, wondering, questioning, asking, deciding, going back and forth, seeing excitement, not getting a call back...wonder of wonders, we're on the air! Well soon anyway. July 6 to be exact. And we've found the ideal broadcast partner in AZTV 7 (Cable 13) in Phoenix. They're interested in real people and their real lives and what they're really doing, most specifically MOMS. We are so excited to be developing this concept and this Mom Time show with them.

Hurray! Our voices will be heard! Who's interested in what moms have to say? Moms, of course. We're all in the same boat so to speak. Who better to compare your day with? Who better to get a new idea from? Who better knows what your life is like and what you're going through. We have a great group of moms, all different ages and stages and backgrounds, all caring about the impact they make in their children's lives, all wanting to learn more and share their experiences to help other moms have more fun doing this BIG job.

We don't have all the answers. We don't even know all the questions, but together we'll share and compare. And we want everyone to be part of this mix. It's moms uniting together to better each others lives. Support, direction, encouragement...we're just going to help each other. And enjoy the journey, not as one single mom in one single home, but bringing our homes together as moms who share similar daily stresses.

Come along, blog along and let's get this thing started!



Student of the Month

And to think I almost missed it! Taking care of all the dates and details for all the kids is just plain overwhelming at times. The note came in the mail and the mail piled up. Yesterday I looked at it and was so busy, I thought I'd wait until the next day to go through it all. When one of the kids added the new days mail to the top of the old, I changed my mind. And that's when I found in that pile the invitation to be at my daughter's school the next day to surprise her.

Today my 7th grade Samantha was one of six 7th graders at her school to be awarded "Student of the Month". The Middle School she goes to makes a big celebration of it and rightfully so. All you ever hear about in the news are the bad news kids who know nothing and do nothing but the wrong thing. It takes a monumental accomplishment to ever get a good news story about a kid doing something right. So that's why the school takes the time to reward kids who work hard.

They make it a surprise so the kids don't know until their name is called during morning announcements. Then they get out of class for a few minutes to go to the cafeteria where their parents are already waiting for them. They then get to introduce themselves and their parents. The boy who came in with Samantha and then sat down with her was in her class and his parents weren't there. He humorously introduced himself, acknowledged that his parents weren't there and then announced that Samantha's parents could be his parents for right now. So we did what parents do, we took pictures of Avery from every angle. I took the pictures and Jim took video from his phone. When Samantha got up, Jim's phone froze during the video recording, but he did get most of it.

This was when the principal read what each child's set of teachers wrote about them and why they earned that honor. Samantha is our 3rd child in middle school and our 3rd to get presented with this award. It amazes me that with each one, the teachers captured so well what is special about each child. The comments have been so individual to each of our children, that even though they've received the award for having the same qualities, the reasons mentioned are totally different for each. My favorite comment on Samantha started with "impeccable character". What more can you ask from a 7th grader? Or anybody?

Thank you teachers for recognizing what is special and different and what stands out about my child! And thank you for taking the time to carefully define why they are in that group, rather than just stamping it good and going on. It seems so often in life we skip the hard work and rely on what's easy. I appreciate that year after year and month after month, there are teachers who not only put the effort into knowing their kids, but putting it so accurately in writing.

It's a celebration of a few minutes with a little food from the cafeteria and some fanfare, but it's got to make each child feel good about themselves and know that what they're doing at school is the right thing.

Samantha definitely deserved her moment, she's an awesome girl in so many ways. Her older brother and sister who had gotten that award years before her were excited for her and explained how worried she was about not getting "Student of the Month" like they both had. So now the pressure's on for the next two as they come through.

Her father and I, of course, would love Samantha just as much if she had gone through middle school without that award. But we're glad she got it and knows how special she is to somebody else! And that her goodness can be shared!

Keep up the good work! You never know when somebody will notice and when it will make a difference for them!



Tradition

It's a funny thing, the way a tradition begins. What it means and why it stays.

It's St. Patrick's Day of course and as far as I know, even though I come from a family of many mixed countries, Ireland is probably not one of them. However the kids have a need to celebrate!

Everyone wears green. There were even some arguments of if it was green enough!

It wasn't too many years ago when my parents would travel to Phoenix each March and spend the month out here away from the still dastardly Wisconsin weather. I guess maybe because it was the one holiday we had together, we all made a little minor event out of it. Not enough probably to write a postcard home about, but enough to plant a seed in the kids, enough to keep us running back each year on March 17.

There's a little restaurant called Chompies we'd hit together for lunch. Years ago it was spring break week, so G-ma & G-pa took the kids and us there for green bagels and/or corned beef on rye. And this was our simple but happy, once a year celebration together as 3 generations, doing the same thing 3 years in a row.

Well G-ma and G-pa haven't been out for a few years now. Traveling is a little harder these days. Because of this and because spring break is now a week earlier, I often drag a kid with me and pick up the goods. Doesn't matter, the memory of the fun time with G-ma & G-pa is intact and enjoyed once again. And a tradition is a tradition and will always be what we remember and repeat.

And I'm pretty sure it's meaningful enough to live on into our children's adulthood and maybe beyond. Isn't that so cool?



Spring Break

It could be a good week to get absolutely nothing done!

It's not only another day off for the kids, it's a whole week off! And here I am surrounded by my 5 lovely, smart, happy kids looking for something fun to do!

Lets clean up this week I say. We have 5 good weekdays totally open. You can go through each of your rooms, clean up the mess, pick out the things you don't use or enjoy anymore and we can even have a garage sale and guess what...you can divide up all the money.

Well I'm not too original. For the last 3 spring breaks they've had to do a major room cleaning and we haul it all off to Goodwill. They were actually ready for this. And bless their hearts actually got into it and cleaned, condensed, even rearranged their rooms. It took 2 days. Then they all worked on the all kid get together family room, cleaning, condensing, rearranging. They went outside and pulled weeds and cleaned up after the dogs, all with a minimal amount of complaining. Hallelujah! And thank you!

They actually had a good week with some accomplishment, some reward, some fun. We are not the garage sale family! It's not in my nature. About 15 years ago my husband & I decided held our first garage sale. First we slept in and

people were knocking at the door. Then we dragged out our little selection. Two minutes later my husband was bored and so was I. We loaded up our goods in the car. Took it to Goodwill and went out to breakfast.

Our next garage sale went a little better, my husband got into it and actually gave away all the big stuff we had that he wanted to get rid of. Even though we didn't make much, he was happy not to have to figure out how to haul it!

So when I wanted to get out of this garage sale, he was gung ho! He rallied the kids to make signs, me (kicking & screaming) to help set up, sent the kids to post the signs and drag the goods out to the tables. We got up before daylight, woke the kids and waited for traffic.

Luckily my allergies kicked in and I had to confine myself to the safety of the house. (anybody who lives with spring allergies in Arizona knows this is real and horrible and cannot be faked)!!!

Periodically I peered out to check on progress. Our valuables were selling well for 25¢ each. My ever funny, humorous husband kept everybody in stitches. And even though we're not good garage sales people, the kids had fun and I have memories I may actually remember. And each of the kids came out of it with \$20. Oh well. We got more than money out of that experience.



The Tax Man Cometh

Well it's not like me to do things early, especially when it comes to taxes, but it is one of those things that weighs heavy on me as soon as the new year begins. So basically it's a 4 and a half month burden to bear. A major stress of nearly half a year!

Of course I don't do this all alone! It freaks me out too much. I have an accountant put it all in the right order and place everything where it should be with all the percentages, dots and crossed t's where they should be. And then I sign it not knowing what the heck they did with all those numbers I worked so hard to pull together to give to them.

It's a bit of a burden to bear for any American like me! However the burden to bear of not being born in the U.S.A. would far outreach my minor 4 month inconvenience. We are so blessed to be born in this country that people all over the world are desperate to get to! I know we pay a wealth in taxes each year and I know they're gonna get us for so much more. And it does make me mad! But the alternative would hard to imagine.

And I guess that's why we take this country for granted, it's all we know. And we're so afraid of being manipulated and cheated, especially these days as we learn more and more about how we have been manipulated and cheated which is so far above and beyond anything we can even do anything about.

Everybody certainly in the media is talking about it. What can we do to cut back on our expenses and lead a more ordinary life? I'm talking about it and thinking about it and trying to do it, but it always seems like every time I save a penny or two, the dishwasher blows up or the transmission on the car conks out and even though I've saved \$2.54 this week, I now must pay \$1000 to fix the latest mess.

I find it ironic that Oprah is talking about it on her show this week. Even though she's got good people with good ideas simplifying things in their life and going back to basics, something about the world's richest woman congratulating people on trying to live their already simple life on next to nothing is slightly irritating. I totally believe she's worked hard to have what she has, but her work worked for her. We work very hard for what we have, but all that work hasn't necessarily worked.

The other thing I found a little frightening about Oprah teaching us how to give up our over excessiveness is her close friendship with President Obama. Is this a set up for the coming taxation? I wouldn't mind paying more if I had more to give, but I think we're tapped out. Unless maybe we give up eating out, eat in and save \$500 a year. Then there's more to give! Crazy me!

I don't know. I wish there was a better way to handle taxes, less complicated and more invisible to me. In other words, I'd rather worry about other things. Like getting my 8 year old some new shoelaces before his favorite old shoes fall off!



The Wedding

A friend of mine got married on this day, what was it? Something like well, over 20 years ago. I was one of her bridesmaids. I remember the green dress and the green shoes. The dress was a little snug, because even way back then (where I would die to be now), I was still fudging my measurements! But I was able to get the dress on, thank God. It's funny the parts of the ceremony I remember, the before, the after, the during...like a fuzzy old movie with a few parts very crystal clear!

What's sad and frustrating and so much a part of life is that I've lost track of this friend! A fun girl who shared with me a love of reading, a hometown (only we didn't know each other from there. We had to move somewhere else to meet), a career, and so much more. But as life took its crazy twists & turns in both our lives we lost track.

We did reconnect once in all these years, some 8 or 9 years ago. And the bond we shared recreated itself. Our connection and our conversations sounded the same as they did all those years ago and I know if we reconnected again today, it would be the same, even though we've both grown and changed and have a lot more life in our history, our history together and the bond that we had is still the same.

Our connection has a familiarity and it's not the same as any other connection I've formed with anyone else. It's not any more valuable, it's just different, like the matching up of two different personalities establishes its own type of relationship. Like the blending of colors, every one is different and special in it's own way.

I don't even know if my friend is still married or not. I hope so. I hope that whatever life has thrown at them during these years, that they've been able to weather it and grow and prosper from the experiences. I am well aware that it's not the ease of life that causes us to grow, but the difficulties we encounter.

I also know in life that if we don't have difficulties thrust upon us, we create them, so no one is without!

I hope we can all grab the joy of today and enjoy the memories of yesterday.

Happy Anniversary friend of mine!



Hearts & Valentines

You can hardly be 4 days away from Valentine's Day without thinking about things having to do with hearts. Most of the time you don't really think about your physical heart as much as what your heart feels. Too much of the time I suppose, we really think about how much someone else's heart feels and how good a day we'll have based on that idea! What's in store on the big day? A big romantic meal at home or out? A two ton box of candy in a heart shape? Flowers, Balloons, Jewelry? Or more?

I guess that's what happens with all the commercialism surrounding it. Our expectations get so much higher. We have to have a spectacular day. But now in this struggling economy, it's about time to take another look at how big this little day has become.

Oh for those quiet & romantic husband & wife before kids Valentine's Days! We probably spent a lot, but that's nothing compared to what began to happen in later years. First we had 5 kids together, then my husband's first set of kids got married and had kids. And then there are the grandparents & the nieces & nephews. It was like Christmas 6 weeks later. And then in another six and a half weeks it's Easter. And then every year it's all bigger & better than ever. Oh and don't forget about all the birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and other special days sprinkled throughout!

I've been simplifying Valentine's Day every year a little more & more. This year it came down to a practical & unromantic gift for Jim and a fun gift for the kids to share, a little candy and that's about it. I think I still missed the mark though, Jim & the kids did better. We both got fun, homemade cards from the kids (the house was a mess during the process & after!) and Jim wrote lovely messages to me and each one of his children. And it was a super great day. Hallelujah!



Everyone's Talking Hearts

My dad had a heart attack last week, here now in the season of hearts & flowers, his physical heart gives out. In my small family, it's really the first time we've had a big health issue. Well that is not true at all. It's not even our first heart issue. But it's the first time my dad's been in the hospital in all his 80 years, so that was not expected...to happen...ever. Just not on the radar for me. So it was frightening. He had a cardiac cath that cleared the totally blocked artery and once they refig-ured his medication, he started to do much better. But there is damage to his heart and now he really needs to eat well! No sugar, no flour, no fun! Well life is fun and it's more than sugar candy that makes it that!

But it's a wake up call I didn't really want. What am I doing to stay healthy? What is my husband doing? And will we even make it to 80? Time to rethink some things. It seems like a lot of effort. Do we even have the time to make things better? And if we do, how long before we sink back into our miserable ways? And then there's the kids, what are we doing to teach them a lifetime of good health habits?

Back & forth, up & down, around & around this roller coaster of life. The decisions we make, the paths we take, most of the time without even thinking about it. When we're young, we think we'll last forever. As we get older, the fragility of life is more & more real.

Here's to the good decisions you make and keep everyday.



Super Bowl & the Whole Sports Thing

Don't get me wrong. I am a girl and I do love sports. But does it ever end? The build up to the big day begins even before the season starts with sports show after sports show of predictions by every expert, ex sports hero and regular guy they can find. I do love the fact that on the bottom of everybody's list were the Arizona Cardinals and they made it all the way to the big day...and should have won it if it weren't for a few critical calls (all wrong I might add) that netted Pittsburgh with an extra 14 points and took away 10 points from Arizona. Arizona would have crushed them!

However, I have left my point. There is sports on more than one channel 24/7. Men love it. Many women love it. Even families love it. But do we need it all? Do we need the endless predictions, analysis, cheering sections?

When the idea of MomTime came to me, I immediately thought of sports and how men will turn to it, not only the game, but all the before and after...and even after, talk about it for hours & days amongst themselves.

I compare MomTime to sports because that's what we moms do. We talk about our motherhood experience. We want to share it with everybody and hear what everybody else has to say. We have opinions about our experiences, others experiences and the problems & experiences that are often reported in the news. It's what we think about and talk about and agonize over.

How nice it would be to take that to the TV and internet too. To spend some time comparing notes with other moms we'd never meet otherwise. How nice it would be to be able to get advice and ideas, share & compare, predict, analyze and teach moms all over the place how to be better moms, happier moms, more fulfilled moms. How nice it would be to have a safe place to go to feel purposeful & validated.

Men do it with sports. Why can't we moms do it with the sport of Motherhood?



The Cheer Trip

Well I've done this before and I'll surely do it again! Travel 6 hours on a bus with 30 something cheerleader girls going on a weekend adventure.

(My 3 girls are all on a competitive cheer team and at this time of year they take a few out of town trips to compete.)

Since I have so many girls doing this, it just makes some sense to chaperon. I only have to watch out for my own kids, we all share a room together. I can get them ready, hair, makeup, uniforms in order and out the door. It's good mom & girls time I say.

And it's not so bad, I get some reading & knitting & thinking time in. The girls are all happy with their friends & food & games!

But too much togetherness can sometimes be too much togetherness and I hit my limit when my oldest daughter threw her hairbrush with the intensity of Brett Favre at her youngest sister. The youngest broke out in screaming tears. This brought me to life as I had just finished her cheer makeup regime and I could see the dark blue & silver full of glitter moving quickly onto her face and uniform. My screams were I'm sure no match for hers and I'm almost positive everyone in the hotel could hear me.

Another Mom Time moment I wish I could have avoided. Here was our wonderful girl time together and all our emotions got the best of us. The girls recovered quickly and went on to have a lovely time. I on the other hand took all day. It's not easy getting angry, but it happens.



Inauguration

Today's the day when we stop bashing one guy and put a new guy in the White House to solve our woes and the woes of the world. I think about this a lot and it always comes back to why are we so mean to each other. Do we really expect one man (and yes so far it always is a man) to fix the heck out of everything for us? Can we stand up and take some responsibility or some action? Why does it seem so many want help and yet are unwilling to help. And yet when there is a disaster everyone helps out it seems.

It comes down to this. I really don't understand people. Sometimes you love them and sometimes not. But if I know so little, how am I going to teach my kids.



Holiday Time

We're trying to cut back this year for the holidays. It seemed like a simple task, but do you know how much things cost?

How will 5 kids ages 7-16 take the news that there will be less gifts under the tree? Well besides the fact that I don't think they believe it, they're fine with it. Maybe they already have everything there is anyway. It feels that way sometimes. Especially when cleaning!

Taking the big sting out of that announcement is that we are traveling this year for Christmas, going to visit family and friends in Colorado & Wisconsin! And celebrating my Dad's 80th birthday the day after Christmas!

We're not going to save any money this holiday are we? No. But we will have fun...and family...and SNOW...and excitement...and lots of celebration.

And we are saving. We're driving. 15 days, 7 people in 1 car, 7 different stopping points, 4000 miles. And in 3 days we'll be off for a Merry Christmas.

How are you spending the holiday?



Christmas Vacation

Well the vacation has begun. So far we've logged in about 37 hours of drive time in, well, it's been about 5 days! We've had temperatures ranging from 70 to 10 below. We arrived in Wisconsin today, the farthest point in our destination. But let me go back.

In southern Colorado we visited the kid's 91 year old grandma who gets along pretty well on her own with plenty of help from her oldest daughter who has 6 grown kids of her own, somewhere around 11 grandchildren and is the world's most wonderful caregiver. I hope she's around to take care of me in a couple years! Anyway, grandma gets along with her help and the help of her TV. She cheers for her sports teams, watches her stories and plays all the games! What better gift could we give her than an HD TV.

So we got there & bought it & brought it to her & the boys set it up. Her biggest happiness at the moment was that her living room TV could now be moved to the kitchen where she could watch and see much better. You-hoo Sharon she calls me and my 3 daughters dissolve into laughter. "I've seen that said in a book, but I've never heard anyone say you-hoo before," the girls giggled all vacation long as they told the story. It was a real moment for them as they discovered some of Grandma's personality. My husband teased his mom as she watched the HD set up and worried about the small picture. She wanted us to take that TV back. But when the set up completed and she realized the beautiful picture, she was in!

On we went to Denver and visited our good friends there. Our kids rebonded. We were fed spectacular meals by Valerie. And treated to a carriage ride pulled by Clydesdales through the Christmas lights of Denver. It was cold and Christmasy, beautiful and so special and then topped off with toasty hot Starbucks.

The kids shopped, the men watched football and we had pedicures and good long talks with friends we love but seldom see. We're cold, but so happy to be here!

On the road again for another long day forging our way to St. Louis! The wind was wild! And the cold was consuming. No one wanted to get out of the car even for food! Jim got out to fill the gas tank and we all shivered & shrieked when the doors opened. He immediately jumps back in the car firing off about 45 seconds of expletives. The kids in the back were roaring with laughter! We all were.

We stayed in St. Louis at the Hyatt downtown, now a Marriott. It was attached to the mall and we ate a great dinner and bought about \$80 of fudge to take to all the Christmas parties coming up. The boys shopped in the Cardinals store! But the mall was quiet and empty just a few days before Christmas. Is everybody saving money?

On to Wisconsin today! But it's raining ice! Something the kids have never seen, but it makes Jim & I nervous. We both grew up in this weather, but no longer living in it we don't miss it. There's something downright easy about living in Phoenix! We see lots of cars and semis off the road and battle ice, then snow, then construction. Our 5 hour drive we promised the kids turns to 8. But now we're in Wisconsin and with several feet of snow on the ground, it's going to be a white Christmas!

The next few days we'll spend with G-ma & G-pa and my two sisters and their families. Everyone from my family will be together in one place. No telling when that will happen again, but I can't wait!



Happy Birthday Dad

It's the best day and the worst day to have a birthday. My Dad's earliest memories are of his mom snatching half his presents from under the tree to give to him the next day. All the presents he ever gets are at two consecutive days of the year and he only gets half the amount at that! But my memories of his birthday are all the people he's ever known remember exactly when his birthday is...and call. I always thought that was incredible!

So far we've had a fabulous Christmas absolutely filled with family togetherness and fun. We worshipped in Church. Back at home, my Dad in our family tradition reads O'Henry's great story, "The Gift of the Magi." It's always been a favorite of mine, but I have so neglected sharing it with my own kids. The highlight for me was when Dad finished the story and closed the book, my 7 year old said, "I don't get it." That's when my oldest daughter gave him the summary. It was spectacular. I wish I had the whole thing on tape as my mind will always remember the moment, but not the beautiful detail.

Ok so we draw names for gifts, so everybody gives a gift and gets a gift. It's all top secret til the big exchange. We do have fun with this! Afterwards my mom had a great idea, and passed out notecards so we could each write a thank you note for our gift. It was the most wonderful idea and the best possible time to express our thanks.

There's nothing better than Christmas food! We ate everything imaginable Christmas Eve at my mom's and then had the big Christmas dinner at Linda's. The hometown family has their traditions set and we love the years we are a part of it!

It only seems appropriate that the year we spend with the big family that we would then go to see the movie "Four Christmases" about families trying to get together or avoid each other at Christmas. So funny!

Well back on track again to my Dad's surprise birthday party which to me made no sense as a surprise. Why would you surprise someone turning 80? And since it's his birthday, wouldn't he suspect that somebody might celebrate it! But as always, my sisters and mom put together a fantastic get together with about 40 or so of Dad's closest friends & family. Was he surprised? Probably not so much. But it was a ball to watch Dad greet all his buds and see everybody's love, respect and attention go to him. He definitely deserves it and I think it was cool! We were so lucky and happy to be there. No gifts were supposed to be given, though I think he got a few. And his 3 daughters and their families gave donations in his name. But I don't think he minds the lack of gifts these days, it's the family time that means the most. And though these days in his life are spent giving, he receives so much joy in that.

So Happy Birthday Dad, you are an example & inspiration to us all!



Skiing When You're Old & Have 5 Kids

Where did we get the idea a ski trip with 5 kids would be easy! It looked so good in the pictures! I guess we could ski well enough before we had kids. But then the babies started arriving and of course we just didn't ski. I was pregnant all the time, what would we do with the toddlers, where would we get the money? It wasn't practical, but the dream was there. Someday when the kids are a little older, we'll take them skiing in the beautiful mountains of Colorado. We'll show them and share with them this fun thing called skiing.

Little did we realize it would be nearly 20 years of building the dream and not skiing. The dream was strong, but we were old, heavy and out of shape!

So when the opportunity came in the form of our Christmas driving trip, we had to snatch it up, before the kids left home and went their own non-skiing ways!

So on the return trip we scheduled 3 glorious days in Keystone. Not cheap, but better than starting over on a new trip!

Turns out we were altitude challenged, equipment challenged and ability challenged.

Shortly after our arrival we had to pick up equipment for the next 2 days for all 7 of us. We were bundled up...too cold outside and burning hot inside where millions of others were picking up equipment at the same time. When we finally escaped to the outside well equipped we had to flounder back to the condo with more equipment than the place could hold. It was at that moment of lugging and tugging that it dawned on me, this was not the picture of my dream!

Even the gondola ride, the first time up, reminded me how much I do not like heights! How happy I am at sea level. Hey, why didn't we go to Hawaii, that's been a dream too?

We enrolled 5 kids in 5 ski lessons for the day. That'll teach them! And we went all the way to the top looking for the easiest cliff to ski down. We went about the length of 8 football fields downhill before my husband realized, this wasn't going to work...he could only turn in one direction. So we both turned around and trudged uphill and back to the gondola. It wasn't until the next day that we learned, there is a ski patrol to help ailing skiers! A category we certainly would have fit in.

When we picked up the kids after a full day of ski instruction, we learned that most of them barely got past the rudimentary. Weren't they supposed to be experts by now? After all my husband & I had never had a lesson and we were competent, low those many years ago.

Well the 2 kids we were most worried about got another day of lessons and we sent the other 3 up to the top to fend for themselves. And now they all have their own set of stories.

And now they can all look forward to taking their own children someday!
Cause next time...we're going to Hawaii!



The Sleigh Ride

What a way to end the year! My husband arranged this night harkening back to his TV days in Colorado and scheduling anchors on Christmas sleigh rides for promos.

Well he tracked down the place, 2 Below Zero near Breckenridge and set us up to go for this fabulous sleigh ride and dinner tonight on New Year's Eve. And I must say, despite the cold, which could have been a lot colder! This was the warmest, closest most wonderful New Year's Eve ever!

We were pulled by 2 mules in a sleigh full of people. I had every piece of clothing on that I had brought on vacation and we were wrapped in blankets and cozy. Smiling at my family and gazing at bright stars we never get to see, hearing the clip clop of the horses and excited chatter around me, I knew this would be another moment in time perfectly engrained in my mind.

We were taken to a big tent for our dinner and our whole family was together at the table. There were pitchers of hot chocolate and course after course served to us by the cowboys that got us there. There was even entertainment, a singer who sang all songs my husband & I knew from New Year's gone by. But the kids just thought they were funny songs! It was just a series of moments locked in. The comfort of warmth in the midst of coldness outside, the joy of family to-

gether and happy and safe, the security of my youngest settled onto my lap as he lapses off to sleep. A great close to '08.

Blessings and joy to all in '09!



New Year New Life

Ok, so I can move around the house again and actually get some small things done. I know I should have done this a week or two or three ago, but darn, I'm late again...getting things done that is.

Well it's a new year and some things should change and some should stay the same. Everything revolves around getting in shape, physically and financially.

Dieting.

Not fun.

I don't even eat that much.

I was sick for three long weeks and I hardly had a thing to eat then. Couldn't I at least have caught a break from my misery and lost a pound or two? I mean c'mon. Small bits of food very infrequently and all that coughing & hacking, doesn't that count as exercise?

Am I really going to have to stick to pre-arranged meals and buy special food just for me? I'm praying for a better way...other than sickness, which I have proof doesn't work.

It did take me a good 3 years to gain this weight, but I really need to lose it in 3 days (for my sanity's sake)! With 2 more family birthdays in the next month, plus Valentine's Day & 2 out of town trips...when is a good time to start? I know this whole dieting thing isn't dieting, it's a lifestyle, but it takes time to change a lifestyle and time not to miss all the old bad habits.

February 19th. I'm starting then. On everything!



Oops Mom's Really Sick

Help, I can't move and I'm miserable! And I'm almost positive I did this to myself, with the help of the holidays and quite a vacation! Don't you hate that when people take a v-a-c-a-t-i-o-n and then come home sick? What is the point of that? You're supposed to be sick at home and get rest & relaxation on the vacation so you can come back with a fresh spirit. I could only think of death.

The best luxury of all in the midst of all this hideousness inside of me is the chance to do nothing at all. To sit without feeling guilty. Well I'm still doing laundry and picking some things up, but not much more. The TV is on, I have a few magazines and a book nearby and that's ok.

Now years ago when I felt this way, the small luxury of doing nothing was not an option. When your kids are so small, they need you all the time. Rest only comes if you have relatives in town and we never did. Little things were a lot more difficult and they had to be done no matter how sick or bad you felt. Things have eased up. That's good. I can be sick & miserable & everyone here goes on without me, in spite of me.

Life moves on. If you have those little kids who constantly need you. Enjoy the moments, they will pass, life will get easier, it really will! And you can be sick to death in peace!



About this Website

I've been to a lot of websites in my life, but I've never built one. In fact for the 3-4 years, I've been planning this Mom Time show, I've been drawn to the idea of the web as the way to distribute the information and stories from this growing network of moms. As I've talked to different designers about the potential of this site, I realized more & more that all the stuff in it was going to come from me or the Mom Time group of moms, so it started to make some sense to try and do it myself as more or less a way to show somebody what I wanted.

Well until somebody with a better idea to help shows up at my computer...this is where we're going!

The sunflowers that surround Mom Time came to me slowly as I was thinking logo and colors and such. I totally had pinks & greens in mind. Then I kept running into sunflowers...there's a beautiful graphic mosaic of sunflowers at the end of the WALL.E movie, a friend hosting book club had a beautiful vase of them on her kitchen counter, we noticed fields of them on a drive, and it just seemed within a month's span of time, everywhere I turned there was a sunflower. I even had them in my own house and was noticing them like it was the first time. Well it took a lot of hints, but I latched on to it eventually. Then I found this incredible explanation of the sunflower that compares it to motherhood. Check it out at the bottom of the home page!

After that, in thinking about our lives as moms and women, the recurring thing that we all seem to do is spin plates. We have many things going at the same time as we manage and care for everyone in the household and for all that we remain a part of outside of the household. We just get those plates in the air and give them a good spin. Some are up there longer than others, some are up there forever; we just keep adding, replacing, spinning and spinning. When the plates are going lickity split and everything is balancing smoothly, we feel great and productive and even valuable. But when one falls and we say, “oh no” and try to get it re-spinning, some of those others can come crashing down around us. To me it’s the metaphor of our life and what we do and how many plates can we handle before we crash and burn. For some, one plate is awesome...others of us need about 9 thousand. Anyway, a long explanation for why the buttons on the website are plates!

Too many plates just seemed too many, so underneath the buttons change to tiles. To me these symbolize having our feet on the ground and following the yellow brick road in the best way we know how. It also stands for kitchen counters and all the stuff that goes on on those things.

In building one page at a time, I wanted some consistency and some diversity. I wanted you to be able to click and see you were still here, but in a different, new & exciting area.

I’m also happy to hope that this site makes you feel at home, comfortable and able to move around with ease. That you will feel like part of the conversation, part of the team of moms that help us learn & grow & enjoy what we do and how we do it. Please always feel free to contribute your thoughts or questions. This place should be a reflection of all of us and help all of us.

We may not all be the same, but we face a lot of the same issues, dilemmas and desires. Let's work our way through it together making good choices that are right for us in our own lives, homes & families.



The Big Idea

A couple years ago, I woke up with an aha moment and a great idea to basically form a revolving coalition of moms to discuss mom type issues and make it available to all moms. And in doing so put together a program by moms... for moms...helping moms...be better moms. I've always believed those aha moments when you wake up are the real winners. And so I've stuck with this thing like a pit bull.

So when I tried to explain the idea of this momtime show to my husband, I had his attention when I said, "I have a great idea", but then my description left him blank. His first words to me were..."Where are you going to get the experts?"

We're moms, we're the experts by virtue of we do it everyday...how else do you learn anything? We learn by doing and talking!

Can you read that driver's ed book and then get in the car for the first time and drive up Pike's Peak?

Can you read a bunch of recipes and turn into a gourmet cook?

Can you read a decorating book and hang a shingle as a designer?

Why does everybody think you can read a stupid book about motherhood and expect to instantly be the perfect mom! And yet we all try to act like that worked and that we have it all together!

It's experience that trains us. And if we're smart...listening to the advice of others who've gone before us.

And as I talk to more and more moms out there...the excitement builds...and the idea gets bigger and bigger and more valid. It's time for mom's of all ages & stages to unite together and share info and ideas and make this life a better one for each other.

Will you join this effort with us?



Why Moms Talk

Many years ago, when I got the bright idea to start a TV show about moms, it was clear to me to try and present this type of talk show in a slightly new way. Instead of having guests in a question & answer format, it seemed stronger to me to have moms simply in conversation with each other. After all that's what we do when we run into each other as we go about our day dropping kids off at school, scouring the aisles at the grocery store, waiting at the doctor's office, signing kids up for activities, pulling weeds! We see our friends and neighbors and immediately the pencil and paper is out comparing notes...How did your kid like that teacher? What are you making for dinner? I don't know what this stuff is on my baby's face! Why won't my daughter do a back handspring anymore? Do you have a good yard service that you use?

We share with each other, we commiserate with each other, we ask advice from each other and we just compare how we are doing with how they are doing. Right?? Surely I'm not the only one who takes away information from conversations like these!

Now compare that to how men interact. It's the sports, it's the news, it's a brief comment and a wave. Done, all talked out!

Yet as women our cravings for conversation go on. We want to talk. We want to complain. We want to get it out. And then we want to repeat ourselves...just in case you didn't quite hear us right the first time!

This is not bizarre. This is not a defect in women. This is how we were created. We were engineered to talk. It makes us happy! Scientifically, when women talk they increase their hormone level of oxytocin. This is the feel good

hormone. It just makes us feel better. The problem or situation doesn't have to be solved, for us it just needs to be talked about!

So if you're looking at a hassled and harried mom with a bevy of babies, chances are she's not in the best mood to be around! But give her another mom or two who've been through it or are going through it with her and everybody's singing. The world is right! Our husbands can come home!

Oh & I don't know if there's a hormone that comes from being nosy! But if you're like me, listening in to a conversation is sometimes even better than having it! The people behind you in line at Starbucks, the gathering in the other aisle of the locker room, the people in the waiting room talking about their problem. We want to know. We want to know what others are doing and seeing and feeling. We want to know that we're ok or better than ok or certainly better than they are (and if we're not, we'll learn from them how to do it)!

Let's feel good, let's be who we are, let's just talk!

Here's some other interesting info about women & why we talk!

- ❖ Women talk almost 3 times as much as men
- ❖ The average woman uses about 20,000 words per day. That's 13,000 more than the average man.
- ❖ Women devote more brain cells to talking than men
- ❖ Talking triggers a flood of brain chemicals which gives women a natural high
- ❖ According to Dr. Brizendine, who runs a female "mood & hormone clinic" in San Francisco "women have an 8 lane super highway for processing emotion, while men have a small country road."
- ❖ Testosterone reduces the size of the section of the brain involved in hearing, which is why we can talk endlessly to them and they have no idea we said anything.

It may be somebody's study, but I can certainly say...I've experienced it! Daily. Let's talk some more!



The School Year...It's a Wrap

It's all so sudden. The school year goes on & on. A little activity here, a little activity there and then just as school is about out...the craziness escalates to unbelievable proportions. So much now to do in so little time! With five kids in four different schools there's a lot to think about. Signing permission papers, handing out money...that turns into my job. There's field trips to fun locales like water parks & fairgrounds, there's dances, awards ceremonies, performances of school plays and musical events. There's sign up for summer school or summer activities. There's finishing and future planning going on simultaneously...decisions, endings. And of course graduation!

This is not a graduation year for us, which is really weird since nearly every year for years someone has been graduating from somewhere. This year was quiet. The calm before next year's storm of three graduations (from high school, middle & elementary). The question for me always is...how do you celebrate them?

We haven't done anything memorable for 5th grade finishes. There's no school ceremony other than a DARE graduation, which I think is now out for good with budget cuts. But there is general excitement over moving on to a new school and for them at that age, it has taken them a long time to get there. Part of the parting from elementary is the trips they've taken to view their new school.

Graduation from middle school is a little fancier, it's an actual event that the girls dress up for and the boys wear whatever for. A teacher who's had your child

in class all year mispronounces their name as they march across the stage. You take some pictures just as your child walks out of the frame, but you end up with a few of them and their friends out in the dark afterwards. Did we give them a gift? Yes. No. I can't remember!

We went through our first high school graduation last year at this time. That's where you look back and ask, "where did the time go!" And that's really where a big goodbye and a new hello start. How do you celebrate that time? This is where kids face the frenzy of college or the frenzy of really starting their life. It's a big deal. Look what they've accomplished.

Last year I turned to my friends to figure out what is good to do? What is right to do? How do you celebrate a high school graduation and mark it in your families memories? I got no good answers. It was almost too much for anybody to think about. There are a lot of parties going on, a lot of kids getting together, but what about the family?

With no clues, no suggestions and no good ideas I set out to figure it out and set the stage for the first and the next four kids to follow. It started simple and got bigger & bigger until the bubble burst and all the fun popped out.

It started with dinner for the family and a few good friends. We chose a wonderful Italian restaurant that we'd never been to before. There were 22 of us. We ate great and it cost a small fortune. There were enough of us to make it a party, but few enough to make it intimate. Turned into the perfect gathering, the perfect celebration.

Another small celebration followed a few days later after the actual graduation took place. My son went to an all night school sanctioned party and the next morning our family loaded into the car and drove six hours to a long weekend in LaJolla, one of our favorite places. There we were met by more family and a great time.

I asked my friends, "what do you get them for a gift?" Blank stares. Thinking at the time there wouldn't be much of a celebration so I focused on a great gift. We started with a little fridge for his room and finished with a bunch of gift cards he could use for college meals and supplies. Whew, we did good and he did better!

Can we follow that with the next kids lining up? I don't know. I hope so. All I know is we'll be far deeper into the college expenses with each and every child. And I know that the dollars you spend are not important, the important thing is the family commitment and attention and coming up with something special enough and unusual enough to make and mark the day. Because they will carry it with them the rest of their life. It is a benchmark.

An ending and a new beginning!



The Art of Remodeling

Oh I'm so hot on this topic...remodeling! Never did I imagine that so many people do it! That actually shocks me a little bit, because where do they get the money? I know a lot of people do it themselves. I have heard about people redoing their bathrooms on their own. But I rarely hear people talking about big redos! I know it's a good thing, adds value to your home and recharges you when you see the newer, more modern touch! So with so many people updating & upgrading, why did this never really occur to me?

I keep thinking back to when we moved into our house 17 years ago. It was big and beautiful and new. There were a few little screw ups that reminded me it wasn't the model, but it was good enough for me. Beyond good enough. And we had a big fat monthly payment for the next 30 years!

I never thought about remodeling. It was just not on my radar. There were still things that needed to be finished. The pool in the backyard went in. Then we got into the landscaping in the back yard. That was fun. We brought in all these companies so that we could explain what we wanted and get an estimate. The one who got the job was the one who drew out what we wanted. Simple as that!

So yes, we moved in and we did a few things, eventually we had shelves built in the garage and an entertainment center especially built for the family room. So

even early on there was more to do. But I still never thought about having to remodel.

About a decade or so into the whole house thing, we realized, we would have to re-carpet. You just cannot have 5 babies, two cats and a dog growing up in a carpeted house without a few irreparable mishaps. But ewww how I didn't like the thought of paying to replace things. As we got into it, it made more sense to choose tile for the downstairs and re-carpet the upstairs. Turned out the tile cost more, much more, than re-carpeting the whole house. We chose the tile and waited another year or two for new upstairs carpeting. Then for kicks and because the walls were poorly painted in the first place, we chose to paint the whole house, pantry and closets as well!

We literally loaded everything out of our downstairs level into the garage and a pod we had rented. It then took 3 weeks to tile & paint. It took so long that even though we unloaded the garage & pod as soon as we could, we still got a letter from the HOA telling us to send the pod back. By the time we got the letter, the pod was gone, but it was all irritating anyway.

For three weeks we lived smooshed in whatever room hadn't been taken over by the tiler or painter. The whole downstairs was out of commission, yet that was the only level where the toilet was available, a real inconvenience! We bought our fast food dinner and huddled together in one small room eating in front of the TV.

We started out smiling when the workers came, by the end we were slamming the door when they left. Nothing fun about it!

Except when it was all done and they were all gone. The work of moving and hauling and tearing down, tossing out and setting up was excruciating, but the joy of the newness soon overtook the woeful three weeks we'd just gone through. And life settled back to normal.

Six months ago a friend who was over, commented to my husband that our kitchen was a little outdated. Ha ha I said, but he had my husband's attention. And it was my husband who over my protests decided let's take action. Back to the misery...kitchen only. We replaced appliances and repainted the walls (previous blog on that fun). But then the granite guy and cabinet guy got in the action. It was a mess of decision making and budget blasting. Our friend who started the frenzy had good connections and even though we got great prices, it still cost quite a lot. The paying for it part I don't like.

Funny thing was as we made all these earth shaking decisions we didn't have any of the results of any of the other decisions we made. So we decided on the cabinet color, but we didn't have even a sample of that when we went to pick out granite. And when we decided on the design of the back splash, we only had a cell phone picture of the granite. We were guessing based on memory and although it all turned out all right for us, that's not the way to go. We must have been in a hurry or something.

The thing I learned about the guys we hired to do the work is that they operate on their own timetable and you have to learn to translate their language. So if they say, I will be there at 8:00 AM, count on seeing them at noon. This is not great fun if you also have a life and have things to do, but then again I guess they count on you to give them your full attention, until they get your last check and they're gone. Patience is the key. And fortitude.

And that's what you give up to enjoy the upgrade. I'm not a remodeling expert, but here are my tips:

- ❖ Think ahead and spend some time planning before you begin. Take your time. Know what you want. Look at magazines, internet, models to see what you like.

- ❖ Talk to people you know who have experience with remodeling. Get their ideas & recommendations.
- ❖ Get quotes from the people who've been recommended to you who will do the work. Make sure the quote includes all the work involved. Does that quote include the materials as well?
- ❖ Look at their work. Many of them have good relationships with their clients and often the client will let you in to see what they've done.
- ❖ Rather than hire a local company to oversee the work, do it yourself and hire each job out to a small company or individual. You can save a lot of money that way as you are able to negotiate with each one separately. Often they will add in some extras for you at no charge.
- ❖ Ask for design input from the people you hire. They've seen what their clients have liked and chosen and can often help you make decisions.
- ❖ When you hire individual vendors have them share their resources with you. My cabinet guy sent me to his wholesaler for knobs. I paid wholesale and they weren't marked up by the cabinet guy or another retailer. And I could look & choose from thousands of knobs. Our granite guy did the same. He took us straight to the wholesaler, gave us advice as we looked around. And we bought it direct. They can also take you to the boneyard area where granite is found at amazing prices. Oftentimes they will even negotiate the price for you.
- ❖ If you like the work that your vendors have done for you, stay in touch and recommend them to others. They will remember this and take care of you the next time.
- ❖ Go with the flow. Expect good work. If you can be there for the most part while they do the work, it will help if they need you to make a decision. If there's anything going in that you don't like, you can catch it and get it fixed right away.



Structuring the Summer

Every year it starts more quickly and ends more quickly than before. And always I feel that same feeling. At the beginning of the summer when school lets out, it's that bit of fear and trepidation of the unknown, what are we going to do with each other 24/7 for the next two months or more? But in the same way, it always ends the same too. While there's excitement sending them back to something new, there's the quiet discomfort of a summer well spent and some sorrow knowing you're going to miss them...a lot.

Well on our little piece of the map, the school year has come to a close once again and the house is filled with screams, laughter, loud TV's, the microwave binging as food is constantly being made, cars coming & going, splashing in the pool... a lot of noise and a lot of movement.

I can't help but think about how summers have changed over the years, when the kids first got out of school (kindergarten) until now when they're getting out of college, high school, middle school and elementary school...still.

It's easier now that the kids are more independent, the older ones definitely have the ability to schedule their own days with work and play and whatever interests them at the moment. They still get bored. They miss their friends. They even miss the rigorousness of a busy schedule.

For a while it's nice just to chill. But if you let them chill into boredom, run for the hills, they will make life miserable for you.

Here are some ideas for kids and families that are at all ages & stages:

- ❖ Visit the library once a week. Sometimes there's a story time for young children. Sometimes they have a program for book readers to earn points and reap rewards. Let your child check out some books. But be careful, I had a couple of kids who lost more books than they read.
- ❖ Visit the book store, they too often have reading programs. When I do this, I always let each child pick out a book to buy.
- ❖ Go out to lunch once a week. You have to eat anyway. Pick out different places and experience different foods and atmospheres. Let the kids help you choose.
- ❖ Teach them a craft or something you enjoy doing. For me it's knitting. I bought my girls knitting needles and some yarn and they sort of enjoyed making themselves a scarf for winter.
- ❖ Let them help you with dinner. Alternating kids, I let each one go through some of my recipe books and select what they'd like to help me make for dinner. We shopped for ingredients and I let them measure things out (great for math), stir and bake. It was fun to do it together.
- ❖ Once a week have an outing, Go to a movie or the zoo, botanical gardens, county fair, indoor play park, bowling, science center or somewhere else in your community you'd like to share with them.
- ❖ Pick out a sport or activity they don't usually get to do during the school year and sign them up. Music lessons are good during summer since they're generally inside and can give you respite from the heat.
- ❖ Get together with other families you enjoy and go on an outing together or to the local lake or pool or water park. Or have them over to your house. It's fun

for the kids to share their backyard. And visiting someone else's backyard is always more fun than your own.

- ❖ Gather the family together for a summer brainstorming session. Let the kids think of and contribute ideas of things they'd like to do.

- ❖ Plan a family vacation or staycation or special weekend getaways. Let the kids contribute and do research on the areas & places you visit.

The key is to keep busy, just a little something everyday to look forward to. Keep summer fun. Let them learn in new ways. Take advantage of the bonding time you have, it's so very special!



Pool Safety

Living in Phoenix like we do, where having a built in pool in your back yard is almost as common as having a grill out there, you gotta think about and beware of who has access to the pool.

For the 17 years we've lived here, we've had a fence around the pool. In fact when we had it built, we had the pool set on the side of the yard, so it would be easy to gate and we'd still have good backyard space. Even though our kids are grown, we've kept the gate, because now the first set of kids are bringing over their kids. And the gate is important. But you can never be too safe.

I remember when the kids were toddlers, it was important to me to get them quickly into swimming lessons. I always felt that the best defense was knowledge and ability to handle yourself in the water. Whether we had a pool or not, did not matter. Everyone else has pools, if my child is invited to somebody's house where there is a pool, I needed the comfort of knowing they'd be safe.

Do you know how many people I've known over the years with babies & toddlers who've moved into a house with a pool and no gate? Bunches! There are laws about having specific gates when you have young children, but somehow they seem to get ignored. It also always bothered me when people try to put up the most rickety kind of do it yourself fence. Kids may not have the ability to swim, but they definitely have the ability to find their way in to the pool space. Here

they are with a baby, toddlers and another one on the way and they aren't concerned about an open pool.

Who in the world can watch their child 24/7. And how many of us have had night wanderers? How many of us have had to buy higher locks for the doors because one of the first things our child learns is how to get out?!!

We gotta work to protect them. It's not a casual thing.

The other thing we have to be careful of are all the things created to help our children in the water. Chief among them are water wings. Those little inflatable floaties you slide on the kids arms. When our kids were small we were invited to a pool party where surprisingly there were lots of parents & small kids. The kids were floating around with their floaties. Parents were chatting with each other. I watched as a child got out and the parent took off the floaties and sent the child inside. The child left but then came back. No one was watching as she jumped in. One of the other kids noticed the sinking toddler, but the parents were socializing and didn't see. Fortunately the child was all right, but it could have been a nightmare.

For me the big thing I worry about is parties like that. Especially when I am hosting one. I'm busy and distracted and not inclined to watch. When our kids were young, we had very strict rules and no one went in when we had guests.

We always emphasized with our kids, young as they were, not to go around the pool without mommy or daddy. We must have made an impression because they never even tried to go near it. They were careful.

Yet in all our carefulness as parents, we don't want to make our children afraid of the water. Water is a good thing and a fun thing and should be enjoyed. We just need to set parameters and enforce them.

As the parent, we must set the rules and make sure they are followed. We need to follow the code, pay attention and give our child's safety priority over everything else. If money is tight, we will give up something else to put in a safe fence. We will put layers of protection around the pool. We will because we love our kids and they are irreplaceable.

That way the most precious sounds of summer, the laughter and the splashes and the joy of pool time can truly and always be cherished.



Episodes from our Summer Vacation

There's a bag full of sunscreen lying on my floor. No one else has picked it up and neither have I. We are home from vacation and I am exhausted from all the relaxation!

There was a time in my life (nearly forgotten) when I actually vacationed by myself with a large pile of books. A good read on a plane or on the beach or anywhere for that matter, that's what relaxed me and filled me and made me ready to go home.

I actually did finish two books on the trip, so don't feel sorry for me. I completed nearly two prayer shawls in the days of driving. And I had more fun and talks and laughter with my family and relatives that will fill me and last me until my next fun vacation!

But any mom will admit, vacations are different with kids. In fact it's hardly fun anymore to take one without them. My husband & I keep saying "I wish the kids could see this!" There are so many things I could say about traveling with kids and tips I could give, but others have done that. All I want to do is relive my vacation a little bit and show you how we get the most out of every moment we spend on vacation. And that's important because you might be like us, we have a lot of family that lives in other places and so generally we want to spend our vacation time visiting our family in those places. But as much as we love visiting our families, we want to expose our kids to new places and views too. So we try to build each vacation so we can stop and smell the roses along the way.

This year my husband's family planned a reunion of sorts in Orange Beach, Alabama near where his sister & brother in law live. My family on the other hand lives in Wisconsin. So the question became...how do we manage the trip to Alabama with a trip to Wisconsin? Do we fly all those legs & rent cars each place? Or do we take our large car with 150,000 plus miles on it, squish in all our junk and our 5 large & growing children and drive 6000 miles? We ping ponged between options (neither sounded too great) for a few months until I started to open up the map a little. Hey look at all these cool places along the way.

If we leave Friday night after work and spend the night in Las Cruces, we can get to San Antonio by early to mid afternoon and spend the rest of the day there on the Riverwalk. On Sunday which just so happened to be Father's Day we could visit the Alamo (which really was a major place he wanted to visit)! You see how this is working?

So then after the Alamo we'd check out of our hotel and drive a few hours to Galveston, stay on the beach and eat seafood! The next morning we'd head to New Orleans. A short drive and we could spend the rest of the day exploring the (nicer) parts of the French Quarter! After some morning time in New Orleans, visiting the World War 2 museum there, we could then make the short jaunt to Alabama, check in at our condo on the beach and head to Jim's sisters house.

Aaaaah, then we'd spend a week on the beach having fun with many members of Jim's family!

Then it would be Wisconsin time! We'd have a nice long break from all the driving and we'd break that Alabama to Wisconsin drive into two days. We chose Nashville as the spot to visit and set up a hotel room right across from the Grand Ole Opry!

Next day, the long road to Wisconsin. We'll get there and spend another week! My husband would have to fly back to Phoenix on the 4th of July and go back to work, but the kids & I could stay & enjoy some good family time. Since our youngest was scheduled for surgery on July 19, our plan was to be home a week before that, to re-acclimate a bit before he had surgery. We wanted to spend time with some good friends in the Denver area so we planned to get there in time for our

last weekend of vacation. Jim would fly to Denver, spend the weekend and drive us the rest of the way home. Meanwhile I would get us from Milwaukee to Denver. That's when our oldest son threw in his two cents! Let's stop in St. Louis on the way and see a Cardinals game in their new stadium!

And so we all agreed to this plan.

I booked our hotels and on July 17 our vacation began with our signature vacation song, "On the Road Again." Every time we got back in the car, that was the first song to play. Other favorites are "Some Beach Somewhere" and "A Cherry Cherry Christmas". But on this trip, Jim put together a CD of music based on the cities we'd be seeing. Songs like: "San Antonio Rose", "Nashville Cats", "Living in America", "Callin' Baton Rouge", "Take Me Home Country Roads", "All My Ex's Live in Texas," "Holiday Road", and our new favorite "Knee Deep" were just a few in his wonderful mix. You had to love it cause we heard it over & over for the what was to become 6000 miles in 24 days!

First stop Las Cruces for a few hours of sleep and an early 6AM departure! Crossed into Texas early and thought it was a joke when we saw a sign for I don't know what city at 751 miles! But late the next day I was taking pictures of the mile markers. I think 880 was the last one! But before we got there, we got to San Antonio where we stayed on the River Walk at a great Marriott Resort. They even washed the car windows and set all 7 of us up with waters before we departed.

Somehow I expected (and remembered) a larger shopping area on the River Walk, so I was a bit disappointed not to browse around much. The kids immediately discovered humidity and after walking the walk and taking the cruise around, we sought refuge in a River Walk restaurant that could seat 7.

On Father's Day morning we enjoyed brunch followed by a self guided tour of the Alamo. My husband talks about those Alamo heroes as though they're his old friends, so it was the perfect place to celebrate. The only thing we missed was the IMAX movie, that would have made that bit complete! If we had known more about our next stop we'd have taken more time for the movie!

And so after some Alamo touring & shopping we hit the road to Galveston. The one song Jim forgot to put on the CD! Being Father's Day there was a bit of traffic, so not being able to quite blaze to the next destination was frustrating for our celebrated driver! Finally we made it to Houston and traveled south of our track to Galveston. Interesting views! The skies were blue but the water was an inky, murky gray. Our hotel was not ready with our room. We drove up and down that little peninsula. Tried again. No. Got some ice cream. Tried again. Drove down the other way. Back to hotel. After seeing the water, none of the kids wanted to swim, so we were trying to decide on a nice sea-foody restaurant. I jumped out of the car, but before slamming the door I teased, "if it's not ready I'll just cancel and we can go straight to New Orleans." I whammed the door closed, but before I could get into the hotel door, I heard a horn beeping and saw my husband's arms waving. "We all want to go to New Orleans," he exclaimed. So I canceled. And we headed back to Houston and out.

We had reservations at the JW Marriott in New Orleans, so I placed the call to make sure we could add in Father's Day night. Because there are 7 of us, we really need two connecting rooms. But hotels don't like to promise those, so I always check & double check. Which is what I did in route to the Big Easy. "Ok so I'm confirmed for tonight and those rooms are connecting right?" "Yes m'am they are." Good, all set.

Now the rule I've learned for electronics is if they aren't working properly, shut them down and reboot. This rule I forgot as we approached New Orleans now past ten at night! So instead of following the GPS I can see on my Ipad, I'm following it on my Iphone which is the same only smaller and after a long day, my contacts get foggy and it's that much harder to see. However I followed the directions nearly flawlessly and we headed up Canal Street searching for our hotel. "Is it on the right or left," my husband asked. "Looks like the left!" "No it's right here on the right," my happy hubby yells as he veers into the alley like entrance to the Marriott.

Now I jump out on my wobbly, road weary legs and fly in to register. After waiting in a too long line, I'm told we don't have a reservation. After a blank stare

from me, I think to ask, “Is there another Marriott on this street?” “Yes it’s just across the street,” she answers.

Hummmph, I was right! So back to the car where Jim & the kids have totally unloaded all the bags with the bellman striding to the door. No no no we’re at the wrong hotel. Soon the happy father’s day father is screaming and I’m announcing he can vacation himself, I’m flying home! The kids are in the car laughing their heads off. And so this is how I had to enter the JW Marriott across the street, which took us 10 minutes of driving to get to.

After about 10 minutes of pecking around on the computer, I’m handed one key on the 30th floor and one key for the 28th floor. I hand them back, “this is wrong,” I say. “We’re supposed to have connecting rooms.” “Well there are no more connecting rooms.” “Oh but we have them, I just checked a few hours ago and he assured me we did.” Another 10 minutes of computer keys pecking away. “Ok I can get you two rooms on the same floor, but that’s the best I can do.” I’m fuming. I have a very angry husband! Little did I know he’s laughing with the kids in the car as they’re watching my hand & head movements. It’s getting later & later. We’re all tired, hungry & thirsty and we’re scheduled to be here two nights now. “The rooms have to be connecting!” I stare her down. She picks up the phone. Ten more minutes go by. “Would you take a suite?” she asks. “Yes that’s fine,” I say.

She hands me a key and even though I jingle it on the way out to the car no one gets out. They wait to hear the word!

As we march into the lobby and through, my favorite reservation lady says, “you’ll love this room!” And we did. It was the presidential suite on the top floor. Two stories. Two bedrooms. Three bathrooms. And I’m almost sure the square footage was bigger than our house!

The next morning Cafe du Monde and some shopping New Orleans style. I did the Mom Time TV radio show about vacations from that fabulous room. A little R&R for the family in the room to remember. And then dinner at a fancy restaurant. Here’s us living it up in the French Quarter.

Before we left New Orleans, we trekked down to the World War 2 museum. That is well worth the trip to New Orleans in & of itself. What a valuable way to learn about those days. We toured it way too fast, we could have spent most of the day there. But we all learned a lot and someday when we go back will definitely do that again. We did get to see the movie there though! So our two nights in the amazing suite ended and we were once again on the road to Alabama and the family reunion.

After some rain and a little fear that the beach would be wet, we arrived at Jim's sister's house in Alabama and had a lovely meal. This is her husband Tom's big project, a railroad that he built himself. It runs great. And Mary Ann gets credit for decorating! Our condo at the beach was beautiful with lovely views.

We are all together, almost everyone from the family reunion out on the boat looking for dolphins. Since my Iphone doesn't always take a quick picture I had trouble catching the dolphins. But we saw quite a few including a pair mating. We also searched for alligators and (luckily in my book) didn't see any! Afterwards everyone out to eat at Tacky Jack's right on the water. Lots of atmosphere!

I was happy with my book at the beach, but there was deep sea fishing going on, parasailing, zumba, and lots of eating.

And then there was the forest fire. It started in Gulf Shores and burned it's way up to Orange Beach. This was our view from the door of our room. Notice above in the parasailing picture the smoke from the fire. It definitely brought a new dimension to the vacation. I guess I've never actually seen a forest fire!

All too soon our beach time, family time fun came to an end and we stayed one day longer after the rest of the family left.

The next day we were on the road to Nashville where we had tickets at the Grand Ole Opry. And how lucky were we! They only do shows on Tuesday, Friday & Saturday. We traveled in Tuesday, saw an amazing show of 8 or 9 acts and headed out early the next morning. Our original hope was to stay at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel, but rates were over \$700 per night and we still would need two rooms. We did however have time to walk through it and eat a lovely dinner there

before the show. Our vow is to come back & stay there! It's just gigantic, beautiful, peaceful and amazing!

Early Wednesday morning, we were off to the races in our trek through four states to get to Wisconsin. By this time we were learning a lot on the trip. Every place we went, we were able to make the most of the moment and do something fun that was special to that place. And so as we approached Louisville, I noticed how close Churchill Downs was to where we were passing. Let's just go & see it quick, take some pictures...and if the gift shop is open...

We did, we saw, we loved it all! The only animals racing through there that day was us! But we got photos, gifts and souvenirs of the moment. High five!

There were so many highlights to our week long stay in Wisconsin, the main one being with family for that long. We don't usually get to wake up and eat or shop or visit our family, so that was perfect.

Of course the week we were there just so happened to be in the heart of Summerfest, one of the most popular summer time events in Wisconsin. We braved the crowds, gobbled down foods (and drinks) of all kinds and my husband talked everyone into bongo playing at the lakefront. The video is especially good:))) Then we had so much 4th of July fun when the whole huge family group of us went to watch some Brewers baseball against our very own Diamondbacks.

Suffice it to say...the Diamondbacks won so our Arizona contingency was happy!

The cheering, I should mention, was led by our 10 year old, who started out as the only one cheering for the losing Dbacks. The crowd around him thought he was so cute, even taking pictures of him. Pretty soon the rest of the AZ family joined in and as the Dbacks pulled ahead, the Brewer fans cast some withering looks at the head cheerer! Things change quickly in sports.

Before leaving Wisconsin, I got to get together with my HS friend, Becky which was a real treat. We've seen each other sporadically through the years and exchange Christmas cards. Wish more of my old friends were on fb, but even email

is a too big commitment sometimes. When will we catch up technically with our kids?

It was sad to say goodbye to our family in Wisconsin, but time to move on. Off to baseball in St. Louis! But uh-oh, oh no, rain!

We had this great room at the Hilton right across from the ballpark where we could literally see into the stadium from our room. The rain was pouring down. Certainly they would call the game, who would go out in this? But this was St. Louis where they love baseball wet or dry. The crowd showed up & so did we. Where's the roof? Who would build a stadium in the midwest without a roof?

Authentic baseball according to St. Louis(ians) does not have a roof:)

Fortunately the rain cleared for 5 good innings. Then it poured again & we got drenched running back to the hotel. And cold! This is not Arizona!

We are good luck charms, cause in a full 9 inning game, the Dbacks beat the Cardinals. Oh yeah we lucked into following them around like big time fans!

4 AM the next morning we're off on a long long drive to Denver! Our most wonderful friends Gene & Valerie had tickets for us at a concert at the Botanic Gardens. Unfortunately Jim couldn't fly in in time, so I got all the fun! We buzzed into Colorado, left the kids the car and their own discoveries and picnic'ed to our hearts content at the concert. It was not without rain! Soaked two nights in a row, but happy as a clam.

The rainbow meant a lot!

Jim's flight was late due to weather! By the time he got in we were all asleep.

The next day started with Starbucks, middled with a walking tour of the University of Colorado in Boulder (where Jim graduated), some lovely pedicures, an amusement park for the kids, and ended with a fabulous dinner at The Flagstaff House in Boulder.

The next morning, we played "On the Road" again for the last official leg of the road trip. Jim got a speeding ticket as we reached his hometown of Trinidad. It was an unmarked car and he had just gunned it, because we were a bit late and

his whole family was waiting for us for breakfast. Nearly 6000 miles and it had to happen.

I know there are a lot of people who would never want to do that kind of driving, but it worked out so wonderfully, I can't wait to do it again and stop in all new places! What great memories!



What I Want to Teach My Kids

There are so many things I want to teach my kids, so many things I feel responsible for teaching my kids, that I really don't want to write about it, because it could very well be a writing without end.

I remember shortly after my first born was born and I of course was first learning how to get around with him, he was everywhere I was. And therefore he was always on my mind. He was just this little fluff of love, he didn't do anything but eat & scream and it seemed so far in the future when I could even expect him to. Our church was putting on a dinner sponsored by the youth center there to raise money for their mission trips and so we went and had dinner served by the teenage kids.

And so there's me there with my new momma angst. And I'm watching every movement of these kids in and out and serving the adults. And I'm looking at what they're wearing and how they are carrying themselves and their haircuts and their voices and I'm wondering, wondering what my small baby son will be like at that age! What will he look like? What will he act like? Will he be nice to me? Will he be an example to his siblings? Would he have any siblings? What kind of friends would he have? Would he be active in the youth group? What would he be interested in and how would he spend his time? Would he work?

So for all these years (he's 18 now) I've held these thoughts and wonderings in my head and as the answers have slowly been revealed, I'm in awe. How did he get from there to here in just 18 years and do so well?

I remember my husband quizzing me near the end of that pregnancy, “what are you going to do when he hits you?”

“What? Are you crazy? I’m the mom. Why would he hit me?” I was dumbfounded by that question. I still am and I still don’t know what I would do because I can’t remember either one of my sons hitting me.

I’ve always wondered what makes a person good. And why do some just float to the bad? How can we bring up our kids to be respectable teenagers and adults? I’m not talking about perfect. I just mean how do we give them the desire to lead a good life, to be able to take care of themselves, their family and others...to be loving, giving and kind...to be hardworking and yearn to contribute to this world in a worthy way?

What makes one kid good and the other bad? Is it genetic? Is it the luck of the draw? Is it parents doing the right thing? Or parents doing the wrong thing? Is there anything we can do to insure our kids future?

I really have no clue to the answers to those questions. But I think you really can’t go wrong if you live in love. If you are genuine. If you put your family above yourself.

So what do I want to teach my kids? The list is long and incomplete. I will think of other things later, but for now, I took 60 seconds and wrote down the first things that came to my mind. And I came up with two lists. One is the day to day things in life through the years. The second is traits and life skills and directives.

LIST 1:

how to eat, sleep, play, talk, walk, read, write

how to share, don’t pull the dog’s tail, don’t eat the kitty litter

brush teeth, comb hair, clean up, shower, bath

play sports all sports, do homework, get along with others

how to swim, don’t run out in traffic, stay away from strangers

good behavior, how to act around others

choose good friends, read good books, put in positive

turn off the lights, turn off the TV, put your shoes away & your socks in the laundry

load the dishwasher, do the laundry, take out trash, run a vacuum

study hard, speak up, shut up

how to drive, how to budget money

who to marry

LIST 2:

love

respect

positive attitude

hope

wonder

exploration

courage

interest in the world

inner vision

ambition

generosity

energy

sensitivity

patience

persistence

friendliness

right & wrong

honesty

good language

speak what you want

contribute...make the world a better place

And don't think we're the only one teaching them things in their life. The synergy between husband & wife influences in such big ways. And so does everybody we put our kids around...family, friends, teachers, sports clubs, church. We may bring somebody into their lives in the most casual way that will make us so sorry in the future.

I've heard it said and I believe it...that the people we associate with and the books we read (I'll add to that TV shows too) will determine the person we are. Want to change? Change those things.

Please feel free to add to this list!



Celebrating Anniversaries

There's something about celebrating that I'm reluctant (sometimes) to do. I don't have difficulty celebrating for others. We've done some pretty good birthday celebrating for the kids through the years. But when it comes to my birthday or my anniversary, I tend to let down. Why is that I wonder.

Initially it may have started as a way to save money or better yet maybe a way to not spend money that we might otherwise have spent. We had a lot of early financial obligations and so instead of buying gifts we needed or didn't need or going out for a more expensive dinner, it just seemed like a better idea not to spend too much.

I can't say I felt bad about this or not loved or taken care of because I held the hope that next year it would be different. Maybe we were worse off the next year, because for years we agreed to skip the celebrations. What did we do instead? Was it business as usual?

It's crazy, but I don't remember. Eventually after years of uncelebrated (but not unrecognized) anniversaries, we started to venture out. We had a couple excessively nice meals, we've had a few fun times at favorite standby restaurants, we've had a few small gifts and a few excessive gifts. Those things I remember though I don't associate it with a year!

So that brings me to thinking and wondering and wishing I'd taken the time & effort just to record what we've done with our anniversaries through the years. After 19 years together it would be fun to look back & put a sense of order & reason to it all. It would be nice to know the gifts or even the particular reasons for not celebrating it in a more special way. And a picture of us together every year would be so fun to look back on!

This year when we got to our anniversary, it was the day after we returned from our longest vacation ever. We had such a magnificent time and spent so much money, that we were actually a little tired from magnificence and a little bit broke. We'd been filled with food and fun, entertainment and adventure, neither of us felt a heavy need to go out. I didn't feel the need to cook either, so we went out together, just the two of us, reflecting on where we started, where we've been and where we think we're going. It was cozy and nice and just right.

The kids are growing and beginning to move on with their lives. They are starting to put together their own plans & ideas for the future. As more of them get old enough to do that, it may be time for us to think ahead a bit too. Maybe our anniversaries can be travel times together. Whether traveling near or far, it would be something to work on, plan for and delight in. Love the thought. It's something maybe we can build toward so anniversaries don't get lost in the shuffle of life.



Dealing With Discipline

There is no greater gift you can give your children than the gift of proper discipline, of setting boundaries and teaching the distinct difference between right and wrong.

Zig Ziglar always used the phrase of “going through the difficulties of today for the joys of tomorrow.” And I think that’s so true when it comes to discipline.

I mean as much as kids don’t like to be disciplined, parents don’t like to do the disciplining! It’s hard work, it’s painful, it upsets us as well as them. We want to be happy. We want our kids to be happy. It would be so much easier to skip the correction process and just hope that they stop on their own. But any of us who’ve tried that method have certainly found it doesn’t get better, it only gets worse.

Discipline has a rather bad rap, most of the time we associate that word with punishment. And often good punishment is necessary. But as a child starts out in life, they know nothing, everything they learn is from you and those around them. So initially discipline would start out with guidance. When a child reaches for a cord in the socket, you pull them away, correct them and redirect them. However if a big brother or sister was trying to plug the baby’s fingers in the electrical outlet, this would call for a noticeable punishment in my book!

A child needs to know where the boundaries are, they need to know that there are limits. Then they need to learn self control to live within those limits. As a parent, that is what we are guiding them to learn. There are certain limits that may be important for everybody to learn...look both ways before going into the street, don't bite your brother. And there may be certain rules that apply specifically to your household...make your bed when you get up in the morning, turn off the TV before you leave the room.

The catchy part is as parents, we don't always have our life lines very well defined. What are the things that are important to us? How do we want our children to act? What are the things we will allow and how far does it have to go before they cross that line? It's those blurry edges that seem to lead to our greatest mistake in discipline and that is inconsistency. If we catch it one time and let it go the next because we're busy and then let it go again because we let it go before, and then catch and really discipline the next time because we're in a bad mood and now they've done this negative thing so many times, it's got to stop. Well isn't that a bit confusing for the child? What do they do next time? I think they're going to test us. And then it becomes a match of wills. And I don't know about you, but kids have an absolute resolve and ability to wear me down.

The other important thing in this lovely portrait of discipline is how you and your spouse feel about it. Think about that one. It's not really one of those discussions high on your chart in the dating days of wine & roses. It's not part of the wedding day checklist! And even during pregnancy, the idea of discipline might be a glimmer out there, but there's so much more to think about and learn about.

So it's not unusual that the first time we come face to face with discipline is right at that moment. Freeze! Now what? What do I think? What do you think? Do we agree? "Never let 'em see you sweat!" Truer words were never spoken! If we're not on the same page, then those devious kids will divide and conquer! Generally my husband and I will give the other space to make a point. We may talk

later if it was too harsh. Because our life goals and beliefs are so similar, we generally find ourselves in line when it comes to determining the line.

I'm no expert on discipline. I haven't even read the books that are out there. I've just been in the trenches and somehow keep managing to muddle through. Because when it comes to discipline, we need to do what we tell our kids, "make good decisions." It's just so important, because it will shape absolutely everything for them in the future, the way they see the world, the way they do their job, the way they raise their own kids.

Here's another thought on discipline...you know as parents, we need to discipline ourselves as well. Maybe part of that is watching what we eat so we're not excessive, not spending every penny we have just because we want something now, doing things we don't necessarily like to do, but doing them because they have to be done, ie: working, cleaning, laundry, yard work, etc. Because as we so often say, our kids are learning from us and our actions speak so much louder than our words, and so now I'm thinking in the case of discipline, this must work as well.

We need to let them see our own discipline in action. Because at some point, they need to be able to do it on their own.

"The chief cause of failure and unhappiness is trading what you want the most for what you want now." ~Zig Ziglar



Back to School Planning

It always amazes me how fast the summer goes. Every year I worry about how to keep the kids busy and happy and the summer exciting and fun. And then suddenly it's all coming to an end and all the traditional functions of going back to school stamp their dates on my calendar.

With five kids in four different schools, there's always lots to anticipate. The high school gets things moving first with planned pick up days for schedules and books. Then there's meet the teacher nights at the middle & elementary schools. Every year it's the same, same days of the week, same time of the year. All that sameness has turned back to school into a tradition for us.

We've made back to school shopping a big part of the tradition! I don't shop for clothing for the kids too often during the year, so we try to cover the gamut of needs they've acquired. When they were younger, I used to take them all together for a big day of shopping, but as they got older and could stay on their own, we'd break it up, boys on one day, girls on another. Now as they are older still, we break up shopping days based on who's available when! No matter which way we've managed it, they are always fun & productive days and a good time to go out to lunch together.

Our shopping list usually includes: shoes, lots of socks, underwear, jewelry, shorts, pants, shirts, accessories. I try to start with a bit of a budget, but somewhere along the line it generally starts to run amok! Occasionally we will order

backpacks or some clothes online! That's always fun too when the packages start to arrive!

The thing about back to school that shocks me every year are all the expenses involved. We are happy with the quality of the public schools in our area, so the big expense I don't have is tuition. However the rest of the expenses add up and add up fast. Let's do a bit of a laundry list!

clothing, shoes and accessories

backpack

school supplies (from supply list given by the school)

doctor's appointments before school: physicals, eyes/glasses, teeth/braces

haircuts

class fees

PE clothing

activity fees for fall sports & clubs

parking

lunch account money

food for class snacks

pictures

fund-raisers

ID's, lockers, PE lockers, sports event fees

yearbook

field trips

And every year, there are things I've forgotten and am surprised by. I have noticed that school's are trying to get fees upfront and early, like for yearbooks and field trips. Student pictures are usually taken the first month they are back in

school. Fund-raisers are out in the first two weeks. Donations are requested year around.

It's an intimidating list if you start to go down it and place a dollar amount by the side. So along with back to school planning, we should have a little bank of money we've been collecting all year!

Sometimes it's easy to get swallowed up in the shopping and school visiting and all the summer plans that are wrapping up. We forget about mentally preparing the kids for school. Time for a coaches pep talk.

What I always like to remind my kids when school starts is that it's a whole new year, a totally clean slate. Whatever happened last year is over and gone. This is the time to change or correct anything you did not like about last year. Set your goals. If you want better grades, now is the time, start early. If you want better friends, be friendly and meet new people. If you want to participate in different sports or activities, seek them out. You only have a short amount of years in each school, make the most of your time there, be who you want to be, and do the things you enjoy.

“There's only one way to succeed in anything, and that is to give it everything. I do, and I demand that my players do.”

- Vince Lombardi



Choosing the Right School for your Child

When it comes to choosing the right school for your child, let's just start at the beginning of this! Pre-school. And for some people it actually does start there!

I remember my cousin whose children are older than mine, telling me she actually camped out the night before preschool registration, in order to get her children in that particular preschool. Our neighborhoods were new at the time and packed full of families with small kids, but even so, would I be willing to camp overnight to get a preschool slot for my child? Preschool this is! I didn't even know if I wanted to pay money to send my kids to 3 and 4 year old school. Eventually I did decide to do this, got a recommendation from someone who worked at the elementary school down the road and sent all five of our kids there. That was (easy math) 10 years of preschool!

When it came to elementary, middle and high school, we simply sent our kids to the public schools in our neighborhood. We gave it very little thought or conversation, because our thinking was so in line. We're not trillionaires and even if we were, it didn't make a lot of sense to us to pay huge tuition checks and drive across the city to go to school, when we had a high functioning school in our neighborhood two blocks away.

School is a good thing in my mind. My kids can go and learn from somebody smarter than me, someone who will be easier to listen to than me, and that's

good. I don't feel the need to be everything to my kids, I'm willing to share. The thing about it to me is... they spend 7 hours a day in school, that's a lot of book learning time. When they get out, I think they should have their world opened up in other ways. I think they should be able to try different sports and different activities. This is the time to experiment and learn how to be part of a team or find out what they're good at, what they enjoy doing. If they don't do that, how will they ever be able to decide what they want to work at for the rest of their lives?

So instead of us spending a certain amount of money on the school they went to, we took that hypothetical money and spent it on other opportunities. And you know what, that was just right for us. I wouldn't do it any other way.

However around me, I've seen a lot of interesting school choices. One of my daughter's best friends was yanked out of their high school and sent to another public high school a little further away. Why, I ask? Because she wasn't behaving at the first school! And her sister just started at the first school, so now they both go to different high schools. Seems like a lot of work.

I have another mom friend who started over with school selection each year for her children. She did this from preschool on actually. And she did it with the noblest of intentions, she just wanted her kid's teachers to be the best one possible for them. Our stand on this has been the same for every one of our kids for every year they've been in school. We've never asked for a particular teacher and we've never tried to change our kids out of a class where the teacher didn't like them or they didn't do very well. Why? Because that's the real world out there. Bosses, colleagues, situations are not always to our liking, but we have to learn to manage and work our way through those things. The best time to learn that is from the beginning.

My daughter still talks about the teacher who hated her, she rocked her world by giving her one bad grade after another. We thought what's happening to our sweet daughter? Why does she refuse to learn this stuff. One by one we took everything away from her, her phone, her TV, her electronic games, everything we ever saw her having fun with, it all went away. Her grades stayed the same. Imagine our surprise when the next year in high school, she had near perfect grades! Here all this time we thought something was wrong with her, and it suddenly became apparent that it wasn't her at all, it was a teacher who just didn't like her. But you know what? When it happens again, she will have that experience in her back pocket, she will recognize it and she'll figure it out from there. Because this is life, it will happen again.

Let me talk about Catholic schools and Lutheran schools, the parochial schools you have to pay tuition for. I went to a Lutheran school from grade school thru high school. It was fine. I learned enough. I'm not damaged by it. However, I always felt like I was missing out on real life. I had religion and memory work and learned the Bible. I did like that and I'm glad I had that valuable chance at learning. I wish that were an option at public schools. It should be because that is one of the important concepts our country was built on.

What I didn't like about my parochial school was the small small school where the same kids were in my class year after year. I think in a more creative way. It would have been more interesting and exciting for me to have things mixed up a bit. I didn't care for the strict, it's my way or the highway rules, they managed to beat out the love of learning (in school) for me.

And so as I watch people around me choosing Catholic schools (there are more Catholics out there so I'm simplifying) at early ages for their children, the decision always seems to be made around the discipline aspect. You see them with the fear that they can't adequately teach their kids to behave, so we will send them to the stricter school and they will beat it into them. Forgive me if I seem to be generaliz-

ing, this is only the case with the people I've met who've made this decision. It has always been for discipline reasons.

When it comes to discipline and priorities and teaching right and wrong and goodness and character, that's what I want to give to my child. I believe that is my responsibility as a parent.

So are private schools filled with naughty kids whose parents have money? Are they filled with kids whose parents are too busy for them? Well it's definitely something to think about.

I don't want to totally downplay tuition based schools. They have their place, they offer alternatives and variety and that's important. I know people who go to those schools, teach in those schools and love those schools. In our area, there are so many options for schools and that is spectacular, we should have options and we should take time to learn & investigate them.

Just don't go too wild & crazy when you do that!



Giving Birth

My husband and I laugh and say it was probably a good thing that we met each other so late in life, if we'd have gotten married young, we probably would have 17 kids by now.

I am one of those women who are made to give birth. My body just works well that way. Not that it's entirely easy, but it was always rather quick.

The nurse who attended the birth of my first child advised, "Just don't tell anyone about this birth, they will all hate you, because they don't often happen like that."

So I'm one of the lucky ones. What I find amazing is the conversation about giving birth! Talk about opening up. We each remember every detail of the task and we never tire of telling the tale. And once we've talked about how it all worked with the delivery of one of our kids, we have to get the stories of the others out as well.

But in giving birth, we are the vehicles of an amazing miracle, no wonder we remember every moment of it as vividly as though it were yesterday. And of course the whole 10 month pregnancy of anticipation, makes the culmination even more spectacular.

My husband works at the kind of job where you always have to be there. Yeah they get vacation, but only in certain months. God must have realized what a strain it would have been to take off and 4 out of 5 of our kids came on a weekend or holiday. No days off taken...or necessary.

It strikes me as strange when companies give paternity leave and dad's take it and then add their vacation time to that. My husband had to leave work early to pick the baby & me up from the hospital. He was always there for the birth, but if I was in the hospital and it was a work day, he went back.

The quickest I ever got out of the hospital was with my middle daughter who they diagnosed with a heart problem that first day. She was born in the middle of the afternoon. Around 9 pm the pediatrician walked in (on a holiday) and slowly broke the news. My husband had just left with the kids to put them in bed. So I got to walk down and see her all hooked up before they air evac'd her to another hospital downtown. I couldn't go along, because I had to be released to get out of the hospital and it was late at night, no doctors were there to do that. They were kind enough to get me out first thing in the morning though, so 16 hours after giving birth, I was on the run!

That's the beauty of it though, we all have our stories, whether they're the lazy days of recovery and lots of time spent together with the family or a quick drop and back to the routine, they're our memories and our stories to share.

It's been a decade now since I've given birth, but with every birthday of every child, I remember back. We're celebrating their birthday on their day. But it's my day too. And no matter how old they get, I remember that moment. That magic moment of birth!



When Your Child Has Surgery

With five kids in the family, you would probably expect to have some surgeries along the way, one or two or maybe even five. But we've certainly had our share. We've had small surgeries, hernia and ear tubes, surgeries where we've actually had an option of whether to do them or not, and surgeries that were life & death necessary, no decision needed!

We actually have two children who were born with the same heart defect, tetralogy of fallot. At the time when our youngest was born, the second child to have that condition, the medical community did not believe it was hereditary or genetic, so it was a real long shot to have two kids with the same serious medical situation. It's as likely as winning the lottery we were told.

So our daughter had two open heart surgeries, one when she was 5 months old and the second one at 10 years old. And it looks like she's set for a while!

Our youngest had his first two open heart surgeries at 9 weeks old and then again at 9 months old. Now at 10, the doctors debated and decided that this was a good time. His arteries were too small and too lopsided in function and he needed a pulmonary valve replacement.

A July 19 date was set. His surgeon now operated out of Diamond Children's in Tucson, so we would have to travel 90 miles for this.

Words cannot express what it feels like to turn over your child to a very high end surgery of this type. Should this be easier to enter into the fifth time around? Or is it harder because we're just that much more educated in what is taking place in that operating room?

Even though we had an awesome summer of fun, there always stood this little cloud of dread. I know my husband felt it too. It was like a battle going on in my mind, the first was the side of disbelief that this was going to happen or if it did it was a long way off. The other was the side of this is going to happen and I'm not going to like it or something will go wrong. And I guess there was a third side too and that was the side of are we doing the right thing at the right time? Does he really need this surgery right now? Can we put it off another year or two, after all he acts like a normal kid, he's healthy and active and smart, he doesn't miss a beat. Should we wait until we see some signs?

We thought we saw signs, sometimes. Yet those only came at rare times where he was over extending far past what most athletes his age would do. So were we even judging correctly? The cardiologist pointed out that it was much better to do the surgery when he's healthy than when the heart problem gets so bad he's no longer healthy. That made sense.

The night before his surgery somewhere between my wakefulness and restless sleep, the comfort came to me and instead of feeling torn, I started to think how lucky we were. How lucky Matthew was healthy. How lucky we have insurance. How especially lucky we have the best pediatric heart surgeon working on him, a surgeon who knows us personally (through all the years of heart surgeries). How

lucky we have faith in God. How lucky we have family and friends to pray and give us their thoughts. We are in the right place at the right time.

But still as we faced the day and brought him to the hospital, it was heavy on my heart, are we doing the right thing at the right time? It just doesn't seem necessary now. All this was in my head.

We had tried so hard not to talk too much about this. We wanted Matthew to know a little bit, but not too much to frighten him. We wanted him comfortable and ready and confident and willing. And he was. He stepped right up. Played his video games until they gave him the calming medicine and counted the minutes until he fell asleep.

During those last few minutes before surgery, the surgeon came in, he had just parked his car and was wearing his street clothes. There was a lot of preparation to do and it wouldn't be his turn for quite a while. He came in hugged us and shook hands, told us everything would be alright. They wheeled our son away and we went to wait.

Two of our children came with us. Matt's older brother and his sister who had already had that surgery. They were both amazing and strong and such a comfort to have with us as we waited. We were especially curious what it was like to be Samantha knowing she remembered so much from her surgery and then watching her little brother go through it. We all recognized the very unique perspective of this.

Our other two children kept things going at home which was also a great reassurance to us. It's hard to pick up and leave and worry about feeding the pets and

doing all the things that normally go on at home. It was a division of kids that worked well for us.

Somewhere 5 or 6 hours later, they wheeled Matthew back, the ventilator was out and he looked as good as a child could look coming back from a surgery like that. The staff and nurses were calm and there was only one tree of medication.

Technology, advancement...the aftermath of the first surgery was nothing like this. They set him up in his room and even though there was a constant flow of activity, it was so calm, not the frantic frenzy we remembered from before.

And so it was time to heal. The surgeon called it a high end surgery, said when he opened up the arteries and replaced the valve (which hadn't been working at all), it was like his heart went ahhhh! Do you know how wonderful it is when the heart surgeon is smiling after the surgery? I think that's a good thing!

Amazingly enough, it seems the best thing you can do to help yourself after heart surgery is to get up and walk. It was not something Matthew wanted to do anytime soon. But the next day, he did walk a little. The day after that however, we challenged him, after all, he is a competitor! The record laps after heart surgery was 16, so we asked him if he thought he could do that. His sister held his hand, the nurse walked alongside him and his brother & I walked behind. Dad waited in the doorway of the room and counted laps cheering!

After 16 laps, he walked one more to break the record, and then one more to equal 18 holes of golf, because he loves to play golf. It was not easy for him to do, walking at that point was hard work.

This picture was actually taken the next day, day 3 when he was released from the hospital to go home.

Let me not make this sound too easy, there was a regimen of medicine to give and a boy who'd been through enough and did not want to take it. It took a while before he wanted to eat and before the food stayed down.

But he's healing everyday. Three weeks later he was able to start school with everybody else. Tonight as I write this, it's been 4 weeks and he's back at soccer, just kicking, no running or contact yet. In another 4 weeks he'll be cleared to play in a tournament.

Miracles happen all around us every day. We are so very thankful for ours!

A friend of mine had an awesome suggestion. You know how people will offer and ask "what can I do for you?" "How can we help?" I am never very good at answering that question. Usually we manage to figure things out for ourselves before anyone asks. So when we are asked, I don't really have a good answer. Then my friend suggested the blood bank. What a great idea to donate blood to honor a relative or friend or child who is having surgery. The blood doesn't go to them, but it does go to replenish and increase the supply. I mention this in case anyone has ever asked or wondered what we can do to help each other in these situations.



Sending Your Kids to College

When my babies were babies, time went by kind of slowly for us. As they advanced to toddler stage, it still went by kind of slowly. They were adorable and so much fun, but a lot of work chasing them around, teaching them and keeping them safe from themselves. On to a couple hours of preschool a couple days a week and the days still went slowly, sort of, and so did the years. They were very young still and spent the majority of the day with me and were a lot of work. I loved them dearly, but they made me work hard!

Suddenly I'm taking the first one to kindergarten and even though it was a half day at that time, it was a big step to school. Cameras flashed and mothers all around me had tears in their eyes! And remarkably those first few years that went by so slowly seemed suddenly to have fast forwarded to this. Little did I know at the time that the next 9 years leading up to high school would go even more quickly. And then the quick blink of the high school years and whoosh now it's time for college.

How did their childhood go so fast and escape me, the mother who stayed home to witness all the firsts and enjoy their every days?

When they say it goes by fast...they are right. Even though some times seem to go slow, altogether, it happens in a blink. And the thing about going to college

is...that is their first step away from us. They will come home, but they will never come back, their independent selves will emerge and take them other places.

That's why if kindergarten was a hard place to leave them, college could be so much more difficult.

Helping to ease that pain...lovely, amazing, wonderful technology. Because when the kids head off to college, no matter how far they go, they are only a text away!

Even a phone call directly to their phone where you can leave a message or talk to them personally is such a change from when we were in college. In the dorms, there was one phone in the hallway for everyone to use. It was a big deal when a call came in! Now, not so much, just business as usual. Nonetheless I love that access back and forth that cell phones bring.

In my college days, our dorm rooms were adorned with hot pots and popcorn poppers, now they're equipped with fridges and microwaves. In class, we took notes or took tests. Now they go to class, but take the test at home on their computer. It's been decades since I've been in a college classroom, but the picture of every student walking in and opening up a laptop is amazing to me.

Which brings me to the more important subject of the cost of college! Forget tuition and room & board, we already know that's not affordable! But what are the other costs involved?

Laptop

Printer

Books

Supplies

Bedding

Microwave

Refrigerator

Lamps/Lighting

Room decorations

Cell phone use

Clothing (for different weather conditions)

Food allowance

Spending money

Car (+expenses with that gas, insurance, repairs, etc)

Parking

Sports tickets

Travel back & forth from home to school, school to home

Hotels for visiting parents

Cable TV

Internet connection

Laundry

The above laundry list is brought to you by my small brain. There are probably dozens of other things that should go on that list, but my knowledge is limited. It is a start though when the time comes to put together a budget!

Now how do you go about selecting a college? I've watched a lot of my kid's friends choose their college based on a sports scholarship and the opportunity to

continue playing the sport that they love in college. That's a good thing if you're a highly sought out athlete in a major college sport, especially if it can take you on to a career in that sport, but what if the decision is based only on the fun of it? That's very nice and fine, but no reason in my book to select a college based on that alone.

Well what about a major? Some kids know what they want. Some kids don't. And some kids who knew what they wanted change their minds. I don't blame them. This is not only a difficult decision, but a decision that could lead to their happiness or unhappiness at the job when they enter the working world for the next 40-50 years!

It would seem that the amount of time and effort and research going into that decision should encompass a little more than a comparison conversation with a few kids.

As a parent, you don't really want to bug them about that whole decision. After all they are still a kid to you. You remember clear as a bell the day you first dropped them off at kindergarten. How can it be time already to get serious about the rest of their life? When our oldest son was a high school senior, we broached the topic. What are you thinking about for a major? "I don't know." You don't have any ideas? "No."

So we tried to help. Well you have a whole life of work ahead of you, what kind of a lifestyle do you want? Do you want a nice home in a nice neighborhood? Do you want to vacation a lot or have a house on the beach? What kind of car do you want to drive? Do you want more than we have or less than we have? Take the picture that you've just painted in your mind and think about what kind of jobs will get you there.

Now what do you like to do for fun? Is that something you can make a career out of? Oh you like sports and sports is really the only thing you like right now? Well do you want to be on TV reading or editing sports, do you want to be a reporter? “No.” Hmmm well do you want to be a sports agent and negotiate deals between players and management. Bingo. “Yes. That’s what I want to do.”

Okay, now what will it take to get you there. Let’s look at some programs at colleges in state where your dual high school credits will transfer and see if they can put you on the road to pursue your passion. Will you be happier at a big college, small college, far college or near college?

And that’s how we worked it with our oldest. He chose a huge university near home where he can commute and his credits take a year off his completion date. Then as he got excited and more interested in that field and began researching it and talking to people who do what he wants to do, he’s made some other decisions. He wants to follow up with law school. Fine we think because it’s another back up, if the first idea falls flat. So business and law and negotiation and communication. That’s useable for a lot of careers. That’s a nice thing.

Now our daughter who’s two years younger starts to think about this at about the same time her brother does. And she knows exactly what she wants to do... physical therapy. And she knows she wants to go away to school in state and she knows the school that has the best program for that. It’s two years later now and she hasn’t wavered. All our research and conversations point to a good decision on her part.

Our third child knows what she’s good at and what makes her heart sing. It’s fashion. And she’s right about that. She is good. She knows what she wants, now it’s finding the right place for the rest of her education. And she has time.

As parents we have a little perspective and experience that our kids don't. A little guidance from us along the way, even as they are growing up, will be such a help. And if we do it right, they won't even know that we're helping.

So maybe all these discussions start around kindergarten when you ask them about their day. Who did you meet? And what did you like? And what's interesting about your teacher? Are you reading good books?

Raising kids isn't just raising kids, it's getting them from here to there. It's positioning them to be smart and respectable and responsible...picture a future for themselves and enjoy the pursuit of that.

If we're going to pay for college in a big way, it better make a player out of our children! That I know!



Battle Waves of a Tight Economy

The whole confusing money mess, or am I the only one confused by it?

The money battle...for so many of us, that's exactly what it is. It's not fun. It's not easy. It's not understandable. As quickly as we catch on to something it seems the financial wizards have made a change that will do us in...at least until we can figure that one out and then...they move on.

Frankly, I'm tired of coming to the end of each month, swooshing my brow and doing the little dance, whew, I managed to make a payment on all my bills. Hallelujah! And out to the mailbox and there's a whole other handful waiting! And I'm tired of wishing my life away...oooh I can't wait for the next paycheck, if we can just get to that, it will all be good. But since I already have the next handful of bills in my clutches...it really already is gone. And so we wish ahead another two weeks.

When will the cost of living cease to be the bane of my existence? I hope it's not when I'm dead! Surely, we both have college educations, we can figure this thing out! We're making the money, we just can't seem to refrain from spending it all.

I think my problem is in whatever comes up, we just add it on. The tires are without treads, put new ones on. It's 118° outside, turn the air up a notch. Somebody's having a birthday, gotta get the right gift, oh and what about a party? Too busy to fix dinner, we'll all go out and I'll get back on it tomorrow! The family's coming over, gotta get the house cleaned. The kids are growing and need a computer. If we take this trip, we better have video in the car or get iTouch's or DS's for the kids. We'll take this trip because we need to see our family. Gotta get the kids something for Christmas. All of my 5 children need to bring a pumpkin to school. They need new dance shoes or soccer balls or haircuts. The water tank blew up. The roof is leaking. The dog is sick. The house needs painting. The carpet needs cleaning. The summer killed another car battery. Church needs money, donations. School needs money, donations. Here's a project, there's a project. Make a meal for a friend. Get the picture? Now add your own, you know it's an endless list.

Yet there are some people who can master it. They can actually live within limits. I think it helps if you start out life with this mindset and stick to it in a steadfast way.

So I look back to when I started out, what were my circumstances. I graduated college, had a small speck of spending money, moved home with my parents & got a temporary job until I could find one in my field. Three months later I find a job and move across state. I have enough for a deposit and first months rent on an apartment and gas and enough to eat. I get my first paycheck 3-4 weeks later. I live in an apartment, sleep on the floor cause I can't afford a bed. Sit in a director's chair (the only one in the living room) and watch my 18" black & white TV. There's a bottle of wine and a small block of cheese in my refrigerator. But look out world...I'm a professional...I have a job...I have a career!

I really should dress for the part, shouldn't I? I need some clothes, my college attire doesn't quite work. Ewww, what's this? I have to pay for electricity and

heat? And my phone? And that was such a short list compared to today when you have cable & wifi & land line & power & gas & cell phone & iTunes & insurance & that's just the beginning!

I started in a hole and stayed in a hole. Actually the hole got bigger if that's even possible. And I lived frugally. I really did. I waited a long time for a lot of things. I was on my 3rd job (in my field, as a woman, you had to move around a lot to improve salary) and 4 years into the working world before I owned a bed or a mattress. And really every time I moved in those first 6 years, I could pack almost everything I owned and move it in my car.

The reason for this long remembrance, is that I spend a lot of time thinking about all this and how to teach my kids about money and wanting, needing and having! My husband & I slept on a mattress in our room for a decade before it occurred to us to get a bed or a bedroom set. I can't expect the kids to notice that and take that into consideration when they have spending decisions. I can't expect them to notice the things their father and I gave up along the way, so they could have stuff. Aaaah, and that's the problem shining clearer. We so want our kids not to suffer or lack or want for anything. We want them to live the good life, so we help them do it. And they're so involved in all the stuff they have and want, that they don't even notice what you don't have. They don't see what's been given up, so they don't know about delaying gratification or waiting to get something they'd really like to have. We're teaching them to want and want it now.

So how am I teaching my kids about money? My example that I'm setting is both good and bad. I am afraid all they see and notice is my bad example. That's also an easier and more fun example to follow!

But here's what we've started! Although we still buy some clothes and supplies for our kids, as they grow older, we are beginning to transfer that responsibility to them. They get a certain amount of money from us, they make their own money through babysitting, refereeing and now some jobs and it's up to them to budget

that and make buying decisions. My girls are especially good at this. I love to shop with them, because they can spot a good buy in a quick snap.

What we're trying not to do is put too much financial burden on them before they have the resources to support that. They have a car to drive and we start out paying for the car, license, insurance, gas. Pretty soon, they pay for their own gas. I think it's time soon for them to pay a portion of the monthly insurance and before they are out of college, they need to discover that license fee. The monthly cell phone fee, I think is another good one to turn over sometime during college. I just don't want them to be surprised by the long list of expenses when they suddenly decide they want to be on their own. I want them to have a bit of a head start and a smart start.

Maybe I'm dreaming, but I hope it's easier for them. I hope they have the struggle, but it's not a heart wrenching one. I hope that they never get to the place where we feel like we have to save them. And I hope they don't wish their life away from paycheck to paycheck.

When it comes to things to watch for out there...remember everybody wants your money, as much of it as they can get, the more they sell, the happier the system. So for me coupons and deals can be too much of a good thing. Whenever I get on a coupon kick, I always buy things I don't need, want or use...but I think I will and I do have 15¢ off...or I can get 15 of them, 14 of which I can't possibly use. You may be able to get some good deals at Costco, but can you really walk all the way through that store without grabbing all kinds of stuff you can do without for now? Really I don't need to spend \$500 for two nights of meals!

Watch out for the banks, they have all kinds of ways to grab your money. Just the fees even to put money in an account can be crazy. They want you to maintain a \$1000 balance to avoid a monthly fee and there's no interest to that balance,

but even if there is, it's maybe 4¢ a year. Then they change the way they do things and suddenly you're paying an account fee. They reel you in because you don't have to pay for checks, next month they've added a fee for checks. And forget credit card interest. They tell you you have to have credit (which you do, how else will the banks make their fortune), but if you fail to pay it all in a month, you may never be able to do it because the interest charges will get you and bury you.

Have you ever checked out of a store and they tell you, if you just buy \$5.00 more, you will get a coupon for \$20 off a purchase between this date & this date. That's too good to refuse right. So you grab something you weren't even looking at that's \$18.00. You get the coupon and you miss the shopping date! I hate those things!

I have a table full of coupons I will never use. First when I get to that store, I remember the coupon is on my table. If it happens to be in my purse, I either forget it is there or I find it is expired! Am I unorganized? Not really, I just want to use that coupon when I need it, not when they need me to.

Another money pitfall which keeps getting worse & worse, it's the publicized cost vs the real cost. What do you pay for an airline flight? It tells you \$199, but you forget to realize that's one way and the return flight is \$375 or you make that decision to buy the flight and then 5 more things are added on to the price of your ticket. And then when you get to the airport, you now must pay for each bag you are sending back & forth (heaven forbid it should be over 50 lbs!) and if you want to eat on the plane, that costs cold hard cash as well. And don't forget, now that you have to be at the airport 2-3 hours before your flight you'll probably be buying food, drink, magazines, candy and more while you wait.

It's a racket out there.

Sign your child up for any sport, it'll cost you...the monthly fee is...Ok we can handle that, we're in. Oh what now? The uniform is a few hundred? Oh so are the ref fees or the tournament fees, or the travel fees, or special coaching...what my kid's not actually good enough to play?

Well and look at college. Technically you really should be able to graduate in 3 years, even if it's a 4 year college plan. Add to that that a lot of kids can now take dual credit in high school and by taking a higher level class and paying a bunch of money to community colleges you can get those credits off at the future university of your choice, Here's the fallacy...after paying for those credits, they don't transfer out of state, sometimes they don't even transfer in state. In our case, our son earned a nice academic 4 year scholarship. With his collected credits, he will be able to graduate in 2 years, he'll go 3, but even so, we'll lose a year of that scholarship. So are we losing money by paying for those community college credits? That's what we thought originally, but in his 2nd year of college, tuition went up about \$1200 per semester which is above & beyond his scholarship dollars. Then because he goes to school 5 miles down the road, he lives at home to save that expense. But for his friends who are entering that university this year, they have to live in the dorm their freshman year and pay room and board. Oh and don't let me forget...the application fee, just to apply for a college. So there are ways to force you to pay more. And any big institution can find a way to get you.

Now add to that college education, that it's not enough anymore to get a degree, you need an advanced degree and another 2-4 or more years of college to compete.

What about just simply having fun anymore? The price tag on that has gone up too! "It's just an honor," my son says, "to look at Madden '12!" The first Madden we got was '03. That's \$60 every year. And every year my boys can't wait to hand over that money and get the new Madden Xbox game. Call it crazy, but somebody's making a mint off us.

Everybody's always happy to have our business. And that's what makes me suspicious! America the land of enterprise! It's a good thing, but it can leave you hanging by your toenails too.

The art of making money, saving money, keeping money, growing money is not lost on me. I may not understand it, but I certainly appreciate it. And I'm determined to figure it out!



Working Moms

There are a lot of people out there and Dr. Laura is one of them who really denounce moms who work outside the home. This both bothered me and thrilled me since I gave everything up to stay at home with my kids. And the working world denounces that. So the ferocious fight is on. There's gotta be someone who's right and someone who's wrong. Of course, that's why we fight for our rights don't we?

I'm a stay at home mom. I left my job for a number of reasons:

- I fell in love with my kids
- I had some kids with medical situations and they needed me some of the same times the company needed me.
- I had a lesser job than I was capable of.
- The money I made still wasn't enough.
- I thought I could work from home.
- My husband worked a lot of hours.
- I missed my kids desperately.
- We were willing to give some things up to have me home.
- If you're going to have kids, you should raise them yourself

Those were my reasons. And that's what worked for me. It was a lesson in giving things up that's for sure. There were just so many things that we couldn't do or have anymore. And that was hard. It was so hard that I started to look around and see what I could do. I took on so many freelance projects and jobs and home businesses through the years, that I can't even remember them all. And even though I am and have almost always been a stay at home mom, I know my kids think of me, tease me, remember me as an almost always working mom.

They don't know what I do. It makes no sense to them. Since I'm on the computer a lot, their impression is I play a lot of games and Twitter to my hearts content. Sometimes that makes me mad.

And sometimes it makes me mad that I've had to invent jobs for myself. Some of those just cost me a lot of money and some made a dime or two. Losing lots or gaining some is not the steady work of a full time job. It's the tougher side of working in that sense. You may not like your boss, or your employer, or your job, but every payday, there's a check. There's a certain comfort in that.

One of the hard parts about raising kids and working at home... oh what the heck not hard, nearly impossible is more like it, is trying to get anything done with little ones running around. Thank goodness for technology and email, cause anyone knows with kids, you just can't talk on the phone, they find you. Even older kids pick that phone time to try to communicate. They are all alike and they are all crazy. And they will make you crazy.

How many moms have held working phone conversations in the closet while the kids play hide and seek with you? You just wish sometimes you could find a way to cut a tunnel out of your little Alcatraz, cause they will come and get you!

I have often said through the years that it would be really hard to be a working outside the home mom, because there's just so much to do. But after living a working, working inside the home mom life, I wonder if that's not even crazier! Because in doing that you could literally work all night and all day. You can get very very tired.

But that's also the tremendous advantage of working from home. You can allocate your time in most respects and work little bits in and between when the kids are up and around and really go to town at night when they go to bed. The disadvantage of that is you have to have a work ethic on overdrive!

Another advantage is you can cut down or take time off when you need to. Worn out from all that work? Slow it down. Need a vacation? Take that extra day. Speaking of vacation, it's an easy way to take your work along, after all you're used to working from anywhere.

You are for the most part, the boss. Now that is both a positive and a negative. It's good because you probably like the boss and bad if the boss is lazy or doesn't understand something.

It's hard work creating a business from nothing. It's often like when you build a house and suddenly something you've never paid any attention to is now the biggest decision of your life, like door knobs. Or should you separate the words of your company name or run them together?

I will say being on the creative side, working from home has been a great blessing and opportunity for me. And I thank my husband for getting that steady paycheck so I can spend it trying to build something for us. We're working together doing the best we can, some hits, some misses, pick yourself up and try it again,

When people ask me what I do, I say I am a stay at home mom. They think I don't work, that I'm the queen of TV and bon bons. They look at me like I'm the laziest person on earth. They think I must be really stupid or otherwise someone would hire me. Or they think maybe I was once smart, but now my brain is atrophy-ing away. They don't understand that the time my kids will be living with me is really short in the scheme of things and that's a time that I don't want to waste. I want to live it and enjoy it.

This blog did not go anywhere I intended it to go! Ha, but that's life and that's sometimes life in the working world. It spins and you just try to spin with it!



The Perfect Mom

Is she a myth or is she in fact very real? I'm talking about the perfect mom here! I started the day off thinking of course there is no such thing as the perfect mom. Of course not, nobody's perfect. But now I've got a little bit of that nagging feeling that maybe I am wrong. Let's take a look at this.

It all starts the day we are born, when our mom becomes the mom of us! And over the years she proceeds to teach us everything, including how to be a mom! We learn this from watching her during all the time we spend growing up. How does she treat people? ...me, dad, siblings, her parents, friends, relatives, in laws, co-workers, acquaintances, and the people she'll never see again? What is her attitude toward life? What are her interests? What does she do well? What are her priorities? Who does she look up to and admire? What does she say to us? Does she notice the lessons in everyday life? How well does she guide and direct us through turning points and all the points in life?

Does she know who she is and what she stands for? Is she happy, sad, steadfast? Does she love who she is and what she's doing in life? Does she love being a mom or is she resentful? Does she enjoy the journey or complain about it? Is she a neat freak or a big fat mess? Is she trying to teach me something she will not do? No matter what, she's teaching me to be like her, because we all turn into our moms, we know this, right?

And so we become independent and adult and we have our own ideas and skills and dreams and desires and we are on our own or with our husband and we continue to observe the behavior of other people. Parents with kids. Moms with their kids. Did you see that mom make her kid cry? Do you see that mom not even watching her kid who's running rampant? Can you believe she has her kid on a leash? Why aren't those kids in a stroller? Why is she screaming at her kids? Why won't she just buy them one little thing? Why won't she stop that kid from crying? She could at least dress her kids in clean clothes!

And on & on it goes. We all see it. We all think it. We all have our opinions. You've been there right? I'm not alone here. I know that. Do we ever see a mom and say, she's perfect? She's doing it just right! I'm sure I never did. At least not until I became a mom myself.

Aaaaah that blissful time of pregnancy, filled with wonder, filled with desire and expectation and future. And so we look forward and dream ahead. And that perfect little being inside of us has no flaws, no divisiveness, no issues or problems. Unseen, they really are perfect. And so it doesn't surprise me that we begin to think with this perfect kid, we know it all and we absolutely will be the perfect mom. How can we miss? We've learned the good, the bad and the really ugly from our own moms, we've certainly seen everything wrong that every other mom does out in public and it's all so obvious, that it's absolutely certain that we can get this right.

And so because we both work and there's not a bad income here, we go shopping and we outfit the bedroom as good as we can. And how can it not help but be perfect with all the amazingly cute and beautiful baby things. The fancy cribs and strollers and playpens and high chairs. And changing tables and curtains and stuffed animals and wall decorations. How can a mom not go wild?

We've spent a fortune. We've outfitted not only the baby and the bedroom, but we're starting to outfit the rest of the house as well. The swingy thing in the living room, the rocking horse, the legos table, the blankets, the diaper bags. This that and the other thing takes over the house. But it's all neat and clean and in order. Even if it is a bit more cluttery, it looks so new and clean and good. Wow!

And then ka-pow! The baby comes in whatever form of delivery it chooses for us. Usually that doesn't go according to plan either. And we are suddenly holding the little lovely that even today's ultra sounds can't reveal entirely! Tired, totally frenzied bliss!

Mom time!

And here it comes...unimaginable tiredness, creepy crawly hormones, a shrieking baby, home alone, no breast milk yet, everybody in the world wanting to hold the baby and that baby only wants one person...mom! Now two breasts competing to reach the size of Vesuvius, days without any solid sleep, confusion over the crying, what does this kid want? And this is nothing like the motherhood in my mind!

Perfection blasted to pieces. The baby won't sleep alone or at night. Baby stuff is all out and all over...where did it go in the first place. Tripping over the baby stuff. Eating M&Ms to keep awake. Not at all losing the baby fat.

And that's when you look over and notice! That's the perfect mom over there. Look how she's dressed! Her breast isn't hanging out. She doesn't have baby poop on her hip or throw up on her shoulder. That diaper bag she has is nicer than mine and so much more efficient. And look at that stroller, she can go anywhere and do anything with that thing, and I bet it doesn't weigh a pound. And

she's skinny too, how did that happen? She walks like she owns the world, look how confident she is. How does she do it?

Oh and look at that girl with the swagger, bet she's about 7 months pregnant. She looks totally in charge and ready. Bet all this will be easy for her. She's got it together, she won't be a mess like me.

And so it goes, right? Are you with me on this? Have you been there too?

And what about the first time we forget our kid? Or the first time we scream, really scream at our kid, or the time that they cry and we let them or when they break the DVD player or throw the heavy toy down the stairs and it crashes through the wall? What about all that baby perfectness that is lost at birth?

And so again we compare. We begin to think our moms weren't so bad. We begin to want to do some of the things they did well. We wish that our house were that clean or our meals were that good day after day and night after night. Pretty soon everybody looks perfect, but us. And even though we start acting like our moms, we may realize we are not our moms and what they did well, we do miserably.

We can get so belittled by what we don't do right, that we forget our own specialness, our own talents and joys and abilities. And it actually takes some time and discovery and distance, I think to find them again. And then a little more space and some more experience to appreciate them again.

But we are women, we are resilient, we are not down for the count. Let us roar! Pretty soon our good points are our great points and we're happy and confi-

dent with that. We actually like it like that. We begin to think more people should be like us. We look around and see new moms and although we remember a little bit of the struggle we think, oh don't do that baby, wrong thing to do. Here's what I did and it's a whole better idea. Ha you've got a tiger by the tail and I've calmed the dragon! Oh no, I would never do what you are now doing. How can you yell at your child like that. Yikes, should I say something or run. Runnnnn....

I believe we all think we're doing it right, even with our foibles & flaws, don't we all feel like we're the best mom for our kids. Don't we sometimes wish everybody knew what we know.

The years have passed, the kids have grown, they're out and about and now they are having kids. What do we do then? What do we say to our kids who become moms? Do we try to make them like us? Do what we would do?

Don't yell at him like that. Don't let her make that decision, who's the parent? You're giving them everything. They are spoiled. You need to make them eat healthy, get rid of those M&M's. You are pretty frumpy, your husband is going to leave you.

Oh yes and that is why, hmmm, I thought there's no such thing as the perfect mom, did a little spin and now am giving it a second thought!



Allergies & Asthma

I actually woke up this morning at 5 am, I was struggling to breathe. It's allergy season and I'm not happy about it.

Every year, at the time of year, where temperatures are perfect and I long to be outside enjoying the season, allergy drama springs on with a vengeance and I am miserable. My husband will roll down the windows of the car and immediately I start sneezing. It can set me off for the whole day. The windows have never been open at my house, I wouldn't even know how to do it. Yet in all this misery, I think my allergies are mild compared to most!

“Every season can be an allergy season, depending on what you're allergic to.”

~Clara Chung

Thinking back, I'm considering myself lucky that I didn't suffer from allergies when I was a kid. Allergies didn't come to me until I was well into adulthood. I remember watching my dad deal with allergy attacks and it was scary. As a kid we were always in the yard pulling weeds so that he would feel better! In those days, we thought that was the answer...maybe it was, but not in these days.

I keep asking the question...what is it with allergies and asthma these days? Why does it seem to be getting not only worse, but more prevalent? Because I

didn't have allergies as a kid, I was really surprised when it turned out some of my kids had them right from the start. And of course I roll my eyes that that was one of the things they picked up from me. Yuck!

“We either have to shoot the owner, or we create a special allergy vaccine just for them.” ~William Miller

So when my oldest started displaying allergy symptoms, I learned from the doctor that if you have allergies, you will also have asthma and eczema as well. He did have the eczema, but it took a while for the asthma to take place. That started during his middle school years and was brought on by a baseball episode in PE class. While my son who had played competitive baseball was in the on deck circle, a kid who didn't know what he was doing but did it anyway, took a mighty swing and then let go of the bat. That bat hit my son square in the nose. We didn't realize it at the time, but it altered the position of the septum, so it was at a fairly extreme diagonal. That blocked the air passages of both nostrils.

We noticed it first on the soccer field where it seemed his breathing was labored. He got an inhaler, but only used it occasionally. But one spring day after running the mile in track, he couldn't breathe and he didn't have his inhaler with him. Luckily I was there and coached him through those deep cleansing breaths. It kept him from panicking and gave him enough air to gradually catch up. But it scared me and I realized how hard it must be for kids with bad asthma to carry on each day. Kids forget everything very easily. One of the hardest things as a parent is to remember to remind them. I can't even imagine what it's like if the child is split between two households and they forget their inhaler.

“As a country becomes more developed, allergy rises and rises. And the notion there is that in the more-developed countries, you may be getting less exposure to infections and germs and other things that may stimulate your immune system in a

direction other than allergy...The more your immune system is kept busy by exposure to germs and infections early in life, the less time it can devote to things like allergy.” ~Robert Wood

And then there are the food allergies that afflict so many children these days, especially peanut or other nut allergies. Dairy, eggs, wheat, soy and seafood allergies also seem to be prevalent. When I was a kid, we all lived on peanut butter & jelly. No matter who's house we went to all kids were served stacks of peanut butter & jelly sandwiches. It tastes good, it's easy to make, and it's inexpensive. But these days, don't send that to school in your child's lunch. Somebody across the room can be seriously affected by that.

Schools and churches and daycares, anybody who cares for your child has stringent policies set up for dealing with the rampant food allergies of the children who attend their facility. Nobody can afford to take it lightly, because these allergies for a lot of kids can be deadly. In my school days, I don't remember one single kid with a food allergy. What has changed in our society to shake up the lives of so many people? Can it really be pesticides? And why do allergies of any kind affect just certain people.

If I go back to my own allergy experience, I have to admit, I think my husband believes the whole thing to be a myth on my part. Unreal reality. I am convinced that people who don't suffer from allergies, don't understand the impact they have on the people who do. It's not fun. And it's getting worse. Don't these things run their course? Doesn't your body build an immunity after a while?

“Sometimes children may have one allergy episode in their childhood and then it lays dormant for 20 years...If it comes on later on in your life, it's here to stay.”
~Angel Waldron

And what about all the money put into developing new and better drugs to do the trick? Dear drug maker, they are not working! Try something else. Wouldn't you think with all the time and research, donations and money spent, we would all be cured? Hah, we can't take enough medicine.

Does it then make sense to assume that the point is not to rid us of our allergies, but to keep us miserable so the drug companies can make billions?

“People are taking two, three, sometimes four different medications at a time to relieve their symptoms quickly and effectively because they are increasingly unsatisfied with their allergy medications. This can be a very costly, dangerous and frequently ineffective solution to treating bothersome symptoms. ~Dr. Alpen Patel

What I noticed about my allergies this year is that they did not subside this summer... they are supposed to go away and come back in the fall. They continued. My son is asking me what can I take to feel better. And I am saying I don't know. I just don't know. Take another allergy tab.

More people have allergies

Allergies are getting worse

There's no good way to relieve allergies

Allergies are now living inside us longer regardless of the weather

We blame allergies on the environment & pesticides

The creation and sales of allergy medicine is a lucrative business to be in, but is not solving the problem very well.

If it appears that I'm a little grouchy here, I am. I'm an allergy sufferer and I'm miserable. Yes I know, I can clean my house cleaner, get rid of the stuffed animals and curtains, filter the filters, clean the air ducts, do more laundry, hide the clothes, cool the house to under 70°, but after doing all that while feeling bad, I'd still be grouchy.

There are no answers, only questions. But the conversation is important, maybe that will get us somewhere.



Kids & Sports

Dear parents of kids who play sports,

I am one of you.

My children have been involved in sports since my oldest began 16 years ago. And my husband's children started 16 years before that, so he has been in the active stages for longer than he wants to count. But that would be 32 years. So during that time, we have learned a few things. We've observed a few others. And in many cases they are startling and unsettling and so I'm writing to you in hopes that I can help you see differently! Certainly from what I've seen some of you are not bad, but a lot of you are! You are really bad. Bad to the core. Bad in a bad way and your kids are watching you. Will they grow up and be bad too?

There are so many things that I've seen take place on the field, I feel like I've been a bird observing from a tree. Keep in mind that I am not blameless here. I too have complained about coaches and ref's and ump's, and a kid out there who was not very good, why is he playing? I've sided with parents about a ref who's not calling things in our favor (or maybe he did, but it only counts when he calls it against us and we don't agree). There's so many decisions made by so many other people out on the field that we feel helpless, like we have no control. Right? Get over it. It's a game. And win or lose, those kids out there are learning. And for the most part they're loving it. And what's not to like? They're playing a game. They're running and high 5'ing and strategizing and figuring things out, what

works, what doesn't. Who has this strength and that strength and how do I play it to him? It's pure fun...that's why they're doing it.

Why are you? Are you out there to enjoy the beautiful weather, sip on a cup of coffee. Love life, thank the stars above that you have a beautiful child who loves this activity and that they are able and capable to do it, that they have friends and teammates to support them and revel in the moment. That you get to watch extraordinary moments of skill and equally extraordinary moments of failure. That this is life and you have given the child that you love above anything this important opportunity to play and learn and grow.

No my sports fiend friend. I've spent years watching you. And you are marching along the sidelines of the game instructing your child's every move whether they're 4 or 14. You are walking and stalking in front of the chairs of other parents and stopping when it suits you to block them from seeing the game, because without your screaming remarks, this game could not possibly happen. We hire and pay for a coach to do that, but even though he's with the team more than you, he can't be trusted. Only you have the right words to make that team rock. Aaah and then somebody makes a mistake, a ref, a coach, a player and so you take a step back and instead of walking in front of us, you are walking behind us hollering even louder than before and right into our ears. You are annoying and unnecessary and your bright ideas and the things you think you could do better are not helping the game. They are making everyone miserable. Some of us are laughing at you, some of us would like to belt you and some of us would like to video tape you, so you could see what we see...how ridiculous you are.

You are bad, but there's another guy who's worse! He's doing all the same things only he's screaming at his kid with swear words and obscenities. These kids are 6 years old. It matters, but it would matter at any age really! It's not enough just to yell at your kid, I'm sure he knows these things already since he's probably been trained by you. The other kids haven't, so you set your sites on them with

your loud voice and your lovely language. The eyes of the other parents are shifting back and forth. Is this a nightmare or is it really happening right in front of me. And am I really ignoring this like it's not important. We are complaining about it, but yes we are, we are ignoring it and saying nothing and the offensive parent continues to rant. I would hope that whatever age you are, you could play this game better than a 6 year old. That's a bit of a given, I don't need classic proof. Dummy, you are not playing the game, your kid is. Go vent your rage in your own game against people your own age. Don't teach my child, I don't want him to learn from you, I don't want him near you. You are not even close to the example I want to expose my child to in the short amount of time I have his attention to teach him.

Well I'm not that bad you say. No of course not, but you are pretty bad. Weren't you the one last week who was screaming at the ref because he missed some calls? Weren't you the one criticizing the ref because he wasn't much older than your child who was playing the game. Yes actually you were yelling at him and insulting him because he wasn't in your book good enough to be out there. That boy is somebody's child. Somebody who trusted you enough as a parent not to hurt him. Well I see it in your eyes, you'd hit him or shake him if you could, but you don't because you can't, but you can and do get him with your words. In a way, even worse.

Don't you love it when parents compare kids and who's good enough to be out there in the game and who shouldn't be out there? Keep in mind these are kids, they don't have your years of experience. They are learning. They are learning. They are learning. And they are built for fun. Not torture. They want to play the game for the love of the game, not to hurt, mangle and ridicule someone else. So if they're not doing that, why do we feel it's our responsibility to take it on?

Baseball & football & basketball look like the worst of these sports. Everyone wants their kid to shine in these sports. Everyone fancies themselves as the parent

of a pro player in one of these sports. Parents are willing to spend money they don't have to train their children to play in these sports. They are also willing to coach them. I've seen some of these teams with like 8 dads coaching. Their kids of course are always in the starting lineups. What though are their qualifications for coaching? Are they bored with nothing else to do? Do they love sports so much, it's the only way to get in a door? Are they trying to get a better opportunity for their child? There are more questions than answers to that one. But an answer or two would satisfy me for a moment. I am pretty sure I would not have fun in a sport where 8 dads were hollering at me.

How would it feel to a kid if the group of dad coaches gathered to watch tape of each game? It would make me afraid of making a mistake, that's what it would do. The fact that they would watch tape of opposing teams before they play is a bit scary, not so much if they're 16 year olds, but 6 year olds...yikes. See that kid over there, he's really slow, take his head off. Nice. See that one over there, he's really fast, I want all of you to chase him & take him down. Great.

So watching a soccer game a few weekends ago, I wrote down some of the quotes from some of the parents. What you won't see is the tone of voice used, but I think you can imagine it!

“Hustle boys”

“Let's go stars, anticipate this”

“Stick it in”

“Back it up boys, c'mon”

“You need to stop acting like this”

“Fight him Nick, fight him, stick it in”

“Win the ball stars win it”

“Go boys attack attack attack”

I actually did watch one father shove his small daughter into her chair. “Sit down you’re not going to play while we’re watching the game.” Really? To a toddler? Do you think she understands your obsession?

And it’s never enough for a parent to watch their child’s team win by a little bit. The more they can win by, the better. The cheering gets louder and more obnoxious the higher the difference of the score. Hey so if you can’t make your own team feel bad, let’s make sure the kids on the other team are totally demoralized! After all, isn’t that what we’re here for?

I took up knitting and it helps a lot. May look ridiculous to you, but it helps me focus my energy elsewhere. I still get to see the game, but my intensity relaxes. I can take a deep breath and reflect on the fact that life...and even games, don’t always go the way I’d like. But it goes on. And when it does, I have the chance to be the best I can be. That’s what we want from our kids. That’s what we want from ourselves.

Sports is a good thing. It’s a great thing for children. They learn discipline, respect, teamwork, friendship, trust, determination, sportsmanship, preparation/training, competitiveness, grace under pressure and the ability to accept defeat. And the joy of turning hard work into winning. There’s so many good things about sports that I just can’t help wondering why we insist on turning it into a bad thing.

Maybe sports aren’t for the faint of heart. They say that players have to have heart. I’m just afraid there are too many parents trying to rip those little hearts out.

Go be competitive in your own sport or your own job or your own arena of life. Live your life. And the best you can & should do is be a shining example to your children. Guide them, sure; direct them toward their own talents and desires, sure; help them get to where they want to go, sure. Show them how to create their own dreams and pursue them. But don't force them to be who you want to be, take that journey yourself. Step out.

Hey we're not perfect out there on the field of life. But we can watch tape, pick out our flaws and go out there and try again. And again. And again. Cause that's life.

Just be nice.

Sincerely!



Snap Grades

There is a bit of a debate when it comes to those instant grades, you know, where parents can peer into their kids school grades any day any time and get the whole scoop. There are some parents who highly like this option and some parents who highly dislike it. When it comes to me, I am on the dislike side. The advantage in this case of disliking, is that I simply don't need to use it. No harm, no foul. No need to care about it too much, right?

That's about how it went for me until I met a few moms who really loved the system. They were wild about it. In a sense it gave them some place to go and something specifically to do on the vast and ever changing internet. It reeled them in like Twitter and Facebook and email and all those ever changing places to go and things to do. There's so many places to go on the internet that sometimes you don't even know where to go. And our kids constant grades was an easy save to favorites.

After all, don't we want the smartest kids in the world? And isn't it our duty to snap them into shape and make sure every grade is near perfect? Wow if we can watch all this throughout the day, we can meet them at the door when they get home and go over all that with them. What a wondrous invention. We can drive our kids crazy. And ourselves as well.

The reason I am personally opposed to the system is the way I felt about grades. I got beat up enough over those things, I didn't need them hanging over my head on a daily basis. And the thing that tips the whole deal is that you see every grade for every aspect, not just the average grade of it all. Average is good enough for me, I don't want to worry over the details. I certainly wouldn't have wanted my parents worrying over the details.

School does enough to squish the creativity right out of us. It shoots us through that giant tunnel of right and wrong with no space for what if in between. That just did not go well with my nature. Even when my daughter volunteered me (because I don't work during the day, ha) to grade papers in her class every Friday, I was a mess. I looked at those questions, saw where the student was going with it, and thought well they have a good point, they aren't all wrong here, so how can I mark them wrong. How do teachers do it? I will tell you, the kids in that class always did well on Fridays!

The other reason I don't care for snap grades is that my kids are good. They like school. They like to do well. They take pride in achievement in school. I don't know how they got that way. Maybe we did something miraculous as parents that we didn't know about (wouldn't that be nice). But why would I hurt a good thing, by flying into a frenzy over every grade along the way. Let them fail some, it teaches them to try again. Failure isn't a bad thing, it's the thing that helps us correct along the way. What will happen to them as adults if we teach them to fear failure? They'll never try anything. We will be a nation of zombies. And how badly will they then treat their kids? Even worse? I can't even imagine.

I've sat in classrooms for curriculum nights and meet the teacher nights where parents are insistent on getting all the info to start following their child's grades. The tone of voice was icy, intimidating, invasive to me. Now maybe their children had specific problems with getting their work done and maintaining interest in learning, but in that case wouldn't you look toward the reasons they respond that

way. Wouldn't you try to find the source of their disinterest. I would think the constant monitoring would increase their disinterest.

We have the privilege of raising good kids, but that doesn't give us the right to torture them in all they do. Some things maybe, but not all things. I would look to what does interest my child, what makes them tick, what makes them happy and try to give them the resources to reach out and learn in those areas.

We are not robots.

We are not robots. We are not robots. Do you read me? Or am I crazy?

Do I think that snap grades will ruin kids lives? No. But in the wrong hands, I'm not so sure.



What's For Dinner

I love this topic. Why? Because it motivates me. I don't have enough access to my friends most of the time, but if I did have a chance to talk to them, there are certain friends I would always ask, what's for dinner. And I would ask them because I always know that they know, they always have a plan and usually they are pretty creative. I, on the other hand, wait way too long and generally find myself driving through someplace. Not good on the waistline or the wallet, my friends would say. I'm not so sure, but who am I to argue?

I asked the moms who were on the radio show to provide a recipe or two to share, so in lieu of the regular chatty blog, let's get down to some recipes!

So here is the full recipe for the super scrumptious lasagna I made just last week. On the show I mentioned (to make it easy) just add raisins to the sausage and use raviolis instead of lasagna noodles in your own favorite lasagna recipe, but thought you might like the real thing I made. I left out the mushrooms cause I don't like them and I used water instead of the Burgundy (because the bottle was too big & I couldn't drink all that myself!) And I cheated on the cheese, I used a little more.

Worth It Lasagna

2 jars (26 oz each) meatless spaghetti sauce

1 can (14-1/2 oz) diced tomatoes, drained
1/2 cup Burgundy wine
2 T brown sugar
3 garlic cloves
2 lbs Italian sausage
3/4 cup raisins
2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
1-1/2 lbs sliced fresh mushrooms
1 onion, chopped
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 cartons (15 oz each) ricotta cheese
1 pkg (10 oz) frozen chopped spinach, thawed & squeezed dry
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 pkg (24 oz each) frozen cheese ravioli, thawed
1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
18 slices provolone cheese, sliced in half
6 cups (24 oz) shredded monterey jack cheese
5 large tomatoes, sliced

In a dutch oven, bring the first five ingredients to a boil. Reduce heat, simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes, stirring often.

In a large skillet, cook sausage over medium heat until no longer pink, drain. Stir in raisins & Italian seasoning; add to sauce. In the same skillet, saute mushrooms and onion until moisture has evaporated. Stir into sauce. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, ricotta, spinach and grated cheese; set aside.

In each of two greased 13X9" baking dishes, layer with 1-1/3 cups sauce, half of a package of ravioli, 1-1/3 cups sauce, 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese, six half slices of provolone cheese, 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese and 2-1/2 cups spinach mixture.

Top each with six half slices of provolone cheese, 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese, 1-1/3 cups sauce, remaining ravioli and sauce, 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese, six half slices of provolone cheese, sliced tomatoes and remaining Monterey Jack cheese (dishes will be full).

Cover and bake at 375° for 45 minutes. Uncover, bake 10-15 minutes longer or until bubbly. Let stand 15 minutes before serving.

And here is the easy soup recipe I talked about on the show, I made it that night and it was very good. And other than chopping up all that spinach...very easy.

Chicken & Spinach Tortellini Soup

1-1/2 C sliced fresh mushrooms

2 tablespoons butter

2 garlic cloves, minced

4 cans (14-1/2 oz each) reduced-sodium chicken broth

1 pkg (9 oz) refrigerated cheese tortellini

4 cups shredded rotisserie chicken

1 pkg (6 oz) fresh baby spinach, coarsely chopped

1/2 t pepper

8 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese

In a Dutch oven, saute mushrooms in butter until tender. Add garlic, cook 1 minute longer.

Add broth and bring to a boil. Stir in tortellini, return to a boil. Cook for 7-9 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Add the chicken, spinach & pepper; heat through. Sprinkle each serving with 1 teaspoon cheese.

And now recipes from the rest of the moms on the show!

From Natalie:

Tater Tot Casserole

1 lb raw ground beef

1 can cream of chicken soup

salt/pepper & seasonings of choice (garlic powder, onion powder, seasoned salt)

1/2 – 1lb frozen tater tots

Put ground meat into 9X13 baking dish. Sprinkle with seasonings. Pour soup over meat and spread evenly. Place tater tots over soup. Bake at 350° for 50 minutes or until meat and tater tots are brown.

From Susan:

New Mexico Red Chile Bowl

3 tablespoons olive oil

1lb ground turkey or beef

14 oz Bueno mild red chile sauce (in freezer section)

6-8 cups of cooked pinto beans (substitute canned beans to save time)

1 tablespoon dehydrated onions (or fresh equivalent)

1 clove minced garlic

1/2 teaspoon cumin

1/2 teaspoon oregano

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

Heat olive oil on medium heat and add ground turkey or beef with onion, garlic and cumin. Mix until meat is browned. Add thawed red chile sauce and oregano. Stir until blended. Add beans and allow mixture to come to a low boil. Add salt & pepper and allow to simmer for at least half an hour.

From Rita:

Salmon Patties (Makes 10 patties)

1 lb can salmon*, drained (reserve juice) and mashed in large bowl

1 egg, beaten slightly

1 T lemon juice

1 t Worcestershire sauce

1/4 t hot sauce

2 t dried parsley

1/2 t dry mustard

1/8 t paprika

1/4 t salt

1/8 t pepper

3 T grated onion + 1 T butter (microwave about 1 min)

1-1/2 t baking powder

3 T instant potato flakes

2 t nonfat dried milk

Reserved salmon juice + hot water to make 1/3 c total liquid

Whip baking powder, potato, milk and liquid till smooth. Add to above ingredients. Mix thoroughly (with hands?). Add more water or extra cracker/bread crumbs as needed to form 10 patties. Lightly coat by dipping in:

$\frac{3}{4}$ c Panko bread crumbs

Brush off excess crumbs and refrigerate on Pammed trays overnight, covered.

Bake 12-18 minutes or fry on slightly oiled 350 degree griddle about 6-9 min (depending on size); turn and fry about 4-6 minutes. Keep warm till served. Serve with ketchup and ranch dressing or tartar sauce.

*Can mix with some tuna to stretch if making large quantities.

Red, White & Blue Chicken Salad

(Chicken Salad with Cranberry Sauce)

3-4 c (2 large halves) cooked chicken, chopped into bite-sized pieces

2 T chopped onion, red if available

1 stalk celery, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ c (or more) of mayonnaise (enough to bind together)

Salt and pepper, to taste

$\frac{1}{2}$ – 1 can whole jellied cranberry sauce

1 c blueberries, optional

Combine chicken, onion and celery. Add enough mayo to moisten. Season and stir. Fold in cranberries and blueberries. Chill thoroughly. Serves 6-8. Good with mini-croissants.

Couscous with Squash

1 T butter

1 t olive oil

1 t minced garlic

1 c. yellow onion, medium dice

Cook above over medium heat about 5 min. till transparent

1-1/2 c butternut squash, peeled and diced to 1/2" cubes (or 1/2 squash)

Add squash and reduce heat to medium-low, partially cover and cook 10 min more or till tender (I did this a day ahead).

2 c chicken broth

Add broth and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, stir in remaining ingredients, cover and let sit 8 min. Fluff with a fork.

10 oz box plain couscous

1/2 c green onions, sliced in 1/4" rounds

1 T fresh parsley (I used dried)

1 t rosemary, chopped fine

1/4 c. toasted pine nuts (watch carefully in toaster oven)

Season to taste.

1/4 c fresh Parmesan, if desired (I didn't)

Hardest part is peeling the squash. Yummy change of pace, good with salmon, great for company (serves 10-12).

Cheese-filled Jumbo Shells

4 c (2 lb) ricotta or cottage cheese

2 c (8 oz) shredded mozzarella

1 pkg frozen spinach, thawed and drained

3/4 c grated Parmesan

2 eggs

1/4 c fine bread or cracker crumbs

2 T dried parsley

$\frac{3}{4}$ t dried oregano

$\frac{1}{2}$ t salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ t pepper

1 t dried red pepper

Combine above ingredients in large bowl; spread $\frac{1}{2}$ c sauce in oblong pan. Stuff shells and layer in pan, alternating layer of shells and sauce.

1 qt (32 oz) spaghetti sauce

1 pkg (12 oz) = 40 jumbo shells, cooked

Sprinkle with additional Parmesan if desired. Cover with foil. Bake at 375 about 35 min (50 or longer if cold) until hot and bubbly. Serves 8-10.

Meat Stuffed Shells

2 lb ground beef

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb sausage

Brown meats in skillet and drain

$\frac{3}{4}$ c onion chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ c celery, minced

3 cloves garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$ c sherry or broth

Saute onion, celery and garlic in broth in microwave till tender;

$\frac{1}{2}$ pkg frozen spinach, thawed and drained (optional)

$\frac{1}{3}$ c Parmesan

1 t salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ c dry bread crumbs

Combine above ingredients in large bowl; spread ½ c sauce in oblong pan. Stuff shells and layer in pan, alternating layer of shells and sauce

1 qt (32 oz) spaghetti sauce

1 pkg (12 oz) = 40 jumbo shells, cooked

Sprinkle with additional Parmesan if desired. Cover with foil. Bake at 375 about 35 min (50 or longer if cold) until hot and bubbly. Serves 8-10.

Mounds Bars (Candy)

Rita Puckett

½ c butter, melted

3-1/2 c confectioner's sugar

1 can sweetened condensed milk

28 oz coconut

1 t vanilla

Combine in a very large bowl. Press into an oiled 10"x15" pan. Chill or freeze. Cut into pieces (1"x1" or 1"x2"). Melt dipping chocolate or chocolate bits in small batches (takes about 2 lbs total). Dip squares in chocolate to coat and place on parchment or Silpat and chill till firm. Store in refrigerator or freezer. Makes 75 to 150 bars, depending on size.

Oreo mini-cheesecakes

Makes 30

- 42 Oreo, cream-filled chocolate sandwich cookies, 30 left whole and 12 coarsely chopped

- 2 pounds cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs, room temperature, lightly beaten
- 1 cup sour cream
- Pinch of salt

1. Preheat oven to 275° F. Line standard muffin tins with paper liners. Place 1 whole Oreo cookie in the bottom of each lined muffin cup.

2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with the paddle attachment, beat cream cheese on medium-high speed until smooth, scraping down sides of the bowl as needed. Gradually add the sugar, and beat until combined. Beat in the vanilla.

3. Drizzle in eggs, a little at a time, beating to combine and scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add in sour cream and salt, beat to combine. Using a large spatula, fold in the chopped Oreo cookies.

4. Divide batter evenly among the cookie-filled muffin cups, fill each cup almost to the top. Bake, rotating muffin tins halfway through, until the filling is set, about 22 to 28 minutes. Transfer the muffins tins to a wire rack to cool completely. Refrigerate (in the muffin tins) at least 4 hours (or overnight). Remove from tins just before serving.

Candy Bar Cake

Serves 20-24

1 chocolate cake mix (prepare according to pkg directions)

8-10 oz caramel or butterscotch ice cream topping

1 can sweetened condensed milk (like Eagle brand)

1 c whipping cream, whipped or 8 oz of Cool Whip

2-3 crushed Heath or Skor candy bars

Bake cake according to directions in 9"x13" oblong pan. Poke lots of holes with big fork while still hot. Combine topping and milk and pour over cake. Let it cool completely. Frost cake with whipped cream and sprinkle candy bars over top. Refrigerate or freeze.

Best if made a day ahead. If using real whipping cream add a little confectioner's sugar. You could use whatever your favorite flavor of cake, topping or candy bar.

This is so easy yet makes an outstanding, rich dessert. Enjoy

From Sangita:

Vegetarian Fajitas

Add fajita seasoning while grilling the following:

Grill green & red bell peppers

Grill one large onion, sliced lengthwise

Grill zucchini, cut into lengthwise wedges

Shredded Mexican cheese

Sour cream

Heat tortillas, fill with sour cream, cheese & veggies.

From Melissa:

Easy Chicken Pot Pie

2 cans cream of chicken soup

1/2 cup skim milk

3 cups frozen mixed vegetables

2 cups cooked chicken breast, cut in pieces

2 cups Bisquick

1 cup skim milk

2 egg whites

Heat oven to 400°. Stir together soup, 1/2 cup milk, then stir in vegetables & chicken. Microwave uncovered for 3 minutes. Pour into 9X13 baking dish. In medium bowl mix Bisquick, milk and egg whites; pour over chicken mixture. Bake uncovered about 20 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

Try these out and let us know how you like them. It's always fun to add a little variety to dinner...especially if it's a little bit easy.



Halloween

Halloween is not my favorite celebration. As a trick or treating kid, I loved it, sure. But times have changed and even though all my kids have loved it, trick or treating is not what it used to be.

I've never been good at the costume thing either. To me, that's just a lot of mis-spent effort. Dreaming up and obtaining the pieces & parts for just the right costume has not been my cup of tea. I've avoided halloween parties in my adult life because of costume discomfort! The one winning costume idea that I would be happy to duplicate was when my husband & I went to our good friends party dressed as people in the wind. It was down to the night of the party when we were whining about what to be that my husband ventured forth with this idea. We were standing in front of an extremely messy kitchen island. We started grabbing for the papers and trash on that counter and taping it to the left side of our clothing. It was a riot and authentic and voila, my kitchen counter was clean again! We got extreme styling gel and glued our hair (ok my hair) to the extreme right. We found two old umbrellas and leaned right. That was it and we were the chuckle of the night!

But that really wore me out & topping that in the future was too much to handle. Miraculously, now there are costumes, adult costumes of every kind, readily available in halloween stores, catalogs & on the internet. And if I ever choose to dress up in the future, that's what I'll do!

I look at halloween as the gateway to the holidays, once we've passed that point, the countdown is clicking! Out come the boxes and the real celebrations start!

But the thing about halloween is that it's marketed so well. There's so much to do and look at. You've got candy and costumes and parties. You've got major lights and decorations of all kinds. And you've got fall and leaves and pumpkins.

And the food ideas are so much fun! Stay tuned we'll have a few recipes at the end of this tirade!

Celebrations are so much more fun for me, when our kids have been involved. Dressing them up when they were small was much more of a pleasure than a chore. They were just so cute and excited. And as they grew, the fun came in the ideas and choices they made for costumes.

And the best tradition we ever started on halloween was to invite friends and their kids to our house for a pre-trick or treat party. The kids had fun comparing costumes and getting their individual and group pictures taken. We had special halloween punch and chips & dip, apples & caramel dip, homemade mini corn dogs, pumpkin stew and myriads of different cookies and candies that change off & on through the years.

It's a feast and a gathering of admirers. A time to join the kids in kid-like fun. To take them door to door, while still being able to keep your door open to other kids.

This halloween was also our 14th and official last celebration at the grade school. We've watched some changes in the fun over the years, but even the big kids still like to go back and enjoy. It's also like a grade school homecoming, cause so many of the kids go back. The highlight for me is the lineup of lighted pumpkins set out in rows by each class. They are amazing and beautiful to look at. I will always treasure those days, though now they will belong to someone else.

Those are our fun halloween days and memories.

And here are some of my best halloween recipes:

Pumpkin Stew

2 lbs beef stew meat, cut into 1" cubes

3 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided

1 cup water

3 large potatoes, peeled & cut into 1" cubes

4 medium carrots, sliced

1 large green pepper, cut into 1/2" pieces

4 garlic cloves, minced

1 medium onion, chopped

2 teaspoons salt

2 tablespoons instant beef bouillon granules

1 can (14 1/2 oz) diced tomatoes

1 pumpkin (10-12 lbs) washed, with 8" circle around the top, discard seeds & loose fibers from inside.

In a dutch oven, brown meat in 2 tablespoons oil. Add water, potatoes, carrots, green pepper, garlic, onion & salt. Cover & simmer for 2 hours. Stir in bouillon & tomatoes.

Place pumpkin in a shallow sturdy baking pan. Spoon stew into pumpkin & replace the top. Brush outside of pumpkin with remaining oil. Bake at 325° for 2 hours or until the pumpkin is tender (do not over bake). Serve stew from pumpkin, scooping out a little pumpkin with each serving. Yum!

Mini Corn Dogs

1-2/3 cups flour

1/3 cup cornmeal

3 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons cold butter

1 tablespoon shortening

1 egg

3/4 cup milk

24 miniature hot dogs

Honey Mustard Sauce:

1/3 cup honey

1/3 cup prepared mustard

1 tablespoon molasses

In a large bowl, combine the first 4 ingredients. Cut in butter and shortening until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Beat egg & milk; stir into dry ingredients until a soft dough forms. Turn onto a lightly floured surface; knead 6-8 times or until smooth. Roll out to 1/4" thickness. Cut with a 2-1/4" biscuit cutter. Fold

each dough circle over a hot dog and press edges to seal (dough will be sticky)
Place on greased baking sheets. Bake at 450° for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown. Combine sauce ingredients in a small bowl; mix well. Serve with the corn dogs. Yield: 2 dozen

Pumpkin Seeds

1 cup seeds from freshly cut pumpkin, washed & dried

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1-2 tablespoons ranch salad dressing mix or taco mix

In a skillet, saute seeds in oil for 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Using a slotted spoon, transfer seeds to an ungreased 15X10 baking pan. Sprinkle with salad dressing mix or taco mix; stir to coat. Spread in a single layer. Bake at 325° for 10-15 minutes or until crisp. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 weeks.
Yield: 1 cup

Orange Witches' Brew Punch

(Actually it would be good to make anytime and stays nice & cold, refreshing but not too sweet)

1 pkg (6 oz) orange gelatin

1/2-1 cup sugar

2 cups boiling water

1 can (46 oz) apricot nectar

1 can (46 oz) pineapple juice

3/4 cup lemon juice

4 liters ginger ale, chilled

In a large bowl, dissolve gelatin & sugar in water. Stir in the apricot nectar, pineapple juice & lemon juice. Freeze in two 2 qt freezer containers. Remove from freezer; place contents of one container in a punch bowl; mash with potato masher. Stir in ginger ale just before serving. Repeat.



Scream Free Parenting

Scream Free Parenting. I thought nobody would want to be on this show. After all who wants to admit they're a screaming shrew of a mom, even if we all are. And the word screaming sounds so much worse than the word yelling. Yes I'm sure I would rather be known as a yeller than a screamer! Screaming just takes it up to another level.

Yet if I truly wish to confess, I'm probably more of a screamer than a yeller. And I'm willing to bet that the reason for that, is that now, after all these years, I've developed... (drum roll please!)...patience! Hard to believe, but yes, I'm willing to wait a bit before losing my cool.

At the same time, my kids are a little older and they don't surprise me quite so much anymore. I rather expect a mess all around. I know when they eat, there will be a mass of dishes left all over the place. I know when they shop, there will be tags and bags flung far & wide. I know when they come home from school, there will be papers, water bottles and backpacks strewn. I know these things, because probably my yelling about it all has not made enough of an impact.

What has changed from my yelling days are that most of the kids can find their shoes everyday, no matter where they left them the night before. And they remember to put them on. And if it's cold, they grab a jacket. And when they're ready to go somewhere, they remember most of their stuff.

I know from my husband's children, who marched boldly before our five, that they may not have been too neat in childhood, but when they found their own safe haven of a home, they began to pick up like pros!

And so I'm a bit more relaxed, a bit more patient. Does the mess make me crazy? Absolutely yes. But I live with it. I do what I can to brush it aside or clean it up. But even in my newfound patience, the tension builds one small incident at a time, for a long time, until...boom, I am not yelling, I am screaming.

I am screaming like I stumbled on a murder scene, or the house was collapsing or I'm trying to get out of a nightmare. I know there must be some words coming out of my mouth, but it's mostly the screaming I hear. The kids take quick looks at each other and wordlessly and in seeming agreement scatter, but not before they grab whatever they would have casually left lying on the floor. No bodies are left. Except.

My husband's eyes are saucer sized as though he's surmising this happens with a high level of frequency and this is what he has to look forward to in retirement. He's glued to his seat in what appears to be fear.

My blood curdling scream weakens as my vocal cords give out.

Wow. That felt good. I think I'm all better now. Ah-ha! On to the next task. Life is good. Of course, all the people standing in my way are now out of the way. We'll see how long it takes before someone leaves their shoes by the couch and socks in the cracks of the couch...about 15 minutes, I'm sure.

The kids had a babysitter once who watched them while we were on a quick jaunt out of town. When they got too unruly (or messy) for her and she was probably at her wits end, she held a screaming contest! They all took turns and screamed as hard as they could. The kids all claim she won it! (Why am I not surprised?).

But I think she had a point. There are great tension reducing factors in a good, well timed scream. And I've found that I need one now and again. Kind of like a massage. With the same benefits. And like a massage, you don't need one every-day, or even every week or month, a couple a year will do. And really, I think the kids kinda respect that.

Mom comes alive. For a few quick seconds, loud as they might be, I am not the Cinderella maid of the house, I am the commander. That sounds so good...I might start screaming more often.

Scream free parenting! Whatever that is, it's not for me! I am mamma, hear me roar. And if you don't like it...

Clean up your mess!



Holiday Organizing & Prioritizing

I thrive on chaos. Well no, I just like to think I thrive on chaos. It feeds my ego to think I can juggle a million jillion balls everyday no matter what. It's a challenge to see if I can do more this year than last year, to try to make a good thing better each time I have a shot at it. And as we've reached that season where we vault from holiday to holiday, the trick for me is to do it all and make it look easy. That was actually a legitimate thought before my kids grew up. Now they are here to remind me, and they do constantly, of all the things I have forgotten, or am late on, or will probably forget.

Do I really need all that, when all I do is work?

So here we are with halloween barely an after thought and Thanksgiving just 2-1/2 weeks away. I should be part way through my timeline right now. It would help if I didn't have to reinvent that thing every year. Why don't I think to put that on my computer, so I can pull it up each year.

Oh yeah, I did put it on my computer. Just not sure which is harder...finding it in there or reinventing it to fit this year's scenerio.

Thank goodness for tradition, right? You do things a couple of times, it works out well and you kind of get in the habit.

Years ago I was hosting a cookie & ornament exchange (which some professional organizers will tell you is a time saving device). You make thousands of one cookie, plate them up, exchange them and voila, you have a feast of variety! Course if you're doing the hosting, it can be a workload as I found out years & years & years ago when all the kids were babies.

We lived in our new house, we'd bought a fresh tree, I had it halfway decorated with lights, the ornaments were all over the house, I was desperately trying to make my cookies look beautiful all wrapped up, there were appetizers and desserts to fix and put out, forget cleaning anything, I desperately stuffed all the kids in my husbands arms and shoved them out the door. The stress was insane and all for a little cookie get-together.

That was the moment I decided this was no longer an area in which I wanted to excel in procrastination. It was time in my life to get my holiday planning act together. It was a time of year I wanted to do it all, have it all and enjoy it all. And the only way I could think to do that with small kids was to start early.

I cast the real tree idea out the window and bought a perfect fake! Each year, the day after halloween we drug in the tree and I started weaving in the lights. I learned to go bonkers on those and that took me a good two weeks of constant effort. Each year we added to the Christmas decorations inside and out. When my husband and the kids took to decorating outside, I took to cookie baking and hot chocolate making inside. It was a perfect blend. By Thanksgiving day all our decorating was finished. All I had to worry about was food.

As the years went by and the turkey and accompaniments got bigger & better, a Wednesday and Thursday of cooking was not enough. Guests arrived and all I did was cook. Sometimes I was too busy to even set things out. I felt like I was al-

ways pushing people over to get to something in the pantry. So I solved that problem by getting started earlier. It worked well.

So now we still start by putting up the Christmas decorations as soon after Halloween as we can get to it. We put up the big things as fast as we can. Then I find I have a little bit of time to putz around with placing the smaller decorations before we move on to the bigger tasks.

For me the place to start is by cleaning out the fridge and the pantry. If I take the time for that and organize some things, I know better what I have and I have room to make and store things. Even doing this as early as October is a benefit. I haven't gotten to it yet this year, but know that by taking the time, it'll give me back some time in the hurry up and cook stages.

The next thing is a shopping list. I usually do an initial long list and add to it as I add on cookies, appetizers, desserts, side dishes, etc. I put together a separate list for grocery, Costco, Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, BevMo or any other specific store I would need certain things from. I usually start stocking up on some baking items in October, just to get a little jump on expenses.

I start by cooking all the things I can freeze about 2 or so weeks in advance. The week before Thanksgiving, I work on Christmas cookies. The week of Thanksgiving I cook constantly getting everything I can ready to go. I keep toppings separate from the dish they belong to so they don't get soggy. I do everything I possibly can in advance. Including the mashed potatoes! It's a messy task and a lot of space taking steps to make those potatoes. I have found I can do it in advance, load it into a 9X13 glass dish and either freeze or refrigerate it. Makes a big difference, so much less Thanksgiving mess!

Before I go to bed the night before Thanksgiving, everything is done or in the works. The idea is to just be able to pull things from the fridge and transfer to the oven.

And truly, when we have a big crowd, that is enough to keep me busy. I always seem to forget how much work it is simply to arrange everything onto serving plates. Don't underestimate that job.

We cook our turkey on the Weber grill. We use a bag of coals, prepare the turkey as we would normally do, put it in a disposable pan and on the grill. It cooks a little faster on the grill, but for the last 18 years we've been doing this, we've always had a perfect bird, moist and beautiful. The other tip I have is to cook the stuffing in a crock pot. That way you can get it going early, set it and forget it. By doing this, I found I have a lot more oven space to use for all the other fabulous side dishes.

I'm not a real good table setter. I remember my mom being good at that...putting the extensions on the dining room table, washing, ironing and gently arranging the tablecloth, setting each place setting with a place card, polishing the silver & washing the special china. I don't own fine china and my dining room table is squashed into the dining room which in our house houses several offices & computers. So I'm not so fussy. When we have a big crowd, the boys move the table into the family room, we put the extensions on and the washed but un-ironed tablecloth. I don't set the table, I let everybody grab their own plates & utensils as they choose their spot. If I got any fancier than that, it would be too shocking!

So when you come to Thanksgiving at my house, we are decorated to the max with all the Christmas gaiety laid out. We have multiple TV's playing the parades and football games. We serve you two meals and a never ending spread in between. And if you stay long enough, you could probably end the day with a

fresh bowl of turkey soup. It is the biggest party of the year at my house and we work for nearly a month full out to get ready for it.

The kicker is, none of the other tasks in our lives go away, there's still work and laundry and chauffeuring and meals to provide and everything else we deal with in our regular daily lives. And that's why we need to be organized. That's why we've given up on procrastination and found a way to get it all together.

Am I on schedule this year? Nah, I'm still slightly behind, but I live in the hope that I'll make up the time somewhere. Maybe I'll get some help. Or maybe I'll drop a few cookies, but either way and no matter what I do, Thanksgiving is coming whether I'm ready or not.

I'd rather be ready!



Thanksgiving Planning

FYI...Thanksgiving dinner preparation has just been interrupted to bring you this blog!

The frenzy has most certainly begun to get it all done for Thanksgiving and I'm on to the cooking part of it all! When I stop to think about it...isn't it a little ridiculous to spend an entire week cooking for a meal for just one day?!!

Look at me last night, baking cookies for the big day, I have all ovens going, ingredients spread all over the counter, dishes flung somewhere near the sink. It's 6:30 or so at night and my daughter who's got a project going at the kitchen table with her siblings and a friend suddenly asks, "hey mom, what's for dinner?"

"Really? Are you hungry? Didn't lunch fill you up?" I actually thought I was off the hook because I got them all lunch. Little did I stop to suspect, that the lovely smells from the kitchen were getting their hunger juices going. So it was off to pick up a pizza!

We've picked up food every night for like two weeks now!

So that I could fix all the food for Thanksgiving!

It's a bigger event every year! And why is that? Because you gotta have all the mainstays! All the food you've loved every year! And then the creative devil inside me speaks in a voice that only I can hear, "try something new! What else can you do?"

And so I look and find and decide and do. What would you do?

Now in my defense, it's a little more than a day. We have some relatives in from out of town and the party will start Wednesday night, traditionally for me the time for all my crunch time last minute cooking. But the idea is, to do as little as possible when the guests are here, so that I can participate and enjoy the time that I have with them. But when you make that much food, remember it does turn into an almost full time job to find that food, warm it up and set it out. Still not easy.

And the funny thing is that all the guests will probably bring a dish or two or three. That's the nature of Thanksgiving. I've already made too much and now everybody is bringing more. It is a feast. It is a celebration. It is a bounty from the harvest that was this year, we reflect that in our Thanksgiving. It is the culmination of the year and an offering to those we love. It is a coming together and a sharing.

And that's why I love this holiday more and more every year.

I even look forward to the work and the organization of it all and trying to get the timing down to perfect. Perfect-er would be if I could actually cook dinner each day along the way as well. But oh well, I still say to that!

I do follow a bit of a timeline in getting to Thanksgiving. But I'm not stringent on it, because I like the option of changing and adjusting it each year. I liked Susan's suggestion of putting your Thanksgiving shopping list on the computer and just print it up each year, but that's too rigid for me. I need to go through the recipes again and rewrite the list. It's just part of the process. That's how I start. It also reminds me of all that's part of the feast. And it helps me reform that familiar timeline in my mind.

For the food part, I always begin with a wish list of all the items I hope to make. I write those down so I can check them off and mark my progress. I also add on purchased items to this list like brie cheese or other cheeses and dips. That way I can remember what I'm actually supposed to serve. I start with appetizers and things I can freeze. Done. Then I go to a few varieties of Christmas cookies. Done. Then I move on to carmel corn and party mixes and such. Then I start

with jellos and cranberries. Continue with all potato dishes and vegetable casseroles. Then I'm back to desserts. This is where I throw in extra items as I have time. In between I'm still working on appetizers and pieces & parts for Thanksgiving day. Somehow it all works out and the good thing is, if something doesn't get done, or if I forget to serve it, no one will ever notice. Neither will I.

The party is on!

Mainstay Recipes of the Main Meal

Turkey – Prepare it. Put it in disposable turkey pan & cover with tent. Light charcoals on weber grill. Grill until the charcoals have burned out or popper on turkey has popped. About 3 hours or so.

Mashed Potatoes - Take the skins off the potatoes, place the potatoes in large pot of water, bring to a boil until potatoes can be stabbed easily with a knife. Drain water, pour hot potatoes into a large bowl and mix. I throw in a 1/2 cup of butter, pour in heavy cream, add some white wine all until consistency is right. (I make these ahead of time now, put in a 9X13 pan and freeze or refrigerate).

Sweet Potatoes – I boil (about 3 lbs) sweet potatoes about 20 minutes or until skins are starting to separate and potatoes are soft, then I drain them and let them cool so I can just pull those skins right off. Then in a mixing bowl beat the sweet potatoes. Add 1 cup sugar, 1/2 cup milk, 1/4 cup butter softened, 3 eggs, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Beat until smooth. Transfer to a greased 2 qt baking dish or 9X13 dish. (This is where I would refrigerate it). Then in a small bowl combine 1 cup brown sugar, 1 cup chopped pecans, 1/2 cup flour and 1/4 cup cold butter. Cut in butter until crumbly. This I store in a small tupperware. Before cooking spread over top of sweet potatoes. Bake uncovered at 325° for 45-50 minutes.

Cranberry Jello – Combine 1 pkg (6 oz) peach gelatin with 2 cups boiling water, add 1 cup of orange juice. Chill about 20 minutes then add large can of sliced peaches drained. Chill until firm.

Combine 1 pkg (6 oz) raspberry gelatin with 2 cups boiling water, add 1 cup cranberry juice. In blender place 2 peeled oranges sectioned, 2 cups fresh cranberries & 1 cup of sugar, blend until coarsely chopped. Pour into raspberry jello mixture. Pour over peach layer and chill until firm. (I put this jello in a glass bowl so you can see how pretty it is!).

Debbie's Yummy Cranberries – In a medium saucepan add 1 small pkg cranberries, 1 cup sugar & 1 cup water and bring to a boil. Add special touches like oranges, raisins and cinnamon spice. Refrigerate and it will gel.

And before we forget why we cook for a week for one great memorable day, let's remember the meaning of the day and the gratitude that we feel for the good things we have in life and the life that we're able to lead. In my house we put up a gratitude tree on the wall and each family member, each day, can write one thing we are thankful for on a leaf. It grows & grows throughout the month and our guests can add their grateful items as well.

In honor of Thanksgiving and our grateful gathering, we offer you this prayer to take to your Thanksgiving table, because sometimes in the frenzy of it all, it's hard to remember what to pray. This prayer was written for us by Melissa Mashburn.

” Father God, thank you for this time to prepare our hearts and minds to what's really important this time of year. Thank you for the gift of your love that you give so freely to us. As we celebrate with family and friends this season help us to keep a spirit of thankfulness and gratitude for all you have given us. In Jesus name, amen.”

Happy Thanksgiving! Work ahead and enjoy!



Gathering the Relatives

This business of gathering the relatives for the holidays, I figure, takes either a hard heart or a soft heart...or a bit of both...or maybe that's the same thing. Hard & soft.

I wonder how many mothers or fathers have to chomp down on their tongues when their children decide to head to another home to celebrate with someone else's family. I wonder this because not only do we do this ourselves, but I hear so often from others that no their kids are not coming home for the holidays this year, and sometimes one or the other of the kids come home, but rarely in the same year meaning at the same time. Rarely is the whole family together.

I wonder because I am one of those kids who can't go back home for every holiday, maybe one a year and not every year at that. Do I ruin everyone's holiday? Does their soft heart forgive me while their hard heart doesn't care too much?

And you gotta wonder about that as you are raising your children.

Will they come home? Or will they marry somebody with a better family? Or will the person they marry be so attached to their own family that there's no room for another family? Or will they move away and be too broke to come home or

will you be too broke after raising them (and giving them everything) to pay their travel costs to visit?

And if they do come home, will you like who they're dragging with them? Will their new spouse be the crazy relative everyone wants to edge away from? Or will their new spouse think you are the relative that needs to be edged away from. The only sure thing in life is that everything changes (whether you do or not) and as those changes are coming, you are losing control.

Gone are the days where the kids come down from their bedrooms to eat or greet guests. Gone are the days where they hang out because there's no where else to go and no way to get there! They age and move out and create new options and new reasons not to grace us with their presence.

Distance is a factor. Significant others are a factor. Divorce is a factor. Even the home that you live in is a factor. When it comes to gathering the relatives, you really want some relatives to gather.

I don't know about you, but when I invite people to come to my house, I want them to come. I don't want to hear that they have a better option. I don't want to know that they'd rather do something else. I don't want to throw an empty party. But the kids grow up, they make their own decisions. They may not want to know what you think or feel. It may not be a callus thing, they just have more options.

So as a parent, what do you do? Can you scream and holler that that's not right? That they need to spend some time with you? Do you give up, give in, understand that going to 14 homes on a holiday is not fun? Do you wait and hope that someday they'll include you? Do you try to make friendly with the competition and invite everybody over?

Which heart do you use the hard one or the soft one?

When that happens, it's time to change your celebration. That's why you keep your marriage happy and close. The kids will grow up and have their own lives and we will have ours. Maybe it's enough to snuggle up together and have some quiet time, maybe it's time to travel and see what's until now been unseen, maybe we volunteer some of our time and do for others.

What we forget as our kids become our lives, is that we had lives before them. We did things for ourselves and outside ourselves. The time will come to reflect, go back to that or try new fun things. Stop demanding and start playing.

Of course, if when my kids leave the nest, and they want to celebrate the holidays with us, we will move heaven and earth to do that. But since I can't see that far down the road, I'll make my memories with them now and live it up while I have them here! And I better start taking some pictures, enough cooking!

Maybe it's not a hard heart or a soft heart, just a smarter heart.



Enjoying the Holidays

The thing that I've learned about the holidays over the years is that they will come whether I am all ready or not!

They don't care if all my Christmas cards are out. It doesn't matter if I've baked one cookie or 50. And if my presents aren't wrapped...no mercy.

The holidays are coming whether I'm ready or not.

That I've learned.

And what I know from that is that I do like to be ready. The other thing I've learned is that I still like to have all the fun in and amongst all the work. I've also learned that the work is fun...as long as I'm not in a perpetual frenzy over it.

And so I've learned to manage the holidays. But I don't always manage them in the same way. Sometimes I choose to let things go. I've been a little reluctant to let the Christmas card thing go because we've been pretty consistent with it. And I like that record of the photo we send every year. It's great fun to look back at the kids and see that bit of growth every year until suddenly they're all almost adults. And that is brilliant too. Also with the Christmas card we've been sending,

we send what we call an ABC letter over the years. It's so simply done. We type the alphabet down the left side of the page. Then we write a one liner that begins with each of those letters. It gives a good indication of what we've been doing this past year without having to dredge up all the details. Our family this year in a nutshell. Perfect. And perfectly wonderful to look back on those letters. Triggers many memories.

So as I said, I still like the Christmas card, but would be willing to let that go in a few years. I can feel that coming. As the kids leave, we may want to simplify. For now, it's a good thing. But it takes time and effort, so since I'm going to do it, I gotta start early. I figure it will take me a good two weeks of time! I haven't even started that yet and even the kids are asking about **THE PICTURE!** I will admit, though most of the years my cards go out before Christmas, one or two years they've arrived after Christmas.

I was surprised on the radio show how many of the moms do their Christmas shopping all through the year. This makes sense to me if you are buying for a **LOT** of people. But if you've narrowed down the list and still buy ahead, to me it takes away some of the joy of shopping in the season.

I don't get a thrill out of a good deal. I do get a thrill if the thing I want to buy turns into a good deal. That has me jumping for the stars. What I don't like is being forced to buy something I don't really like or want because it's cheap. I'll take it home and it will still be cheap. I'm not that kind of person! I like a good buy, but only if that good buy is something I wanted anyway.

Shopping during the holidays can be a blessing or a curse! Wandering the mall or shopping center with only a few items on my list, to me, is bliss. I don't like to fight the weekend crowds though, but I do love to soak in the joyous, fast paced, music filled, highly decorated and highly charged atmosphere. And I do this during the week, when there's still a parking space in the lot! When the shopping

doesn't get so fun is when you must have the tickle me Elmo and 95 people are charging over the two that are left. A little shopping stress goes with the season, but when it's over the top, my bag of fun is empty.

I have shopped for items early in years past, but now I save and savor that right during the season. In order to do that, some other things need to be done in advance.

Hence the decorations come out early. Sometimes as early as the day after Halloween or the weekend after. Why? Yes we are a Griswoldy family and there's lots to put up. That stuff takes time. I'm not too busy right after Halloween, if we can get it all out and all up in a couple weeks, it leaves time for a happy Thanksgiving celebration. And opens the time bank once the official holiday season has begun.

We've built up our holiday decorations, lights and ornaments for years now. But things age or break down and so now I am trying to identify one main thing that needs to be replaced each year. This year it turned out to be a big item, the decoration on the stair railing. We had it specifically made and it's beautiful! Not sure how we're going to get it down yet, that's a future worry though.

Once the decorations are up, I have a chance to start cooking and baking. I can make and freeze appetizers and cookies. This allows plenty of Thanksgiving food, but also keeps me supplied if we choose to throw in a quick party during holiday time or we invite friends over. A stress reliever that allows us to be spontaneous too.

When your kids are small and toddling, everything in life is harder because you are doing for yourself and them as well. I find most young moms can lean on their own moms or mothers in law to handle the party giving. This wasn't really

an option for me when my kids were young, so the holidays especially took a lot of work. You have to build up the momentum there and really psych yourself up. You can do it with a willing and happy holiday attitude or otherwise. I prefer to enjoy it.

The thing I miss about Christmas are the children's services at Church. We like almost everything about our church, but they are very particular about their music and don't often give children the chance to participate. I grew up where we as children got to participate wholly in the Christmas eve service. It is a wonderful, full memory, that I wish we could have given our children. And every year, I miss that. And even though my children are older, I still long to see the young ones on Christmas eve.

I have the TV on with all the holiday advertising, commercial after commercial of it. And it's no wonder we all get so charged up for this season. It's no wonder we want everything we see. It's no wonder we can't stick to a budget. No wonder we overeat, overdo, over achieve.

And no wonder we worry about properly preparing our kids for the holidays, when it's that hard to contain ourselves! But I think we teach our kids from the very beginning, the way we act and react, the stress we exhibit and the joy we share. The things we do together as a family, are they money & gift oriented, or are they oriented to bringing joy and giving from our heart to the less fortunate and those we love?

We don't give enough, we get caught up in the details and run out of time and money. That's where we need to plan ahead a bit more. We do a little, we need to do a little more. We have done enough though through the years, that the kids have picked up on it and they are taking responsibility and doing their own things. When my girls put together boxes of fun toys for Operation Christmas

Child and took the time to figure out who their gift would go to and what they might like and then shopped and paid for those items with their own money, that is the most heartwarming feeling a parent can get. They didn't ask for help or money, they just took charge and did it. That's when you know the spirit of Christmas has been received.

There are so many fun pieces and parts to the holidays, so much tradition and spirit and familiar warm feelings, no wonder we look forward to it and delight in it all. So this year as you're sipping your hot chocolate and looking at lights, or purchasing that last good deal left in the store, or are on your way to the Christmas Eve service, remember to take a breath, feel the good spirit and carry it with you as long as you can.

Happy Holidays...all the way through!

“Plenty of people miss their share of happiness, not because they never found it, but because they didn't stop to enjoy it.”



Pets

Pets have a way of worming their way into your heart and pushing until they're almost into your very soul. I've always wondered how this can happen so easily and why people seem to love animals in general really more than they love other people.

Really this is not a shocking statement, you see it everyday in the news. Something tragic happens to a person, we shrug and go on, but when something tragic happens to an animal, we are up in arms, kicking, screaming, blaming. This just doesn't seem quite right to me, yet there are some obvious reasons...I guess.

Pets don't talk back. They don't argue with you. In fact nearly everything you do is fine by them. They love unconditionally. They'll walk beside you. They'll comfort you when sick. They snuggle with you, keep you warm. They want your attention all day everyday. When you come home, they welcome you, tail wagging. You call them, they come. People aren't nearly so reliable when it comes to doing those things.

Yet when it comes to pets in your house, they aren't perfect either! You have to train them and even then, if they don't like what you're teaching them, like kids, they'll ignore you. This I know to be true!

Yes pets will have accidents in the house, some are intentional, meant to send a message (though what that message is, who knows?), some happen in the excite-

ment of the moment, some come from human error (forgetting to let them out). And even if they do their duty in the right place, you still have to clean it up! They can't help you pick up the house, in fact they can't even feed & water themselves, for all that, they depend on us!

As puppies, count on everything to be chewed! We had our whole back yard, trees and all, destroyed by a teething puppy. We've had every leg of our kitchen table and chairs chewed up. Even the kitchen cabinets got it. The new carpet was chewed, the baseboards...chewed. Shoes, socks, clothes. You name it, whatever you have exposed, they will apply their teeth to it!

Even when you give them those rawhide bones to chew, they'll naw them until gone, then move on to the chair at the table. We spent a fortune on bones and another fortune replacing chewed up furniture!

Speaking of chewing, they do love to eat, especially if it's right off the counter or table and about to be served to guests. There's quite a stab of horror that happens when you've worked all day to create the perfect meal, the guests are arriving soon and half the pie magically disappears!

And why is it, that they never make a mess with the food? When the dog ate the blueberry pie, there wasn't even a shred of evidence, hardly even a change of coloring on the white fur. And you rarely catch them in the act. They jump, grab, swallow and they're gone. I remember waking up to noises in the middle of the night, only to find it was the dog downstairs munching on a bag of potato chips. They are actually able to get every single chip from the bag and leave it lying. I wouldn't be surprised if they placed that empty bag back on the counter, they are so sneaky.

Yet weirdly enough when it comes to eating the food out of their bowl, they drop it all over the room. They will eat our crumbs from the floor, but not their own. They let us clean up after that! (Oh and that us would be me!) And the water trail they leave behind goes on forever! Not what I want to see on a freshly cleaned floor. Oh and their nose marks on the sliding glass door. They are out & in in 45 seconds half the time, but from the nose marks on the door, you'd think they lived out there and wished for the great indoors!

They say that chocolate is comparable to poison for dogs, so imagine our panic when the dog gobbled down a whole chocolate frosted chocolate cake. Not a hint of a problem from that one. Our dogs have eaten everything. What an amazing digestive track they must have.

And let me tell you. It is very much cheaper to take your kids to the doctor than your dog to the vet. Those vets have it made. I complain about the \$20 co-pay for the kids, but shell out hundreds to help the dogs out of all sorts of emergency situations. I'm sure I complain about that too. But pets are shockingly expensive. If it isn't vet bills, it's food and dog bowls and collars and leashes and toys and bones and treats and grooming and carpet cleaning and all of this over & over again. What I've learned about dog food is...go top quality, your dog will stay beautifully built. Whenever I see a fat dog, I absolutely know it's from cheap food. Oh and hauling that food around! Heavy!

We fill the dogs food bowl and they eat what they want and leave the rest for the next time. I was shocked by that. We fed our little poodle when I was growing up, one small Gaines Burger a day. That poor dog barked for that little tidbit of food and gobbled it down in about 4 seconds. I thought dogs just ate & ate until it killed them. And so you weren't supposed to give them too much. Maybe my mom just told me that so I'd follow the rules. She had to resort to a lot of things.

Barking is another thing. Our golden retriever rarely barked and when he did, you knew to move into action. These two poodle retriever mixes that we have have the best and worst traits of both breeds. The best of course is that they are adorable and smart and loving. But on the other side from the poodle they picked up barking and jumping. From the retriever side they picked up loudness (to the barking) and size (so they jump really high). Both those things make me crazy. How do you teach a dog not to bark?

By barking back?

They do calm down a little after a few years.

Have you ever hired a professional trainer to train your dog? We should have. We are miserable teachers of dogs. They kinda sorta half obey. Getting them to do a trick for a treat is laughable, they just look at us like “why? you’ll give it to us anyway, eventually!” And of course we do, what, are we gonna hold it all day?

After our golden died, I was not in a hurry to get a new dog. It was kinda nice to be able to leave the chips on the counter, but a friend of my husband told him to get another dog right away. He convinced me by saying we could teach him everything we wished our other dog would do, so this time we could get it right. What sounds too good to be true, usually is and this was the case right away when the puppies came home! Yes puppies, we couldn’t decide on one so we took two. Which as my husband’s friend warned him...

“When you have one dog, they think they’re human. When you have two, they know they’re dogs.”

Oops. And on top of that we skipped the trainer part. Oops again. Then I depended on my husband to teach them a few things. Another Oops! Three mistakes I won't make again.

My husband's favorite thing to do with the dogs is take them in the car to pick up kids from wherever they are. He opens the front door and they race 100 miles per hour out of the house, go straight to the car and stop on a dime until he opens the door. The scaredy cat dog lays on the floor, the other hops from window to window. Once they're back home again, they know to come in through the garage. My husband opens the door and they crash it open the rest of the way racing back into the house. And that's their happy outing.

The habits of dogs are interesting to observe. Their inner clock is flawless. I can remember what I'm supposed to do by watching what they're getting up to do. They know what order the kids leave in the morning, when to laze around & watch TV. Oh yes they watch TV and when a dog comes on a program or commercial, they jump out of their chairs and press their noses right up to the HD. So they pay attention too. But they know the lifestyle of the house and the pace of the house and when all that stuff is supposed to happen and when the time is right, they are poised to go along with it all. So entertaining to watch.

On the news this morning they were talking about a cat who knocked over the family Christmas tree which hit the tile and broke all the ornaments. That sets a picture of dread in my mind!

We did have cats once. There is nothing cuter than a kitty. Really you can't even stop watching them. They are adorable. The thing about cats, kittens...is that they can get almost anywhere they want to go. They will jump from atop the refrigerator, over your head and onto the floor. They will creep around on top of your counters or tabletop looking for food. They have an absolute, resolute need

to own everything in the house. Get new bedroom furniture and they will roam around on top of it all until they are bored. Don't wear shorts when you have a kitten at home, when they run up your leg toward your shoulder, those claws can really dig in.

A cat is a great pet for a single working person, because they are so good at taking care of themselves. With the convenience of a litter box, what do they need you for? Cleaning the litter box is a job nobody wants. Finding a good place for the litter box is nearly impossible. A lot of people with cats live in an apartment where you're likely to find the litter box in the kitchen. There's really just no good place for the litter box. That's the worst part about cats, until you do something they don't like, then they will punish you in their favorite way which is to not use the litter box at all. I loved having cats, but I love not having them better!

And then there's the beta fish. Big Blue was given to me last Mother's Day from my oldest son who must have thought I needed something else to mother. The biggest issue with the fish has become who's feeding it? For months we were all feeding that fish and it was eating like a starving teenager, so we were all basically feeding it twice a day. The fish is now on a diet, fed only by my husband who actually talks to it while feeding! Well and who knows when the kids throw some in!

But the job of cleaning the fish bowl is mine alone. Lucky me. That thing gets filthy so fast, the kids and hubby are always reminding me by fitting these words into whatever the conversation happens to be: "when are you planning to clean that bowl!" Hmmm, I'm pretty sure anybody could do that job, who made it mine?!

So when it comes to the love of animals, I think they have the upper hand. They reel us in, we get lost in their adoration, and then we become their servants. And they smile. Why not? They're living the life.



Christmas Countdown

Oh it's all coming together...

or is it?

It may all be coming apart by now. This is the time where we suddenly realize we're running out of time to get everything done by Christmas. 12 days into December and 12 days to go.

It seems like every time I cross one thing off my list, I add three things on! Or maybe it's really more like 30 things on. Because when there's plenty of time before Christmas I'm really just thinking of everything in broad strokes...cards, cookies, shopping, decorating, parties, etc.

But when it comes time to nip away at these things, it suddenly becomes... cards: buy a card, take a picture, get picture copied, buy pens with different ink colors, write Christmas letter, have kids sign their name on cards, sign cards, address envelopes, argue over picture taken & letter contents (the kids are old enough where they want to be involved), stuff envelopes, buy stamps, mail cards. And who knows, you may do more.

But you see how suddenly one small task takes on gargantuan mini tasks. That's why preparing for this holiday is not easy. Years ago we set up our own little Christmas card tradition and it's always been very important to me to make them as personal as possible. For many years I refrained from writing a letter to stuff inside and spent unbelievable amounts of time hand writing various details in everybody's card.

Meanwhile the world moved on and I started receiving huge detailed letters inside the cards I received. I loved these letters. But I still liked keeping it personal, until, one year I received an ABC Christmas letter from a friend. The next year I totally swiped that idea and now ten years later, I think I own it. What I do is buy pretty holiday paper to match, as well as possible, the look of our Christmas card. On the left side of the paper, going down the side of the page, I list out the alphabet. Then I start each line with that particular letter. We can list all kinds of family activities, etc without going into too much glorious detail and it's a great way to recall all the small things, who's driving, when the braces came off, where we went on vacation, what happened at work, etc.

Usually I start writing the letter and my husband fills in where necessary. Most of the time he gets credit for writing the whole thing. Why this is, I don't know.

The reason this works so well for us is our family is big and there's always a lot going on. These letters were relatively easy to do in the early days when the kids were young. They couldn't even read it in those days. Now they want to know what's on it. This year after reading an early draft, I heard the complaint, it's too boring you need more action in it.

And when it came to the photo to send, our five editors couldn't agree on a photo. We're too white, my eyes are closed, that's a year ago, I hate that picture, look what I'm wearing. I finally told them, we'll take another picture. My hus-

band positioned them facing into the sun, snapped the photo, I had it copied & out it will go whether they like it or not!

A new twist I added to our cards a few years ago is that now all the kids sign their own name on the card along with a short thought “Happy Holidays”. I still sign for the family after the text of the card, but I still like the personalization and that everybody took some time to make the card special.

Now I know the world has moved on with cards, family pictures are on the front of the card, most often you can't even open the card, one card we got didn't even have the family's name on it, some cards don't even come in envelopes, and a lot of cards don't even come in the mail...they come in email or on facebook. But for now I'm ensconced in tradition. It's special to us and I hope it's enjoyed by others.

When it comes to counting down for Christmas and me wondering if I'll get it all done in time, all I have to do is look around the house, nobody's doing too much. The kids are excited to finish exams and hoping they do well. My husband is counting how many vacation days he has left and figuring out how to use them. I am the insane crazy person with all the added work on my list.

And all I want to do is make sure Christmas is a little more special for everyone around me.

I will buy lots of gifts in the next few days for a lot of different people. In all the hustle and bustle, in all the hurry and scurry, through all the crowds and traffic and desperation what I need to remember the most is to give the gift of my time. To stop and look at my kids when they talk to me, to hold them and walk with them and sit with them at dinner. To not brush off a question cause I'm running

out the door. Stop. Give them time. Give them me. And love them like only I can.

Now from the radio show, here is Lora's toffee recipe:

Lora's English Toffee

Original Recipe Yield 2 pounds

Ingredients

2 cups butter

1 1/2 cups white sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 cups semisweet chocolate chips/ or milk choco chips I prefer milk)

1 cup finely chopped pecans or almonds (I use pecans)

Directions

1. In a large heavy bottomed saucepan, combine the butter, sugar and salt. Cook over medium heat, stirring until the butter is melted. Allow to come to a boil, and cook until the mixture becomes a dark amber color, and the temperature has reached 285 degrees F (137 degrees C). Stir occasionally. Use a wooden spoon...works better

2. While the toffee is cooking, cover a large baking sheet with aluminum foil or parchment paper.

3. As soon as the toffee reaches the proper temperature, pour it out onto the prepared baking sheet. Let sit until it hardens, Melt the chocolate chips and spread over the top of the toffee. Sprinkle the nuts over the chocolate, and press in slightly. Putting a plastic bag over your hand will minimize the mess.

4. Place the toffee in the refrigerator to chill until set. Break into pieces, and store in an airtight container.



Getting Skinny

Doesn't it seem like some people have just this natural, automatic tendency toward thinness? Like they don't have to suffer or work very hard to have the great body that they have, For those of us who've been overweight at some point in our lifetime, we gotta wonder if something metabolism wise is not working quite right with us or some other body part is not doing it's part. And that could very well be true! Or not. Or it could be the whole other way around where the thin, beautiful person is barely eating and the chubbier person is eating everything and really should be a lot fatter.

Stew on that.

We're all so different, it makes sense that different things affect different people and while some principles may apply, others may not. That's why this dieting thing is so complicated. I think if I do what she does, I'll look like her. If it were only that easy.

But if it were only that easy, we'd all look the same, right? And life would be so boring.

As it is (especially in this time of year with resolutions in mind) we hear so many different tips, things that are sure to work...drink more coffee, don't drink

any coffee-drink tea instead, it's purely calories, calories don't matter – it's the chemistry of the food. Eat each meal the size of your fist, eat all you want of this! It seems once you hear one thing, you hear it a little later in the reverse.

So as with so many other things, we have to try a few things, see what works and what doesn't work. Find out how our body and mind handle each one. How does it fit our individual lifestyle. Even how does it fit our priorities and our wants and needs. In all the talk about losing weight and eating healthy, it would make sense to figure it all out around what makes sense in our own world.

It's always good to have some firm goals too. If we don't really want to lose weight or eat healthier, we won't go through the trouble of what it takes to do that! We gotta want it, we gotta be willing to make room for it, go through the extra time & work it will take to do it and go through change! We have to want it badly enough to set out on the journey.

Change is not easy, it's not comfortable. It's not something we can really provoke in another human being, but it's something we can work on for ourself. But to think we can lose weight without changing...is once again senseless. We need to change our thoughts, our patterns, our activities.

So where do we start and where do we want to be in 365 days? Write down those goals and post them where they can be easily seen. Personally, I'd like to go into this taking small steps, but this has never worked for me, if I let one area go, I slip then in all areas.

I believe in the 80% / 20% rule. Maybe I'm right, maybe I'm wrong, either way, I think I'm close. I think 80% of weight loss depends on what we eat and 20% depends on how we workout. I always consider the workout time is at least

an amount of time where I'm not exposed to or tempted to be eating. But I do have to be aware that workouts can make me hungrier.

I go early in the morning with my husband to workout. Neither one of us likes to get up early and for me getting up early to workout is just one more reason to stay in bed. Based on our history, my husband feels about the same way. So in order to make it work for us, one of us has to roll out right away in the am! In order to make this easier, I changed the dynamics of my workout. Instead of working & competing with myself and "going for the burn", I take my Ipad and read a book on the exercise bike. It helps me meet my reading goals and I can at least move a little while I do it. And most importantly, it takes the dread out of getting up.

When it comes to losing weight, we gotta want to do it. We gotta see the light at the end of the tunnel, we gotta figure out a way to stick with it no matter which crazy way our day tumbles. And I think we need to plan our days to accomplish what we need to and stay out of the kitchen.

How do you lose weight? I don't know. Just keep trying.



Budget Workout

Expert-ship is really about logic. What makes sense to do to get out of a mess or set yourself up for success. It's common sense. Whenever I hear an expert speak on a morning show or a seminar or in a magazine or on the web or wherever I look thinking I'm going to get 10 hot tips that will change my life, it's always the same. I can write that list. I know what to do. I just don't know how to do it in my life. I need a chipmunk on my shoulder going "no no no that's against the rule."

For those of us with a little more creative leaning, we know that rules are meant to be broken. The point is to break the rule and find another way around it. That's certainly one of the keys to creativity and invention.

So when it comes to money and budgeting and keeping more money than we spend, we can either follow the rules or bend the rules. But if we bend them, then we really need to come at the solution from another angle.

I've learned from our radio show that the rules do apply and work for people who follow them. For those of us who rebel, we either need to get on board or create our own workable solutions. How many years can we give it to figure it out?

But spending money and budgeting is all about emotion. And in the end that's what makes it so hard to have the common sense necessary for following the logic that leads to success.

Because budgeting is all about decisions.

How can I say no to my son when he wants to be in the cast for the school play? How do I measure that \$80 fee? No you can't be in the play because it's too expensive. Or it's only \$80 and he'll have something constructive to do on various days after school. He'll have time with his school friends. He'll learn to perform which will help him later in school. He'll be doing something he wants to do. It will keep him busy at a time where he's usually bored out of his mind. It's a good activity. Sounds like I'm going to pay the fee. He tries out for the play and he doesn't get a part, he can be in the chorus with 50 other kids. They won't rehearse until the last 2 weeks of the 3 month project. Now the \$80 I just spent is going to pay for other kids to have the experience I wanted my son to have.

So what do I do, expect him to lose and tell him no not this year? And then a few months later, I pay my daughter's field trip to LA fee. What does that say to him? And most likely I won't even remember that "no" after a few weeks, but he will. How do you make those decisions?

Then there's the whole mission of trying to save money when we're spending money. How, for example, do we go about buying the cheapest possible food? Is it possible sometimes that it's more expensive to make it ourself than to buy it already made? What about drinks? It's a dry heat in Phoenix and we are always dehydrated. Tap water is deadly. And cheap drinking water still adds up. Reverse osmosis filters need to be changed frequently.

How much time do we have in our schedule to buy the cheapest foods and cook the cheapest meals. It even costs money to be a coupon queen. And then if it doesn't work for you, there's all that money down the drain.

And then what about commercials & coupons & email deals & punch cards? There are so many big deals and special savings, we think if we take advantage of them we will save a lot of money. We may save money, we may not, but what we end up with is more likely than not to be something we don't need or want in the long run.

The marketers are so much smarter than we the consumer. I am frightened of them. If they give me a deal, I am wary: that I am getting inferior merchandise, that they'll mark it down even further the next week, that I am buying something only because it's a good deal, that it's the last of its type and a better one will be out tomorrow, that everyone will be wearing this same cheap shirt that I just bought, that it's out of season, out of style or horrendously outdated.

I try to keep temptations to a minimum. I rarely go to Costco or Target or the mall. And when I do, I have a list and zero in on exactly what I need. In this area, I am pretty disciplined.

I have a tendency to overstock products that I dislike shopping for. Sometimes this can cause problems of over consumption in our family. If I have too many snacks or too many drinks, the kids will gobble until it's all gone. This can get embarrassingly expensive. But ... do I put myself in the store of temptation more often? Stock more but hide some and maybe forget where I hid it? Or buy enough to last a while. The alternatives could be worse than the current problem.

And then...did we have too many kids? Those guys are expensive. While you can set limits in some areas, there are others where it's easier just to go for it. We try to make Christmas and their birthdays special. But even then when choosing gifts, we almost always give them something they need or will need. (When we give electronics or games, it's something we need, if you know what I mean). My kids get clothes and shoes and coats and socks three times a year, Christmas, birthday and back to school. They are not deprived by any means, but there is a limit and they know it.

As kids grow their life gets more expensive. I can't believe I used to think that if they could just get out of diapers I would have it made. Put them back in the diapers please. I used to just think what happened next was the worst...and that was all the activities. Of course we had to have them in swimming lessons and then other sports and gymnastic, etc activities. Huh! Now to even have those days back again.

Now we are paying college tuition, college acceptance fees, driver's ed fees. They need computers and cell phones and cars and insurance.

I will say when each miracle baby was born. I did not hold them in my arms and say, "welcome to the world and to my family tiny one. I plan to give you the least and cheapest of everything you're lucky enough to get. I cannot or will not extend any extra opportunities for you for fun or learning. We will plan to pay as little as we can for everything and try to get as much free stuff out of everybody who crosses our path. Oh and when we are bored, we will ignore each other."

We do too much for our kids. But I think it's better than doing too little. They are not over-indulged. When it comes to budget decisions, we've erred on the side of giving them experiences, teaching them, traveling with them and enjoying life with them. We have 4 teenagers all still living in the house and still liking to be

with us. They also have goals and expectations for their own lives. I don't worry about them living with us forever, they are motivated to do and do well. Isn't that what I want for them?

I save where I can, spend where I have to and try to have enough left over at the end of the month to make it to the next month. I've made some bad decisions and some good financial decisions over the years. Some I've learned from, some I feel I can't learn from, because a lesson learned is a lesson changed as the world changes now so quickly.

How do I know what I've learned and that I've learned?

I know when I watch younger people, younger moms facing the same places I was and I think, ouch. I did that and I was wrong. Will I say anything? Will they listen to me? No they won't, they have their own lives and their own priorities, hopes and dreams. I will not take that from them. They will find a way.

For all of this angst over saving money, I'm thinking it might just be easier to try and make more money. But then again, if we just spend more (unnecessarily), it's still a wash. Deciding what's necessary and what's not, always tips the scale.

Follow the experts advice or set our own course, but no matter how much money we make or have access to, there's always a budget to follow. May as well get it right sooner as opposed to later!

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” ~Albert Einstein



Everything in it's Place Organization

The cleaning ladies are coming today!

That's a luxury in our household! It's also the chief thing complained about. Now why would my family complain about something that is meant to be a help to them?

It's because they're slob that's why. We not only find it too aggravating to clean, we find it too aggravating to put stuff in it's place as well.

And not only that, when a counter or table is cleaned off, we find all the more reason to fill it up. All 7 of us are like that.

So you gotta wonder where that OCD urge comes from, cause we all could use a smidgeon. Why are some people neaties and why are some messies?

My mom is a neatie. She will even kind of follow us around and pick up after us. She does this now cause she knows and she's used to her clean, everything in it's place house. When she talks about her messy house, it's because someone (my dad) has left the newspaper on the table and the lunchmeat out.

She didn't follow us around when we were kids though. She was the hammer of the law. She made us make our beds every day. (Oh Lord, how did we survive?) She made us rake and vacuum, dust, clean, do dishes, pull weeds. Everything that could be done was tossed our way. And woe be unto the child that didn't get their JOBS done.

You know, so obviously I was taught how to do all those things. My two sisters are neatniks. Their houses are pretty spotless and not heaped with junk, you don't see monsoons of dust flying through their air! So what happened to me? Why am I so barely interested in doing what it takes to have a beautiful, clutter free house? I do want that, I just need someone to follow me around.

What I really want is a place to put stuff where I can find it again. Putting things away means never being able to find it again. Most of the time. I like to have things where I can see them.

I also love to see other people's worst messes. That validates me, cause at least I'm not that bad.

And I would say I'm only bad in certain areas. There are other places where my mind works well in organization. And then over the years, I've learned a few things along the way that work for me. So I've gotten to the point where I'm only half bad (I guess).

Now where does that leave my kids? They are learning from watching me. They are also learning from watching all those stupid shows on TLC.

My oldest son decided last week on a Friday afternoon that his room just didn't have enough room. So he set out to clean and rearrange and give his man cave a little more space. "Mom, I'm a hoarder," he says as he walks out with one of those cool, drawstring Apple bags, chock full of greeting cards. "I've saved every card I've ever gotten." And he proceeds to pull out random cards and read them to me...graduation cards, birthday cards, congratulatory cards, valentine's cards, thank you cards, cards from the 90's. "What should I do with them?" (He asks me!)

Well save them of course I say! Aren't you having fun reading them? And you have Grandma's messages to you in her writing. And you've organized them so well in that perfect Apple bag. I never like to throw away those bags, they're so great!

And so he disappears back in his room again. He empties a locker and then asks what to do with it? Give it to your little brother, he'd love that. So he peels off his name and moves the locker to his brother's closet and fills it up with his old childhood books. Someday that locker will go to one of the little nephews I suppose.

"I'm an extreme hoarder," my son says as he comes back out of his room carrying old cell phones and cables and cords to old electronic devices. Haha, I laugh. "But don't throw those away."

"Why not?" he says. "Why not," I exclaim. "Son you are part of history here. Look at these phones you've had in your life time. Look how much they've changed. Would you want to go back to that one? No, no, you gotta keep these phones and when you have enough you can display them in a shadow box. See history!"

“Yeah and the cords still work!” “Keep it all!” I say.

And this is what my kids are learning from me. However I think there’s hope since I didn’t seem to learn too well from my mother. Even though she was the perfect example and the perfect enforcer.

When it comes to cleaning up, this would be my advice...

Come up with a storage system that works for you. Purchase whatever it takes to keep that system going. Clean up and get started. Try not to let the mess pile up too high so the system becomes daunting. All this I can do, until the system gets filled up and I have to put a new one together or empty the old one. That always confuses me.

Periodic cleanups though do help us to reassess what’s worth keeping, what’s worth giving away, and what’s worth throwing out. For me the process of decluttering constantly goes on the back burner, because I know for a few minutes or weeks the emptier space will make me happy, but gradually it will get full again and when it does. Darn it, I will have to do it all over again.

A cleaned up space is just meant to get messy again. I can’t help it!



Positive Living

I'm wondering if our natural nature is to be positive or negative?

I'm thinking our natural nature is negative and in order to be positive we have to work at it.

So we're having a great day, all is well and then, one little thing goes wrong and suddenly it's the worst day ever! Everything attached to our body and mind latches on to focus on that one bad thing that happened. That happens a lot doesn't it?

How many times have we tried to be humble when given a compliment from somebody. "Oh no, I'm really not a very good mom. I was late picking my kid up from school last week." It's not a natural reaction to just say "thank you", we have to denigrate ourselves. Somebody puts in positive, we turn it to negative.

We take things personally and blame ourselves if something is said or doesn't happen quite the way we would like to hear it or have it happen. Instead of taking something in a positive way, we immediately look at it as negative and get defensive.

How often does it happen where something goes wrong right at the top of the day immediately followed by something else not so good and it sets us up for our whole day. So we get on Facebook and say “overslept this morning, then stepped in a puddle of dog pee, couldn’t find Missy’s shoes and she almost missed the bus. I should go back to bed.”

I do these things and see these things done by others so often that it makes perfect sense that our natural nature tends to be negative.

But who wants to live in the negative world? That’s dark and scary and boring and confining and sad and depressing.

I want to be positive. I want to see the hope in everything. I want each day to be bright and shining and feel fulfilled in what I have accomplished. I want to go for the gusto. I want to love and be loved. I want to have fun. I want to experience joy and gratitude and see the good in everything. I want to feel like my life makes a difference to all I encounter.

Look at it like running a marathon. If we start it too fast and do too much, we’ll wear out, grow weary and maybe give up. But if we walk before we run, do a little at a time until it feels good we’ll have more success. And then there’s the training. Most of us don’t start out fully able to run 26.2 miles, we have to exercise and work up to that. We have to take a step at a time, lift some weights, do some walking, walk & run, stretch, build the right muscles. Build the muscle, exercise the muscle, strengthen the muscle.

Building a positive attitude is like building a muscle. We work at it in the same way. We think about it, we work at it, it’s in our consciousness and even when we’re weak we keep working. The more we do it, the easier it will be.

And if our tendency is to glom on to the negative in our life, we have to consciously make the decision to form a whole new habit. To let go of the negative, take away its power and influence in our life and pour in positive thoughts. I have learned that we are most influenced in our lives by the books that we read and the associations that we keep. And the longer I've known this, the more I believe it to be true.

To be positive, to create that muscle of positivity, we must pour in the positive. If we take a drop of cyanide we will die, but if there is a drop of cyanide in a huge pool of water and we drink a drop of that we will not die. Obviously. The cyanide is diluted. We need to dilute the negative with enough positive that the negative doesn't control us anymore.

We need to read the books that proclaim positive into our lives. We need to read them over and over until they make sense to us and fill us with hope. I think music does that as well. If we pick out our happy songs that have the energy and lyrics to invigorate us, listening can turn our spirit around.

We also need to cut the line on friendships that spread negative in our lives. We are not strong enough to shed that negative. Being with a negative person fills us with negative. Two negatives do not make a positive. Picture it like this. You are out fishing with your line in the water, if the fish that you catch tries to pull you into the water, you need to cut the line.

As we become more positive, we will attract those people who are more positive. A positive plus a positive equals a positive. When we surround ourselves with positive thinking people, our own thinking can't help but change.

The most powerful thing we can do in our lives is to speak what we want. This is the hardest thing to do and the easiest. It seems too easy to be effective, but there is truth to it and it is biblically based. God spoke all of creation into existence. Let there be light. If we follow Him (as our children follow what we do), then He wants us to speak our wants and needs into existence. He's showing us the way. So we must speak positively. When the negative thought comes to our lips, we gotta stop and turn it into a positive. That's the exercise, that's the strengthening of the muscle.

As we speak it, we will begin to think it more often. The thoughts that fill our head will be positive oriented. And that's important because thinking is contagious. So often we think in terms of one end of the spectrum or the other. It's either all good or all bad and we think if we're not totally perfect we are a failure. And so the negative strikes up the band again, playing over and over in our thoughts. Resilience. Let it go. Feel the hope. Look up.

The luck in my own life happens to be my husband who has an incredible, over the top sense of humor. No one appreciates that more than me. I watch him talk about a bad day or bad experience and he turns it into a comedy scene. Pretty soon we're both laughing so hard, that that laughter just crushes all the bad parts of the day. Never do I underestimate the power of humor in staying positive and enjoying life.

Bad things happen to all of us. We have setbacks, disappointments, we make mistakes that we can't change, we have sicknesses, arguments, we lose jobs or money or time or love. Some of this is out of our control. What we do have control of is our attitude and our hope for the future and our ability to think and move forward. If we exercise those skills and build them up they will rescue us during those bad times and low moments.

What we do will affect what our children do. What we think will affect what our children think. What we say will affect what our children say. So we need to take care of our thoughts, actions and words in a very conscious way.

I look at my kids and see their bright hopes for the future. The speech my son just gave about having dreams and drive for the future. And I wonder where he acquired the positive? Was he born with it or did we pour enough in?

Are we born with that tendency toward the negative or does the world put that into us? I don't know and it probably doesn't matter. The important thing is to exercise the positive every day as though our life depends on it.

And in so many ways it does. Happy day!



Helicopter Parenting

There seems to be a lot more to this whole “helicopter parenting” thing than I ever thought. The whole notion of it to me was always funny, would cause a giggle or certainly a smile thinking about how we might be keeping our kids from doing something fun because “we were a little worried.”

But now as I delve into this topic, read a few opinions and have a few revelations of my own, this helicopter parenting thing is really a big thing! By helicopter parenting, we are changing the world. And not necessarily in a good way.

It’s self perpetuating. Enough moms take a stand and say, “my child is very smart, they need more homework so they can get smarter” and pretty soon all our children are walking home with backpacks filled with pages of homework and multiple projects.

So let’s take this analysis and start back a couple generations when family’s were larger. They were larger for a lot of reasons. The lack of dependable birth control, inadequate medical attention and technology resulting in more frequent baby deaths & child deaths which caused parents to compensate with more children, many Americans lived and worked on farms where they needed their children as farmhands. There were probably many other reasons as well, but it wasn’t unusual for families to have ten or more children (nowadays when that happens

the family has their own TV show on cable). But imagine what it must have been like to be the mother of so many children and pregnant so much of the time.

You're worn out, the kids have each other to entertain, they have freedom to go on their own, they're pressed into service helping around the house or with adult work. Kids were lucky to get through a high school education, a college degree was not the norm. Parents couldn't helicopter parent because they had too many kids, they couldn't afford to send them to school and they needed them to work so the family could survive.

Fast forward a generation or two. When we were kids, we had a lot of freedom to roam. Our favorite thing to do was race our bikes down the highest hill (which was high), no helmets, no supervision, just pure recklessness. Somehow we survived. But if I saw my kids doing that I would freak out. (Is that why we helicopter mom... because of the things we did when we were growing up that our parents didn't know about?)

At halloween we were off and running doing our trick or treating thing, and nearly blinded by those crazy masks we always wore. Our parents never went with us. They didn't even know what route we were taking or which neighborhood we were going to. We started in packs and finished alone depending on how fast we could get from house to house. Our parents had a decent phone chain thing going and managed to keep a vague track of us without us knowing.

And then girl scout cookies...oh yes even back in the dark ages we sold them. But far be it from the parents to tag along, that was our job and we better make those sales. We tripped around to house after house after house as far as our legs could carry us and we were hoarding envelopes full of cash! No parental supervision or worry.

Today is a new day in a different world where if we let our kids do those things, we'd at the very least be questioned by friends, family and other moms. Anytime there's a school fund-raiser, there's always the missive from the school warning parents not to let their children walk alone door to door. So I'm the one to buy whatever they have to sell.

But there are parents who escort their kids all around as they sell the latest fund-raising item. Here's to a little hovering!

There are new rules now that have surely turned into laws, one that you can't let your child ride a bike unless they're equipped with a world class helmet. That provided, where can you let them actually ride their bike to? We let them go to the end of our short cul-de-sac. If that wasn't boring enough to put an end to the bike riding, it was riding onto the greenbelt at the end of the cul-de-sac that eventually flattened all their tires, which ended up being another problem on my to do list. Price of bike, price of helmet, used six times equals a big waste. A class A helicopter parent surely would have gotten their own bike and ridden around the neighborhood with their children, but we weren't such parents.

Things have changed, bad things have happened to children on their own out there. We have to watch them diligently. We can't let them go too far for too long. We have to educate them with a lot of frightening information and then follow them around in their play. When our kids were little, we built a little brick landing pad in our front yard, so we could set up some chairs and watch that they didn't get run over by cars or stray too far from home. Hovering from the outset.

I blame the media for a lot of this. News focuses on tragedy and makes it larger than life. By the time they are done, we're picturing predators in every street sewer waiting for our kids to pass by. When I was a kid they didn't talk about this stuff on the news and we didn't worry about it. Today we think about it

every time our child asks to walk down the block to a friend's house. And we worry about sex crimes every time our child wants to spend the night at a friend's house. We even have to worry about the people we know because they can be bad guys too.

When we were kids, our parents would pack as many of us as would fit (uncomfortably) in the station wagon, we sat on laps, on floors and halfway out the door. Someone must have been in an accident along the way, because eventually car seats were born. Recently I heard there's a law on this now, that all kids under 57 inches need to be in car seats. So really, must I put my 10 year old back in a car seat? And will he get out in time for driver's ed? When I mentioned this height thing to my kids, my oldest daughter quipped, "You only have to be 47 inches for the roller coaster at New York New York in Las Vegas!" Just my point. This law I know has come from helicoptering!

What is there for kids to do anymore? Life as a kid gets boring. And so what started to grow were places to go for kids to learn different sports and activities. These were supposedly safe havens for kids where parents could pay a monthly fee and have their kids go to soccer or t-ball or dance or gymnastics, tennis, swimming, piano, any sport or any activity. Of course as good parents, we couldn't just leave them there, we had to watch them for the total time of their activity.

And as we watch we wonder, why are they not so good at this activity? We're paying lots of money for this, so we push them to be better. Maybe we even coach them at home, make them practice. We compare them to other kids and take heart when they're better, push them harder when they aren't. We push them whether they succeed or fail. If they're good we push them to be better. If they're not so good, we push them to be good. Whatever their performance is, it must be better. We sit and we watch and we evaluate, then we coach. We are hovering and we don't even know it. And because of that we are looking for and demanding perfection.

I tell the story about when my youngest son tested into gifted math which when he transferred in, he lost a year of math due to the advancement. I didn't even want him in this class, but he wanted to be there and I was curious as to what the parental fuss was all about. Immediately his math grade plummeted...this smart kid who shocked the family with the kind of math he could do in his head...now on the fringes of failure. "I want him out of that class," I told both of the teachers. "Stick with it," they said.

So now what am I doing. I'm searching for Kumon classes for him to take to catch up. I'm in this whirlwind to keep my successful son at the top of his math game. Fortunately, or not, for him and for me, we had a complicated scheduling problem with the Kumon and he never went. It's now a year later and he's rallied back on his own.

This helicopter parenting, it's a time issue too. We want to hurry it up, right the wrong, wrestle it back into proper form. We lack patience, we want it now.

Let's go back to our babies and the toys/activities we are buying for them, Baby Einstein videos...Mozart to raise their baby IQ. Smart baby and toddler toys, genius in training toys. This is to help them learn to lift and move, this will help them count before they can speak, here they will write their name and maybe a novel too, flash cards on a baby teething ring. It's all cute stuff, but what do we pick out and why? It will say a lot about us, I think. And by the way, the average child nowadays has 150 toys.

Schools and sports are where the helicopter parents pervade. I wasn't kidding about the homework comment at the top of the blog. I totally believe that the reason our kids bring home so much homework is because the helicopter parents are demanding more from the teachers, so their kids can learn more and learn it better. I was advised once by a former teacher not to enlist my kids in honors or

gifted classes, because the only difference in what they learn is the amount of homework they have. Is this how they react to pushy parents striving to have the smartest kids? I suspect this isn't totally true, but overall, it's probably pretty close.

When it comes to sports who's in control? When my son played on a competitive baseball team 8 of the dads were coaches. That left one position left for a kid with parents who weren't coaching. I've seen the same with kids football teams. In sports like soccer with less coaching, you see the kids who play most often are the kids who's parents are constantly in contact with the coach. The squeaky wheel's kid plays. There's also all this shuffling about positioning, parents trying to get their kid to play a better position in the field. You see this a lot in cheer, nobody wants their kid to have to hold up the other kid, yet there are 4 positions for that and only 1 for the kid at the top. I would not want to be a teacher or coach of any kind for people's kids, the hovering would do me in. And how embarrassing for the kids when the parents insert themselves. It would be so much easier to give up.

I have had my hovering moments, but I did not like myself very well at the time. It was an exercise, done over and over, to let it go.

It may be a single mistake or a single catastrophe that changes big things, like the need to put a warning sign on a stroller that says "Remove child before folding." We are warned by so many obvious things that we really no longer look at the warnings! So now to keep everybody absolutely safe are we going to have to figure out how to warn more blatantly? These are the things I think about.

These days we have less kids so we have more time to monitor every movement. Technology certainly helps with this too! I can text my child at school, on a date, at the mall, wherever they are without anyone knowing. How

convenient is that? It helps me to know that they're okay. It also keeps me from letting go.

When my daughter goes away to college this coming fall, I won't have to panic, I know we will be able to contact each other at any time. It's a more gentle way of letting me let go.

Speaking of college, when my oldest first enrolled, whenever there were questions to be answered, I had to make the call. In his teenagery way, he was disinterested and probably fearful. Well at the college level they don't answer parents questions, they will take their credit card, but they will not talk to us, only the student. Also as far as grades... I have never seen my son's college report card, it goes directly to him. He still has his scholarship so I think we're good, but we're all expecting the child to grow up and do it on their own. As long as they're doing well that's fine with me, but if they're struggling I want to know, so I can rev up the engine and hover in.

I read recently that Ernest & Young at one time made parent packs for their student recruits. They did this because it was the parents who did the negotiating for them. That sounds entirely crazy, yet we must think this is a good idea, after all the job arena is a whole new ball game and probably unfamiliar to young adults. I'm all for consulting my kids on how to do it on their own, something my parents never even came close to doing for me and never occurred to me to expect. But I think that's an okay, happy medium kind of way to hover.

I think there's positive and negative to our parental need to helicopter around our children. To me the positive is forming that loving connection to them, keeping them out of harm's way, catching them making a mistake and correcting it before it's habit. I think, done correctly, it provides a closer relationship and a better

chance for a child to happily consult with a parent so that they don't have to make every mistake first before they learn.

Where we have to be careful in using that hovering instinct is to guide them rather than do it for them, let them not be perfect and let them be who they are, not who we wish we were.

If they're going to jump off the cliff, give them the wings to fly, not the barrier. Let them experience their life in their way. Hyper helicopter parenting will cause more damage than it will correct. When we let go, they'll fly higher. The hovering holds them down and fuels anxiety and the ability to be adventurous. Kids learn to be resourceful by having to use their resources. It's a muscle that they must develop, we can't, we shouldn't let them standby as we do the workout for them.

We can still change the world, let's just lighten up and do it in a positive way.



Eating Disorders & Body Image

What did I learn from the divorce of Eva Longoria and Tony Parker? If he was cheating on her with her looks, beauty, perfect body and in the height of her career, there's no hope, you can't ever be beautiful enough, or smart enough or have the perfect enough body, there's always somebody else.

So why do we try? Why are we so drawn to what we think is perfect? And where do we get our ideas of perfect?

This starts at a scary young age and of course primarily with girls. As a mom of three girls, I wonder what I'm doing or not doing to ease them into this world of having to be the perfect body. What do we say and when is the right time to say it?

I'm not sure if it needs to be a speech. I'm not sure those are as listened to as our actions. How do we respond when we see something outrageous on TV? How do we respond to what's inside those teen magazines they're reading or the posters & pictures they tack onto their walls? What do we say when we're having a bad hair day? How often and how critical are we of ourselves?

A lot of this comes right down to us and how we feel about ourselves. Which of course we learned from our own parents, our friends, sports we were involved

in and experiences we've had along the way. It all adds up to how we respond when we look in the mirror. What's our reaction when we dress up to go out or to go to work, or what do we say when we try on clothes and our kids are listening. Casual or not, our words make a difference. I guess if we're able to let go and accept ourselves, our kids will feel more capable to follow in our footsteps.

But reality may be that we're only a very small part of the influence. We are being trained to feel bad about our looks and we are in turn training others to feel this way. Are there any beautiful people in the limelight out there who haven't gotten that way with the extreme help of cosmetic surgery? Look how popular it is. And think what a money maker it must be. No wonder in every way we are being told we aren't looking good enough.

And then look at the size of the cosmetics industry and the amount of money that filters through there! They've got to tell us how ugly we are to keep the cash flowing.

And then, as though that all is not enough, we have modern day technology to tweek and tweek and fix and filter and take a perfectly beautiful face and turn it into incredible. So while the world is at work making us feel miserable and hopeless about our bodies, we should be harder at work changing the negative way we feel about ourselves. Yes we want to be healthy, but maybe we should be a little more careful about who we listen to and who we give credence to. If we look a little deeper there are so many resources to help us do this.

Maybe we create our own self affirmation that focuses on all our good points inside and out, write it down, post it on our bathroom mirror and read it out loud every day. Or maybe just find a good quote from below and load that into our minds.

A mind altering experience that we are in charge of. Take charge.

“The human body is the best work of art.”

— Jess C. Scott, 1: The Intern

“Step Away from the Mean Girls...

...and say bye-bye to feeling bad about your looks.

Are you ready to stop colluding with a culture that makes so many of us feel physically inadequate? Say goodbye to your inner critic, and take this pledge to be kinder to yourself and others.

This is a call to arms. A call to be gentle, to be forgiving, to be generous with yourself. The next time you look into the mirror, try to let go of the story line that says you're too fat or too sallow, too ashy or too old, your eyes are too small or your nose too big; just look into the mirror and see your face. When the criticism drops away, what you will see then is just you, without judgment, and that is the first step toward transforming your experience of the world.”

— Oprah Winfrey

“Freedom from obsession is not about something you do; it's about knowing who you are. It's about recognizing what sustains you and what exhausts you. What you love and what you think you love because you believe you can't have it. (p. 163)”

— Geneen Roth, *Women, Food, and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*

“Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart.” ~Kahlil Gibran

“You can take no credit for beauty at sixteen. But if you are beautiful at sixty, it will be your soul’s own doing.” ~Marie Stopes

“Beauty isn’t worth thinking about; what’s important is your mind. You don’t want a fifty-dollar haircut on a fifty-cent head.” ~Garrison Keillor

“It is not only fine feathers that make fine birds.” ~Aesop

“Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies, for example.” ~John Ruskin

“We don’t need Afghan-style burquas to disappear as women. We disappear in reverse—by revamping and revealing our bodies to meet externally imposed visions of female beauty.” Source: Robin Gerber, author and motivational speaker



Naming Our Children

Ahhh, the magic of words and how they all fit together and the way the letters match up in those words to ring together and ring off your tongue when you read out loud. Amazing how many combinations and coordinations of those letters in those words and the way they are set up and arranged on the page to make sense. Think of all the books in all the stores and all the libraries with different arrangements of these words and the vast amount of stories and information gathered from those words. It's quite a marvel if you really think about it.

And if you made it through that paragraph and understand any of it, you're a genius! But it just goes to show in a short little way the difference between good writing and bad writing and how it affects our feelings and our understanding. The difference between words and how they sound to your ear, can change a lot by just switching out a letter. I wonder if the letter sounds we're drawn to have something to do with who we ourselves are and if that is a reflection of our personality built through the years.

All of my meandering comes back to baby names and why we choose the names we do for our children. I came up with my own theory a couple decades ago that people will choose a similar beginning to all their children's names or they will have a similar ending. Names that begin with A are popular: Allie, Amanda, Adam and Amelia or names that end in Y also work well in a family: Christy,

Kelly, Johnny. I don't know if that trend is as popular as it used to be, but it certainly had it's time.

The Duggar's with the 19 children named them all with the first letter of J. Obviously they like that J sound. And thankfully there are a lot of pretty good names that start with J.

I think today we're more liberal with names. With all kinds of famous people naming their kids more unusual names, it seems like the acceptance of those names is easier. All the old fashioned names are coming back and getting popular, names like Gordon, Agnes and Hazel, even Emily was an old person's name when I was a kid.

We come to like particular names from names we hear a lot. Celebrities names or names of characters they've played, or characters in popular books are names we're exposed to and come to like enough to name our own kids those names. I've even seen on the Today Show where people have named their kids after the anchors & hosts on that program.

Companies are formed to come up with names for other companies that are willing to spend lots of time and lots of money to get just the right name. In contrast, we spend an average of 4 hours coming up with a name for our children. Four hours is not a lot of time. Do we just hear something that we like and go for it. Give our children a name that will stick with them & be them & they will be that name all their lives. That's a sobering thought and a rather important task if we look at it that way.

My husband & I laid in a hammock one morning when we were taking a break from scouting locations for our wedding. That's where we agreed and decided

that we'd like six kids. And then we proceeded to give them all names. We wrote them down. Most of the names we had memorized, so the list got lost somewhere along the way.

Those names underwent minor revisions. A middle name adjustment. Dominic turned into Dominique when we had a girl instead of a boy. Our #1 boys name and girls name went first. We shifted a bit as we weren't sure we'd make it to six kids and then with the girl boy situation, which names did we like best, should we adapt one? I also spent a little time in the baby name books, just to make sure we didn't find something we liked better. But all in all it was decided quickly one morning one day.

If I put a timer on that day and all the little discussions we had, it might have totaled 4 hours for all 5 names. But then there's all the years that went before that of thinking up names what do I like, what don't I like and letting my favorites stick with me, so when it was time to decide, it was a short list. My husband and I are so much on the same wavelength that we agreed on best names very quickly.

But what's in a name? I always looked for the meaning of each child's name, though I can't say that was a heavy influencer and I certainly don't remember any of those meanings strangely enough. I like the idea of naming a child after someone who's important to you. But I've felt insulted when people I know take my kid's names and use them on their kids. I always tried to stay away from names similar to names my sister gave her kids. I thought that was a courtesy to her since she had most of her kids before me and named them first. Now if someone says to me ahead of time, "I love the name you gave your son/daughter and I respect you and your child is so special, I would like to name my baby after him/her." Well then I would take that as an honor. But when they seem to forget that my child has a name, it's not so fun.

Let me go back to the similar sounding names and the importance of sounds when choosing the right name. We talked about names with a same first letter sound and a same ending letter sound. But I realized a couple years later, that we named two of our children with similar sounding names. Samantha and Matthew...mantha-matthew. What? How did we not notice that? We practically named one of our kids after another one of our kids. I guess we like that sound.

As with similar sounds, we sometimes get into naming our kids in certain categories like cities or colors or numbers.

So do we want to choose a name that stands out? A name that's common and fits in? Do we want to make up a new name, grab an old name, or find a same name? I once knew a couple who had two kids, a boy and a girl and they named them after themselves. Too confusing for me, but they were proud of it!

We all have our own personalities, drives and dreams and when it comes to naming our kids, somehow that must all come into play. This is fascinating to me. I've always wondered how kids have the personalities that they do. Is it something we as parents influence, or are they born with it, or some of both and then what percentage would that be?

I love the privilege of naming a child. And I love the prospect of what their personality will be. Well guess what? I found the most interesting book (too late for naming my own kids), but fun to look and see if their personality matches their name. The book "The Secret Universe of Names: The Dynamic Interplay of Names and Destiny" by Roy Feinson is an amazing look at what our names suggest about us and the kind of personality we might have as a result of that name. How fascinating is that?

So of course I look up my own name and what do you know? Yeah, that is pretty much me in a nutshell. (I like to think there's more to me than one page). The characteristics of me, both good and not so good, are on target. If a friend came up to me and said, "So this is how I see you and the person you are..." and went on to describe some of the characteristics under my name in the book, I'd look at them like how did you know. But no one would ever do that because we're not into really looking into others that closely.

So thinking the explanation of who I am from my name was pretty accurate or a lucky guess, I turned to my husband's name which described him to a tee, hitting on the strong points of his personality, I couldn't have targeted it better myself. So on to my sons and daughters and those too were spectacularly close to how I see them!

You know a lot of these characteristics could apply to a lot of people, but the sense that they dominate in certain people is very strong. There is a lot more to these letters and sounds than meets the eye. I'm sure.

Something fun I noticed was that a different spelling of the same name, Cheryl or Sheryl are totally different personality wise as described in this book.

Ever notice how you don't like a name simply based on the personality of somebody you once knew with that name? I even remember when we named our Matthew, my husband and I both looked at each other and said, "I never knew a Matthew I didn't like." But that's a big one that favors the names you favor.

It's a totally fun book to browse through with a friend or family members. Like reading your monthly horoscope from a magazine. Though my horoscope predictions are usually and mostly off base.

I remember an English class I had in High School where we studied the sounds of letters. I was absolutely hooked and fascinated by it and of course it's really one of the few learnings that still sticks out to me.

We wonder what's in a name! Me thinks...it's more than we think.



Social Media & Our Kids

In my everyday day, which is generally filled with minor inconveniences (after all I am a mom and that's what we take care of for everybody) I now have another one called Facebook.

Thank you very much.

I like my days to be clean and fixed and faultless. I like my Facebook to be the same way. But oh no some security thing is blinking away on there and stuff that I'm not a part of is flying on. So thinking I'm hacked, I look up instructions on google of course. But apparently Facebook is making bunches of changes and so the instructions are not the same. I find my way to help. But is there any real help when you're dealing with prompts on a computer and trying to solve a problem that may or may not be on the list.

So I think I fix it, it kinda sorta matches the guide instructions I dug up from google. It involves changing my password which is doable, but not in a happy way. My Facebook password is one of the few I can actually remember. And please don't take me there. (ok but quickly, I have thousands of passwords to totally protect me, all of which I think I can remember, none of which I do, all of which I spend hours trying to look up, figure out or re-do).

And in a snap my password is changed and they ask me to log back on. Whew, it worked, hallelujah. I punch in the password that I still remember and it tells me no that I need a new one. So tap tap tap, there's a new one, la-de-da. And that takes me right back to the same password window which now wants a whole new password.

Ok Facebook, I don't like you that much right now and thanks for the material for the blog I should have written yesterday and didn't. And now, obviously, since I can't get into Facebook to scan the lives of my many friends. I now have time to rant!

I don't know how these things get fixed. I don't know why bad things happen to good people. I am disturbed by the inconvenience of it all and the need to find somebody much smarter than me to pick up the pieces.

And this is the world we live in. Getting technically more complicated every day. I should have seen it coming when receptionists started disappearing out of the lobbies of businesses. Now an armed guard takes every piece of ID we have if we want to enter a building and forget calling on the phone, it's automation only.

Well this is my day! What is it with this timing? I just stepped away to answer the phone and it's my husband's doctor's office calling. The automated voice tells me to hold for an important message, then another (how fancy) automated voice comes on to tell me when his next appointment is. It then goes into all the insurance technicalities to be aware of. I know this appointment is important, because one time he missed it and we still got billed for it!

Technology. It's taking us away from actual conversations with real people. We must listen to an automated voice or write our 140 characters into oblivion! Share

our lives with 864 friends. No wonder there's so many billions of bloggers out there. Will somebody listen to me please!

I complain about the technology and the changes and all the new stuff out there that I have to learn. But once I learn a little bit, I'm the most excited one on the block. In fact, more of my friends than not, aren't even on Facebook, either they are too busy or too fearful. I don't want to get old too fast. I think as we get older we stop the technology flow and stick with what we have and what we know, we are more unwilling to keep learning and keep growing. And I also try never to use busyness as an excuse. We are as busy as we want to be and we can be very unproductively busy or busy doing nothing. I have oftentimes been very busy doing something that has turned into nothing (but that is another blog).

I've dipped my toe into the social network scene. I still don't think I'm doing brilliantly at it, but I'm doing it on a few different fronts. Pinterest definitely has my interest and some days I have to force myself to wait for a better time to get at it!

When it comes to my kids, they do seem to have an easier time navigating it all. For me doing anything with social media is a big hullabaloo, but the kids, it's just a small part of their day. Some like it better than others. It's more or less something to do when they are bored and I'm sure come summer, Facebook will be open on all computers.

Children must be 13 to have their own Facebook account, though I think that's been an easy rule to get around. And judging from the action in my own house, it's those middle school kids who seem to love it the most. I don't like to hound my kids over their posts and I don't enjoy monitoring them. Fortunately my husband fills in well at this and when we found one child going a bit overboard, we made her delete a few hundred friends and limit it to 100 or so. My kids seem to learn

well through others mistakes. They know to keep it simple. They know, no one wants to know how much they love their boyfriend or girlfriend, or how much they hate their job, or trash about teachers or other students. What we post is permanent. What we post should be a reflection of the “good” us!

There are some good sites (listed below) to find social media outlets to help teach young kids. By giving them limits, I think it helps teach them to set their own limits in terms of how they handle it all. So then as they move up to a more visible network, like Facebook, they are ready. I would rather have my kids doing and learning these things, how to behave and how to act, while they are living with me rather than on their own. I think the experience is important. And by the time they are out on their own, it will be a whole new something else to learn and deal with. But at least they have learned the parameters and why.

Another important thing for both me and my kids to learn is how to deal with the distraction of it all. As I sit and write this blog, I have emails popping in right in my line of sight. And if my eye happens to miss them, my computer will help out by binging me! Most are not too important, but they can take me away and distract me from my purpose. I could be here writing all day as I attach, unattach and reattach. Focus. What was I just saying?

I’m not really much of a phone person. But look what our cell phones are doing these days. How can a kid not have one. In fact, I stumbled on a series of photos of babies with Ipads the other day. I don’t know what danger an Ipad can pose to a baby, but the photos were not only cute, they were a harbinger of what’s to come in that babies life. It’s not enough to get a kid version of a toy phone or kiddie computer these days. No it has to be the real thing. And not just an older version of a phone, no it must be the latest greatest. I see young moms all the time handing their Iphone over to their very young children so they can teether with it or play a game with it. Whatever they do with it, it makes me hold my breath in anticipation of what they might do, like throw it across the room, take a bite out of

it, or mess something up inside it. That's an expensive luxury, I don't understand how people can let a baby/toddler/tyke take control. Also what does that teach the kid about the value of things? Things have changed since I was a kid when they didn't ever let us touch or receive things of value.

My kids did not have the luxury of playing with real iPhones or iPads, they weren't invented when they were babies and toddlers, they do have the luxury of using them now and that's their real lifeline. It's also my lifeline to them and allows me to continue a little hovering!

You can do everything on a phone. Well everything invented so far. My favorite is my library of books. Whenever I have to sit in line to pick up my kids, I have a book available to read. And when I have snippets of time, I have a few games of "words with friends" on-going. I have a calculator to use, YouTube to watch, stock & weather info, a stopwatch, GPS, a calendar that aligns with all my other electronics, a bookstore, a music store, my whole photo collection, a camera. But with apps, I can read a magazine, look up a recipe, play games, catch up on Twitter and Facebook (let's hope), shop, get coupons, find a movie, do dictation, plan a trip, find a restaurant, watch TV, write a blog or do any other kind of work, get unique photo storage and perspectives. Amazing, amazing stuff and that's just a bit of what can be done on a 4-1/2 X 2-1/2 inch phone...oh and plus calling & texting. Whack.

Now here's the thing about texting. It's a good thing. It's a quick quack quick catch up. Question asked, question answered and out thing. It's a touching base, I'm thinking about you kinda thing. It's a chance to catch up with your kids and husband kind of thing. It's instantaneous most of the time and we expect it to be. We send a message and we don't want to wait for an answer. We get a message and we don't want to wait to read it. And text messages are so much easier now to do, that we write very much longer ones, don't we?

We hear the ding of an incoming text and no matter where we are or what we are doing, we have to see it now! It's like our old home phone used to be, if it rang, we answered it. The problem is because our phone is mobile and almost always with us, that leaves us susceptible to texts and calls all the time. So we have to be told in church and at movies, in seminars and in all kinds of places to just turn off our phones, at the very least, put them on vibrate. Inevitably, even then, somebody's phone always interrupts.

There are times where I'm driving and a text comes in. Maybe I am in transit between dropping one kid off and picking up the other one. The other one is texting me to find out if I'm on my way and knowing I'm late, I'm desperate to text back. I can see why the temptation to text while driving is excruciating. What we're doing right at the moment we always tend to classify as the most important thing, clear the way, I'm coming through and I'm in a hurry. Don't you dare drive too slow or pull in front of me or that light better not turn red now.

I think that technology fuels that need. We all know we shouldn't text and drive, but we are stopped at the light for a minute or two (or 10 it feels like sometimes). We multi-task in every other area of our life. And just a quick text...

For me, I don't know how many texts I send a month, maybe 100. That would average about 3-4 per day. Yeah that's probably close. I think that's a big deal. Yet according to Nielsen, the average teen sends 2,899 texts per month (nearly 100 per day). That's a lot of texts and you gotta think if texting is second nature to them and they're driving, that they would be more than tempted to text. They have less experience driving and more experience texting and that's a bad combination.

Plus all the helicopter parents out there are checking up through texts. And as a parent, paying the Verizon bill, I expect to be answered.

But also as a parent, I have rough ideas of when my kids are on the road. If I need to text them about something, I do it before or wait until I see them again. My part may be a small part, but I really do think about that. I don't want my text to be the one that tempts them into potential danger.

As these kids learn from us, they do like us, we see it all the time from when they mimic us as babies to when they mimic us as teenagers. So anytime they are in the car with me driving and we need to make contact with the outside world, I have them do it for me. If a text or call comes in they take it. If I need to respond and they can't do it, we pull into a parking lot. But if they see me texting & driving, then they will be more likely to do it also.

Texting & driving is just as dangerous for my husband or I to do. We don't do it. Their lives are too important. The lives of those driving next to us on the road are too important. We must respect that. And we must teach that to our kids.

Technology is great. The world is changing. We can choose it and enjoy using it. But in our eagerness, we must not abuse it. And we must teach our kids to be responsible.

Now back to my Facebook debacle.



Sibling Relationships

It's not the first thing you think about when you have kids. It's not like you say, "should we have another kid? What if they don't like each other? I don't know if we can stand their bickering!"

No that's not at all the thought in our head. We just have one that we love so much, we think we should try another. I know some people who really think about whether they should have another child or not, but for me & my husband we just go with the flow.

Right from the outset, we wanted a big family. We laid in a hammock on a beautiful fall day and named our six kids...to be. Not once during that conversation did we think or say, "I wonder how they will all get along?" If someone would have asked me, I'd have given them my blank stare, of course how could it be anything from perfect?

Fast forward a couple decades to now...where we have 4 teenagers and a pre-teen living in the house. How could I have not foreseen this? Actually there's no way we can foresee anything that relates to the pairing and matching of our seven different personalities.

And it's an amazing and wonderful thing to watch. I love the siblinghood and the part my husband and I have played in it all. Watching their personalities develop and then intermix with each other's personalities is like watching a puzzle come together, fitting the pieces, but oh not quite, let's try it here or better yet on this side of the puzzle. And watching them adjust to accommodate one another, even though that doesn't always happen well, is really just a thing of beauty.

You notice things early, like an older sibling giving the baby in the car seat a smack. Then as toddlers, the only toy they want is the one the other one is holding. They whack and smack and kick and bite, laugh and cry and chase and holler. And through it all we try to intercede, to make it even, to haha...teach! And maybe something we do or say along the way hits home, but I could never put a finger on what worked actually. (But if I had to make a guess, maybe it wasn't so much what we said, but the love for them and for each other we modeled in our home.)

As we added more kids to the mix, there was a tilt in the relationships, different pairings and matchups taking place. In his book "The Sibling Effect," Jeffrey Kluger had a pretty good observation. It goes something like this. You have the first two siblings who fight with each other, but when sibling #3 comes along, sibling #1 pulls out, so the fight becomes between #2 & #3, then when #4 comes along #2 pulls out and #3 & #4 go at it. Then when #5 comes along #3 pulls out and #4 & #5 give & take the heat! I stop there because we have 5 and I can say, that's pretty much how that played out for us. Not that the others don't have their fights and arguments, but the primary contenders are the last two. They are the ones that make the rest of us pull our hair out.

The thing I always loved about watching the siblings interact was when things changed. Change always brought out new and strengthened relationships. When our oldest started school and was gone a large portion of the day, #2 who loved and adored #1 turned to #3 in play and a different friendship formed, it was not

the same as #1 & #2 shared, it was a new relationship. When #1 came home later in the day, #2 slid back over to favored #1, but #3 was more in the mix and how special it was to watch the different kind of play and conversation when it was just #2 & #3 and watch that grow and develop for a couple years...until, #2 went to school and #3 turned to #4 in play and a whole new relationship developed. Meanwhile #1 & #2 now have a new bond from their shared experience in school.

And that cycle continues as they share different experiences together. School is the most obvious one. The ones who share middle school at the same time, the ones who are in high school together, now have new reconnections and more mature bonds. Now as they graduate and go off to college those special one on one friendships are changing once again in a new more adult like way.

While all the kids connect with each other in their own unique way and the obvious friendships between the ones connected by age, there are also the bonds between the boys and between the girls. The boys bond mostly through sports, the ones they like to play, soccer and the ones they like to watch, everything else. Although they are 8 years apart, the older one has mentored the younger one and the younger one with 4 older siblings is way smart beyond his years, so the age difference works well and wonderfully. The boys are best friends and respect each other's boundaries.

The girls are cuter than cute together. They've spent many years doing dance and cheer performances and competitions together. Because the 3 of them are so close in age, they could march together into any circumstance and have strength in numbers. This has given them their own confidence as they move on often without each other. But at the end of the day seeing them reconnect and share their experiences is great fun.

They are older now, they run in their own directions, have their separate schools and commitments and interests. Sometimes there are days, even a week where they don't see some of their siblings at all. But after time away like that what great joy it is to watch them gather once again, laugh, tell the stories of their day and their time between meetings. It's an absolute treasure. It's the light at the end of the tunnel after refereeing all those fights along the way. It's exactly what I hoped and wished for, healthy, happy relationships between our children.

A friend of ours had a unique opportunity with his siblings that either his parents or grandparents had set up through their will. What they did was put money into an account that was to be used every year to bring the family together in one place during the summer. The money provided for their family's travel, accommodations and everything else during their time together. Each year a different sibling would plan the vacation and location. So they would get to see different places each year and spend solid time with their siblings and their families. And basically it was all expense paid. I just thought (and still think) what a wonderful gift and wonderful way to hold the family together, especially a family like theirs that lived all over the country. Really I think it's one of the best ideas for a will that I've ever heard.

Because isn't that what we all want in the end for our children? We don't only want them to get along. We want them to want to be together, to continue to share their lives even though they move away and build very separate lives. We want to know we did a good job helping those sibling friendships to build, thrive and survive.

Because it does make a certain amount of sense, that we spend the majority of years of our life with sibling relationships, longer than with our parents or with our spouses. So as a parent, when I leave this world, I want my kids to have each other and be best friends with each other. I can't force this, but I will endorse it!

In every subtle little way I can.



Around & About Couponing

The coupon queen in me is dead.

Or more exactly she was never quite alive. I have never been able to wrap my head around the couponing craze.

I'm the worst failure at saving money through clipping and cataloguing, nickel and diming. The heart in my soul just can't get into it. Have I tried? Yes I've tried several things in several ways and not done well. So not being a good quitter, I set it aside. Again and again I set it aside. It's still sitting to the side. It's time to bury it!

I am not a coupon queen, no way, no how, even in my bestest days, I am not. Maybe it's the math. Maybe it's the organization. Maybe that it's just not fun for me. All of these could be major reasons. It's not in my DNA. Even if I had no money at all, I could still not figure out how to do it. Not to save my life...or yours! Perish the thought.

I think it would be a nice talent to have. I'm just smart enough to know, it's not a talent that was gifted to me. I do use some coupons though and I've gotten really good at those! My breakthrough coupon is Bed Bath & Beyond. The reason that works for me is threefold. It's big and hearty and looks the same. I can

find it, put my hand on it, collect it. It's easy. Then I learned, even though it has an expiration date on it, I can always use it, it really never expires and even though it's only 20% off one item, you can use as many as you want at a time at the counter. And then to top it all off, I came up with a brilliant filing system to always have as many of these coupons on hand when I need them. As soon as I get them, I insert them in the side pocket of my car. That way when I'm driving past and thinking I need a new humidifier, I can zoom right in and pick it up. No going home, or getting distracted, or forgetting. It works for me.

HOWEVER, why do I have to use a coupon? Why do they make me carry it around. Why do they work so hard to bend my mind to think like that? Why don't they just give me 20% off everything just because I walked in the store? I might buy even more with an incentive like that. And from a company who understands I'm not liking this coupon queen task! Maybe I would buy everything I buy there, maybe I would talk about it to all my "similar thinking" friends. Maybe they could make a mint just by understanding me! I'm loving that idea.

I have a punch card for Mr. Goodcents and I'm actually pretty faithful in using it. I go and order 7 sub sandwiches for the family and get 7 stamps. It doesn't take so long before one day one is free. I feel on top of the world. I saved a couple dollars.

I also have one of those punchcards for Einsteins Bagels, Culvers, Dunkin Donuts, The Good Egg, Tropical Smoothie Cafe, Port of Subs, Wetzels Pretzels, Zoyo Yogurt and are you getting the picture? When I go to these places, by the time all 7 of us order, I've forgotten I even have a card. (And of course they never ask you if you do, that might jog my memory). And so then we eat and leave and ka-pow, then I remember. And you know what? Then I get mad. Not at me. At them. C'mon a little help!

And then there are the credit card like cards that you gotta tell ‘em you have or run through their machine. I like my Barnes & Noble card that automatically takes off 10% or is it 20%...oh well, it’s never enough! But I can find it and use it and they always ask me if I have it, because if I don’t they will be able to sell me one. Oh yes I get to pay to get my discount! If they knew I had the card, they wouldn’t ask. Maybe I should wear a shirt that says, “Don’t ask me for my card, I’ll forget.”

But the other stores like Best Buy and Office Max and Petco and American Eagle, they check me for my card every time. But I never know what I get for using it. Supposedly you’re supposed to build up points and then get a coupon? But I don’t know really and the reason I don’t know is because apparently I have to register this card. I have to go online and give them a lot of information about myself and in turn when I spend enough money I will get something back. The trouble is nobody knows how much you have to spend to get (what) back. It’s too many hoops to jump through. And you know what, they’re getting more out of it financially than I am. They now have a bunch of info about me that they can sell. And they’ve had my hits to their website to increase the value of their website. Brilliant.

I was checking out a few things at Hobby Lobby one day and was asked if I had any coupons. Now I’m already feeling terrible, because here I’m about to pay for something that I could get for a lot less, or some less. So I’m shaking my head no and kicking myself and she tells me “just go to our website on your phone, there’s a coupon there, just show it to me on your phone and you can get 20% off. I loved that idea! They just want the hits to their website and it’s easy. Everybody should do that. But you do have to have a smart phone. Pretty soon everyone will.

I was getting bagels the other day and as I was paying for my dozen, a lady interrupted to ask if her coupon would work in that store. Yes it works, the guy

said. Bummer and I paid full price! Again I feel bad. But I gotta remember I did no work to pay full price. It would have taken me – how much time – to find, organize, choose out and actually bring a coupon, and what value of time did I lose to save how much? Say it's a half hour of my time and I saved a dollar, is it worth it?

My daughter was selling those big entertainment coupon books for \$25 for her dance class to make some money. She had to sell 6 of them. So I bought them all! I kept one and turned the others into gifts. Every once in a while I look through that book. It takes so long that suddenly I look up and whew, it's too late to cook dinner and I go back to the coupon book. One time I chose a pizza place with a nice discount. I went in ordered my pizzas to go and found out...oh no, that coupon only applies to the owner operated stores, not the franchises. The nearest store that would accept the coupon was 20 minutes away. I paid the couple extra dollars!

The funny thing about that coupon book is I not only forget I have it, I never have it where I need it! I should keep it in the car, but then I want to look through it, so I bring it in the house, then the next time I'm in the car, it's not there.

My sister torments me. We are out at dinner or something together and she hands me a coupon for the restaurant. "You have this one too," she says, "in the coupon book, but since you never use that thing...here's mine!" I'm always thankful she has it in hand! But guilty AGAIN!

Have you ever tried the airline reward plans where you fly so many miles and then after so many get a free flight? I've been a disaster at that too. Since they rig it for businesses and not families, this is a hard one for me to win at. I say businesses because people who travel a lot for their business can rack up a lot of miles quickly and then can use them for personal use. Any companies I ever worked for

though never let me use that mileage, so maybe it doesn't work for business travelers either. For me with a large family, it's a frightening disaster. First you have to have an account for each person and our miles can't build together or be transferred to each other. So we take a little trip. It costs us \$3000. If we do that 10 more times, we might each get a free trip. Oh but wait, there's a time limit on that! If you don't use your miles in a reasonable time, boom gone!

And what about the second flight? What if the first airline is double the price, or double the inconvenience to fly? Yeah, we're going to pick another airline. Sign us up again! We'll never win that prize. Improbable. Impractical. Imbecilic.

I was driving through a burger place the other night getting dinner for the family. (And yes I do cook, but they get sick of it) I was happily clutching 6 coupons that would ultimately save me \$6. But the cashier got so confused, even with my simple order that she forgot to deduct my coupon amount. "That's okay, I'll use them another time," I say. When it's too much waiting, it's too much waiting, don't you think?

So this blog is dedicated to all the retailers out there who profit from my abysmal ability to use their coupons and profit from others who are dedicated coupon queens. Either way, I think they're getting what they want from it. Everything evens out.

I will say, I think I shop less and buy less because I always feel like I'm coupon cheated. Just give me your best product at your best price and help me feel good about it.

Hallelujah and amen. If you want real good coupon tips, you'll have to listen to the other moms on the radio show. I think I was the only loser!

Happy coupon collecting! When you make a million, let me know so I can feel bad! I won't disappoint!



Toxic TV & Your Family

This was a very interesting radio show that took a couple wild turns and it will be well worth your time. So take a listen!

Now from my perspective, I've always loved TV. I've loved the story form of it. Being a die-hard creative type, I've always been drawn to what's being created for it.

When I was young, our family had one TV, then two, then one in color, then eventually got to three, then went back to two, but both in color. In the day, parents were concerned with how much TV we watched. What did they give us? An hour a day? Maybe two hours in the summer? They didn't usually use TV as a babysitter, they babysat the TV.

No they didn't need babysitters for us. They just set the boundaries outdoors and let us run for it! No cell phones, no connection, no contact for hours & hours, they didn't know where we were. Well they had a clue. They had home phones with miles of twisted cord so they could vacuum while they talked and while they had their mom time on the phone, they updated each other on who saw the kids last and where they thought we were off to.

So I didn't grow up with a lot of TV in my background, but when I got to college and jumped off the what's my major going to be wheel, I landed in TV, and shock of all shocks, I was good at it. And so fortunately and luckily after college I got a job in TV. Those were the days before cable, when the networks were king of kings and there were only a couple stations in every market.

Those were the days of Happy Days and Soap and Barney Miller and the Love Boat. All pretty milk toast and mild compared to today's fare. I promoted shows like those along with News and other local shows we ran. My claim to fame was beating Oprah in our market one November during the onslaught of her popularity, where she was on the cover of every magazine on the newsstands. The show we beat her with was Small Wonder, a meekly mild kid's show. No one could believe it. It was a miracle not to be repeated, but one good win with a small show that probably didn't make it a year on the air was fun, fun, fun.

I digress, but the point is I grew to know and understand and love TV for the creative and entertaining deal that it was.

Fast forward now 20 years or so, where I'm long out of the business. I have 5 kids, 2 dogs (1 of which watches TV), a husband who still works in the business. And so we now have 8 TV's and full access for all anytime, any day. With 8 TV's there's one for each of us with 1 to spare! Four of those TV's have their own DVR. This is affectionately called "the box" by the kids and they love it for being able to record all the shows they are missing. The older ones catch up with their shows somewhere in the middle of the night. And somewhere along the way, I lost total connection to what they're watching. Now they talk about what they're watching and what they like, but I'm not the boss anymore.

Back when they were pre-schoolers, they would watch a good show like Barney. Or the Wiggles. It felt to me like I watched every show they were watch-

ing, until one day when I heard their little voices talking about “Sponge Bob Square Pants” and that sounded so hilariously funny to me and who was “Bob the Builder”. They were finding other shows. And pretty soon it’s “Hannah Montana” or “The Suite Life of Zack & Cody.”

Then we’re finding they know a star or two each time on “Dancing With The Stars” from the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon or...Jersey Shore? We think we’re keeping track, but they move on so much faster than we do.

My husband loves *Desperate Housewives*. I don’t know if it’s his way of trying to figure us out or what really, but for years we’ve been loyal viewers. Now in it’s last year on TV, my three girls and even my youngest boy are waiting around waiting for us to turn it on. I didn’t realize how many cringeable moments are on that show until I started thinking about what the kids might be wondering.

Another show they like to watch with me is *The Bachelor/Bachelorette*. They like choosing out the best guy or girls. We like picking out how fake they are, and how catty the girls are to each other. I think there’s a good teaching experience with that show and I try and pick them out and talk about them with the girls. But especially I like when they pick out things and give their opinion about them. I hope these shows work to guide the kids in a better direction rather than teaching them the wrong direction that I think those shows tend to go in.

The TV trend seems to be going from bad to worse to what’s the worst that could possibly happen? Producers of these shows are really out to horrify us. And there’s plenty of people to draw from out there in the world who are happy to do that.

Here's a few of the amazingly disturbing/captivating/must watch TV on TV. Have you seen some of these? What can you add to the list?

Toddlers & Tiaras

Gossip Girl

The Girls of the Playboy Mansion

Jersey Shore

Teens Having Babies

The Kardashians

Disaster Date

Say Yes to the Dress

4 Weddings

South Park

The Simpsons

Fear Factor

I can't even begin to name them all, because I don't know them all. I haven't ever watched a whole show of any of these, just bits and pieces of the ones the kids are entranced by.

I don't know what their story will be when they look back on it all, but I'm hoping they're smart enough to separate the riff from the raff. We think they are or their father & I would exercise our privilege as parents to take it away. At some point though, they begin to live with their own decisions.

The movement in TV to the extreme does bother me. In the case of American Idol where they went from an inexpensive, simple stage in year one to an all

decked out, wildly produced amazing look today seems like a normal transition with the success of the show.

But in other shows like the Bachelor, where they went from simple dates to extreme locations and experiences where they wear the least amount of clothes most of the time and do whatever it takes to reel in a guy they don't even care about has traveled in the wrong extreme. And it takes away from the simple relationship point in the show. Now if there's not an extreme shocking episode every few along the way, it's not good enough. Now they have to purposely bring in people to thwart the goings on! I don't know, maybe after years and years, the show doesn't hold up and we need these extremes to stay hooked.

What a lot of pressure to come up with these shows and what a lot of pressure to increase the beauty and tension of them each year. The formula is the formula that needs to be further ravaged each year. It's wearing on me. And I just find more reluctance to watch. But habits through the years die hard. And with 8 TV's, one is always buzzing.

I don't see it getting any better, though I hope it does. How much worse can it get?

My husband turns to sports, I turn to pinterest!



Bedtime

Ah ya ya ya whoever would have thought bedtime could be such a difficult thing, What should be the best cuddle buggie time of the day wreaks terror through many a house. But not my house. We got bedtime down. The problem develops though as we start to get it right, things shift gently and the whole set up tumbles down.

Doesn't bedtime start at the beginning? As soon as we bring that precious baby home, one of the first questions we're faced with is where will this baby sleep? All too often we might go awry early trying to make the middle of the night feedings easier. Because it is just easier if the baby sleeps close to us, either in a little bassinet or in our bed. Does anybody let an infant sleep in their bed? Seems too dangerous, too much chance of actually crushing the baby. But I remember a lot of early mornings when I was exhausted bringing the baby in about 5 am for my husband to hold. He set the baby chest to chest and they both slept. Those were my best sleeping hours.

But my husband was insistent from the beginning that we all had our own rooms and having the baby sleep with us was never an option. It was tough for the first months, but we adjust. And though it feels like forever, the baby does learn to sleep and sleep through the night. We worry though about hearing the baby don't we? But for me my mother sensors were on high alert and I never failed to wake up when the baby called.

Switching the baby from crib to bed, well that's quite a trick. The blooming toddler discovers independence and now we have to worry where that kid will wander. I had one that wandered every night into one of the other kids beds. He was so little he was hard to find. Finally I figured out that all he needed was a roommate. We moved him over and the wandering stopped.

I've found it helpful to establish a bedtime ritual that is consistent and loving. For us it started with songs and transitioned to book reading and then to a prayer by each bed. I think as long as you spend some time in that day to night transition, snuggle a bit and end with a loving but firm good night, it eventually works quite well. It even begins to become a big part of the day we all look forward to.

To win the bedtime war, we as parents just need to have a better plan than they do. We need to set the rhythm. If we give them too much lee-way, they'll use it and drain us of the last bit of energy we have left for the day.

I needed to get my kids to bed. I needed to have my own down time. It was critical to my sanity. If I let my kids take that away, I wouldn't have much gump-tion to give them my best mommyness while they're awake.

Once the habit was in place, we all fell in line with it. And it even worked well when babysitters took over.

I have friends who lay down with their kids to help them go to sleep. They usually fall asleep too. I can't imagine a worse precedent, but so many people do it, they must like it. I remember one of my daughters had a little slumber party for her birthday when she was in first grade, one of the three girls she invited was crying for their mom by midnight and another one was going at 1AM. Both moms had to pick up their kids.

But hard as I try, I just do not understand going to bed at 7:00 with your kids. Oops or are these just the moms with one child? That would make sense. But I still wouldn't do it. I don't know how long that part of the deal lasts and I don't want to know either. How many years of doing this do you do?

We are also a bit more lenient in the summer with actual bedtimes. A lot of people believe parents need to be more stringent and consistent with this even in the summer, but for me it worked to relax the system a bit. I found the best playtime of the day for my kids was actually after 7PM. They played so wonderfully and creatively together, it just wasn't in me to break it up. They needed that time and magically it still gave me my time.

I have shopped late at night when my husband could be home with the sleeping kids and am constantly shocked to find so many parents out with very little kids in strollers and toddling next to them. Most of the time the kids are as unhappy as they can possibly be, they are crying or whining, complaining in every way they know how. And it's like the parents don't even notice. What is wrong with them? I understand people in difficult situations and that sometimes there's just no other way, but then get done what needs to be done and go home!

When kids (and adults, I can relate) get overtired, they get stressed. That releases the hormone, cortisol, which is like getting a second wind. It makes it really hard to settle down and even after falling asleep, the tendency is to wake up more often through the night. Who needs that? Not me, not my child. Of course this happens to all of us sometimes, it's just all the time that is just not right to do to a child.

It's funny as kids grow up, suddenly bedtime takes another turn, called homework...or better yet, projects! None of my children picked up my penchant for procrastination, they are really very good about getting on tasks. Sometimes

though the task is a big one and it appeals to their artistic sense and it just takes them longer, so it spills into bedtime. As they grow and do more, the bedtime expands and they start making some of their own decisions about when it's time. I think this is okay as long as we as parents stay in charge and don't let the bedtime get out of hand. It does though begin to teach them to manage it.

With two in high school and one in college, my husband and I find ourselves almost always heading to bed before the kids. As uncomfortable as this is, I think it is the natural pattern of things. I still have a hard time when the girls are out later babysitting and am conflicted about waiting up for them or snoozing. But life is easier that way now with cell phones and our ability to communicate more closely.

The battle at bedtime, do we cause it ourselves maybe by not giving our kids enough attention while they're awake. Are they trying to make us notice them at bedtime, because now we finally are involving ourselves in their day? Whew, that's a thought that paints quite a picture. We gotta have our love moments during the day or even as we say goodnight. It's too easy to get wrapped up in our own day, our own work that we ignore our kids. How many times do we say goodbye before they walk out the door and there's not even a glimpse of eye contact? And it's surprising how easily it happens. Take those moments. Create that connection at all their ages and stages and the payoff will be spectacular.

But my best tip for bedtime (or anytime) ... speak the positive about what we want them to do. Instead of saying, "you better not stall around like you did last night," it would be better to say, "let's snuggle up and I'll read you one good book before lights out." That also sets up the routine and the expectation. But I love the idea of the positive aspect. Just tell them what we want them to do, not what we don't.

Amen to that. Good night!

Think about this:

Any kid will run any errand for you, if you ask at bedtime. Red Skelton

It is one of life's bitterest truths that bedtime so often arrives just when things are really getting interesting. ~Lemony Snicket

Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, "Where have I gone wrong?" Then a voice says to me, "This is going to take more than one night." ~Charles M. Schulz

Night time is really the best time to work. All the ideas are there to be yours because everyone else is asleep. ~Catherine O'Hara

I often think that the night is more alive and more richly colored than the day.
~Vincent Van Gogh



Kids in the Car

It starts with car seats, but it's not too long after that when our kids are quite literally in the drivers seat! And the issue that got me thinking about all this was a news promo talking about new laws for car seats and how old, how heavy and how tall kids needed to be before they could escape them!

That cast the picture for me of pretty much pulling them out of the car seat and transferring them directly into the drivers seat. Because I've seen some of those high school girls and they are tiny tiny little things, they have hair that is heavier than they are. They could very well fit car seat criteria.

There is so much to think about with kids in the car. We think we have it made in the shade when we set our little baby in that \$100 car seat. All 5 of my kids hated that thing and cried constantly in it for the first six months. But that's not the point, I'm thinking about the fact that my husband's car doesn't have a car seat and well he'll be driving that baby sometimes...another car seat. Oh and then Auntie or Grandma's going to be picking one up from daycare. Do I take my seat out and leave it or get them their own to use as well?

And just when all those questions have been answered, boom, baby #2 enters the picture and car seat #1 is outdated, filthy or just not feasible in some other way. Baby #1 no longer fits in seat #1 so now for \$200 we need to buy two new carseats. What about my husband's car? And Grandma's or Aunties? It's the car seat shuffle and it starts to get even more interesting when baby #3 lands on earth! Yikes they all have to move up and the big one has to move back to the far

back seat. Oh and would the kid who has houdini'd himself out of the car seat and is standing up in it...PLEASE sit down!!! And other child please stop encouraging that with your laughter!

When my baby #4 came along, legally our 5 year old could get out of the car seat and he did, but still a careful of car seats. We were the fastest loading car seaters in town, but it was still no easy task. By the time baby #5 got out of the car seat, we'd had them in our cars for 14 years.

How can you talk about kids in the car without mentioning food? In the early days, it seems like we did everything in the car and oh it was so much easier to drive through and throw a bag of food into the back seat. The kids (in their car seats of course) would tackle it like piranhas. Once they discovered McDonalds, it was manna from heaven. No other food type would do. No other happy meal toy would do. But the collection of cups and straws and fries on the floor of the car was so thick, it was like stomping grapes when the kids made their way in and out of the car. My arms were always full of whatever had to be brought in the house, I never bothered to clean up either. My husband was flabbergasted by the filth. He could not possibly conceive of how it got so bad. Finding the areas where the bottom fell out of the cups was always a treat too!

Imagine driving while all that havoc is going on behind you? There are statistics I suppose on drinking and driving, there must be statistics on texting and driving, but are there any statistics on moms driving with kids in the car? Are we a hazard or do we somehow manage to make that look effortless too? Are we able to manage our way through mayhem in the backseat without incident or accident? If so we truly are super moms...or God blessed!

Some of my kids are driving on their own now, they're bigger and better behaved now when they're with me. TV in the car has come a long way since it be-

gan in the days when my kids were little. The first one we bought was in a console that fit between the two front seats. I had to half stand on my head to insert the VHS tape and all the kids had to crane their necks to find the 5" monitor! And imagine the large pile of VHS tapes flying around the car! Now I see cars go by with separate monitors on the back of each seat right at eye level. I bet moms can insert the DVD right from the driver's seat without the slightest contortion! Ahhh, modern day technology. What will it be in the next 10 years for our convenience? Or the next 50 years?

Maybe like everything else technology is helping moms overcome the back of the car craziness. Maybe kids in the car are less of an issue and less of a hazard. If the whole family car ride is getting safer, than I can get happier and breathe a sigh of relief that we all made it through!

Next hazard! Driver's Ed!



Reading: The Book Lover's Library

I may not have new clothes, but I always have new books! I can't stay away long enough to really stay away. I always have to take a peak at what's new. And when that happens, I always find something.

Back in the day, it was such a treat to stop at a bookstore and rummage around among old and new books, pile up the discoveries and head home with all new reads. I could smell it, feel it, enjoy the touch and the sounds of almost any bookstore. What a great way to spend an hour or a day or a weekend, ensconced between bookcases, full of unread stories.

The books have piled up over the years! And in answer to all that weight, my husband got the brilliant idea to buy me an Ipad. And now I can wander all the books available on the internet anytime, the store is always open and the story always awaits!

What I love best about my Ipad is that all my books are in hand in one place at one time. I can take along one small, lightweight object and all my books are there for me, thousands of pounds of them.

I generally keep a couple books going at a time, but I try to only open one at a time on my Ipad. Otherwise I'd be into everything and confusion would reign. I

keep another book going on my cell phone to alleviate stress and feel like I'm accomplishing something as I wait. Most of the time I do have my cell phone with me, I don't always have the Ipad on hand. And then there are places I just like to take a real book... to the beach, to the nail or hair salon... just in case, I don't want my electronic device to get ruined or lost.

As a mom, it's not easy to read. As an employee, it's not easy to read. Somehow I always feel guilty if I steal that time for myself. The attitude I feel around me is that reading may be fun or entertaining and I ought to be working and accomplishing something. Or that reading isn't getting the job done, it's a diversion, preventing me from ever accomplishing the task at hand.

The reason I know I'm not reading too many books? I keep longing for a longer list of books. When I get to my max, my automatic interest system will shut down and I'll move on to other things. But for now, I find the time to read at night before I fall asleep, in the morning when we go to work out (I plop on a bike and think I'm multi-tasking), when I'm waiting, during those short windows of time between dropping off one kid and picking up another. Sometimes I read while watching TV or on a good day take a 1/2 hour during morning coffee or lunch to make some headway. It all adds up and my pile of finished books escalates rather quickly, just not as quickly as the new bunch of books gets added on.

I like lots of books, though my patience for bad writing or books that don't move me has increased incredibly. There's just too many good books out there and not enough time to enjoy them. I'd rather be turning the pages of a great story than falling asleep with a boring one.

I love it when the stories in certain books come together to create new awareness within me. This has happened to me especially in the case of how women have been treated throughout history. I have read *Mary: Mrs A Lincoln*, *Sophia*

Tolstoy, Louisa May Alcott and Harper Lee. The first of those books was fiction based on a biography, so I read that biography to get the “true” story. I am entranced by the ideas and what I’m learning from the lives these women led.

The joy of reading for me comes from the joy of discovery. And I can receive that just as much reading fiction as true stories. Now using my Ipad, I can highlight those beautifully written sentences or points that make sense to me. I highlight, bookmark and even comment when I think I won’t remember why something hit me the way it did. It’s so nice to have that to go back to. I never wanted to mark up my paper editions, but I feel like if I don’t mark up a book on my Ipad that it meant nothing to me. That’s not true, but I still like to find the statement that hits the mark for me.

Finding good books is almost as joyful as reading them. The best way for me to learn about good books is to ask my friends what they’re reading. That way I get a good idea of what books they like. By now I’ve been able to separate out a few friends where everything they suggest, I like too. Those are the people I watch like a hawk. And I love the book club I go to! What’s great is there are so many people who love to read, presenting their favorites or books they’ve found, and I can take down titles of books that may never have crossed my path.

I think books are important. I can’t take them with me when I die, but I can live my life more brilliantly with the light they turn on in me! And I truly believe that the person I am is a result of the books I read and the people I keep company with. My choices are many, but they better be good.

Enjoy the book list compiled by each of the moms on the show and one mom who couldn’t be on the show. And please add your own suggestions!

“Wear the old coat and buy the new book.”

- Austin Phelps

Book List from Sue

Recent books I've finished

One Moment, One Morning – Sarah Rayner

Oxygen: A Novel – Carol Cassella

Code to Zero – Ken Follett

In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror & an American Family in Hitler's Berlin
– Erik Larson

Books I'm reading now

The Lucky One – Nicholas Sparks

Books on my list to read soon

Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do
Differently – John Maxwell

Same Kind of Different As Me – Ron Hall & Denver Moore

The Paris Wife – Paula McLain

109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos –
Jennet Conant

Favorite all time books

Moloka'i – Alan Brennert

Child 44 – Tom Rob Smith

Still Alice – Lisa Genova

The Pillars of the Earth – Ken Follett

World Without End – Ken Follett

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks – Rebecca Skloot

Book List from Jerilyn

Recent books I've finished

The Hunger Games Trilogy (books 1 & 2) – Suzanne Collins

Soul Surfer – Bethany Hamilton

Kisses from Katie – Katie Davis

Books I'm reading now

The Hunger Games – book 3 – Suzanne Collins

Love and Respect – Emmerson Eggichs

Do Yourself a Favor and Forgive – Joyce Meyer

Books on my list to read soon

Blessed Beyond Measure – Gloria Copland

Heaven is Here – Stephanie Nielson

Favorite all time books

Bible

Redeeming Love – Francine Rivers

Choosing to See – Marybeth Chapman

Life Without Limits – Nick Vujicic

Heaven is for Real – Todd Burpo

Book List from Melissa

Recent books I've finished

I Used to Be So Organized – Glynnis Whitwer

The Beautiful Wife: Focused on Christ, Fulfilled in Marriage – Sandy Ralya

Sweeter Than Birdsong – Rosslyn Elliott

Books I'm reading now

Growing Great Kids – Kate Batistelli

Real Marriage – Mark & Grace Driscoll

LeadHer Devotional Challenge – LeadHer Team

Power Thoughts – Joyce Meyer

Books on my list to read soon

Good Girls Don't have to Dress Bad – Shari Braendel

God, Grace & Girlfriends – Mary Snyder

String of Pearls – Diane Woodman Bailey

One Year Alone with God – Ava Pennington

The Mission Minded Family – Ann Dunagan

Favorite all time books

Bible, NLT version

Visioneering – Andy Stanley

The Five Love Languages of Children – Gary Chapman

My Utmost for His Highest – Oswald Chambers

Jesus Calling – Sarah Young

The Hole in our Gospel – Richard Stearns

God Chicks – Holly Wagner

Redeeming Love – Francine Rivers

Talent is Never Enough – John Maxwell

Jesus, Life Coach – Laurie Beth Jones

Book List from Tara

Recent books I've finished

Killing Lincoln – Bill O'Reilly & Martin Dugard

The Lincoln Lawyer – Michael Connelly

Girl with the Dragon Tattoo – Stieg Larsson

Girl who Played with Fire – Stieg Larsson

Girl who Kicked the Hornets Nest – Stieg Larsson

Little Red Book of Selling – Jeffrey Gitomer

Ender's Game – Orson Scott Card

Speaker for the Dead – Orson Scott Card

Books I'm reading now

Steve Jobs – Walter Isaacson

A Discovery of Witches – Deborah E. Harkness

Automatic Wealth for Graduates – Michael Masterson & Mark Skousen

Onboarding: How to Get Your New Employees Up to Speed in Half the Time - George B. Bradt

Books on my list to read soon

Children of the Mind – Orson Scott Card

Favorite all time books

Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

The Hunger Games Series – Suzanne Collins

The Harry Potter Series – J.K. Rowling

Honor Among Thieves – Jeffrey Archer

Ender's Game – Orson Scott Card

The Firm – John Grisham

The House at Pooh Corner – A.A. Milne

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe – C.S. Lewis

Book List from Carly

Recent books I've finished

The Lucky One – Nicholas Sparks

Books I'm reading now

Lineage of Grace – Francine Rivers

Favorite all time books

All Creatures Great & Small – James Herriot

The Help – Kathryn Stockett

The Holy Bible

Book List from Vicki

Recent books I've finished

The Hundred Foot Journey – Richard C. Morais

How to Eat a Small Country – Amy Finley

Still – Lauren Winner

Angry Conversations with God – Susan E. Isaacs

Books I'm reading now

Forgotten Country – Catherine Chung

Books on my list to read soon

Behind the Beautiful Forevers – Katherine Boo

Great Young Adult books

The Hunger Games – Suzanne Collins

The Book Thief – Markus Zusak

Between Shades of Gray – Ruta Sepetys

Favorite all time books

The Glass Castle – Jeanette Walls

Little Bee – Chris Cleave

Vicki says: To find good books, I read lots of reviews and then download sample chapters on my iPad. This has been GREAT! Before, I often bought books that others recommended or that had great looking covers and was often disappointed because it was too predictable, too boring, had too much sex or was just downright mediocre. With iTunes, I get about 40 pages to sample before purchasing a book. By reading the first couple of chapters I can pretty much peg whether it's going to be a good book or not.

Book List from Sharon

Recent books I've finished

Even Silence Has An End – Ingrid Betancourt

Girl in Translation – Jean Kwok

Sophia Tolstoy – Alexandra Popoff

I've Got Your Number – Sophie Kinsella

Thinking for a Change – John Maxwell

The Sibling Effect – Jeffrey Kluger

Saving Cee Cee Honeycutt – Beth Hoffman

The Weird Sisters – Eleanor Brown

Child 44 – Tom Rob Smith

Heft – Liz Moore

Books I'm reading now

Nearing Home – Billy Graham

The Art of Fielding – Chad Harbach

Louisa May Alcott – Susan Cheever

Bel Canto – Ann Patchett

Books on my list to read soon

Bringing Up Bebe – Pamela Druckerman

Defending Jacob – William Landay

Imagine – Jonah Lehrer

Into Thin Air – Jon Krakauer

My Name is Mary Sutter – Robin Oliveira

One Moment, One Morning – Sarah Rayner

The Winter Sea – Susanna Kearsley

Favorite all time books

The Time Travelers Wife – Audrey Neffenegger

The Postmistress – Sarah Blake

Shanghai Girls & Dreams of Joy – Lisa See

Unbroken – Laura Hillenbrand

Steve Jobs – Walter Isaacson

Mary Mrs A Lincoln – Janis Cooke Newman

Sophia Tolstoy – Alexandra Popoff

The Forgotten Garden – Kate Morton

The Distant Hours – Kate Morton

I Don't Know How She Does It – Allison Pearson

Bright Shiny Morning – James Frey

The Lacuna – Barbara Kingsolver

The Imperfectionists – Tom Rachman

Outlander Series – Diana Gabaldon



Bullying

I've been bullied. I've been bullied by other moms. I've been bullied by policemen. I've been bullied by teachers, and coaches, credit card companies, realtors, employers, people with jobs, bankers, salespeople, the vet. You name it and I feel like they've gotten to me. I feel like they've tried to hurt me or take something away from me.

But I can't say that it's been truly malicious, they just wanted something from me. They either wanted to hurt my feelings or embarrass me, guilt me or take more than I had to give. And how do I respond when this happens? I give in. They get what they want. If I want to deal with them, then basically they get what they want.

So then I wonder if I too am a bully. My kids get really upset with me when I try to bully a salesperson to hurry up, just put it in the bag, or if I try to bully the orthodontist back by telling them they're ripping me off, or if I try to give somebody else an idea on how to do things better. I find it interesting that my kids are so nice, they are bothered by my badness. But usually I'm bad for a reason. I'm mad and I'm not going to take it anymore.

What that says to me is that while I let others bully me, I will sometimes try to be the bully myself. I have little patience for people who take up my time (they are slow) or people who tell me something can't be done. Then my little bully comes out.

Can any of us say, we've never been a bully?

It usually seems like we view ourselves in a hierarchy, people we view as better than us and people we view as lower than us. For whatever reason, wealth, health, accomplishment, beauty, status, talent, the people who have a greater abundance of it than we have, get to bully us and the people we view who have less of it than we have, we either don't care about or choose to bully onto.

And then there are degrees of bullying.

It seems to me in this world of bullies, it's up to us as parents to give our kids huge healthy doses of self esteem. And how does that happen? Praise, true and honest from our heart. It's looking for their good qualities and abilities, recognizing them and helping them grow and build them. It's praising them more for what they do right. And when we catch them doing something wrong, we can correct them without demoralizing them. It's loving them for who they are completely, voicing that, and creating an environment where love is felt. And doing it from the day they are born. If we do this in love and with the right intent, I believe they can grow up with a sense of self esteem, but also with humility.

We take pride in their achievements, but we should also take pride in their failures for that's where their learning and growth gets its strength. As parents sometimes we expect victory in every act. That's a great expectation that will hurt everyone involved.

I think of my girls and their teams and the moms pushing to have their daughters be the best and be the captain and then the girls who are captains are the tyrants and the bullies. They will hold themselves in such high esteem, they never realize that nobody else does. In the frenzy to have it all, we forget we are walking

a tightrope and balance is the key to handling it well. In this case that, in my mind, would be self confidence and humility.

Without the self confidence, it would be very easy to get bullied, people can spot that a mile away, we would never ever stand up for ourselves, never claim what's ours or try to negotiate, just take whatever the other person dishes out. Take the abuse so long that it results in even lower self esteem. We have to think pretty highly of ourselves to go up against a bully, but once they have us down, it's nearly impossible to dredge up enough confidence to have a go at them. And that's when bullying gets really nasty.

Imagine holding your new precious baby in your arms. The love is lavish and instant. And we look at that beautiful innocent baby, say a prayer and promise them everything. From that moment on we will do anything, fight anybody, climb any mountain to bring that amazing baby happiness and an easy life. But then life gets in the way. The baby starts to toddle around and doesn't hold on to our leg as long. Pretty soon they toddle off and find their own fun. We get busy. We forget to look and hold and protect. We ignore their insecurities and some of their needs. We have more things to worry about than we ever imagined, and we think they're doing okay. Sometimes we forget to notice. Or maybe we notice, but we don't ask.

After seeing the movie "Bully", it left me with the over-riding thought that we are all to blame. And we are all looking for someone else to blame. The parents were going to the school for help, the school administrators seemed to shrug it off and send them home. The parents asked their son what was going on. And when he didn't say anything, they grilled him, warned him that he better stand up for himself, acted disgusted and let it go. When all I wanted to see them do was take him in their arms and tell him how much they loved him and how important and wonderful he was in their lives. Instead of building him up, I got the impression they were bullying him too.

Then when they found out how bad the bullying was, they went to the school, the mom and dad and their two little children. The mom explained what was happening, the dad said not a word the whole time and then the administrator they talked with got up and walked them out when they were obviously not finished. The parents were bullied by the administration, an administration that was probably pointing the finger back at them.

Is this why the problem of bullying goes on and on, gets worse and worse and never gets solved? We all think it's up to somebody else to fix. We have the power to do something. And somebody needs to stand up and bully the bullies.

Who ends up being a bully? Kids who are bullied at home. Kids who are unhappy or bored or ignored at home. Kids who have an over inflated ego and think they are better than others. It has to be something at home that influences that. Maybe they watch their parents be bullies. There are plenty of those, boy do I know!

And so maybe the bullies are victims too. The statistics do point to the fact that most bad bullies end up in big trouble with the law when they are older, so they are going down a bad path. It is in their best future interest that somebody can stop and correct them.

They say that the best thing a bully victim can do is stand up for themselves. This has worked for a lot of people, but yet it seems like a very difficult task when the kids being bullied are already feeling inferior and weaker. And that's exactly why it leads to the dramatic kind of Columbine event when the bullied kids get their fill and take action.

When we stand up for ourselves it seems better to do it early when the bully takes his first strike. That would put an end to it especially when done with confidence and ego. Those are the two absolute qualities needed. And they're needed before the bully can destroy them.

I was thinking the other day of what it is in somebody that draws the bullies to harass them, because some people just seem like more of a target. So I think, well they'd never target a star athlete especially in a brute sport like football. They'd never target somebody who works out all the time and is physically stronger. They probably wouldn't target someone who is pretty good looking and buff. They are looking for what's weak in a person, not what's strong.

And then I think about Tim Tebow who's been a star football player all his life. He works out and works hard to be better than his peers. He's handsome. He's famous. So why is he the most harassed, tormented and bullied person in sports? I mean really, he is bullied by broadcasters, coaches, athletes, fans, writers, photographers, any and everybody in the football arena or any sports arena or even in the world in general.

People love to see others succeed, they just don't like them to succeed too much. We watch star after star, athlete after athlete, singer after singer, famous person after famous person rise high in the eyes of society and then boom. Either through a mistake made or something they say or a belief they have, somebody doesn't like it and the destruction of the person through the media and through our individual conversations, we bring them down. Like crabs in a pot, we don't cheer too long for their success before we're pulling them down so we can look taller and better.

I don't understand why the media and the public have it in for Tim Tebow. I don't see the same flaws they see. But for whatever reason they don't want him on

the playing field. They bully him endlessly and in the most ridiculous ways. We cheer on other people who break barriers and do what's never been done before. But for some reason they taunt Tim Tebow, he's too tall, too muscular, too religious, too physical, too whatever to be a good quarterback. Yet from what I've seen, he looks better than most of the quarterbacks out there.

What I hate about bullies is their ability to rally a crowd. The crowd may not even agree with them, but they're there to support them. It seems like it's the sports media that has generated this story about Tim Tebow, they fuel it and flaunt it and convince their loyal fans that they're right and pretty soon, he gets harassed just for showing up. Anybody can be bullied.

It's not pretty.

We kinda have a thing for bullies. We're drawn to shows on TV where people pour out their talent and then have to listen to people judge them. We even like to side with the meaner judges as though mean means right. It's an interesting tendency to study.

If our tendency as a society is to believe and follow and side with the bullies, then how are we going to stop bullying in the schools and anywhere else? How can we threaten bullies to stop bullying when they turn around and watch it successfully happen on TV?

How can we solve a problem that so many people are proud of? If we hold the bullies in esteem and peg the bullied to being less than, this is a problem that can only grow.

My thoughts are running in a vicious circle and there are still a million and one things to be said. The bullies, the bullied and the sheep that follow. Who are you? Who am I?

On the tightrope.

Self confidence...humility.

And a little bit of mercy can go a long way.

“Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized.” ~Margaret Atwood



Building Healthy Kids

Just because we're cooking dinner at home doesn't mean it's healthy. And just because we drive through McDonald's doesn't mean it's unhealthy. Just because we send lunch to school for our kids doesn't mean they're eating it. And just because we don't buy candy doesn't mean they aren't getting it somewhere. Our best laid plans don't always work out the way we planned!

And don't I know it! My first big food shock with my kids was making a nice lunch for them, placing it beautifully on a table with matching placemat and dishes and little kid silverware and then watching them not eat it. It was lunchtime for me, but they weren't hungry! So I thought I'd let that lunch sit until they were hungry. It rarely worked, they had minds of their own and they wanted to pick their own delicacies to eat.

So is the woe of trying to handle somebody else's eating habits, even at that young age. How could I possibly have thought I could handle somebody else's healthy food selections when I can hardly handle my own.

And that may be the key, fix our own first.

I know moms who've had to make major diet changes for their children's health and they took total charge and did it well and then taught their child to do

it too. I think about those moms and think, wow that is a lot of work! Is our main problem as moms (trying to feed our children) that it's too much work?

Too much work to work out calorie counts. Too much work to work out ingredients and inventorying them. Too much work to set a dinner time and have everybody get there at once.

Really all of these things have been very difficult for me, starting with my husband's work schedule. He's a little bit more regular now on the time he arrives home in the evening, but for years I never knew if he would be called into a last minute meeting, have a late change of plans and have to rework his whole day late into the evening. For me to meal plan was outrageous. I know because I gallantly tried it a few times. I'd plan a week of meals and end up discarding meat that had rotted in the fridge waiting to be cooked. It was easier to add up who was home and buy directly for them. In the early days when the house was full of babies and toddlers, they didn't eat much anyway. We ate light.

As the kids got old enough to enroll in activities, it just so happened that they were all always scheduled at night. All the kids, all the activities, all the nights and everyone coming and going at all times, when could I have dinner hot & ready for all? Pretty impossible. My best bet was always the crockpot, but that involved planning as much as a day ahead. Sounds easy, but it's not. When I could manage that, that worked out the best.

But just because I'm cooking dinner at home instead of doing what's easy and driving through somewhere, doesn't mean really that it's one bit healthier. It also doesn't mean it's cheaper. If I can buy a dozen tacos at Taco Bell for \$10 and feed my family, that's something that I couldn't achieve buying the ingredients in the store and taking an hour to make them myself at home.

And what's this whole organic thing we're all so buzzed about? It used to be that everything was organic. Now it's only organic if it's raised on a family farm somewhere. But how do I know when I'm in the store if the lettuce in my hand is really organic or just marked up in price? How do I know the loader guy put the organic products in the right slot? That's a lot of trusting going on!

The best information I've ever gotten on dieting was to eat things with the fewest ingredients, so an apple is great, applesauce gets a little more dicey, apple pie a la mode with whipped cream and sprinkles gets even more suspect.

I also believe that what you eat the most is what you crave the most. When I'm eating m&m's, chips and brownies, those are the things I crave. If I eat dessert on a regular basis, I expect and need dessert on a regular basis. If I start eating salads every day for lunch, pretty soon that's what I look for at lunchtime, a salad. I don't know if that's more inherent to my nature or if everybody is a bit like that. We tend to find the things we like though and go back again & again for them.

I picked up dinner last night from Chick fil A. I know, I know, that was the easy route, but since I've taken that route many times before, I didn't even need to ask what everyone wanted. We all crave what we usually order when we go there. I came home with 3 chicken sandwiches, no pickles, 2 spicy chicken sandwiches, no pickles, 1 chicken salad sandwich, and a large chicken soup. So is my family like me because I've taught them this, or again, is it human nature to crave what we're used to?

My husband and I have been on countless diets and countless forays into healthier eating and I've gotta say those took total attention and took over our lifestyle. It was so much work, we quickly gave in. My husband has tried this more often than I and I find it easier to focus on his health than both of ours. Mine is just too much to worry about. On top of it, the kids are not interested in fish and salad

every night. They have gotten to the point where they will eat a lot of different things, but the things they like best are the least healthy.

That's when healthy becomes a bad word and a turn off...more expensive, yukky tasting and non-filling.

But we just found out about something that so far has been working for us! It's a system of shakes that you can drink and substitute for any number of meals, the more meals you substitute for the better the outcome. But these shakes are chock full of the vitamins we need for energy and optimal health. In less than 2 weeks my husband lost 21 pounds. It's coming off far slower for me, but I've been eating badly for a long time and being an aging female the fact that I'm losing anything at all is amazing.

Now instead of buying frappucino's and rooting around for chocolate, the shakes substitute beautifully. I feel satisfied. I get what I want.

And when it comes to the kids, they're older now. They have their own cravings and attitudes about eating. No matter what I have in the house to eat, it's not good enough. If I have fruits and veggies and breads to snack on, they want cookies and brownies and yogurt. If I have the reverse items in the house, they are looking for the fruit and veggies. They are teenagers and even when it comes to food, everything I do is wrong.

I'm feeling a sense of relief that they can find their own food and be responsible for their own health. I may not have given them a brilliant start to health, but who knows. They may see where I went wrong and right the ship. Or if I had been good and faithful and healthy all along and then set them free only to discover m&m's, all my direction could be caught up in the wind. They are their

own people. They will learn and discover themselves, compare it to what we did and learned and discover, hopefully, what works best for them. We have them for a short time, they suffer from our shortcomings, but all too soon the decision is there's. We learn from the good and the bad, what we like and what we don't like. We will always be our own persons.

There is a good quote out there that speaks to when we are young we risk our health to create our wealth. Then when we are old, we spend our wealth to regain our health. Maybe we can work on both of those together.

These are the decisions we make.



Building Something Big

The playing field is leveling!

Less than a decade ago, there was no way a radio station would put a mom show on the air. They hired professional talkers to play tunes and keep their audience entertained and they paid huge corporate salaries to these people. There were lawyers and agents involved and the paychecks got higher, advertising costs skyrocketed and only the hugest of all companies could really afford to advertise their products or services!

And even they got tired of paying the price. Agencies who buy media managed the money and got their 15+%. Lots of money, lots of middle men and only the big and rich could play.

The playing field is leveling.

Enter the mom force. Moms who want to work, need to work to help support their families and want to do it in their own hours, from their own homes or away in their own time are either finding companies who will hire them to work from home or they're starting their own businesses and running them in the available hours they have while raising their families.

We started to talk to each other with our blogs, to share our experiences, our pictures, our day. More and more moms started to do this and more and more of us began to focus our blogs on our interests and our strengths, recipes or organization or design or party planning, or health, fitness, fashion, home and garden. You name it and we are focusing our blogging on that.

The playing field is leveling.

No longer do we look to the big TV stations for the dreaded news of the day, we share our days with others like us, who we relate to and who respond back to us. Technology which only corporations with big budgets could afford suddenly became affordable (sort of) for the average family and now with smart phones and apps and laptops and wifi, we can take our work anywhere and do it anytime. The technology only gets better and it's very accessible for all. And a little movement called social networks rose from nowhere and dominate our lives, marketing and businesses.

Where once there were three TV stations in a market, now with cable, there are hundreds. And now with the internet anyone can create a television show and put it out there. Same with radio. Same with the newspapers. People would rather touch base through Facebook or Twitter or Pinterest. The choices and the places to go for information are endless and with the right idea and a little luck, we all have a better chance to succeed.

So it makes more and more sense for us entrepreneurial spirits out there to set up shop and start some kind of business for ourselves! In a lot of ways we really can play with the big guys. They can still squash our dreams. But we can still start over.

And then for us moms there's been a long and historic argument and dilemma of whether to work or whether to stay home and be the primary caretaker's for our kids. Do we want to live rich or do we want to live poor? Do we want to be the primary influence over our kid's development or farm it out to others? Whatever we chose made us wrong and set us up for ridicule and set us up for even questioning ourselves and our choices. A lot of doubt, frustration and angst compounded through generations.

Now in many cases we can have our cake and eat it too. Woohoo! Doesn't mean it's easy. Doesn't always mean that we'll have the high income that we want, but we have the chance. We have a touch of freedom and an opportunity for the kids to not look at us as the total disciplinary warden, but as a productive, creative, influential member of the work force, even if it is from a desk at home. So yet in another way we can be a positive influential example for them. That is if we conduct ourselves in a professional and positive manner.

I've been working at my own businesses since my first pregnancy. I was fortunate to be able to do some freelance work over the years and although it was lucrative, it was not very consistent. And with children, it was hard to get out and drum up more. It was a lot just to get dressed up and out before a mishap occurred.

The whole mom idea dawned on me around the time email came into being. I was still big on my past career in the television industry and the idea electrified me when I thought to put real moms on TV talking about their experiences raising kids and what went right and wrong and what was working and what was not. That was long before blog was in our vocabulary and long before any social networks rose to the surface. There was nothing that I knew about at that point that could connect and help moms feel like we had a place and that our job as moms was legitimate.

In sharing the idea, I certainly learned that most executives had no interest in moms and no idea that we would have anything important to say. Eventually, like a decade later, I was finally able to put a show on the air. It was a half hour long, aired on a local television station Monday through Friday for six months. At that time the trend in television had turned, few new and especially local programs were getting picked up unless we paid, not only for production but for airtime as well. With little advertising support and all my time and effort going to production, it seemed like a good time to re-evaluate.

But the proof was all around us that moms had something to say and wanted to talk about it. It was happening in the creation of website after website and social network after social network. And then I found Toginet Radio where I was able to turn my television concept into a radio show. And so we continue!

Transforming my life. Transforming my family's lives. Transforming other's lives. That's why I started the whole mom thing in the first place. Take a look and join me in the fun. Catch the wave, you'll be so glad that you did!

Remember...the playing field is leveling...yes you can do it too, get in the game!



Writing: The Book

Very clearly I remember...the seed was planted when I was in 4th grade. We had to do a lot of creative writing that year and the teacher, along with others, determined that I was a pretty good writer. Never having heard before that I was good at anything, I decided that this might be what I must do! Haha!

Right away as I heard others read their writing, I thought, “hmmm does my work measure up? I don’t feel like my writing is any better. Do I need to write longer stuff, funnier stuff, more creative stuff, more practical stuff, stuff that means something, or stuff that makes you feel more? What in the world do I have in me to write that is better than what my classmates are writing?”

And so the love, hate, question, ponder, answer situation of writing was born for me. We all learn to write in school, so we all should have some ability at it. Is mine good enough to find some readers? Does anyone want to know what I have to say?

There is more stuff to read than any human can take in, so if someone spends time with my story, what a wonderful compliment. I love to read and everyday I pass up more stories than I can possibly take in.

Writing has always been hard work for me. Research was fun and amazing and again, my curiosity is always fulfilled in researching and learning, but to turn that experience around and rewrite it for school took hard work and many late nights and all nighters!

I went to college to major in fashion. Then when I was halfway through I realized I was either in the wrong college or the wrong industry. At the time, it seemed to make more sense to change industries, so when the counselor asked me what I was good at, I had to say writing, because that of course was the only thing I did that anyone else was talking about.

So she set me up for a class to learn to write obits! I excelled at that and thought my career was settled! Into various journalism and writing classes I went. Remember this stuff is hard for me, I am not a prolific or happy writer. It takes a lot of food to get me through a research project or a blog. It took me 2 years of constant all nighters to do all that writing, because of course I would fritter away the day and only have the night left. It was grueling and gruesome.

And so of course I also wrote for the university newspaper which was equally as hard as everything else. I had my weekly column and several stories a week to write. I hated this and I loved it. I'm sure every story I wrote was the very last one in, but I always made my deadlines with the best stuff I could think of to say!

And then EDITORS! What did these people know. Was it really their job to reword everything I put out there? Where is my story in there? Shouldn't they just have written it themselves? They took out all my personality, half my research and a good part of the points I was trying to connect along the way. Didn't they know that I spent hours & hours on that? I didn't pop it out during cooking class!

And then of course I had my cover stories when they told you it's the best thing we've got going this week! Hallelujah victory. Until I walked into a building that was being painted one day and wow-ee, the painter had all my cover stories open and laid out to protect the floor with his ladder and paint cans splat in the middle of it. I guess he didn't read the important story I spent 12 hours writing and some editor spent 40 seconds rearranging.

This of course caused me to wonder a few things.

So I graduate. (Another miracle). And now I better get a job, because my parents are done! And I need to survive. So I slurp up all the courage available in my world and call a few local newspapers. Hey do you need a writer? I'm a journalist now!

"Oh yes we do!" they would say. Which thrilled me to hear! This is easy. I'm going to get a job. Yippee! "Here's what you do," they tell me. "Just send us as many stories as you can. If we like them, we will use them and we will pay you \$10 for each." (It was probably \$2, but I exaggerate!)

Humph, well that doesn't sound like fun! I just wrote 800,000 articles for school and didn't particularly enjoy any of it. This is not going to get me my own place & space. Plus, what if I do all that writing and they don't like anything? What if I do all that writing and they publish it anyway? How would I even know?

So I got a job in TV where all I had to write was promos, press releases, etc. I specialized in ten second copy (30 words or less) or thirty second copy. Kinda like Facebook and Twitter! But back in the day, the pay was rotten! Especially for

women! The work was long and the reward was absent! It was fun though! But work work work all the time.

Early on my parents thought I might have a book in me and so my dad offered me \$100 to write a book. That looked like millions to my meager salary. But when I got to about page 20, I wore myself out. And I feared I was getting boring. Where was the story going? What was I doing? And I was working all the time and trying to get somewhere better than where I was. My energy was zapped.

But the idea was there. The need was there. There was even some potential there.

And so with the whole book thought came the whole publishing thought and how would I get accepted or find or link to someone who would give me the time of day and the opportunity? Since I couldn't answer that question the passion for the book really was overwhelmed with confusion.

Why would I do something (even though I feel compelled) that would torture me endlessly and that may result in nothing? And I don't have a niche that would help me get seen. I'm just a generic!

And more time goes on.

Now I'm married with children and have other interests and dreams and desires and have no time for any of that. Now there are so many things in my life that would be prioritized before writing a book, dedicating a year or two that still carries the possibility that nobody would read it or care, makes little sense. If it's

not to make money or help my family, why do it? It's the question that keeps the book from being written. It's the reason other tasks take priority.

Still I am possessed and obsessed.

And so I start to blog because I feel compelled. I am occasional, because writing for me is a lot of work (even on the fast days). Even with my infrequency, they pile up. And I like them. They contain a part of me, the slew of stuff circling around in my head. Slogging along a little bit at a time, somehow, someway there is enough there for a book. Who will read it? Don't know. But the work is done. And so that may be entry for me into the world of writing.

Part of my dilemma encompasses the everythingness of what I'm interested in. I have a huge mess of life experience to share and work with, there is no shortness there. I want to write fiction and non-fiction, screenplays and Christmas pageants. I want to cover subjects I know nothing about and subjects that follow me around all day! I don't know where to start or where to focus. I've left it too long and there's so much.

And now so much has changed since the beginning of my time, that I may have a chance. No longer am I or anybody else dependent on the whims of a publisher. We can self publish and send it out to the world in book form or digitally. Still doesn't mean that anyone will buy it, but it would get out there. And now there are ways, we don't have to pay thousands for a radio or television spot, to get the word out, because social media is our new best friend should something happen to go viral. And if that happens all the others will come in to check it out.

Is this the best blog I can write? Yep, right at the moment. If I wait until tomorrow it will be totally different. But you got me now and this is my story!



Time to Change

You can't start the New Year without discussing the NEW you! I mean don't all those New Year's resolutions center around fixing ourselves? The thing that's hard about thinking about the new me, is that the old me is so firmly ensconced! Apparently I like the old me well enough to keep it going, because the New Year is not the only time to make changes. I think that's the simplest way of analyzing why it's so hard. We settle into habits (good or bad or mediocre) and we kinda like it there. So how do we shake things up and make a change?

How do we even know it's time to change?

Sometimes that answer is obvious, it may still be hard to admit, but it's obvious. Maybe the baby weight we've gained and kept on for 8 years is starting to cause problems, maybe there's never enough money in the account to make it to the next paycheck, maybe we're not physically fit enough to keep up with our active children, maybe we don't cook enough, clean enough, or we're in a dead end job that we dislike more and more every year.

Maybe we're dissatisfied enough to take action. Or maybe we're like the dog sitting on a nail and howling. Well if it hurts so much, get up, get out of the situation, take action, feel better and quit howling!

What are we howling about that we're not taking action on? Who do we complain to and what are we complaining about? Isn't that the best way to identify what our problems are? What are we saying out loud? Put it on paper and write out an action plan. Being a visual person, I like to see a picture. I like to create a scenario I can see of all the things I want to do and change.

Where do we want to vacation to? What do we want to wear day to day? How do we want to look in those clothes? What do we want our home to look like? How can we organize all the activities and things around us to create a better atmosphere?

In the days of old, I'd tear pictures from magazines and hang them all around or montage them on a poster. But now there's pinterest and all the ideas from all the moms and people looking for ideas & answers and sharing them with the world! Five minutes on pinterest and I can work out a week's worth of (healthy) meals, see the latest styles in clothing, hair and anything else, find 40 fun things for my kids to do, get some new books to read, organize my home or my life, get decorating or arranging ideas, new trinkets or gadgets for the house AND enough motivational quotes to walk away fed & happy. There's an answer to almost anything. And if you don't like the first answer, there's six more ideas to choose from, take a pick!

And how does all of this tie into being the right example for our kids? Well if we say, over & over "I'm fat and I need to lose weight," and then go load up a brownie with ice cream, we are sending a very strange message. If we sign them up for football and set them on a vicious road of workouts and lay around all day ourselves, we've gotta leave them wondering. If we scream at them to clean up their room and their dirty dishes and we're tripping over our own mess, certainly they will lift an eyebrow. It amazes me how often we complain about the poor decisions our kids are making, when all we have to do is turn around and look at ourselves.

My husband & I were always very conscious of the quality of the language we used around our young kids. One day we were celebrating our daughter's 6th birthday with a handful of her little friends at Disney on Ice. When it was over we managed to herd them all to the car and as my husband pulled out of his parking space, he realized he'd turned in the wrong direction. A litany of expletives flew from his lips & as my eyeballs bulged in horror that not only our kids were listening, but so were the friends, as I'm pounding on the side of his arm, I hear one of the little friends begin her own litany of expletives! Wowie zowie, she outdid my husband. I nearly choked trying not to laugh out loud. Where does a kindergartener learn those kind of words? If not from the parents, it's whoever the parents allow them to be around, and that's pretty much the same thing. That's a habit to change even for a few influential years.

But how many times do we let something go because we think our kids are so young it's not going to affect them. Everything we do or say and every action that we take is the primary example they will follow. We can say and scream and holler and stomp and lose our voice over the lesson, but if we're not doing what we tell them to do, it's a wasted message.

I guess that's why it's so important to take a look at our own bad habits, try to make a mid-course correction, improve our own lives and in doing so set a proper, helpful example for the little eyes that are watching us.

That's why I like the idea of challenging ourselves. In a few short months, we can right the ship, develop a new healthier, happier habit, have it set in motion and move on to the next correction. We are human and can never be perfect, but we can all be better. Nip away at those things, we all know what our "things" are...they're what we're talking about to others.

And if by chance the New Year gets away from us, there's always a new month or a new day, just focus and start!



The School Report

We say this every August using the very same words in the very same way. “Where did the summer go? I can’t believe school is starting already. Can you believe it?” Well believe it, that summertime feeling has melted and it’s time to go back.

The teachers & administration are ready. The kids are ready. And we moms are really really ready. No matter how great the summer was, nothing surpasses the greatness of getting the noisy kids out of the house with a clean school slate and fresh new clothes. We swipe our forehead with relief! Every one of our five senses is in tune and knows that glorious feeling.

In fact we feed them, wash them and dress them up in the best of their new clothes, set them in front of the door, the wall, a tree and snap up this year’s back to school photo. Facebook went wild when all our kids went back. Even people who have kids starting school later were posting to tell us why their picture wasn’t posted yet.

So with a mixture of jubilation, pride and hysterical relief we send them on their way. So how helicoptery are we as parents sending our kids off? Yesterday my older daughter and I pulled into our subdivision and right away she asks me, “what’s that lady doing sitting there by the sidewalk?” Her voice held that mixture of what an oddball and maybe she needs help. “The bus,” I said, “she’s waiting for her kid to come home on the bus.” “But,” my daughter replies, “it’s the third week of school.”

Well you can never be too careful, there is stranger danger out there. How different are our lives these days than when we were kids? I can't ever remember my mom worrying about where I was and we didn't stay close. But it does beg the question of how much hovering is too much getting our kids to and from school? How much picture taking and posting is too much? Are we embarrassing our kids?

School shopping was the best tradition when I was growing up. My mom would take us downtown and we looked at everything there was to buy, up and down the escalator, from one store to the next, and lunch out, a big deal in my day. We'd get a few things and then end up at the local mall. Because it was one of those standout childhood things for me, I wanted to make it special for my kids. But with five kids, we had to do things differently...every year. The tradition turned out to be that they each had some special time with me, got pampered and fed, dolled up and waltzed home with a small fortune in clothes, shoes and accessories. How can we not love that?

The thing I always liked about going back to school was the fresh start. What I didn't like was screwing up that fresh start in the first five minutes. My kids are much better than me at the school game, they get it, play it and do pretty well.

Here's to a great school year ahead...for us all!



The College Factor

The kids are off to college! Yes that was kids! Two of them. And yes the first one leaves home this week and the second one leaves eight days later. The bank account is screaming. We don't know whether to woo-hoo or cry in our soup. It's a big, slobbery, mushy gushy mountain of moments full of all kinds of different emotions from pride to impatience, joy to gloom, heart-breaking, heart soaring, hearts pounding & parting...moments. Our babies are leaving home.

I remember the slow moving, lazy hazy time of newborn-ness. I thought that baby would never fall asleep, much less learn to walk & talk. And school seemed like decades off. Every motion and emotion seemed in slow motion. And now in a loud shocking finger snap, they're out, off, away on their own. Living their own life. Following their own rules. Making choices that you aren't forcing them toward. How do you like that mama?

Yikes, if I had believed that small thought then, when they were babes in arms, how would my motherhood pattern have changed? Would I have relished those long, draggy days realizing they were vanishing down a cliff? Would I have been more loving, giving, grateful? Would I have spent more time teaching than preaching? More time leading than screaming?

What will be the result of my actions now that they are relatively free of me?

Because I'm beginning to believe that what they do in college when they're away from me is directly, irrepressibly related to what I did with them when they were watching me. And I think it goes both ways in terms of leadership and strictness verses allowing them to do...whatever. The roller coaster is nice and fun, but it gets you nowhere, there might be something to be said for the "happy medium". The constant. The steady. The rock.

Something solid, a foundation that isn't built in sinking sand, that's strong and sturdy and irreplaceable. That's what I want, as a mom, to build for my child, so that no matter what happens from here on out in their life, that they will always know they have a place to go and a heart that loves them so. That they will know that not every try is a success, all of us fumble and fuddle through parts of our life, living is about learning whether in school or out. That's why my kids are in college, not just to mark time to adulthood, but to learn in that time, how to learn and how to continue to learn when there are no longer teachers to hound, schedule and grade. The world is changing and it's not an institution that will motivate us to keep up with it, it's what we find within us while we are there that will stay with us and keep us changing and moving and learning. That is the goal anyway.

So as two leave home once again, we are still influencing the three behind them as they line up for their turn at college. We are really enjoying watching the interaction between all the kids in their ages and stages and differing connections with one another. Way cool, and well worth any effort we put in.

My heart soars for them and for my husband and me. We made it. We feel good about it. We are ready. Victory.



The Obesity Epidemic Blog

There are so many factors that go into whether we are overweight or underweight or obese, that it really is unfair to even comment on them. I, for one, have a very long laundry list of reasons that my body is no longer the perfect shape or the perfect weight. And sometimes I allow those reasons to continue to shape the way I look.

And then there's comparisons that we as women constantly make (whether it has to do with weight or not) where the yeah buts come in. One mom who lost a lot of weight said, "I never thought I could do it after having so many kids, I thought I would never lose the weight." And I'm thinking, "yeah but, I had more kids, more pregnancies, I'm older, busier, have more commitments", blah,blah,blah,blah, blah. And the more these things happen, the more embedded my excuses become, until those become my mantra.

"Well yes, you can be skinny because you had your two kids in your 20's and my five didn't come until my 40's."

"Yeah but, your husband's always been skinny and so it's easy for you."

"We're just trying to survive, I'm too busy working to cook, it's just easier to drive through. The kids just have such crazy schedules."

“Yeah but, you grew up eating right, I come from a culture of big eaters.”

“And you know, the party is always at my house and what’s a party without yummy food.”

“Yeah but, I’m not the fattest person in the world, there is always somebody bigger than me.”

And so it goes, the rationalization will do us in every time. It allows us to be what we are and stay where we stay.

How do we get out of this situation? Sometimes it really takes just hitting rock bottom. Finding out our health is tanking because of our bad habits. Looking at a picture of ourselves and being surprised at our size. Actually having somebody tell us what we need to do. And that last one, well all of them actually, can work both ways. We can either say, “I give up” or “I am going to do something about this.”

If we do nothing and expect a change that’s insane by Einstein’s definition: “Insanity is doing the same thing over & over again & expecting different results.”

The thing I’ve found when I decide to do something, I will not stick to it unless I am desperate. So I really have to see myself as that really fat person in the mirror. I grew up on the skinny side, I was a young adult on the skinny side, I had my career on the skinny side, I found my husband on the skinny side, I wasn’t even too bad during my first pregnancy. But then a couple things caught up with me, age, and pregnancy after pregnancy, multiple kids with extreme medical situations,

trying to work & hold down a job, constant stress, never much sleep. I would eat not only to stay awake, but because I was always awake. That eight hours of sleep at least gives us that eight hours of time where we're not fighting the fridge. And then all of a sudden all those good excuses give way to a huge habit that's hard to back away from.

Meanwhile, even though life has gone on, I am still in my mind that skinny person I've always been. I still go for those skinny fitting clothes in the catalog thinking they'll look good on me. I still think I can have that big buffet, or the m&m's, or the dessert, because in my head, I am not fat.

I wish there was a magic pill that would take away the years of abuse. And I wish there was another magic pill that would take away any future cravings and future abuse. And I guess there are pills and there are surgeries and even if we can afford the expense, they must come with major change or we'll be right back where we started.

To lose weight or change anything in our life, we have to come up with a plan, and work with that plan and stick with it, even if we want to eat the whole plate of muffins because it was a hard day. We have to walk away. This really is a life style, it is not a back & forth thing. Because in my experience whenever I go back, I keep going back and hardly ever forth. And pretty soon back is my norm.

Even the best diets (lifestyle, whatever term works) can only work with being good in between. Here's a few things that I have found have worked for me in the past.

1 Get out of the house – Even if the food in the house isn't what I really want to eat, I will still gravitate toward it and eventually will turn into a machine eating whatever I can find.

2 Funny, in the mall I will always walk past those Cinnabon places and cookie counters never having the urge to buy any of it. But when the “diet” is on, I notice and WANT it all. All I need to do is remind myself that I never buy this stuff anyway and it's easier to walk right by.

3 Working out is good for our health and it does burn off some calories, but really to lose weight 80% is in the food we eat. I like working out because it gets me out of the house and away from the food, the longer the better.

4 Since I like to snack, I try to buy healthier type snacks or things that will fill me up so I can stop thinking about it and move on. An apple a day is still a good thing.

5 It helps me to drink more water. The drinking part helps fill me up a little and just gives me that something to do I'm used to.

6 The dinner habit of being the major meal is really hard to break with a big family that's gone all day and comes home hungry, so I use that to keep me good during the day and look forward to something really good & special at night.

7 If I can cheat one meal during the week, I have that to look forward to and I don't feel so guilty since the rest of the time I'm sticking to it.

8 Stop eating everything the kids don't. That was my huge downfall in the beginning of it all. It didn't seem like all that much, but it adds up crazily.

9 Hang out with skinny friends, it makes me want to look like them.

10 Don't write blogs. They make me want to eat my way through it and they don't keep me moving.

And so now my mantra is move more, eat less. It will help when it comes time to clean the house and I don't want to. I just read an interesting article (I wish I knew where) where they've now decided that any movement is exercise and it all

counts now. Remember how it had to be an aerobic 20 minutes to be useful. I am thinking this new finding could help me be more motivated.

It's all a choice. It takes 30 days to break a habit. Don't focus on the bad habit, focus and think about the good habit we want to start. If I've learned anything, it's that what we think about is what we will do automatically. So it pays to dwell on what you want, put the blinders on and focus in.

I have some obesity facts & opinions to share:

- 1 Every year the average North American eats 180 pounds of sugar, drinks 168 liters of soda, and spends \$2000 on fast food/junk food.
- 2 More than 1/3rd of adults are obese.
- 3 Doctors know nothing about nutrition.
- 4 We don't provide health care in America, we provide sick care.
- 5 Obesity is the #1 epidemic in America.
- 6 24 million children in the U.S. and Canada are obese.
- 7 \$4.2 billion per year is spent by the fast food industry, 1.6 billion of which is targeted toward kids.
- 8 The average teenager eats 4 pounds of sugar a week.
- 9 \$190 billion goes into treating obesity, half of which is taxpayer money.
- 10 \$175 million is spent by lobbyists to hide the problem of obesity.
- 11 Obesity will cost our society 1 trillion by 2030.

“Truly the greatest gift you have is that of your own self transformation.”

~Lao Tzu



Newborn News

New baby = a new me, right?

Almost everything changes in our life in a 180 sort of way. As much as we think we're ready for it, we are not! Go ahead and memorize the baby books. Read up and read on, but no way we'll be ready because there are surprises and surprises on top of surprises. That doesn't mean that we won't love motherhood, it just means it won't go the way we think!

And haha lalala away we go anyway, blissfully. Because that's the way it seems everybody else does it. Everybody makes it look so easy, like there's nothing to it. For jillions of centuries it's been done, it's gotta be a piece of cake, if they can do it, we can do it, how hard can it be, drop a baby and go on with life!

Well all that we will do! And when that greatest gift is placed in our arms we are forever changed, in a very happy way, a very forever way and a most instantaneous way. The nurse was holding my firstborn when he started to cry, "here you go," she says as she casts him my way. "Don't give him to me," I'm thinking, "What am I supposed to do with him?" I always gave crying babies back to their mothers. Oh but now I am the mother and the responsibility is mine. Holy bejeebers, really?

And that's only the first brush of reality, there's a new brush with it almost everyday and I'm telling you age 18 is not the end, it is only a new beginning. But we're in babyhood now and that's where we'll stay. I will say though that even with two or three or many more babies, it doesn't cancel the surprises. Sure there's some things that we're expecting, that we're waiting to have happen. Sometimes those things happen and sometimes they don't, every baby's different and each set of circumstances around that birth and around our family are different. Some things we forget and OMG how could I have forgotten that? And then some things happen that haven't happened before. Surprises, always surprises and how well we survive depends on how well we roll with it!

One of the first surprises after giving birth is that we still look pregnant. If we aren't holding that baby in our arms most people will think we're still pregnant. I think I wore my pregnancy clothes for about six months after the baby was born and I think that's really how long it takes the uterus to shrink back where it belongs. Don't watch the superstars, they have the money to go to extremes!

Nobody talks about the gory details after the delivery, but all moms face pain, tiredness, weakness, crazy hormones switching around, engorged breasts, nursing pains, etc. Everyone expects us to be at our best right when conditions are pointing us at our worst, yet we are expected to be able to entertain while we are juggling all these new duties and our emotions which we thought would be just fine are not fine at all. Just ask any innocent Dad who thinks we are back to normal!

As our baby grows, we get a little more familiar with the routine and the baby's rhythms and needs. And every time we catch up with something the baby is doing, it gets ahead of us again and we have to re-figure what's going on and how we can best get through it. Get used to it though, because that will happen all the way through life with them.

My sister who went before me into motherhood did a neat thing. Each month she sent me a new small gift for the baby that was spot on appropriate for his age. She also called me a (suspicious) lot during the first weeks. Why didn't she warn me I always wondered. But now I know why, I wouldn't have believed it. I would have thought it was some deficiency in her that wasn't in me, that I could overcome.

That's why we have kids and more kids. Because we think we'll do better the next time, we've got the drill, we've got the swagger, we've got this baby thing down. But all it takes is that one small curve ball to know there's definite difficulty in the baby days!

Luckily babies are babies and they don't know how dependent they are and how scary it is to put everything in their life in somebody else's hands...even those with capable hands. Think about that one! No really stop, think about it, what would it be like to have to have that kind of trust in someone?

Who would you trust to do everything for you? Lift you, move you in & out, strap you in, drive you, feed you when you're hungry, change you, dress you, clip your nails without clipping the skin, keep you warm enough, secure enough, dry enough, comfortable enough. Get you to the doctor when you're supposed to go, magically know whatever it is you're asking for even though it's in the universal language of whaaa, entrust you in the arms of other people, teach you to walk & talk and get along. Who would you trust? It's a good thing they don't know the potential for the danger they're in!

Let's think about that as we're swinging our baby around or when we're in a super hurry.

So if we're thinking all will be swell and all will be well and it doesn't go that way, take heart, that's the way it's always gone for just about everybody before us. We just try not to make it look that way! Join the motherhood. It's easy. LOL.



The Experience of Being a Teen Mom

The concept of children having children is nothing new. This has been going on since the beginning of time. It's not only the concept of children having children, but women having children in the absence of men. Perhaps the only thing that has changed is our attitude toward it. And even so, considering the vast number of years that have gone by, we haven't advanced all that far. Women are still alone in the matter and ostracized.

Why do women (girls) bully each other? Why are we so interested in looking down on someone else when we feel like they've done the wrong thing? No mom wants their child to get pregnant as a teen. It's a disaster in the making. The flow of life we're expecting shifts in an uncertain and scary direction. Continuing education has to be dealt with, family arrangements have to be rearranged, money is a concern, who lives where and who's in charge. A lot of decisions we don't anticipate or worry about have to be faced and decided on. But, hello! We all make mistakes and this is the child we love and adore, I cannot for the life of me think of turning my back on my child when maybe they would need my help the most. I may not agree with their activities that led them to an early pregnancy, but if that should happen, I would also have to examine the deficiencies in me that may have led them down that path.

I was not particularly surprised that kids may be mean to pregnant students, though again it's the girl that faces that adversity, the boy involved can pretty

much disappear in the crowd. It's the girl that gets jeered or pointed at or loses their friends. It didn't even so much surprise me that the teachers were difficult and condescending. I didn't ask the question, but I would be willing to bet that the worst ones were the female teachers. We're women and so many of us feel it is our right and our obligation to pull each other down. What did surprise me, that I hadn't thought about was the reaction of the parents of friends. Morgan said she lost a lot of her friends because their parents didn't want them to be around her any more. What? Do they think pregnancy is contagious?

No of course not. They are afraid their daughter will follow her friend's lead. They think that by remaining friends with this pregnant teenager that they will engage in the same scandalous activities. Hello dumbell, with you as a parent, they probably already are. In fact, the girl that is now pregnant, may have been following your child's lead.

On the radio show I told the story of a long ago acquaintance of mine who had a young teenage son and every time he left the house, she would taunt him and leave him with her great advice, "keep your pants on." I actually was horrified when I heard her say that. It sounded like a challenge! What I neglected to tell you was the continuation of that story. Before he was out of high school, he had 2 or 3 girls pregnant. Yeah, he must have heard that as a challenge too. As parents we need to be careful what we tell our children NOT to do, because the words that follow that, are truly often what they will follow.

Another surprise that still stuns me is the reaction of the boys who are the fathers. In nearly every case, they are MIA. They have no obligation, no sense of fatherhood, no desire to be any kind of presence in the baby's life. Sure they may show up from time to time, but not to help, not to contribute, not to make a difference. Again, this is the girl's responsibility and her family's if they are willing to help. But what about the boy's family, surely they know what has happened, that they are biological grandparents, that their child runs from their

responsibility. Why don't they step up? They are on the run as well. Really. Are we in America so poverty stricken that we are afraid to contribute? Are these parents afraid they will be into child care expenses for the next decades? Is that why they hide? Or do their sons who were so eager for sex feel they can turn their backs because that's what their parents have always done and have taught them to do?

It takes two. Yes? Then why does our society perpetuate the idea that men should not be responsible? Why do parents breathe a sigh of relief when it was a son involved and not a daughter? Why do we as parents think, "thank God it happened to her daughter and not mine?" Why do people feel that they have the right to judge and cause those they judge to feel shame? Does it change anything? Does it help anything?

Again, teen pregnancies are no surprise to anyone. Not one of us can say we didn't know somebody in our high school who was pregnant. Of all the generations in my family, we all knew somebody and the more recent generations have known many such somebody's. When Valerie spoke about her pregnancy so long ago, her parents sent her away, which is what people did in those days. Something that happened to countless people all these generations and people were still embarrassed. And even though we've come a long way in the last 30-40 years, it's like we've come no where at all.

Almost a decade ago, my husband got an email from a woman asking if he was related to three or four individuals who were long deceased. Yes in fact they were his grandparents and an aunt. Turns out he has a long lost cousin Mary who was born to his aunt in the 1930's(?). His aunt was young and single and her family sent her away to have the baby. She then had the baby adopted and she went back to her regular life. Seventy or so years later that baby's daughter in law (who also gave a baby up for adoption) said to Mary, "I will help you find your family."

And she did. The family of Mary's mother has opened their arms to her and she to them. The family of the father still denies it. The father.

Yes, nowadays mother's are more likely to keep their teenagers in school and send them back again after the baby is born. The teenage girl's family is more likely to support her and help her through school. People are more likely to keep the baby in the family.

Another surprise for me is that two young moms who were on the show had their moms die while they were pregnant. To me that seems like the worst possible scenario. No matter what age we are when we get pregnant, we all want to lean on our own moms for advice and help along the way. Unbelievably, the dads still weren't much of a factor. While they may have supported a bit financially, what they said was, "This is your problem, not mine. You need to step up and be responsible. Your life is over." For Kaylene that was motivating, she wanted to prove him wrong. But for a lot of girls young and pregnant without a mom, this would be devastating. Basically the men bowed out, even when it was their own child. Sounds familiar. Leave it to the women. Which leads to the question of why are men so afraid of children?

I'm glad that we're to a point now where women will say. I can do it. It may not be easy, but I will hold my head up and step forward and do what I need to do, whether it's alone or with help. This is not going to destroy my life, this IS my life and I will make it good. I will find a way.

And my little tidbits of advice:

- 1 Discover the mom you are. Watch the good moms. Follow their example. You can also learn from moms who are doing it badly and avoid their mistakes.

2 Don't let people make you feel shame. People will make you feel shame for anything and everything. No matter what you do, someone will try to make you feel stupid for doing it. Avoid those people, don't let them get to you.

3 Dreams are good, they give you hope and a direction. They may take a while, but when they do come true, it's time to get another dream. Always stay a step ahead in the dream department. Build a dream board of all the things you want in life, even if it's 5 years at a time or even 1 year. Don't give up.

4 Hardships make you stronger. Nothing that is worthwhile comes easily. Look for what you can learn through the hardship.

5 Help somebody else. Your life will always seem easier when you see what someone else is dealing with. And giving is often a greater gift than receiving.

6 All men are not bad, there will be a right one for you. Remember dreams take time.

You know, women have been ostracized, criticized and set in a back seat (a far back seat) for centuries. The biggest reason (in my book) that we remain that way is that as women, we refuse to lift other women up. We are like crabs in the pot. If you put one crab in a pot it will climb right out and be on it's way. The best way to keep the crab in the pot is to put another crab in the pot. That way when one of them tries to crawl out, the other one will pull (her) back.

Think about it. We are the ones who can change things. Unless, that is, unless we like the pot better!

Get out of the pot and change the world.



Ages & Stages

It's like a big, giant map. Open it up and you see the winding road of our lives.

There's the man. And he's born into his family with all the personalities and quirks that a family has, a dad with one personality and a mom with another, maybe they get along well, maybe they don't. Maybe they've been divorced and there's another mom and another dad in the picture. And there are other siblings or not. They each have their own personalities, abilities and interests. Everybody grows up, gets along, influences the others. But the man has his own personality and even though he's learning from others, his own personality picks and chooses what's important.

There's the woman. She grows up in a different family consisting of parents and siblings and relatives. Same thing. She is influenced by all this family, dysfunctional or not. And like the man she grows up in a town, or suburb or city or country. She grows up going to certain schools that her parents pick out for her. She participates in different activities that appeal to her or that her friends do. Like the man, people come in and out of her life and she learns from them. But the woman has her own personality and how all these people influence her depends on what she allows and what her parents have to say.

And of course to both of these people more and more people pop in and out of their lives leaving behind new thoughts and ideas and attitudes, examples both good and bad.

And then the man and woman meet. They may have matching personalities or maybe they're opposites, but a spark has clicked and they build a home together.

All those roads. All those avenues. All those places and things and adventures. They all come together to influence the couple and make them who they are.

Then they have children. They are surprised at first that babies cause so much disruption and such an uproar in their lives. They know it, but they don't, that their lives are forever changed. The things that they know are called into question and new influences begin to intersect.

The baby days, though hilarious and harrowing, are amazing. There is a perfect child in their arms that can't yet be spoiled. They are surprised that one of them can get along with very little sleep. The baby eats a lot. Soon they find that they can make the baby happy by feeding it a lot. It cries or fusses and they stuff something in it's mouth.

They go from barely getting along at all to functioning rather well. They high five. The next day the baby begins to walk. That baby picks up everything small it sees on the floor and stuffs it in his mouth. He is after all so close to the floor. That baby stumbles and falls hitting his mouth on the table causing his two little teeth to clamp down on his tongue and now blood is rushing like a torrent out of his mouth. That baby is reaching up and pulling down heavy objects, glass objects, knives. That baby has his fingers in the light sockets. That baby is opening cupboards and emptying the contents on the floor. What will take the mom & dad two hours to clean up, he just did in two minutes.

The poor parents, they thought they had it down and the scenerio has changed! Life just shifted back to the disaster zone. And they need all these things to hold the child down, a car seat, a high chair, a walker that doesn't go anywhere, a playpen, a crib. They put everything away, they store everything up high. And then the toddler gets toys and more toys and as they get older smaller toys, because the mom has finally taught the baby not to put everything in their mouth. They got it down.

But no. Now the house is a toy disaster-ship! Toys are everywhere. It calls for organization. But how do they do that? They will never be able to invite anybody into their home again. It is a wreck. There is kool-aid that has permanently stained the carpeting along with some silly putty and paint. There isn't a foot of space or a single place in the place that is untouched by the toy infestation.

As the couple copes with this, they think back to the fun baby days and decide to have another. And so it begins again. But this new baby never sleeps at all. It eats even more than the first one. Now two kids are in diapers with no hope of getting out. "I know by the time they're 18," the mom thinks, "they will be able to go potty." They look over at their neighbors across the street whose house always seems cleaned up, who's kids only eat healthy foods, and they all are potty trained and they think. We can do this too. And they have another kid.

Then the first kid is in school and the other two have to be awoken from their naps and of course they won't be able to fall asleep again. And now they are getting all the kids into different sports type activities. And they have to stay and watch cause the kids are so little and it takes a stroller and chairs and a blanket and a diaper bag, water bottles, equipment and the baby is crying and the toddler wants them to push him on the swing.

Grocery shopping is a nightmare because they all want something every time they go. And the littlest is in the cart seat and the others float around (run around) touching everything. Twelve heads turn every time they yell “Mommy”. One is tired and crying, one is screaming on a sugar high and the other is collecting coupons from the aisle displays and wiping products off the shelves. The mom manages to get ten things in the cart before she is forced to leave by bad behavior.

And the mom puts breakfast on the table and lunch on the table and dinner on the table and the kids only nibble, because there are so many TV shows to watch and games to play. Actually no one can agree on what food they want to eat, or what to watch. or what to play because they’re all different ages. Actually the mom no longer eats what she wants, watches what she wants or plays what she wants because she’s too busy doing what everyone else wants.

And that’s when her chauffeur-hood begins. All the kids are in school, but all different schools, they need to be dropped off and picked up at all different times. They are almost all out of carseats (thank goodness) even though she had read that they need to be in a carseat until they’re 120 pounds, what she would weigh if she hadn’t had so many kids. And after school they all have activities. They need to learn to swim. One likes football, another likes piano, another likes anything and everything they can be in. In addition to pediatrician visits, they now have dentists and orthodontists, eye doctors and someone always has a little something extra going on that requires a specialist.

They need haircuts and showers and clothes and shoes. Whatever they wore yesterday they’ve grown out of by the next day. They want to go shopping and to the movies and to sports events. They need uniforms and special school t-shirts and costumes for plays. There are school pictures and sports pictures and pictures for everything they do (and how can the parents refuse those?) They have fundraisers with special Sponge Bob trinkets for incentives. They need to buy \$500 worth of cookie dough and enough wrapping paper to last a life time.

The man and woman rarely see each other any more because they are both running as fast as they can in all different directions.

All these kids with their own personalities, they may look like each other, but they are so different. Their influences are different as are their ages and their activities and the people and parents and schools, teachers and coaches they are exposed to. One family, thousands of connections and thousands of differences. Keeping track of all of it and teaching, training, guiding in the right direction is a fine art and on the job training for the mom and dad.

And so in between all the frenzy of life the parents try to teach their kids to believe in God, to love and be kind and respect other people and their property. They try to teach the family code that they have set. They try to teach that life is not easy, but it can be good. And they confuse the issue by telling them to obey the rules, but make up their own rules; get good grades, but be creative; to work hard, but have fun. And the laundry list of teaching goes on.

Pretty soon, even though they are not heavy enough to be out of the carseat they are in driver's ed. Now the parents are really scared even though they have a glowing pride that their child has reached this mark. Do they need another car? Actually how many cars do they now need?

Now the kids are driving themselves wherever they want to go whenever they want to go. The mom and dad don't go anywhere because all their money is going to pay for insurance (and gas). They can now watch whatever they want on TV, but they both want to watch different things. Their house is cluttered with all the things they've accumulated over the years, but for the first time there's silence because the kids are running around somewhere else whooping it up.

Instead of tucking kids into bed each night, the mom and dad go to bed first and wait to hear the garage door open or see the lights go off. Then when there's less than a drop left in the money pot, the kids are off to college, planning their weddings and beginning their own families, bringing in a spouse with all different ideas, opinions, background and family from all different places and histories. And now the kids they've loved and adored through it all have another mom and dad, and these are the ones they are trying to impress.

The kids look at their mom and dad and think it must be easy if they could do it and so they have four kids in four years and don't they love them all. They post pictures of their ideal lives on Facebook and Instagram and everywhere else and then text their mom and dad to beg them to take the kids so they can go have some fun.

And that is just a bare bones blink at the ages & stages of motherhood (or parenthood) and the complicated, fascinating map of our lives.

Welcome to the family!



Healthy Healthy Healthy

Yeah 3 healthy's because this word is so engrained in our culture now. In fact it seems, healthy is a topic that keeps on broadening! Growing up, to me, healthy always meant not being sick, not being in the hospital, staying well. How does that old adage go...When we're young we sacrifice our health to create our wealth and then when we're old we spend our wealth to regain our health.

The greatest thing since sliced bread is no longer sliced bread since it's loaded with carbs and gluten. And wherever gluten came from and whatever gluten is, it is not something health experts think we should be eating. In fact it is responsible for many bad health situations. And the simple cure to feeling physically bad is to cut out gluten. Was gluten in everything when we were kids? Why do some people tolerate it normally and it drives others to extremes? These are things I don't understand.

October is National Apple month and no wonder, it's fall and the apple trees are bountiful. I remember being a kid and going with the family to the apple orchard, macintosh apples. We filled bushel baskets to take home and ate dozens of them right under the tree. Something we probably can't even do anymore because of the pesticides. But those were the days where a bushel basket of apples sat in our kitchen and we ate them like popcorn. The benefits of apples are extraordinary as you can see. It's almost as if it's the perfect food. And that's one thing that's been consistent...an apple a day, they say.

Fast food restaurants like McDonald's do respond to consumer talk. I mean haven't they all worked out some alternative to the fattening fries? Now we can replace those with a small salad or fruit. Funny though, I always thought it was the fries that drew people to McDonald's. I think the fruit and salads satisfy the naysayers, but the fries are still what the majority wants. I haven't done a study or looked up a study, that's just my opinion. Jamie Oliver, the healthy food activist has had his wars with McDonald's and other fast food restaurants as well as school cafeterias and the food suppliers to the masses in a desperate attempt to help us benefit from natural foods.

I don't know how healthy sweet potato fries are. But I'm sure doctoring them up the way they do adds a lot of calories or enough bad stuff to change something that in its original state is healthy in the highest extreme. But we don't care for them so much until they are doctored up. My Thanksgiving sweet potatoes are spectacular, but only after I put in all the sweet stuff! My point is, we have that tendency to take super foods and fix them to our satisfaction and then lose the whole big benefit of the food.

It's a fine line figuring out how to eat well. Bad habits are hard to change. Good habits are hard to keep. Just when we think we know something experts tell us we're wrong. I don't hold a lot of faith in the experts. I think it's up to us to research, learn and figure it out. And help each other.



The Funny Phases of Being a Mom

It took me a long time to become a mom! It happened for the first time three months after Mother's Day. I missed it again! So when the next one rolled around, I was ecstatic with joy, I was finally going to be celebrated.

Except the baby was still a baby, too young to do anything about it. Too young to know my many sacrifices. Far too young to care. Soon I had five little kids running my life and running me ragged, but still too young to understand that making an effort to recognize Mother's Day might mean something to me.

Meanwhile as my Mom watched my frenzy of early motherhood, she felt guilty as another Mother's Day rolled around and she received another gift from me and from all three of her girls. After all, in her view, she wasn't working hard as a mother anymore.

I imagine that's how I'll feel someday, when the dust settles and the kids start raising their own families. They'll be in the frenzy and I'll be rocking the free and easy life collecting the Mother's Day honors as they toil away.

But I will have earned it I guess, just as my mom has. And that's pretty much the way it goes. Delayed gratification.

You gotta love it!



Cancer Crisis

Looking around at God's great big beautiful world, it only makes sense that God provided us with all we need to take care of ourselves. Cancer is a disease that man has tried to fix for decades and how's that working. Well it's working for Big Pharma and the government and the medical industry is profiting handsomely too.

But how well is it working for the people you love? How many people do you know who've been lost cruelly through this disease?

It's a medical scare tactic that lures you in, confirms that yes you have cancer and we'll get it out of you. (Like the bug man that came to my house yesterday and used the scorpion threat to get my business) But it gets you rocking & rolling into the system.

Surgery, radiation & chemo is all they have and it's a quick fix to get it gone. Cancer free. But the cancer is still there, maybe it jumped to another part of your body and now that your immune system has been destroyed, it's free to live and grow and carry on.

The word is getting out that your immune system is the key to fighting cancer. That's why you see all the "good" foods that you're supposed to be eating. But those good foods are not enough to fuel your immune system against runaway can-

cer. It's too little too late. But maybe it's not. Maybe God's pure food can turn the sickness around. Fix the immune system. The ruby slippers.

Do we owe it to those who've walked before us living and dying of cancer to follow in their footsteps in the same horrific way.

Listen to me here. If you were told that the answer to cancer was really quite simple, wouldn't hurt, wouldn't cost a fortune, and wouldn't derail your life, would you believe it?

No you absolutely would not. Because you've been marketed to, to believe it's gotta be bad. And if anything changes or new developments occur, it's just going to be a different kind of bad. And probably a worse kind of bad to make it better.

And that is where it's going out there. The richest companies on the planet are the pharmaceutical companies. And don't you think they want to keep it that way! Well of course, the cancer epidemic is going swimmingly for them.

In fact it's going so well that they can pay and influence anybody in the medical field to join right in. Money will buy you anything. And when that kind of money is involved is anybody honest and scrupulous anymore?

The answer is no. When you get too much of a good thing you want more...and more...and more.

Well that's what's happening out there in pharmaceutical land. They have all these answers to solve the symptom you're having. Forget the root of the problem, they gotta keep it there so your symptoms continue and you can keep taking the

drugs to mute the symptom. But they gotcha, because not only will you have to keep taking the drug to mask one problem, but each drug has countless side effects to cause more problems that you need to mask with another drug and pretty soon your one little problem is blasted into 20. And now you have a pill for every ill. Sounds like a pretty good business plan doesn't it?

Do you think your doctor minds that? Wow this is a banana for doctors. Instead of seeing a patient one time a year, they can book them monthly or more. And they really don't have to know anything, they are just covering up the symptom with a drug which they are probably getting kickbacks from. They fix problems by prescribing drugs that cause more problems that they plan to fix with more drugs. They're no longer fixing anything, they're prescribing. They're experimenting on you. Like Auschwitz.

It's a sick, sick industry. Corruption and coverup are rampant. And somehow those of us who recognize that are silent and the rest believe a lie. Sickness and sadness, hopefulness and despair reign down.

Why do we accept the easy answers of medicine? Why do we believe people that maybe shouldn't be trusted and shame people who have taken the time to do a little research? Why don't we care enough to search a matter out? What is stopping us from seeking answers?

Why do we put our faith in man and not God?



It's all about ME

We are so incredibly connected these days, yet at the same time we are completely disconnected. How does that happen?

All we have to do is carry a small cell phone and we have instant access to the world. We can call, text, send posts, pictures, messages via Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Periscope, Pinterest and on and on goes the list. We can find out anything about everything whenever we want.

We can say what we feel, when we feel, even if it's the only time ever that we'll feel it. We can rant, we can rave, we can lie, we can brag. We can post memories and moments, things we're doing or not doing. We can make it sound like we know everything, and everybody else knows nothing. We share, share, share small little bits that mean nothing and everything. We can start an argument and basically talk without thinking. And we can do all this quickly and constantly.

Yet when we put the phone away and walk out of our house, we notice nothing. We can walk right past somebody without ever acknowledging they are there. We can stand in line and buy whatever we're buying without ever saying hi or boo or thank you. When we do cast a look in somebody's direction, it's usually because their kid is acting up or they are, and we see them with judgement.

We walk around or look around as though we're the only one that matters in this world. The only exception would be our spouse and our kids. We don't even know our neighbors. We don't even wave if we happen to see them. But on Facebook, we'll chat it up with the neighborhood group. We'll give everyone our opinions and tell them when they're wrong. Maybe we'll support them or maybe we'll not, it all depends on what we might get out of it.

This is bleak.

This is wrong.

This is us.

Or is it just me?

On the neighborhood Facebook page one bright morning, someone complained about people parking their cars so far up the sides of the road, that they couldn't turn a corner without the threat of getting hit or hitting somebody else. I thought this actually was a legitimate complaint. But the neighborhood mothers arose! "We have little kids that we can't walk that far with, we're worried that the maniac teenage driver neighbors will run them over, we have to drive that block to get there and we'll park where we have to to get the best position for the Easter Egg Hunt. Sorry if you're inconvenienced, but it's basically your fault."

Seriously!

I'm basically bugged, because it seems so many parents with kids feel entitled to do whatever is best for them because they have these kids. Your kids should be

your inconvenience, not mine. If you don't want them run over in the streets, don't let them play (alone) in the streets, you have a backyard for that. The streets are actually for drivers. And if you have to drive somewhere, park properly, there is a law about that.

My mom laid down her law very early. "if you want to have the kids, then you need to take the responsibility." I did and I did.

Convenience. It's the buzz word and the must word for today. In so many ways, we don't want to do the hard work, we want it made easy, I get that. I'm right there. But it's always taken the extra mile to achieve the greatest gains. If we're teaching our children, they're learning best through our example. We don't have time to waste, we have to be with it everyday and never give up.

Our connectedness may be a little bit off or even a lot off. But all it would take is to recognize that in order to make a shift in the right direction.



Getting to the Writing

“You mean you want me to drop you off at the bookstore? At the bookstore...to write?” My husband gives me his wrinkly furrowed brow with a cross between a scowl and his own ah-ha moment. Me his book loving, shopaholic wife. “Uh-huh, to write,” he’s still trying to comprehend if I’m for real or he’s in trouble. I know his mind is working fast, he’s driving all the way out to where I want to go and I don’t ever go there, because it’s too far, takes too much time, too much time for myself. I’m not used to that luxury. I spend so much of my day setting fires and then putting them out. It’s a busy life. And if I make it any busier I’ll never have to write. I can just move it further and further onto the back burner. But every new year that rolls around has me re-announcing my intention to write.

Nobody in my house knows what that means, including me. All I know is that all my life, ever since I can remember, I’ve had some small compulsion, some trace of talent, some untapped desire to write. I understand that writing well means writing often. I’m up for the hard work of that and then I’m not. I’m distracted by anything and everything. Shiny, shiny! Intentions lost, excuses found. Not to be overly hard on myself, but how long can I state a goal out loud and run as fast as I can in another direction.

It’s not that I haven’t done some writing. For heaven’s sake, in the TV business I was a writing machine of five, ten and thirty second ads. That’s a max of ninety

words if you can get the announcer to read fast. The more I wrote, the faster the words came and the better, smarter, funnier they were.

Then came love, marriage and the baby carriage and I was in the perfect spot to be the first blogger on earth. But I put it off. Then I started Mom Time TV with a heavy production schedule and high speed coordination, I tried to blog a little, then I picked it up. Then I droned on and on, bored myself and threw it all back on the farthest burner, thinking my arm would be long enough to get to it more than occasionally. But I built a bit of a wall in front of those burners and set other intensions in front of it.

Since then Mom Time TV has become a radio show and we do a very cool thing at the end of the year, my husband and our 5 kids join in on the last show of the year to reel back through the year, what happened, what shined out, what changed. And then what are our goals for the new year, what do we expect to happen, what do we want to make happen, what are our hopes. This is a tremendous exercise and discussing it in public, in front of your family kind of gives it an edge. The kids as teenagers and young adults are in the perfect place to recognize a value in doing this.

When I got on this last show and announced (again) my goals for this year were two things...just happening to be the two things I least wanted to do...gardening and writing. That was it. Loose as a goose. Garden what? Write what? Well that's part of the issue right?

So as I watched my husband and my kids kinda roll their eyes, "yeah mom, good one mom, we'll never see that happen mom," it fueled that distant desire into a small bit of action.

I planted a small garden. There's still more I want to do this year. But I have six kinds of lettuce, some kind of squash, all the herbs I need for my spectacular pesto sauce recipe (basil, sage, Italian parsley), cilantro, rosemary, dill, and mint that is running rampant. What do you make with mint? And tomatoes that are actually growing. We also have an incredible grape vine, that may get me squashing them for wine one day! But that's another goal. And there's a fig tree, that like the grape vines, looks deader than dead in the winter and truly springs to life when the days begin to warm. But only two figs are blossoming. It may just be a year of renewal. We have 3 or 4 orange trees, all different kinds, a couple different lime trees and a few lemon trees. Like the grape and figs, these were planted when we designed the back yard and since they are all still new, the crop is small, but growing steadily each year. And now I need to remember with the planting comes a harvest that I must remember, utilize and rejoice in.

And so it is with the writing. I've come to write. Write what? I don't know. But the fun is not knowing. I didn't have to plan, didn't have to prepare. I'm just here now with a blank screen...and time. I'll throw in a few seeds, see what grows, see what's worth keeping or planting over. Give it time. But give it attention too. Talk to it. Love it. Embrace it. Let it sit and do what it's suppose to do. Come to life, grow, thrive. And in time there will be a harvest. I gotta just keep at it.