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Distraction

Or, where is my organized life?



Deborah Breslow with sons Robbie, 10, Kenny, 9 and Danny, 6.

Individual Voices is a section that allows mothers and fathers throughout our area to express their views about various aspects of parenting. Readers are encouraged to submit essays of 500-750 words on a subject related to family life that will enlighten, amuse, or educate other parents. Readers whose essays are printed will receive a package of children's books and tapes. Submit manuscripts by mail to: The Parent Paper, 1 Garret Mountain Plaza, PO Box 471, West Paterson, NJ 07424-0471; by fax: 973-569-7725; or by e-mail: parentpaper@northjersey.com.

INDIVIDUAL VOICES

BY DEBORAH BRESLOW

Crash!

"Mommy, Danny threw the remote at the T.V!"

Meow! "Mommy, Kenny stepped on Callie's tail!"

Ouch!

"Mom, Robbie punched me!"

The realities of life can be trying. Valiant attempts to accept the nuances of raising three active boys result in conflicting emotions. On any given day, I vacillate between surrender and despair.

Possessing top-notch organizational skills at the executive level, I remind myself that I am equally capable as a mother. Though unprepared for the demands of child rearing, I am doing my best.

Yet, the inner discord remains. I want to do it all and I can't. I've noticed that my time management skills have taken a beating; my ability to set priorities has faltered. Sometime between carrying a briefcase, moaning with labor pains and driving to baseball practice, I lost momentum.

The tabloids preach: "How to be good to YOU" "How to find time for ME" "How to balance your inner self, your kids and your marriage."

What I'd like to know is how to read 10 books in a month, write a prize-winning novel and rescue homeless dogs while meeting my required responsibilities. Can we live our passions even when life gets in the way?

It's 6 a.m. I stumble into the kitchen. Reaching in the cupboard, I grab hold. That red canister makes me happy. While the coffee perks, I turn the stereo on low. The "family" cat, coincidentally my responsibility, waits for the window to open. As I hum along to the music, the cat gives me a discriminating look.

I imagine I'm back in college, holding a beer while listening to a local band. I close my eyes. I begin to sway. I spill my coffee. I need paper towels. Then it happens: the stampede down the stairs. My moment is over; a record 52 seconds.

"Hi, Mom, did you buy Pop-Tarts; the kind I like this time?"

"Hi, Mommy, I'm wet."

"Mom, the tooth fairy forgot to take my tooth AND she left only one dollar!"

"Good morning guys!"

Breakfast is served but there's not enough milk. Clothing is distributed but my choices are wrong. Lunches are packed but, unbeknownst to me; no one likes grape juice anymore.

During the few seconds I allow myself to shower, it is quiet again.

"Mom, Robbie knocked down my Lego tower!"

Shower over – I dress in seconds. How did I ever have time for pantyhose?

Attempting to decipher the ranting of my screaming boys, I feign calm. I'm certainly able to have a fair and healthy reaction to the accusations and defenses of three boys under the age of 10.

But I don't. I fall into the act with the rest of them. "Mom, shut the windows! The neighbors can hear you!"

We manage to depart for school. "Wait up," I call to my oldest as he storms ahead. His scathing look says it all: "Don't you know not to scream louder than we do?"

Stomping, my middle son attempts to get his sneakers on without untying them. My 5-year-old, sensing my tension, grabs onto my hand: "I love you Mommy."

We arrive at school. Each joins his class line. No one says goodbye. Feelings of guilt seep in concerning my morning lunacy.

I stand in the empty parking lot; reflecting on the morning. I contemplate how best to connect life as I know it with life as I want it to be. My sons have forgotten forgotten about the various calamities that provoked Mommy to an uproar. I am a bubbling cauldron but the boys have moved on. They are not concerned with my threats and warnings. To them, it was a daily testosterone test.

Sauntering home, I think about the state of my house. No doubt I'll be anchored in a state of crouch. "Try the newest Pilates pose: The Crouch! Exercise while picking up dirty underwear, library books, and tangled video game wires!"

There's so much to be done! How do mothers with full-time jobs do it? As it is, I vote for an extra 10 hours to the day. Picking up the pace, I do accomplish – not always to standards of perfection; not even close.

Chores completed, I make the last of the beds. What is this under the pillow? A note addressed to me:

Mommy! You do a lot of stuff. You buy us stuff. You yell but you should take a rest one day.
xxxxoo

On the nightstand, a family photo: "Family is forever; Families stay together even when times are bad; Love is the foundation of a family." Next to it: a selfportrait drawn in preschool. On the wall, the black and white photo of the three boys looking out at the lake at Ramapo Reservation. I can remember watching them skip stones. My eyes begin to tear. I love my boys.

Simon and Garfunkel come to mind: "Time it was and what a time it was, it was – a time of innocence, a time of confidences. Long ago it must be – I saw a photograph: preserve your memories, they're all that's left you."

Controversy abounds as to whether "we moms" can balance personal goals, children, marriage and household.

My current occupation means placing passions on the back burner. Doing so requires a certain amount of acceptance. It has to! Otherwise, I'd be in a sunroom making lanyards in a place called 'Shady Something.'

The daunting task of making dinner overwhelms me. "You can do this!" I tell myself. My mother put a well balanced meal on the table every night of our formative years.

Struggle may be part of who we are but motherhood is tough. It is the truest test of personal growth. If we acknowledge everyday life for what it is, we owe it to ourselves to hold onto our

dreams for the future. For me, I know that one day I will realize inner calm, peace of mind, and, if possible, my first novel.

Deborah Breslow is a freelance writer and the mother of three boys: Robbie, 10, Kenny, 9 and Danny, 6. She lives in Wyck off with her husband, Jay.