



Having It All: A Mother's Thoughts about Balance

by Michele R. Acosta

I am an 80s child. My teenage years were spent in the midst of the Cold War, punk rock, and hair-sprayed hair. I was lucky enough to have parents who raised me to believe that I could accomplish anything I wanted if I worked hard enough. I was unlucky enough to spend my formative years brainwashed into thinking that I could "have it all."

I imagined myself one day adeptly juggling kids (who were perfect), a home (that was also perfect), and a career (at which I was perfect). No one told me—or the thousands of girls like me—that "having it all" often means sacrificing things along the way. "Having it all" does not leave room for "perfection" because it means cramming as much into every second of every day as possible. "Having it all" means cutting corners whenever possible because 24 hours does not leave room for everything a working mother must do in a given day.

After 13 years of marriage and 10 1/2 years of motherhood, I have juggled children, a home, and a career. Notice the deliberate absence of the adverb "successfully" between "have" and "juggled." But I suppose success is a relative term.

My kids are not perfect, but they are not bullies, they have nice friends, and they do well in school (despite my fears that they do not read enough). My home is not perfect, but it is clean (if not as organized as I would like). My career, which has changed several times during my adult life, is certainly not perfect and always seems to interfere with my expectations for myself as a mother.

I suppose I now mark my success with my children's mile stones: I was supremely proud, thrilled (and relieved) when my oldest son told me that he liked the book *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* better than the movie of the same name. I was also thrilled when the same child received a rather long book for Christmas last year, read the whole thing, and liked it! My middle child recently took on the challenge of reading a book that was probably somewhat above his reading level, determined that he could read and understand it. (Notice the trend.)

Every time I think I have shed my 80s sensibilities regarding work and motherhood, some insidious thought pops into my consciousness. While I am supremely proud of my children and their accomplishments (and still guilt ridden that I do not do more with them in an educational sense), I am still looking for the perfect career.

My earliest career attempts involved writing and editing in the business world. There was not a lot of fulfillment, and I did not spend as much time with my family as I wanted. I also did not have time to cook pretty meals and keep my house up to snuff (at least my snuff). (Has anyone mentioned high/out-of-reach standards?)

The birth of my first child spawned an interest in education, and the birth of my second child became the impetus to seek out a career in the field. I went back to school, and two years later, I emerged with a teaching certificate and a Master's degree in education. I actually thought that being a teacher would "simplify" my life. The joke was on me. It was the hardest — and second most fulfilling — thing I have ever done. I was good at teaching and I loved it. A lot of teenagers write a lot better because they spent time in my classroom; I am very proud of that. However, it was also exhausting. I could easily have worked 60 hour plus weeks (and sometimes did). Classrooms are just too full. Imagine grading 140 essays that take 15 to 20 minutes each several times each quarter in addition to all of the other grading and prep work.

My children would not have recognized a home cooked meal if they did not encounter them at their grandparents' homes. The laundry was piled high (clean and dirty), and I had weeds in my flower garden. I thought I was going to die the first year my oldest child brought homework home. Factor in the newest trends in education that tell teachers that everything they've been doing is wrong and the politicians who think they know best (even though their last classroom experiences were as students), and you have a profession that can swallow you alive. As I said, I loved teaching, but I hated the politics of public education.

Five years (and one more child) later, brings me to my keyboard and this moment. I am still searching for a career that provides not only income, family time, and fulfillment, but one that makes me feel successful, as if I have realized that unattainable dream. It seems that I cannot totally escape my desire to "have it all" even though common sense dictates otherwise.

About the author:

The author is a writer, a former English teacher, and the mother of three boys. She spends her time writing and teaching others to write. Visit articles.TheWritingTutor.biz for more articles or TheWritingTutor.biz for other writing and educational resources for young authors, teachers, and parents.