

## THE CHALLENGE OF RAISING CHILDREN

I had an epiphany while walking my dog. I passed by my neighbor's house just as her daughter was getting picked up by the carpool. "Bye, Mom. Love you," she yelled as she got into the car. This may not sound like much in the retelling but to me it was huge.

For years now, I've been aware that when I talk about my daughters in a certain way, tears flood my eyes. Now this wouldn't necessarily be a problem—I don't mind crying—but it seems to happen for no reason and I haven't understood—until now—what it's about.

Some background. I have 3 daughters, all born in the 70's. I was a stay-at-home Mom at a time when the National Organization of Women was just coming to the forefront. NOW espoused lots of rhetoric about how women were wasting their educations by being full-time mothers and atrophying their minds by not putting them to good use through productive employment. There were "consciousness raising" groups so that women could support one another in making this gigantic shift happen.

I had a good friend who was very into this, lamenting the tedium, repetitiveness, and thanklessness of, for example, doing laundry that just needed to be done again in a few days. I gave lip service to this dogma. After all, how much of a Stepford wife was I willing to look like but in my heart of hearts, I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. I was doing what I wanted, in the way I wanted, caring for and spending my time with the people I loved best. What could be wrong about that?

I wondered about the notion of "quality" time that NOW espoused. Whattaya mean it's more meaningful to spend 15 minutes of "good" time—wholly paying attention—with your children than to simply "be there" with them all the time? This worried me. There was no way I

was giving them my undivided attention all day long. Could it be that my 24/7 effort was of no greater benefit than a mere fraction of an hour? Really?

That was then and this is now. Now I know that meaningfulness and connection cannot be orchestrated. It occurs in odd moments, in its own time frame, and a parent just has to be there to catch it when it happens. The notion of quality time was just a novel idea put forth to assuage women's feelings of guilt at abandoning their children to go to work.

It is now many years later. I'm long divorced and my kids are grown. They did leave the nest after all though I can clearly remember a time when I thought they never would. My oldest was 12. Her sisters were 9 and 4. I'd just finished putting the younger two to bed, a marathon event, and plopped down on the couch exhausted, when my 12 year old, who was still up (always still up it seemed) began to clamor for my attention. In that moment, I felt sure that my children were different; they would never grow up and leave me.

But the old cliché rings true and now that they finally are gone, I find myself wondering how it all went by so fast. Where did the years go?

All of this crystallized for me when I overheard my neighbor's daughter yelling "Bye Mom. Love you."

It brought up just how much I miss those little bodies. The laughter and tears, the unexpected outpouring of hugs and kisses, the love that permeated even the times when I wanted to wring their necks.

And although what has come next has been exciting, fulfilling, and wonderful in its own way, when I am truly old (even older than now), I think what I will look back on, with the most fondness and the fullest heart, is the time when I was a Mom with kids at home.

And so when I see couples with young families in my practice, where both parents are stretched to the max, where commotion is the order of each day and enough sleep is a rare commodity, I smile to myself, remembering how wonderful it was and just how truly hard it was.

And it brings home anew, corroborated by my own life experience, what a huge toll raising children can take on the marital relationship even if, at the same time, it's the glue that binds the parents together. Too many marriages aren't able to survive this.

And so I say whole heartedly to all Moms and Dads with young children—Take time for yourselves. Take care of each other. For yours is the relationship that holds all of this together. See past the endless tasks, constant commotion, and incessant litany of “I need/ I want now.” Recognize that this is just for a long moment and then it, too, will be gone. See, appreciate, and be grateful for this chance to love.

I don't know of anything better.