

# Some sleep would be nice

## *Kids, marriage, meetings make days long, but worth it, for almost all working moms*

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I received my baccalaureate degree from UNL in 1978, and the world was mine! In the prime of my life, with endless opportunities stretched out before me and no limitations that my 21 years could see. Those were the years when we talked of the "Women's Liberation Movement" and, like most young women at that time, there was no doubt in my mind that I could have it all.

Most of my friends got married within 12 months of graduation, and I assumed that it would happen to me, too. Instead, although I dated some interesting men (and some not so interesting), my white knight and I didn't find each other until 13 years later. I was 34 years old and met him on a blind date — not exactly the way I had thought it would happen. We both wanted children and were blessed with the birth of our son, Colin, two years later, and our daughter, Lauren, three years

after that.

Career? It's great!  
Marriage? He's still the man of my dreams!  
Parenting? Best thing I've ever done!  
Volunteer work? On hold for a while!  
Sleep? Who needs it?!  
Housework? That's why they have cleaning services!

Friends? I hope they're still there for me when I resurface!

Cooking? I make a mean mac-and-cheese casserole, and there's never a bite left!

You're beginning to get the drift. I have everything that I need to have a full and rewarding life, but I no longer fool myself into thinking that I can do everything I was able to do before becoming a parent. It all becomes a matter of priorities, and the priorities of a 4½

year old and a 15-month-old have become mine.

Let me back up a bit. When I became a parent, I had already spent nearly 15 years building my career. And when you have spent that much time at anything, it becomes a significant part of how you define yourself. So when I was home on maternity leave, there was never a question in my mind but that I would head back to my office after several weeks at home with each baby. Perhaps my response would have been different had I become a parent soon after beginning my career, but going back to work was the only answer for me.

Don't get me wrong — I loved rocking and holding and nursing my babies, but my brain missed the stimulation it receives from interacting with faculty, staff and students every day. I missed this place.

So I have had to learn how to juggle. And as I said before, it all starts with priorities. My first two priorities are Colin and Lauren. They are both well-cared for at their preschool and day care during our working hours, but our evenings and weekends belong to them — sidewalk chalk, bubbles, books, trips to the zoo, playgrounds, books, swimming lessons, Legos, dinosaurs, books. Sometimes they go to meetings or our offices with us, but usually we devote their waking hours to them and then try to finish our work after they are

asleep.

Then there is work. I do my best to keep my mind focused on the tasks at hand while I'm at the office, and I am generally successful, except for those times when we've had a rough morning getting everyone ready to go or when one of the children is sick. A recent example: It was 44 degrees outside on a Monday morning and I tried to convince Colin that he had to wear long pants to preschool. He refused, and spent the next 20 minutes crying and wailing. I finally convinced him to wear sweatpants OVER his shorts, and carried him out to the car with him screaming "I hate you, Mommy!" By now, I was 15 minutes late leaving for a recruitment event in Hastings, and as I strapped on his seat belt, he turned toward me and vomited. Even though I knew it was the result of his being so worked up, I still spent the rest of the day feeling guilty that I had forced him into sweatpants, worried about whether or not he was really sick, and hoping that he was having a good time in spite of the rocky start to the day. (He was fine — laughing and playing with the other kids as soon as I was out of earshot. But, I haven't insisted on long pants since; with luck, he'll figure it out before the snow flies.) And you think you've had bad Mondays — what a way to start the week.

I am fortunate to work in an institution that places a value on families and that understands that small children and their needs are frequently unpredictable. The days when the phone rings and it's someone from day care asking me to come pick up Lauren because she is running a temperature are decreasing in frequency as she grows. But those phone calls can still wreak havoc in a workday that is scheduled with meetings, appointments and classes from beginning to end.

So how does it feel to balance it all? Well, it's like this: You have 15 balls in the air at home at any given moment, and at least that many at work. You throw them all in the air, and spend 18 hours each day trying to make sure that none of them drops. You aren't always successful, though, so you also have to deal with the guilt over not having done your best or not having tended to everyone's needs in the manner you had wanted.

Interestingly, you are harder on yourself than anyone else is — in fact, they will tell you that they don't know how you do what you do so well! (I generally look at them in total amazement, unsure whether to laugh hysterically or burst into tears, because I don't often feel that I have things under control.)

There are things that I have given up, and I suspect that most working parents have to give up some of the things they enjoyed prior to the birth of their first child. I do very little volunteer work these days, although I hope to get back to that when the kids are older. I rarely see my old college friends any more, although we are still in occasional contact, and are delighted when we manage to squeeze an hour or two together. Cooking and entertaining were two of my favorite pastimes that have been put on hold. And there are other trade-offs as well.

Is it worth it? Absolutely! I wouldn't change a thing in my life right now (although I could use a few more hours of sleep, I suppose). Being a parent is absolutely the most wonderful thing I have ever been involved with, and I hope that each stage of my children's lives is as fulfilling as these early years have been. My career is challenging and rewarding, and it's still a significant part of my self-definition and self-esteem.

Can I do it all? Well, it depends on how you define "all." I think I am doing a pretty good job of handling my top priorities right now, and I guess that is enough to satisfy me most days. I could be better at some things, and I could do more of others, but isn't that always the case? I am very comfortable with and proud of the title "working mom" — it fits me well and is tremendously rewarding.

