



The Great Balancing Act

Who trumps whom: Daddy or the kids?

By Kelli Wheeler

I turned “The Oprah Winfrey Show” on the other day while taking a minute to fold some clothes. I was supposed to be squeezing in a shower before taking my son to T-ball, but I had met my quota for dumping clothes on the bed to be folded and then transferring them back to the laundry basket at bedtime unfolded.

But I digress.

“Oprah” was already half over, but it quickly caught my attention. It was a forum of women—mothers—talking about who comes first in a marriage: the husband or the children. And the segment I tuned into was showing clips of women who unapologetically put their husbands aside in favor of their children. And they thought they were being good mothers.

One clip showed a mother so busy doing flashcards, teaching world study and balance beam out of her basement that she said she’s even forgotten to acknowledge her husband when he’s walked by. She admitted she had no time for her husband, but it didn’t matter much anyway because her children needed her more. She pointed out that he had his TiVo so she wasn’t too concerned. I’m sure it won’t be too long before we see her sobbing bewilderedly on “Dr. Phil.”

Apparently the whole episode revolved around an essay published in *The New York Times*. Author Ayelet Waldman had written, “I love my husband more than I love my

children.” And let me tell you, the women on “Oprah” were going after the writer like she was a mother who’d eaten one of her young. I agree, it was a bold statement, but I was sure there was more to the story.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t finish watching the show because I had to get in the shower and clear-cut the forest that was growing on my legs. But as I was showering, thinking about the women on the show who said they were too busy with their children to worry about their husbands’ needs, the more indignant I became. I guess that, for the sake of good TV, Oprah found women who knew not the concept of balance. Maybe she was doing some future scouting for husbands for an upcoming show titled “Neglected Husbands and Nubile Nannies.”

I was so fired up, I imagined writing to Oprah to tell her that her collection of misguided mothers was not an accurate description of motherhood today, despite the success of shows like “Desperate Housewives” (which, for the record, I love). It wasn’t enough to cool me down, though. So I imagined being Dr. Phil on her show, berating the women for losing sight of what a marriage is. I was feeling a little better. But I didn’t feel vented enough until I went to my son’s T-ball game and asked the first mother I saw, “Did you see Oprah today?” She said yes and was just as outraged as I was.

Soon we had a trio of mothers clucking over Oprah, stopping only long enough to shout, “Nice hit,

honey! Great catch, sweetie!” (Not too many more years of being able to yell that in Little League).

The truth is, as these mothers on “Oprah” failed to see, marriage and family is a balance. It’s a job that takes herculean effort to balance once the chaos of family life is added to the mix of couple time, but isn’t it worth the effort? I mean, the love that a husband and wife have for each is the main ingredient in deciding to have and share that with children. And once the children are grown and gone, as one mother from T-ball pointed out, “I want to make sure my marriage isn’t so far gone that there’s no getting back.”

Exactly! It was just beyond my comprehension that these women on “Oprah” could not see for themselves the lopsided world they had created by wrapping themselves up so completely in the overachieving world of Supermom. They equated a nonstop world of catering to their children’s needs, schooling, activities and desires devoid of the husband’s involvement as a nurturing environment.

I’m sorry, but if you’re too busy with your children to take time for your husband, then something has to give—and it shouldn’t be your husband. A child will be better served in life by having learned from a loving environment than from music lessons without it. A nurturing home should be the most important part of raising kids. When you forget to include your husband in it, it’s like spreading caviar on Chicken in a Biskit crackers.

It’s all about balance. For my one girlfriend with two kids, it means “My

husband picks what room he wants me to be best in: the kitchen or the bedroom. We eat out a lot.”

For others, like my playgroup friend with three kids, it means yelling “Daddy’s home!” at the end of the day when her husband arrives home and everybody gets excited and runs for the door, even the dog. “I love seeing the look on his face when he realizes he’s appreciated and missed.”

So back to Waldman, the woman who was thrown to the wolves on “Oprah.” From the small part I saw, she seemed to be a funny, normal mother who obviously loved her children to pieces as well as her husband and was trying to make a point. The women on the show who took her observation about her family so literally were the same type of women who condemned her when she forgot to bring snack on Snack Day at school. Trying to make up for the slip, Waldman wryly said she rushed to 7-Eleven “and bought snacks with partially hydrogenated oils.”

And that’s the mother and wife that I try to be. My kids may not make it to ballet and gymnastics on time, but we’ll have had one heck of a game of Hulk Chases Spiderman that made us late. And when Daddy comes home that evening, before the kids can wrap themselves around his legs, Mommy will have gotten there first.

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