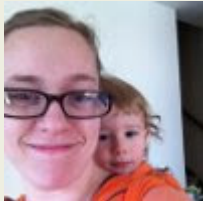


Our Little Secret



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“Balancing on My Toes” is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), her partner Daddy G and father-in-law Grandpa G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found [here](#). BMT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

We all do it. Every single one of us, even if only for a split second. Moms can relate: Tonight I fed my children shit out of boxes and cans. I got home a bit later than usual for a couple different reasons and I didn't really have much in the way of dinner to prepare. So here it is 6:30 going on 7:00 and I've got nothing. So I grabbed an old frozen dinner out of the freezer to feed my toddler (yeah, I know, it really was horrible too. I'm gonna do better tomorrow), and my teen heated a can of over-stuffed raviolis, stopping to cover the bowl in the microwave upon my insistence, while my mini frozen pizza cooked in the toaster over. Classy right? My neighbor on the other hand has got some lovely looking casserole baking and meat on the grill. She had been home for approximately 15 minutes. She looked great, too. She always does. Then the thought struck me. She must think I'm a total loser. Ugh! Mommy guilt. How did she *always* look so friggin' great while also always having her shit together? Its mind boggling really. And, you can't say you haven't felt it. You know what I'm talking about. As a mom we feel every thing we do is being judged. Its natural, but the overwhelming guilt is not.

Why can't we compare ourselves to every other, or any other, for that matter, moms? Because *all of our situations are different*. In this case my neighbor does not have a significant other that works in hospitality, so she has more help. My partner is gone often and so I'm home with just the two boys up to six days a week. And she also has two children that like to help in the kitchen; none of her children are toddlers, who are actually counter-productive. Her other trick is to prep for dinner the day before. This has never really been my style, but it certainly has a lot of merit. She whips these meals out when she gets home so fast her first glass of wine is usually about 7:30. Okay, I know my neighbors pretty well so I do have the low down, but its the same thing in every situation. One mom who is doing the best she thinks she can sees another mom effortlessly doing a

much better job and there is instinctual guilt that sets in.

And its Not Always “How Does She Do That?”

Most of the time its, “Why can’t I be like that?” This is a complex matter. Preparedness, forethought, organizational skills I am not capable of, and motivation. These are the skills one needs to make all this look easy. It takes desire and fortitude. I say that because I can be incredibly lazy and it takes a lot to get past that sometimes. If you have all of this, that’s awesome. I hope its enough, but I bet even the most prepared mom is jealous of someone else’s situation. A more attractive child, fewer stains, more calm... the list goes on. Competitiveness plays a role in it too, I imagine. “If she can do it so can I” is a great mentality as long as it stays pleasant. But it doesn’t always. Does it? Nope. Sometimes it gets nasty. I have been on many Internet forums and can say that anonymity really brings out the worst in people. But that is another discussion. Mommy guilt and competitiveness is the matter at hand. And it is rampant.

Do Other Cultures Experience This?

I’m assuming this is happening all over the world, but it doesn’t have to be this way! Guilt comes from a place in us that wishes we can have it all. We want to be able to relax and also have dinner on the table. We don’t prepare food ahead of time and when we feed our children fast food we hope there are healthy elements (usually not) and bad mouth the lady that took the time to collect healthful food for children before leaving the house while out. Because along with guilt there often comes a desire to put the object of jealousy down so we can feel at least on the same level as them. We *all* do it. Some of us just aren’t mean about it, but we all experience the guilt.

So What are We Going to Do About It?

Something about this behavior *must* be a survival instinct, or a part of some vestigial nature to be the alpha, but I am no psychologist and cannot postulate on that. But I can say it sucks. I can also say there is a way to over come these feelings. Recognizing they are happening is the first step. When we name our feelings, we can rationalize them. *It makes me feel guilty that I am not giving my children the best there is in life and am jealous that someone else fits these ideals.* Think about it. Say it out loud. Does it sound silly to you? It should. You *don’t* have to put yourself down or anyone else for that matter. What it takes is confidence and assuredness. Sounds easier said than done? Fake it ’til you make it. You deserve a happy life, and if there is a green monster hiding in your heart you will not feel satisfied. You will always allow yourself to not feel good enough. Are your children fed mostly healthy food? Are they growing? Are they developmentally stable? Are they happy and confident in your ability to parent? If you answered yes to [at least 3 out of 4 of] these questions, Congrats! You are doing a great job!

Its Hard to Learn to Be Confidant But its Worth It

Trust me. In the long run you will have better memories of being a parent if you allow yourself to be happy with yourself as a parent. Sounds silly and new agey? It might be, but it has improved my life. I have learned to be gentle with myself about my past parenting choices. I also find that knowledge is my friend here. The more I research and learn about the best ways to parent, the better I feel at the end of the day. I'm not perfect. Whoa, am I far from it! But I can now say these feelings of mom guilt don't get me down anymore. Now they are moments of learning. Jealous of my well prepared neighbor? Time to begin preparing food ahead of time so I can make it look effortless. Another thing I have found is that I am happier when I am not judging others, too. Now instead of thinking "Ugh, how could she *do* that?" I try to think "Hmm, that is a thing I haven't thought of before." Or "Oh that works for her, I'm glad because it did not work for me." Try it out for a test run and let me know how ditching the mommy guilt has changed your life!