

The Columns

EXHAUSTIVE PARENTING

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I realized how exhausted I was before I even woke up this morning.

In my dream, I had won a trip to Hawaii for my husband, our two boys, and me. I rode the small island hopper plane down into paradise, skimming over crystal clear water, white sand beaches, and tropical foliage. It was just as I remembered it all from the honeymoon Duane and I took nearly 20 years ago.

Then the plane landed and I had kids and luggage and security checks and by the time I got out of the airport with my several bags I just sat down, exhausted, in the parking lot. I was covered by my luggage, which sat weightily on my lap.

I noticed three large books we had brought along, hardcover, and very thick volumes. Why did I have these and why wasn't my husband carrying them?

The boys wanted to swim, but I found myself yearning for my bed back home.

"I don't think we had this much baggage last time we were here," I remarked to my husband.

And that's when my four year old woke me up.

I love being a mom. It's above all my favorite job in the world. But let's face it - parenting is exhausting.

After a week of dropping into bed at 9:30 p.m. every night (including Friday) I decided to figure out why I was so tired. I stayed up later that night, making a list of all I do and reorganizing my planner.

That, of course, was the night the boys both woke me up several times with various problems. And they still got up early the next morning.

I have been exhausted for 10 years, from approximately the time I became heavy with pregnancy until now. Friends with older children tell me I will never sleep well again. When they are teens, I'll wait up, worrying, for them until they are home safe, and even when they are in college I will worry that someone will fall out of their top bunk. Then our own issues will set in - hot flashes for us women, prostrate trouble for men, sleep apnea for us all. So I have to face it - I'll never sleep well again.

But it's not just the lack of sleep that has me exhausted. Parenting is hard work all around. There's not a single meal where I don't get up at least three times to clean up a spill or get some forgotten item. And going anywhere is like packing for a six-month trip.

I had to pick my son up from school the other day and take him and the 4-year old to violin class. First, I had to make sure I had the violins, music books, snacks, drinks, treats for after class, extra clothes for the little one in case the drinks spilled, the grocery list (so we could eat dinner), my cell phone (to call my husband with the grocery list), pencil and paper so my older son could do homework, and my purse.

I know. I know…those of you who don't have little kids at home are saying, "This woman is crazy! Her kids are spoiled rotten!"

And I am. And they are. But that's not the point.

The point is, no matter how well prepared you is, no matter how self-sufficient your kids are - they still need you. We, as parents, are (if we're lucky) forever tied to their world. It starts as newborns and it doesn't end. Ever.

Just ask my parents.

Last night Duane and I packed lunches, gave baths, got out clothes for morning, and got everybody tucked in bed for the 10th time. We sat down to turn on the TV.

"Does that clock say 10 p.m.?" Duane asked.

I squinted at the clock on the DVD player through droopy eyelids and dried out contact lenses.

"Uh-huh"

He put the remote control down. We moseyed upstairs and collapsed, exhausted, in bed.

It was then that we realized we weren't alone. Curled up on the floor on either side of the bed was a small boy, hugging a stuffed animal and fast asleep.

I got up and covered each one with a blanket from the closet, then went back to bed. I could hear their soft breathing and it felt good to know that they were there near me.

Then I quickly shut my eyes to grab some sleep while I could. At least no one would fall out of bed….

Pamela Gossiaux is a mother of two and the author of *Why Is There A Lemon In My Fruit Salad*. When she isn't trying to fit in a nap, she's working on her next book. Visit her website at www.pamelagossiaux.com

The Year of Fun

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With 2009 safely behind us, my son asked me what I was going to name this year.

I had declared last year "The Year of Good Enough."

It was a very difficult year in a number of ways, and since I was in survival mode at all times, things simply couldn't be perfect.

Our meals weren't always square, the house wasn't usually clean, and my toenails never, ever, not ONCE got painted even though I bared them nakedly all summer.

But we survived. We made it through 2009. I almost printed us T-shirts.

The year didn't end quite so well. The week before Christmas the dishwasher broke, the windshield in the minivan cracked, the microwave oven, washing machine, and grill all died, and I melted a plastic cutting board on the stove burner, rendering it unusable.

2010 isn't starting out so well. We have run out of money, are using a microwave oven from 1986 that is probably radiating us, and we've both needed chiropractic adjustments already.

So what are we going to call 2010?

"How about the year where we don't give a hoot?" my husband suggested.

But I have another idea. I'm declaring 2010 The Year of Fun.

And I've started off with a bang. When you are at the bottom of the trenches anyway, even a small ounce of fun can go a long way.

After six weeks on a very strict elimination diet, my allergist and nutritionist asked me what food I wanted back first.

"Brownies," I said.

Technically, that was more than one food because I had to (on separate days) reintroduce milk, eggs, chocolate and sugar before I could "do" brownies.

But the day came, and I had my brownie with a tall glass of milk right before Christmas. No rash, no hives, and no epi-pen needed.

So 2010 came. Amidst the declarations that sugar lowers your immune system and knowing that I was surrounded by sick kids, I threw together a batch of homemade chocolate chip cookies the other day, just for the fun of it.

And I ate them.

I went shopping at Michaels. Anaphylactic to cinnamon, and knowing full well that they have those blasted cinnamon pinecones wafting through the store, I plowed through the doorway, holding my breath until I get inside. "If I die, I die," I declared, because darn it, I wanted scrapbooking materials.

My quest was accomplished. I survived - apparently the pine cones were only at the front door. Wheeee!

Then the ultimate chance for fun came. My girlfriend invited us to her birthday party at the movie theater. She had reserved seating, right in the middle of the theater for a viewing of *Avatar* in IMAX, digital, HD, 3-D whatever. It was supposed to be a cinematic experience you'd never forget.

I am NOT a cinematic experience type of woman. I get queasy watching the wind blow the drapes back and forth. But I reminded myself, this is The Year of Fun, so I must go even if it kills me.

So there I went, smuggling my hypoallergenic popcorn in past the "no outside food allowed" signs, and settling myself in a middle row seat. I put on my funky 3-D glasses and began to worry about the small children a few rows in front of me. Would they be frightened? What was their mother thinking?

But then the movie started and OH MY GOSH was it COOL!! I felt like I was there, in the jungle, soaring above the trees on a dragon/bird creature of some sort, dodging bullets as they came RIGHT AT MY FACE, and yes, even chanting with the aliens as glowing spiritual seed thingies fell all around me in an iridescent light that I felt I could reach out and touch.

When I left the theater, partially deaf from the exploding bombs, I reminded myself that THIS is indeed The Year of Fun. And my husband and I hurried off to join the others at a restaurant I couldn't eat at.

As I pulled out my dry, homemade gluten-free, fun-free sandwich and watched them wash down burgers and onion rings with strawberry margaritas, topped off with dessert, I relaxed back into the booth and laughed with my friends. No, all is not well with my world. Not nearly. And I don't expect life to get any easier. But in the midst of it all, I am okay.

All joking aside, I have made a living out of sharing with people "How I Stay Sweet When Life Turns Sour". God, it

seems, gives me lots of practice in that. More than I want. But God says, "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b revised).

If I get up in the morning and only have one good hour before I crash, I am going to pack every ounce of fun I can into that hour. I intend to live every day that I can, every moment, to the fullest. That is my goal for 2010: The Year of Fun.

END

Motherhood at Christmas Copyright 2009 by Pamela Gossiaux

This year I find myself thinking less about presents and Christmas trees, and pondering more on Mary, the mother of God

Motherhood been my favorite role ever since my firstborn was laid in my arms. I never aspired to motherhood - never played with dolls or babysat. I wasn't really crazy about kids, in fact, until I had my own.

Then my heart broke open and I felt an outpouring of love that I didn't imagine possible. There was me - or at least a part of me - outside my body, living this incredible life that I got to watch unfold all anew. With each new discovery - the clasp of a little hand around my thumb, the wonder at an autumn leaf, the touch of water dripping from a faucet - I marveled with my babies at their finds. We were like one.

It was painful, almost, to feel them separate as they grew, as if a part me of were leaving and I couldn't quite find the right thing to fill the empty spot. And yet...as they continue to move forward to new learning and new places, a part of me is filled up fuller than before, as if I am living life two or three times at once.

I feel what they feel. I hurt when they hurt. And I love like I never imagined possible.

Which brings me to Mary. If she had been able to see the future, would she have said "no" to God? Her baby was born in a stable and she had to lay him in a manger to sleep. No soft blankets or cribs. No doors to lock against the night. Then, while he was still young, she had to flee the country with him because a king wanted him dead.

But what troubles me the most is that she had to watch him die. As a mother, it hurts me to see my child sick or in pain. It bothers me if another child picks on him, or if I feel he is being treated unfairly in school. I'm the "mother bear" type that will jump up and defend my kid - at the risk of my own life if need be.

But Mary had to watch her son grow up to be mistreated and ridiculed. And at the end, when he was brutally tortured, falsely accused, and put to death on a cross, she was unable to do anything to stop it.

Even with the power and grace of God behind her, she had to be hurting.

Was she thinking about that small child she held that first night in the stable? Did she remember the soft brush of his baby hair against her face? Was she remembering the good times? The scrapbook memories that all of us mothers hold in our hearts?

He was her baby at one time...her son. She was his mother and it was her job to protect him.

And yet...he was God.

What was it like to kiss the cheek of God? To hold His hand? When she cuddled with Him at night to protect Him, was it she who felt safe instead? When people threatened him as a baby and she had to flee...did she feel the power of God, or the fear of a mother with a threatened child?

Mary. Mother of God. Blessed among women. Even if she clearly saw the future, I don't think she would have said "no" to God. No matter what our children put us through, no matter how much pain we endure because of them, I think most of us would agree that it is all worth it.

Mary affirms us women, us mothers. She was young, humble, and lived simply, and yet she displayed great strength of character. She did the job of raising her son despite great odds...even if she wasn't sure how it would all turn out.

We never know how it will all turn out, but great things can happen.

Mary's baby saved the world.

How To Stress Out A Mosquito By Pamela Gossiaux

Our back yard borders on a wetlands and is so full of mosquitoes that we can't go outside unless we roll in citronella and cover ourselves in netting. So I was intrigued when I read a news item the other day which claimed that people who are stressed out don't get bit by mosquitoes as much as others. Mosquitoes, according to the study, don't like to eat what's stressed, so they'll leave you alone.

If that's the case, I should be able to sit inside the Off tent filled with thousands of mosquitoes and not get a bite. I'm so stressed out that my eyelids twitch.

Bees, on the other hand, have been swarming me. They sense fear, and stress is fear. I can't go outside without having some forlorn yellow jacket dive-bomb me. I scream and run, and then he brings his friends.

"Hey guys, let's get the girl!"

I never used to be afraid of bees, but after a scary encounter with a yellow jacket's nest this summer, I'm now bordering on bee-phobia. Also, I'm told, the bees are drunk at this time of year. The fruit is all fermenting and they're lapping the

juices. They'll stagger into you and sting. Kind of like drunk driving.

So after reading the mosquito article and fending off days of bee attacks, I decided to figure out why I feel so stressed lately. I came up with quite a bit, but I'll only share a few.

Top Ten Reason's I'm Stressed Out

1. My Automatic Garage Door. It's moody and only opens sometimes, so it's a crapshoot if you're going to be able to get back in the house once you're out. My dad says it's a pressure panel thing and I can fix it. I don't know what that is. He says to look it up in the manual.

2. I don't know where the Garage Door Opener manual is.

3. Face Book. I'm addicted. I find myself composing (in my head) what I'm going to post next. "Pam is going to the post office." "Pam is eating Tutee Fruity ice cream and enjoying it." During a recent movie I found myself composing a critique for my FB page and missed a whole block of dialogue. None of this would be so inconvenient if I had a laptop.

4. Too many friends. I never thought you could have too many friends but the other night I had three Face Book chat windows open at the same time and thought my head was going to explode.

5. My Car.

The sun visor fell off. Have you ever tried to drive the kids to school in the morning, facing the rising sun with dew all over your windows and no sun visor? Oh - and the interior lights don't work. That wasn't so much of a problem until I saw the shadow of a very large spider drop on me the other night while we were driving on the freeway. It was pitch black in the car and there was no way to see where he went. Was he on me??? Do spiders bit people who are stressed out?

5. Oil Changes. I know I'm not supposed to wait until that little light comes on in my car, but somehow 7000 miles goes by faster than one thinks. And why do the guys at the oil change place have to look at me so disapprovingly when they show me the fluid levels? Sometimes I blame somebody else. They don't know whose car it is. Sometimes my husband takes it in for me, and blames me. Either way, it's stressful.

6. Hungry Kids. Mine, that is, not those poor starving children in other countries. My boys seem to eat constantly. I just get the kitchen cleaned up from one meal or snack and have to prepare another. I live in the kitchen. I keep snacks in the car. There are cracker crumbs in bed. You get the idea.

7. The Other Hungry Kids. I'd like to be able to feed ALL the starving children around the world. I can't even handle that locally. My church had a food pantry and asked everyone to bring in one can of tuna. I bought mine at the store, but forgot to bring it in. Now somebody has a hungry kid and no tuna to feed him.

8. Pets. Speaking of hungry things, our geriatric cat and growing goldfish need to eat three meals and two snacks a day. Each. And in the past 30 days my cat and aging horse have collectively cost me the value of a small car in vet bills. Aren't pets supposed to lower your blood pressure?

9. Allergies. Enough said.

10. Too much TV. Which is what my kids are getting right now so I can write this column.

So you can see why I should be mosquito-free.

My son went out back yesterday to dig for fishing worms. "Mom, that was awful," he said when he returned. "I kept hyperventilating."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, the mosquitoes kept attacking me so I'd think of something horrible to stress myself out like "What if I don't get to go fishing today?" and I'd say it over and over again and start to hyperventilate and the mosquitoes would go way. Then I'd forget and relax and they'd come back and I'd have to stress myself out all over again."

Unlike me, my son has to work at being stressed. Maybe I can learn something from him.

Well, a young one has finished his TV program and wants me to take him outside. I'll wrap up my column now and go do what all-good moms do - play with my kids.

Just let me go get the mosquito spray and netting.

Or perhaps I'll just read over my list one last time….

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." - Mathew 6:34

To read about Pam's upcoming new book, and other things that stress her out, visit her website at pamelagossiaux.com.

Florida Phobia Part II

Copyright 2009 by Pamela Gossiaux

Author of "Why Is There A Lemon In My Fruit Salad?"

I am an adventurer at heart. I've back-packed through Europe, sleeping on a train car in France with two small bearded men below my bunk who didn't have tickets. I've also slept on a train headed deep into Italy in a car shared with a Romanian family and the entire train guarded by heavily armed men in fatigues. I've witnessed drug sales in Rome, naked people in southern France, and eaten something I wasn't sure of in Paris.

I've tasted "The Water of Life" in Potiers (It numbs your throat on the way down.) and I've biked 30 miles across a Mexican isle in the middle of the day (stupid!)

I've stayed on an island in the deep forests of Canada where wolves and bears are frequently seen and a coal stove was our only heat.

Heck, I've survived this Michigan winter.

So it behooves some of you why on earth I'm afraid to go to Florida.

It all started with the plane tickets. The ones I had to buy at the last minute because I only had 48 hours notice I was going to Florida.

"We only have seats left in the last row," said the woman. "That's our family seating area."

"Family seating" are the words that first scared me. I've seen "family seating" at restaurants, went to "family restrooms" in malls and attended the "family service" on Christmas Eve at church. Any "family" event I've ever been to included crying children and stressed adults.

So you see my point.

Then I checked with the airport to see if my Epi-pen was considered a weapon or could I bring it with me on board?

"Can we take our stuffed animals on the plane?" asked my wide-eyed 3-year old, clutching his kitty.

"Maybe," I said.

"I have to take my kitty!" said Logan.

"You can, but kitty will have to go through an x-ray machine," I told him. I pictured the security forces trying to pry the cat out of my screaming child's arms. "Just for a little picture."

"Will it hurt?"

"You just can't take metal on," said my husband.

"What about copper?" asked Zachary, age 8.

"That's a metal," said my husband.

"Pennies are metal," said Zachary. "I can't take pennies? What if I hide them in Pink Bill?" (Pink Bill is his favorite stuffed animal.)

My patience was waning.

"If you hide metal in Pink Bill, he'll get thrown in the slammer," I said.

Both kid's eyes grew wider.

"What's the slammer?" they whispered.

I held one hand above the other and brought them together with a slap. There was a gasp of fear in the room.

"The Slammer." I said.

Then there's the issue of food. With a family who is allergic to nearly everything, eating out is an adventure in itself. Our hotel room has a microwave which I'm in the process of figuring out how to make complete dinners (from scratch) in.

Fortunately my mom is awesome. She found a whole list of allergy-friendly restaurants in Disney World and found a Whole Foods twenty-minutes away. She even called the hotel where we are staying and is now on a first-name basis with Chef Gamma.

"You bring it, I cook it," he said. "No problem."

So I just might get to cook with the chef.

My husband, Duane, is nervous.

"I...I get a free continental breakfast and…and… lunch at the conference," he mumbled, his eyes low to the ground. And because he has booked his flight through work, he gets to sit up in the front of the plane with the big people. Alone. He'll probably read a book or watch a movie on his iPod.

Heck. He might not need to see us at all.

As I was trying to figure out how to pack my gluten-free bread in a suitcase, his left eye twitched, something I've noticed more of in the past few weeks.

"You should get that checked," I said.

"I usually only bring carry-ons…," his voice trailed off helplessly.

"I'm bringing two carry-ons," I told him. "Zachary and Logan."

So pray for us. If Pink Bill doesn't get thrown in the slammer and Chef Gamma doesn't cross-contaminate our food…; if I don't eat out and risk food-poisoning…; if Logan stays in his harness and doesn't get lost at

Disney World. and if nobody needs to use the bathroom while we are on the plane, we just might have fun.
I'm throwing all caution to the wind and preparing for an adventure with the entire family.
How bad can it be?

Florida Phobia Part I

Copyright 2009 by Pamela Gossiaux "You're gonna kill me," my husband said when he got home from work. "My boss is sending me to a conference at Disney World in a few weeks. Of all places to go without you and the kids… It'll be hard."

Ha! I laughed out loud, because it was funny. He actually thought he was going without us???

Ha!

It turns out that we can stay in his hotel room for FREE and get free admission to the parks! AND, my mother-in-law lives in Clearwater so after a week at Disney we're going to go spend another four days at her condo near the beach!!!

How could anybody turn that down???

Ha!

So in resignation, my husband sighed and agreed that we could go. His hands shook a little. I saw his left eye twitch. I went on-line and booked our plane tickets.

But as I hit the "send" button I had a flashback. Fear and trepidation filled me. And one thought went through my mind: What have I done???

Now, you may be wondering why we are both so leery of going to Florida, especially with such a great vacation package.

So let me tell you.

It's because our lives mirror a special Lifetime Movie Event on that weepy cable channel. Or perhaps CSI is a better comparison because we're forever calling 911 for somebody and we do have a lot of spin-offs. At any rate, it's a drama.

Last time my husband went to this work conference we went with him. Same deal. Disney property, free admission to the parks, free stay. Grandparents went with us. I was naively excited.

Day One went okay. We enjoyed the Magic Kingdom. I have pictures of my son with Mickey Mouse. Then on Day Two I got food poisoning.

If you're going to die when you're in Florida, at least try to crawl, claw or negotiate your way out of going to Celebration hospital. (Even the hospitals near Disney have a fun name.) My husband took me to Emergency where after eight hours it appeared we weren't going to be getting an IV anytime soon because there was a back-up of sick people (mostly food poisoning cases). My heart was still beating so I didn't yet qualify for treatment. Two days later wasn't any better. Still no IV after another 8-hour wait with a sick baby (yes…the baby had a fever) and a raccoon-eyed husband who was spending nights in the ER and days at his conference.

I finally made it to my mother-in-law's house where I collapsed on the floor in intense pain from a spastic colon. "Call an ambulance," I croaked.

"You don't need an ambulance," said my mother-in-law. She got down on the floor in front of me, shaking a bottle of pills.

"How about a Vicadin?"

Ten days later (yes, TEN DAYS) I still had NO IDEA how I'd make the plane trip home. Loaded down with luggage and a two-year old, I was shaky and weak and still a bit too busy with the bathroom. While I sat and waited for our plane, my husband saw Hulk Hogan walk by.

Whoosh. Duane was gone.

I was left with the luggage and a gnawing feeling that I'd never make it to the bathroom if I had to lug it all with me. I needed a drink.

(Of water.)

I prayed and God answered because just as I thought I would expire I saw a man reading his Bible.

"Are you a Christian?" I asked.

"Uh…yes," he said, a bit wary.

"Good, because I REALLY need somebody to pray for me…"

And so I prayed with a stranger at the airport and God was good. I made it on the plane and through the ride and my knees didn't collapse until I was halfway up the bedroom stairs of my own house. To this day, SEVEN years later, I still suffer post-traumatic stress when the Mouse is mentioned.

And that's only issue number One.

Issue number two is far more complex and I'll be sure to fill you in on my Other Reason For Fearing Florida in my next column.

But hey, one good thing came out of my last trip.

My husband has a photo of himself with Hulk Hogan. Who can argue that it wasn't all worth it?

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I've kept track of my children's "firsts" in their baby books.

First word.

First tooth.

First steps.

But it wasn't until the other day that I realized that their "lasts" are just as important. They're a different sort of milestone - and the realization that something is over, finished…gone forever except in the existence of memory.

It was an ordinary moment for us, a part of our everyday routine. I snuggled down into the rocking chair with my 3-year old to read bedtime stories. I got his favorite blanket and snuggled it around him.

"I don't need that," he said, and tossed it on the floor. I put it aside and there it has laid for more than three weeks. Something he held on to for comfort, for teething, for security - is no longer needed.

It's a soft, faded green blanket - a sling, really - with a light pattern of leaves across it. I bought it new when he was only a few weeks old - I loved the colors. The cotton material is now worn around the edges, a bit threadbare from all the use. I look at it with a pang of loss, and wonder if I'll ever cuddle him in it again or if it will soon be packed away in the cedar chest.

I also noticed he now calls me "Mom." I tried desperately last night to remember when he last used "Mommy" - a sound so sweet to my ears. Mom is good, too, but Mommy…;where did that go? Where has my baby gone?

How do you fully appreciate something that you aren't even really sure is happening? How do you know to grasp onto this moment because it may never come again? How do you know when an ordinary, trivial moment may be the last?

My friend remembers the last time her little girl nursed. "She bumped her head on the wall and nursed for comfort, and that was it," she said. Did she realize it at the time? Did she grab onto that moment, freeze frame it in her mind, remember the closeness, the soft baby hair, the little hand as it grasped her own? Did she live the moment?

By next summer Logan will have outgrown his baby swing in the backyard. It was one of his very favorite things to do, and he'd swing for hours if he could get me to push him that long. One day last fall as it was getting colder out and most of the leaves had fallen, I snapped a photo of him in his swing. The straps were too tight and he barely fit in it. I knew it, too, was soon to be a thing of the past.

My eight-year old, Zachary, likes for me to lay with him at night and tell him stories before he falls asleep. Sometimes I'm too tired. But mostly I try to because it's one of my favorite times of the day. And someday he's going to be too old to have his mom put him to bed. Someday is a time that will come all too soon.

So enjoy the firsts. Photograph them, mark them down, celebrate them. But in your everyday existence, don't forget to memorize the colors, the smells, the feel of what might seem like a trivial moment. It might be the last time it ever happens.

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GABE AND IZZY

I went to a dog's birthday party on Saturday.

It was cute. Izzy, the dog being honored, showed up with bows in her hair and her nails painted a festive, matching pink. She received doggie presents and even got to gobble up a doggie-sized birthday cake with her two little bulldog friends watching and drooling nearby.

It sounds corny, but it was a touching event that drew press coverage and brought people in from all over southeastern Michigan to help with the celebration.

You see, Izzy and her 28-year old owner Gabrielle, both share the same neurological disorder - a disease that is slowly stealing control of their nervous system. The vets said Izzy wasn't supposed to live more than a year. She is now eight.

Gabe was a dancer. As a child, this beautiful blond-haired, blue-eyed girl loved ballet, tap and jazz dancing and taking to the stage was a joy for her. At age 12, when her disease first began, she had to give up that joy and over the years as she began to stumble and limp, the kids in her high school bullied her. She was teased and even beaten. Eventually, she retreated to her room, curled up in bed and hid from the world. Only when her parents got her a puppy to care for, and only when that puppy got sick, did she venture out into the world that had abused her, among her peers in her home town, to take her dog to the vet.

The dog, it seems, has what Gabe has.

That's when their journey began. Nearly eight years ago.

Animal Planet featured a show on them, which became a hit. Then a local teacher asked Gabe and her dog to visit their class. The kids asked about her background, and when she started talking about bullying and how it scarred her, they really listened. Today, Gabe, who is now in a wheelchair, and her faithful companion Izzy, travel the nation talking to school kids about the long-lasting scars of bullying.

Gabe and Izzy are over-comers. Gabe lost the control of her muscles in a scary and horrible way, with no medical treatment available and none in sight. She lost dancing, which meant the world to her. And she lost herself for awhile, as harsh words and mean hands tore apart who she believed herself to be.

Life is hard, and Gabe has certainly had hard knocks. The family has undergone other difficulties as well. But sometimes, even though we can't see it at the time, good can come from bad circumstances. Gabe, through her willingness to be vulnerable, and through her courage at facing people who once taunted her, has touched thousands of lives. Cards and letters pour in from kids, wounded in spirit like she was, who can relate to her. Kids who have found hope in her struggle against her illness. Kids who have realized that their harsh words can do a lifetime of damage to others.

Would Gabe chose this same path to live over again if she had the choice? Probably not. Would any of us? Wouldn't we all like to walk a less rocky path, with less fear and uncertainty? But sometimes, I think, if we can let go of the fear of

today, we may see the bigger picture of tomorrow. And maybe, our journey will be so much more fulfilling when we get to the final destination, then if we had taken the road smoothly worn.

Gabe's memoir "Still Dancing" will be released in about a year. Until then, she and Izzy will continue to touch lives. She has certainly touched mine.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. - 1 Corinthians 13:12.

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The Opposable Thumb I recently broke my hand and it's in a cast. My thumb is immobile. "If you behave and keep this thing on, we'll give you a removable cast so you can take it off to shower, but only to shower," said my orthopedic hand surgeon. "If not, in three weeks you get the real thing." After receiving that threat from my doctor, I came home yesterday and realized that I couldn't peel the potatoes for dinner. There is a reason God gave us (and primates) opposable thumbs. Have you ever tried to peel a banana with one hand? Dress a toddler? Change a diaper? "You need to potty train," I tried to explain to my toddler this morning. "Mommy has a boo-boo hand." I don't think he understood the gravity of the situation. "Mommy, carry me," he said in a sleepy voice, raising his little arms above his head. It's physically impossible (at least for me) to pick up a 30 pound child with one arm. And so, armed with a box of disposable latex gloves, I began my life as a physically challenged mother. One day many years ago, when I used to show horses, I hired a guy to transport my horse to a far away show. The man drove a stick-shift - and he only had one arm. I hired a tax man a few years back - he was able to work him numbers, his pencil and his calculator - with only one arm. So having been exposed to such amazing feats of physical agility, one would think I should be prepared. But I'm not. I got up this morning, struggled into my clothes, buttoned buttons, zipped up my pants, tied my shoes with my teeth and realized I forgot to use the bathroom. Rats. So one hour later... You get the idea. We need opposable thumbs. They are what set us apart from other animals. Without our thumbs, we can't grasp small objects. Snap our fingers. Pick up a frying pan. Hold open the latest (and heaviest) Harry Potter hardcover book to read. I thought of trying to take advantage of the situation. "Honey, you have to cut up the salad. Honey, I can't wash the dishes - I'll get my cast wet." But that got me growled at. So, to get myself and my husband organized, I set about the task of becoming a one-handed mother, homemaker, and typist. I decided to list the challenges: With only one hand, you can't- drive and talk on a cell phone- drive and eat- eat a snack in front of the TV and channel surf with the remote- unwrap a candy bar So you can see how my life has been reduced. But being a person who wants to look on the bright side, I'm trying to see my strengths and focus on what I still CAN do with only one hand. I watched my toddler for a bit this morning to get some ideas. He often only has one free hand to use, because the other is usually carrying a toy or grasping a blanket. Here's what I learned: I can still - throw things - bang on things - pick my nose - hitch-hike And now that I think of it, a few of them are useful over the next three weeks... Copyright 2007 by Pamela Gossiaux To read more, visit her website at www.fruitsaladthebook.com

I Like Rabbit Both of my sons love the "bear of little brain", Winnie the Pooh, and his friends. The other night at dinner we were asking which one we liked best. (This is the deepest our dinner conversation gets...) Zachary likes Tigger, the happy, bouncy character. (All that bouncing not only gets on my nerves, it makes me think of checks). Logan likes Eeyore, the slow, quiet and somewhat unhappy donkey. (My similarities with Eeyore's house situation stresses me out). My husband likes Gopher and "whistles" through his teeth when he talks about him. (Enough said.) But I like Rabbit. Yes, I know the other animals are more cute and charming. My two-year old even started crying the other day when Rabbit came on the TV screen. "Wabbit scares me!" he claimed. And to be honest, Rabbit WAS yelling. But I can relate to him. All he wants is a little quiet time to tend to his garden. But Tigger keeps bouncing him, knocking him over and smashing his vegetables. Pooh bear invites himself over and eats too much honey and gets stuck in Rabbit's door. And Roo gets a bit overly-enthusiastic about trick-or-treating. Rabbit tries. He really does. He makes plans, decorates, organizes, and then the others join in and total chaos erupts. Even the bugs won't leave Rabbit alone. They invade his garden, his house, and eat his Christmas tree. Try as he might - and he tries very hard - life just isn't easy for poor Rabbit. What Rabbit needs is a little R and R. He needs to do a "Calgon Take Me Away" long soak in the bathtub, followed by a good night's sleep. Maybe some electric fencing around the garden would make Tigger think twice about bouncing in. Forget the bear - make him a carry-out meal. And as for enthusiastic little Roo - where is that kangaroo's mother at anyway? I rest assured that Rabbit is, indeed, my favorite character. And if my husband sees similarities in me and the long-ear, so what? All I want is a little time to tend my garden - and then I promise not to yell (too much) when I get bounced. Copyright 2007 by Pamela Gossiaux

Can Bees Spell "Organic"? I bought a jar of organic honey the other day. Typical of most moms, I try to feed my kids a healthy diet. But then I got to thinking - HOW do we know the honey is organic? Do the bee-keepers line all the little bees up in a row and say "now troops, I only want you to get pollen from Farmer Tuck's field. Don't fly into Farmer Hall's fields - he uses pesticides." And how do they know the bees listen? What if bee #132 was over at Mrs. Studebaker's chemically treated lawn huffing some flower? Is that bee drug tested? Does she have to pee into a bee-sized cup? So I decided to do a little bit of research. Turns out that organic bees have reason to be happier, kind of like "free range chickens". Their owners don't haul their hives all over the country, following seasonal farmers in order to make more money. "Organically" handled bees (which I will call OBs) get to stay at home and actually sleep during the winter. Who doesn't like to curl up under the covers when the snow is flying? Also, when those pesky mites attack, literally taking their breath away and killing OBs, their beekeepers spray them with essential oils, such as wintergreen, while the non-OBs get sprayed

with a dose of pesticide to kill the mites. So, its kind of like a trip to the spa for the OBs. Aromatherpy and skin sloughing. Are the bees not feeling up to par? The OBs are also fed organic nutritional supplements to make them stronger and boost their immunity. Like shopping at the health food store. So happy bees make healthy honey. And that makes me happy (or healthy…) But at any rate, the next time you see a bee pollenating your flower, take a whiff of her. If she smells of wintergreen, chances are she has good working conditions. But if the bee in question has glazed over eyes and looks like she's had one too many…;steer clear of her honey. "So Mom," my son asked me this morning at breakfast. "This says 100% clover honey. How do they know the bees haven't been to other types of flowers besides clover…?" Ah…;well. Sometimes ignorance IS bliss. Or at least a whole lot less work! Copyright 2007 by Pamela Gossiaux The Importance of Insignificance

On a recent vacation to the beach a high wind pushed the water about six feet out past the original shore line, leaving lots of tiny minnows and crayfish trapped among the rocks. My two sons, myself and my husband were walking along the shore when I suggested going back for the net. My seven-year old was thrilled. I trudged back to the boat house, got the net and a bucket and proceeded to capture dozens of minnows. I put them in the bucket and helped my son round up the rest so we could safely release them in the deeper water. My husband, of course, took a turn, but it was much later into the event. He caught a few minnows, one a bit larger than the others. For the rest of the day my son told the relatives back at the beach house how his dad had captured this HUGE minnow, so much bigger than the rest. He excitedly described the adventure, with his Dad as the main character. Of course, I, his mother, was never mentioned. Not once. I wanted to say "Whose idea was this? Who went to get the net? Who carried you in her womb for NINE LONG MONTHS?????" But I remained silent. Fortunately, I realized it was the adventure itself that was important, not me. Somewhere in the deep recesses of his mind my son knows I was involved. And hey, I'm in the photos we took. Besides, I was able to give him an adventure that day - and as a mother part of my job is setting up situations where my sons can succeed and grow. I’m not the star of the show - but I can write the scenes. And sometimes, especially when I see them smile, that is enough. Copyright 2007 by Pamela Gossiaux NO REGRETS

It was the last day of summer. My to-do list was longer than the grass in our lawn and I had a story deadline looming, several baskets of laundry to put away, and my guest speaker had just cancelled on me, leaving me with nothing to share at the Mom's group I was leading that night. "Mom, I didn't get to go outside for recess today, so can we play outside at the park?" asked my kindergartener, Zachary. "Pleeeeeease?" I sighed. I had been promising to take him to the new playscape in Whitmore Lake. And today the weather was beautiful. Perfect, in fact. "Okay," I said. "But only for twenty minutes and then we have to come right back home." Was I nuts? It was already 1:00 p.m. I didn't have dinner planned and we had to leave at 2:30 for Zachary's violin lesson all the way in Ann Arbor. We went to the park. Twenty minutes turned into forty. The baby fell asleep in the sling and I figure he needed his afternoon nap anyway, so I sat down in the shade and watched Zachary play. A friend of his happened to be there at that same time and they were having great fun. On the way home, he told me about the adventures the two boys had shared. What wonderful stories! I've always been a sucker for putting my kids first. When baby Zachary wanted to be rocked to sleep every nap and every nighttime as a baby, I rocked him until he outgrew the rocking chair. Now he can't sit still long enough to be held on my lap. When he wanted to help decorate his room, I gave up my well-planned (and tidy) dinosaur theme, and let him add moons and help paint dinosaurs on the frame of his mirror. It's not perfect, but it's beautiful. I blew bubbles and caught bugs and built snowmen and my husband and I slept on the extreme edges of the bed when Zachary needed to cuddle with us at night, and ended up sprawling out across the mattress sideways. I ignored well-intended folks who told me I'd spoil him by holding him too much and I held him as much as he'd let me. Today, he weighs fifty pounds, and is past the carrying stage and I miss that. Life happens and I'm not the perfect parent. There were times when deadlines had to come before baby, or when dinner had to be made despite the fact that the leaves in the back yard were begging to be jumped in. But for the most part, I can't get enough of my kids. Two years ago I had a life-threatening illness that took my oxygen levels dangerously low. While my doctors tried to figure out what was wrong with me, I had a week to think about my life, knowing I might not live to see my children grow up. I recovered, but I came out of that experience knowing that I didn't have many regrets. I had loved my family as much as I could love them, had lived life as fully as I knew how. To come face to face with that isn't a gift many of us get. After that I realized more than ever, again, what is important. On that last day of summer, dinner wasn't perfect, but we ate. My deadlines were met later that week. And I went to my Mom's group with my hair a little out of place, some sunburn on my cheeks, and talked to them about Attachment Parenting, and how the greatest gift we can give our kids is that of ourselves. Copyright 2007 By Pamela Gossiaux