

Personal Energy Crisis

I'll sleep when the kids are grown and gone

BY MONICA SCALF

Some people long to conquer noble pursuits in their lives: running a marathon, hiking grand mountains, or communing with wildlife on a safari.

I, however, would be content with conquering some of the more mundane things. I'd start with my pressure cooker. Never has there been a more intimidating home apparatus. My children cringe in horror when it makes its rare appearances. I'm starting to wonder if it's really worth the trouble for mediocre pork roast.

I would also be content with figuring out a way for someone other than me to empty the bathroom garbage. If this happens, I will be snapping photos like a tourist who has just seen a rare and majestic animal. That is, if I haven't fainted. If there's a fresh roll of toilet paper that I've had nothing to do with, it's over, I'm taking a home movie. You Tube, here I come.

Now I'm not complaining (OK, maybe I am), but somehow I fell into the job of keeping the house functioning. In other words, accusing eyes look toward me when we're out of Gatorade or Advil, when a favorite piece of clothing can't be found, and when goodness forbid, there's a Saturday morning with expired eggs in the fridge. Just when I think I have it together, we're out of laundry detergent or some other necessary item that keeps houses humming along nicely; TUMS comes to mind.

I'm just going to admit it. I'm a terrible household manager. The sea of paper that I have to wade through in the morning to get to my desk should be a clue as to my organizational skills. The 20,290 e-mail messages in my inbox might be a small sign of my inability to let go of clutter. Not once have I left the house without having to come back in to retrieve something I've forgotten. At this point, I'm just happy if I remember said item when I'm still in the driveway instead of turning around blocks into my journey.

I'm not sure when my family will catch on and hire a better, more qualified person. Let's face it, though, the pay stinks. Besides the crummy wages, I think the job is zapping my energy. At about 3 p.m. every day, I can barely keep my eyes open. Since they don't offer intravenous bags of Diet Coke, I've considered trying out the product known as 5 Hour Energy. But five hours would only get me until 8 pm, and any parent knows that this isn't going to cut the mustard, or fold the laundry, or help with the homework, or complete the variety of other tasks that take place until my usual 11:30 bedtime. When they make 25 Hour Energy, then I'll pay top dollar.

So among the ultimate in domestic noble pursuits, I would be

thrilled to conquer my own personal energy crisis. The amount of times that I think I'm tired is only slightly less than the amount of times I say it in one day. My idea of a lunchtime quickie (much to my husband's dismay) is catching some shuteye in the overstuffed family room chair at noon. I'll nap anywhere these days. I've been caught at the bus stop, waiting for guitar lessons to finish, and in doctor's waiting rooms. I'm trying to think of the last time I felt completely invigorated and refreshed. I think it was around 1994. Since then, I've been going through concealer at an alarming rate. Some days there isn't enough of it in the world to fix these tired eyes.

My only solace is that I've heard that the physical demands and time requirements for parenting and homekeeping get less intensive as the kids get older. It's a cruel trick that by the time they are out of the nest, we'll have trained our bodies to require much less sleep. When we can finally sleep to our heart's content, we'll be wide-awake at 6 a.m. sweeping out the garage, organizing the canned goods alphabetically, or most likely, worrying about our grown children.

But for now I try to remember, in my exhausted state, that we only get a compressed amount of time to be deeply entwined in our kids' lives. I can already begin to feel the unraveling. And while I'm excited that my kids are gaining independence, I'm also excited when they still need me (to do things like buy Gatorade and make sure their favorite shirt is clean). So I guess I'll keep my current position. It comes with great fringe benefits like being able to watch my children develop like Polaroid pictures right before my eyes. Each year a new attribute comes into view – musical, wow; good conversationalist, heavenly; nice person, awesome. These are the moments that keep me awake when everything in my body screams sleep! Well, that, and the occasional Mountain Dew.



Monica Scalf is a freelance writer and mother of two in West Chester. If she isn't downing Mountain Dew, she can be found at mscalff@fuse.net. Check out her Web site at www.theordinarymatters.com.