



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Do kids hinder or inspire our dreams?

People often ask me how I write with four children.

By now I have a pat answer: It's not pretty.

More often than not, my stories are pieced together, written and edited in a series of stolen moments. If I'm working while the kids are home, I have the added challenge of tuning out their chaos. I'll write and write until I fall under a spell, catching the groove I've long waited for. And just when I hit the brink of inspiration, the inevitable happens: Camille will toddle into my office wearing a big grin...and a foul-smelling diaper.

Like I said, it's not pretty.

I wish I had a daily routine, concrete time no one can interrupt, but I don't. Writers are told to write every day, and while I agree with this, life gets in the way. I may go days or even weeks without writing due to family matters. I hate these breaks, because falling back under the spell is hard, and when I'm not writing I don't feel right. But as a mom, I have bigger priorities, and as much as I like to believe the world needs my writing, my daughters need me much more.

So for now I write when I can, usually in stretches of two to five hours. And while this arrangement works, I wonder sometimes how productive I'd be if my life wasn't stop-and-go. What if I had no distractions to break the zone? What if I could ride the trance out, working late at night and picking up the next morning? Could I flesh out a manuscript in six weeks, finish a novel in six months? I believe I could. With time on my side I could be a writing machine, accomplishing in spurts what would normally take me months.

This leads me to a question I find relevant to all parents: Do kids hinder or inspire our dreams? There's no question how much time and energy they siphon. Children are needy by nature, and regardless of how much attention we show them, they want more. By the time we tend to them we're exhausted—and hardly in the mood to pursue a passion.

From this standpoint, kids *do* hold us

back. They push our personal pleasures aside and slow us down, making tortoises out of hares. In a world as fast as ours, it seems impossible that slow and steady could ever win the race.

On the other hand, children add a richness to our lives that I believe inspires better work, thus compensating for time we lose. As a writer, I don't find inspiration sitting at my computer. I find it when I'm out living, and the paths I take because of my children—going to the ball park, school functions, birthday parties, even doctor visits—put me in contact with people who constantly trigger new ideas.

Many *Aha!* moments arise through casual conversation, because an offhand remark a parent makes while waiting for dance to end can hit me like a thunderbolt. Immediately I'll make a mental note, knowing that someday I'll use that nugget in a story.

Then of course there's the inspiration I find through my children's prolific take on life. Their innocence is brilliant, better than anything I could concoct. Thanks to my daughters, I experience life on a deeper level, caring more and loving harder. When my writing taps into the emotions they trigger, it gains a definite intensity.

It's easy to see our children as barriers, obstacles to what we want or feel called to do. But what I've learned is to work smarter, not harder, and approach my goal in baby steps. For now I'm in the tortoise stage, and while tortoises are slow, they make progress, and progress is all it takes to reach a destination. It's my hope that other moms taking the scenic route through parenthood may be encouraged to take baby steps toward their dreams, and remember that the children who consume our life and attention now may also be the muses who influence our best work to come.

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