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Mother Writer

by Melissa Wilkins

I am a mother. It was shocking to think about, for a while, but six years into the gig, I'm not sure how else to answer when asked what I "do." Perhaps I should reply: *Oh, I change diapers. Or I'm a full-time mother. I guess I could answer, I'm a homeschooling mom. I could be more descriptive: I stimulate, entertain, encourage, nurture, build up, teach, maintain; I coax, cajole, coach, correct, provide consequences.* None of that should preclude my claiming other titles, but "mother" is the most obvious, the easiest to see.

What do you do? The question is flawed, really. It's not asking how I spend my time—it's asking how I gain income. What are you paid to do? What talent or skill do you possess that someone else finds worthy of cash pay? And if you aren't employed, what's your excuse? It wasn't an overwhelming desire to write that brought me home full-time; it was motherhood. By that logic, mothering must be what I "do."

I am content with that label, "mother," but parenting doesn't consume my every waking moment, nor my every thought. There are minutes to myself each day, courtesy of movies and toy trains, dress-up clothes, and mud. And what do I do in those minutes? I think. I plan. I read and write. I throw myself into creative efforts and get frustrated when I have to repeatedly push them aside; I end up putting them away until I "have more time," which hasn't happened yet, and when it finally does, I'll have lost interest in or forgotten half of what I started.

I don't have a regular time to write or an empty desk to sit at. I may write while also playing house with a five-year old or in between identifying types of dinosaurs for a two-year old. I may pause while making lunch and run to the computer to record an

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idea—or maybe just a phrase—before it's lost to the fog that is my sleep-deprived brain. I am lucky if I can see the whole computer screen behind the stacks of books and papers that inevitably clutter my little shared workspace. I write in spurts. When any one (or more) of the children is in an especially needy stage, I don't find time to write at all. I am, of course, regularly interrupted by diaper changes, snacks, stories, scraped knees, and disasters involving paint and clean laundry. I suspect that if I had a regular supply of Time To Myself, I would take that to be Time For Myself; I fear there might not be enough bubble baths and chocolate in all the world for me to tire of self-indulgence and move onto regular, disciplined, intellectual endeavors. And yet, by bits and pieces, ideas do find their way onto the computer screen.

Am I a writer? There was writing in my life before my kids came along, albeit of the more technical variety. That sort of writing needed to be concise! And pithy! With no room for colloquialisms! Or expressive punctuation! The work was creative, but the writing—not so much. Still, if my mind were cluttered with work projects, I probably wouldn't feel the need to seek out this creative, communicative outlet. I would be doing *something* creative, but it wouldn't be *this*. And since I am doing this, I can't be doing that other work. Neither one better, to my mind, just different. But being at home with my kids, oddly, allows me the time and mental space to write.

Now, in my unclaimed moments, I want to create, and in so doing, reflect on the creation of selves that is going on around me every day. Sometimes I want to create intellectual spaces that have nothing much to do with the developing individuals in my house. I want to connect, to communicate, to share experience—and reading and writing are useful tools in pursuing those goals. Maybe that makes me a mother-writer or a mother who writes; or maybe there's no need for qualification. I mother when mothering is needed, and I write when I am able. I am a mother, and I am a writer.

Melissa Wilkins lives and writes in southern California, where she also keeps busy with the care and feeding of three small children. More of Melissa's writing can be found at her personal blog makingthingsup.blogspot.com.

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