

[columns](#)[features](#)[poetry](#)[mama likes](#)[about us](#)[subscribe](#)

if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy



columns

Outnumbered: Olympic Experience

Sometimes I think I am friendly with my computer. I think I know how to use it as the Internet-enabled tool that it is. And then the collective computer universe steps up to smack me down. That is to say, I'm trying to figure out how to watch the Olympics on the Internet. It's not going well.

There are four bodies jostling against me, pushing at each other to get a better view of the screen, awaiting the excitement of *Men's swimming! and Women's hundred yard dash!* Abigail and Owen are, somewhat unsuccessfully, sharing a chair to my left. Audrey has her own chair because she's two. Enough said about that. Sadie Jane is in my left arm, which I have twisted as far behind myself as possible to keep her pounding fists away from the keyboard as I navigate away from the Official But Not Helpful Website in search of actual video.

"Is it ready now, mom? Now?" Owen keeps asking.

Abigail would like me to know that she wants to see a marathon. Forget the teenage girls in sparkly leotards flipping through the air and landing on a beam the width of Owen's palm. Not interesting! Will there be a long race with a bunch of guys running sort of slowly for several hours? Because that, apparently, will thrill the crowds at my house.

I'm just trying to provide normative cultural experience here. My kids may not know what Nickelodeon is. They may have never set foot in a McDonald's. They don't know Miley from Britney. But by golly, they will have seen Michael Phelps collect gold medals like bottle caps.

I've already downloaded the special video player. "Watch up to four videos at once!"

Melissa Wilkins



Melissa Wilkins lives in Southern California with her husband, Dane, and their four children, Abigail, Owen, Audrey, and Sadie. Melissa blogs at [Making Things Up](#), and you can find more of Melissa's writing at [melissacamarawilkins.com](#).

Read more of Melissa's [Outnumbered](#) column.

search mamazine:

reads the promo screen. Why I would ever *want* to watch four videos at once, it does not say. I've launched the video player, crashed the computer, closed my browser, restarted the computer, relaunched the video player. But still the Internet is not satisfied to just show me the bleeping Olympic videos already.

What country do I live in, the website wants to know. I don't really think this is any of their business, but I click "United States of America." Next, it wants my zip code and television service provider. But if I had a television service provider, I would not be logging on to watch their over-produced video clips. *By clicking here, you affirm that you are a paying customer of this television service provider*, the screen reads, and I can't do it. I can't steal cable—or anyway, lie about buying cable—to participate in this most universal of spectator events. It wouldn't be in the Olympic spirit. Besides, I don't recognize any of the cable providers on the list.

I can access most of the static content, though. "Here's a picture from the Opening Ceremony," I say. "Look, fireworks!" The children are not really impressed. I read them the list of events. ("Is there airplane racing?" Owen wants to know.) I find a commercial featuring Phelps, and we watch that a couple of times through while Sadie tries in vain to eat the mouse.

This is mostly my fault. For a person who loves to plan, I certainly manage to offer a lot of activities I'm not prepared for during the day. I can't take an hour-long road trip without packing a diaper bag and cooler, identifying all possible bathroom stops along the way, and plotting two alternate routes in case of road closure or traffic, but at home any old thing that pops into my head rolls right out my mouth. *Hey, guys! Shall we bake bread?* Uh, except we have no yeast for the dough. *Anybody want to go to the park?* Whoops, three of you aren't dressed, and one of you needs a diaper change. *Let's watch the Olympics!* Wait, there are about fifteen steps to get from here to there.

When Abigail was an only child—maybe even after Owen joined the party—I could get away with this. I might even have thought of it as a motivational technique. (*Want to go to the park? Great, find some pants!*) But with four—or maybe just because one is a baby and one's a toddler—it's just plain stupid of me. There's no way I'm going to get four kids shoed and two of them diapered, have the other two preemptively use the bathroom, change the shirt of the one who spit up without provocation, and find my keys and wallet—all to run to the store for a packet of yeast. Not going to happen. Someday I will learn to look in the cupboard before mentioning baking. My parenting skills just haven't caught up with reality yet.

browse by columnist:

[Amy Anderson](#)
[Renee Cashmere](#)
[Heather Cori](#)
[Anjali Enjeti-Sydow](#)
[Jennifer Graf Groneberg](#)
[Kenna Lee-Ribas](#)
[Shari MacDonald Strong](#)
[Tomas Moniz](#)
[Jennifer New](#)
[Sheri Reed](#)
[Meredith Resnick](#)
[Rebecca Sherman](#)
[Michelle Taylor](#)
[Laura Tuley](#)
[Emily Wagner](#)
[Susan Wagner](#)
[Kate Washington](#)
[Melissa Wilkins](#)
[_\(archives\) Beverly Reed](#)
[_\(archives\) Kristen M. Chase](#)
[_\(archives\) Laura Davis](#)
[_\(archives\) Lindsay Ferrier](#)
[_\(archives\) Lucinda Ferrara](#)
[_\(archives\) Sasha Hom](#)
[_\(archives\) Stephanie Dennis](#)
[_\(archives\) Timi Ross Poeppelman](#)

>> [all columns](#)

And my current reality involves four children waiting expectantly to view some sporting action. (Oh, alright, really two are waiting expectantly, one is kicking the leg of the computer desk, and the other one's pulling my hair.) I click on athlete bios, but these hold no appeal for the under-ten set. Ditto the schedule of events. Eventually I give up on all the official sites, and we watch the men's gymnastics competition from the 2004 games on YouTube in Spanish. Today's lesson: not so much about the cultural experience as about creativity on the fly. Oh well. It'll do.

column added on 2008-08-17 :: Comments (4) :: Trackback (0)

>> [columns listing](#)

[home](#) :: [columns](#) :: [features](#) :: [poetry](#) :: [mama likes](#) :: [about us](#) :: [subscribe](#) :: [buy stuff](#) :: [support us](#) :: [submit](#) :: [contact](#)

[Administrator Login](#)

© mamazine.com, some rights reserved.

