

Inspiring Story: Super Mum

Inspirational Christian Story

I can't pinpoint the moment when I realised I would never make Mother of the Year. It might have been the day I realised that my lecture to my children on not leaving their toys on the floor for me to trip over could be heard several houses away.

Or maybe it was the time my daughter brought home a gift from her preschool, a book entitled *How To Really Love Your Child*. (I suspect it had something to do with her talent for sharing embarrassing stories about her family.)

Where did I go wrong? I was going to be Super Mum. I played Mozart to my babies. I knew muffin recipes off by heart. My freezer was full of healthy baby foods lovingly prepared from the freshest ingredients. My house was tidy and uncluttered. I read conscientiously to the first baby, long before she could understand a word I was saying. My bedside table groaned with the advice of renowned psychologists on best mothering practices. I obsessed about schools. I agonised over the psychological damage of every impatient word spoken to my kids. And then I got real.

There was that first trip to the park on my own, where I spent the entire time trying to stop my 2-year-old from running headlong into traffic, while the 3-year-old wandered off looking for strangers to talk to.

Fresh air, I decided after that, was highly over-rated. As was this whole impossible ideal of the perfect mother.

The other day I heard my favourite radio station promoting a competition for Super Mums, it being Mother's Day this weekend. Fat chance, I thought. Someone should tell them they're a little behind the times. The Super Mum is dead - or at least no longer in vogue.

And not before time. As if motherhood wasn't already fraught with enough guilt - every time someone goes bad, we automatically blame the mother - Super Mum was making the rest of us mere mortals look bad.

I've glimpsed this impossibly perfect paragon of virtue now and again, zipping round the suburbs at supersonic speed, ferrying her charges to soccer and cello lessons and ballet and swimming, in between running cake stalls for the PTA and finishing her master's thesis, while at all times looking immaculate and calm. Super Mum never yelled or got angry.

But I knew a new era had arrived when I read about a few books on the market. *Confessions of a Slacker Mom*, by Muffy Mead-Ferro, and *The Three-Martini Playdate*, by Christie Mellor, are the revenge of the imperfect mums.

I've not read either book - I need no instruction on the subject of mothering sins. It was a relief to discover that this style of mothering, which I prefer to think of as relaxed rather than lax, wasn't entirely cultural.

After all, the Pacific Island mum is an icon so well-known now that it's the stuff of comedy. She is unashamedly bossy and controlling, doesn't believe that her child should be her friend, is fiercely protective, and yet won't hesitate to embarrass her kids (yes, she will kiss you, or tell you off, in front of your friends, be the loudest mum at netball and hockey, and stare down any other child who dares to pick on you).

My kids are familiar with all this, having learned long ago that being mean is part of my job description, that I don't care what all the other mothers are doing, and that when all else fails, I resort to the argument on my fridge magnet: "Because I'm the mother, that's why."

Endless patience and self-sacrifice are all very well, but too much of it and you end up with kids who have an unhealthy sense of entitlement, and a tendency to treat their mother as their own personal doormat.

In fact, the under-mothering promoted by Mellor and Mead-Ferro - the latter's mothering style boils down to telling her kids to "go outside and play" - may actually be better for kids, encouraging independence and creativity.

Relaxed mothers know that amazingly, and despite our manifold imperfections, children turn out to be resilient, forgiving creatures (they can't help themselves). Most of them tend to survive their childhood experiences without being scarred for life.

A friend of mine, who underwent years of therapy, tells me that her mum recently admitted she wasn't cut out to be a mother. Much as my friend loves her, she's not sure how she's supposed to react when hearing her mother tell people to get a pet - it's so much easier.

But she survived, as did the sons of a colleague who confessed that, not being a morning person, she used to strap her toddlers into their highchairs, with their cereal, and disappear back to bed for a snooze.

My elder son, too, will survive the fact that I've missed two of his birthdays (once he forgets), and my younger son will eventually get over the fact that not long ago, when he came to tell me his height measurement, I looked so shocked that he said, "What? Too short for you?"

And thankfully, my daughter has already deleted from her memory banks the time I burst out laughing when, at age 5 or 6, she tearfully accused me of caring only for my sons.

(For the record, in case they read this, my son is not a midget, especially when it comes to his sense of humour, and I love all my children equally, though I've not always treated them the same.)

I suspect they'll turn out fine, despite their mother's lapses, which is not to say you can't take bad mothering too far.

Google in "mother" and you're just as likely to get stories of mothers abusing and murdering their children, or selling them for the price of a bottle of vodka, as one Russian mother did recently, as you will stories about Marge Simpson - voted Britain's most respected mother last year.

A spokeswoman for Mothers Union, which ran the poll, explained that Marge was a more real mum than her rivals (Cherie Blair, Victoria Beckham and Elizabeth Hurley), who live lives so different from ordinary people.

Which brings me back to Mother's Day - and a bit of a tip on what mothers really want. Yes, perfume, chocolates and flowers are all very nice. Even breakfast in bed delivered after she's already been up for hours, and requiring a big clean-up afterwards (by guess who?).

But what a mother really wants is time away from those she loves most. Call it mother's annual leave, a growing trend among some of my friends and relatives, who hole up once a year, alone or with other like-minded mothers, somewhere removed from the demands of motherhood - if only to remember what life was like BC (Before Children). And to talk about their children.

By Tapu Misa

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