

From Politics to Pampers

by Michelle Morgan Knott

2000 Fellows Class

It's not easy being a stay-at-home mom in Washington. Having jumped ship two years ago to raise my children, I'm slowly learning to reconcile two worlds—the world of politics and power at my doorstep, and the simple, rather gentle life of babies, toddlers, Cheerios, and crayons inside.

I sometimes feel out of step with my contemporaries—a bit like Laura Ingalls Wilder in the big city.

I used to have a normal job like everyone else in this town. As a Congressional staffer, I knew my way around Rayburn, rode the subway, and ate my share of vending machine dinners working late into the night. I worked for a public relations firm, taught elementary school, did communications for an internet start-up, did the Hill thing, and even impeached a president.

Then I traded in a high-profile, hard-driving job working for one boss for a low-profile, exhausting job working for two small, but demanding bosses.

There's a humbling aspect to motherhood, in addition to all the menial labor for which you never get paid. It's the strangely inadequate sounding answer at a cocktail party when asked, "What do you do?" "I'm at home with two kids." Sometimes I feel like saying, "But I *used* to have a life!"

Then I remember a lesson God has been teaching me: *My worth doesn't lie in how impressive, powerful or noteworthy my career may be.* In fact, if the prestige of my job in any way makes me smug or puffed up, I am sinning.

It's hard to be smug about being a mom. Something about changing dirty diapers just cuts you down to size. Folding laundry, cleaning the day's dishes, and picking up toys are not prestigious jobs—but as a mom, you do them. You can complain every day, or you can aim to glorify God with a beautifully folded stack of clothes for your husband and dinner on the table for your kids. It's a lot more pleasant to embrace the job than to curse it.

That's fine at home, but how to handle that pesky cocktail party question? All of a sudden—when someone asks, "What do you do all day long?" and you

wonder if there are antennae popping out of your head by the look on their face—it's hard to tick off your mundane accomplishments with a smile. For a moment, your life seems downright pathetic, particularly when you remember your former job full of quantifiable successes.

But then a neat thing happens. You remember: my worth doesn't lie in how impressive, powerful or noteworthy my career may be. My worth lies in being a follower of Jesus Christ—forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit to become a new creation.

Once you realize your own worth hinges on Christ and not your resume, you are freed up to love and appreciate others—regardless of *their* job or standing in life. A janitor, a senator, a teacher, a lobbyist—all are equally precious in God's eyes and equally deserving of our respect.

What a refreshing way to approach a cocktail party. It's not all about me, and how can I cozy up to the most powerful people of D.C. It's all about Jesus—how can I love others as a reflection of His love for me... and maybe even strike up a conversation about how He's changed my life?

If you think about it, only two things in this world will last forever—God's Word and people. So I believe a wise investment of time, money and resources would include both. My kids fall into that category. They're going to live for eternity and any energy I put into steering them toward Jesus Christ (so they can spend it with Him) and toward a meaningful life on earth—will be eternally well-spent.

And that brings me to my second lesson learned: *Investing my life in my children is worthwhile and rewarding.*

Henry Ward Beecher said it best: "Nothing can compare in beauty and wonder and admirableness, and divinity itself, to the silent work in obscure dwellings of faithful women bringing their children to honor, virtue, and holiness."

Being at home with children (in what sometimes feels like obscurity) is not only beneficial to them, it helps us as parents fulfill a mandate of Scripture:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* Deuteronomy 6:5-7 [italics added]

Since I'm with my kids all the time, I'm able to teach my children about Jesus throughout the day. Before Sydney turned two, she knew that the Bible was God's Word, and could sing along with "Jesus is the rock of my salvation." (Although her version made Jesus the "rocket.") She knew that God makes the thunder, the lightning, strawberries, and even Sydney herself. Without me formally teaching her, she had already learned some important truths—namely that God made everything and He loves us.

Being at home gives me a natural entrée to discuss spiritual things without it being overbearing or forced. We sing hymns in the kitchen while cooking, recite our verse for the day when we wake up, and pray and thank Jesus for our food. As the kids get older, we can do Bible studies together and talk about the gospel in more detail. And as parents, Kerry and I pray often that the Lord will draw our children to Him and that they will make a decision to follow Him at a very young age.

A mother who chooses to disciple her children like this can have a lasting impact not only on their life, but on their children and future generations as well. Indeed, seeing the authentic faith of my mother, grandmother and great grandmother helped me to understand what it meant to follow Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks of the great influence women had on Timothy's faith as well. Paul wrote, "I know that you sincerely trust the Lord, for you have the faith of your mother, Eunice, and your grandmother, Lois." (II Timothy 1:5) That verse is taped in front of my kitchen sink to remind me that faithfulness today will bear fruit in the future.

Lest you think I'm a spiritual giant, there are many days I want to give up. Sometimes I think that if gypsies came to my door, I might be tempted to sell my kids... for a good price! As a true people person, it's easy to feel a bit isolated when I'm home with them.

That's why it has been very exciting to discover my third lesson: *My neighborhood is a booming mission field.*

My neighbors are wonderful people, many of whom are around during the day. They range from retirees to other moms and kids. Sydney, Charlie, and I often bring plates of cookies and a smile, hoping to share the love of Jesus with them.

We've also gone door-to-door and put together a

directory for our street. We hosted a fall block party in our front yard, and we got to know 75 of our neighbors much better. We pray that these efforts will lead to deeper friendships and meaningful conversations down the road.

Even workmen who come to the house often hear inspiring messages I'm listening to on tape, and they go away with some fresh-baked goodies and hopefully some kindness as a reflection of the Lord.

During the summer, we hosted Young Life Bible studies at our house. This was a perfect ministry for me, because I didn't have to find a babysitter. The Young Life kids came to our house on Tuesday nights, and we got to pray for them and participate in their meetings. Who knows where these friendships will go in the future as we reach out to and mentor high school kids?

All in all, once I accepted this stage of life, I discovered it's a delightful chapter. Isn't so much of life like that? Once we get over our hang-ups of what others will think of us, we often find that we're quite happy. It really doesn't matter how the world rates us. If we're doing God's will, we can rest in His plan and be freed up to experience His joy.

I've even found that cocktail parties are nothing to fear. In fact, children are a great common denominator. I've had very animated conversations with powerful Washingtonians about...kids. For instance, the House Majority Leader told me some of his fondest memories are of rocking his baby to sleep in the middle of the night while the moonlight streamed in through the window. Another time, an NBC producer told me that having a baby is the only thing in life that truly lives up to the hype. In many ways, talking about children is a refreshing break from the debates on polarizing issues we often face.

Somewhere down the road, I may get a "normal" job again and so will begin another chapter in my life. But, in the meantime, I am thankful for the little ones who consume my life now. As I work to teach them about my Lord, I've discovered an added benefit... my Lord is using them to teach me about Him.



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Michelle Knott works full-time raising her two children, Sydney (2 years) and Charlie (9 months). She previously held various communications positions, including Press Secretary for the House Judiciary Committee. She also taught at Cornerstone Community School, a Christ-centered elementary school that primarily serves underprivileged children on Capitol Hill.

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