

Parenting Solo: Pit Stops

Written by Michelle Greenlee Harris, Columnist
Thursday, 03 January 2013 08:50 -



After job number three, I dragged myself by my mother's home to scoop up my child. My Mom told me to put it in park and sit down. "What would you do if I were dead?" she asked.

"What?" I responded with a frown, since her death was not a subject I liked to dwell on.

"You hardly ever come straight home after work" she fussed. "What would you do if I were not here to look after your daughter?"

Oh boy, not this discussion. We visit this stop on life's journey every so often, and each time I dread pulling into the station. I already suffer from an acute case of WMG (Working Mom's Guilt). I worry that I don't spend enough time with my child or that I am going to miss some milestone. I worry that when I am home, I my work fatigue makes me irritable or likely to doze off during mother/daughter bonding time. I worry that if I don't work as hard, I will miss the opportunity that will transform us from renters to buyers or pay for her college education.

Plain and simple, I worry.

To add to the truckload of worries, I have my mother reminding me that one day she is going to die, and her support along with her.

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Let me hit the brakes to say that I know that I am one of the fortunate moms who has a wonderfully supportive nuclear family. They are my personal pit crew and they give me the choice of several different paths whenever I stand at a crossroads after my divorce. My heart goes out to young parents who are forced to turn left or right depending on who makes up their pit crew and who will help them finish the race. Sometimes there is no one; I have seen plenty of parents running on empty.

Still, there is a toll to be paid for having a safe and loving place for my child to be when I am not around. I listen to my mother lecture me about how I need to be at home with my daughter. How she never left her children alone. How I need to choose my child over my work and so and so on and so on.

My WMG warning light starts blinking, but I calm myself with some positive inner dialogue. I tell my mom that if she were not around, I would obviously have to make other choices. She gives me that Don't-get-smart-with-me-I-don't-care-how-old-you-are look and I know that this conversation will soon need to pull up to the curb and let me out. Keeping my radiator cool (and holding my tongue) keeps my pit crew intact.

At this point in my life, I have clearly defined goals and a plan on how to achieve those goals. The checkered flag in this race is a better life for me and my daughter. Not a wealthier life per se, just a better one. By putting the pedal-to-the-metal to build dreams for our family, I make it possible for my baby to one day drive off to pursue her own dreams. Hopefully I have taught her what it takes to do so.

I'm sure my mom will ask me the death question again one day. To her, it's part of my tune-up. And I know one day I will have to deal with that terrible bump in the road of life. When that time comes, I will have to shift gears and adjust the map. For now, I will keep driving toward the checkered flag.