

Opinion: Life for a mom is about 15-minute segments

By Eileen Wacker

I am the mother of four kids, aged 8- to 14-years-old, and trying to launch a business. I live life in 15-minute increments.

Our house wakes up at 6am during the week. Getting everyone to eat something is a challenge so I let them eat whatever they want – leftover pasta, soup, mac and cheese, cereal, bagels, whatever. Then I either drive them to school, leaving at 6:45 or go to my office and start to work. I usually have appointments racked and stacked as I work with a team located across Korea, India, Vancouver, San Francisco, Mexico City and Honolulu.

Today, I'm also trying to keep fish from dying. My son went to a birthday party and the party favor was a beta fish. I groaned when I saw it and secretly vowed to get even with the mom. Then my son named the fish Medallion because it was like gold to him. So, yesterday I went to the pet store to get some accommodations for Medallion and we left with six mollies and an aquarium. Anyway, the six mollies are named – Blaze, Spike, Buster (girl), Anna, Crusoe, and Razor.

This morning, I came upon our dog, Buster Brown, with the fish food container in his mouth. He had eaten nearly the whole can and I had to wrestle the container from him. Apparently, he had climbed up on the chair and snatched the food. He was utterly remorseless standing there with fish flakes sticking all around his mouth. And he apparently scared a fish to death. Poor Spike met an untimely death.

Buster Brown is also going to the vet today as his ears are infected and he has been chewing his paws. So now I add

allergy medicine and pet hospital to the bills. Lately we have been cracking down on him running away to visit our neighbor's chihuahua as our other neighbor feels menaced by small dogs and calls security.

My assistant arrives and we crank through as much as humanly possible as we are launching April 1. Then school pick-ups start at 2:45. Someone helps with the driving but we are both in our respective cars from 2:30 until 6pm every day. Each child has school, a sport and an instrument. But we also have doctor and dental appointments, birthdays, school orientations, parent conferences, school fairs, major sports events, dances, play dates in all different venues. And, they keep growing and needing new clothes and shoes.

I arrive home at 6 from the vet, picking up my 13-year-old son from tennis along the way. My 8-year-old daughter runs to the door to remind me the bake sale is tomorrow and we promised to send in cheesecake brownies, cut into pieces, bagged and labeled. Luckily, I have brownie mix and cheesecake filling. We preheat the oven and start to make them. I am making dinner at the same time, boiling water for pasta. So it appears to be working out. Then I discover we have no canola oil. I rush to the store to get the oil. I am almost home and my oldest texts me – “just ran out of milk.” I text her back “drain the pasta and I'll get milk.”

As I walk in the door, one of my kids calls me to report an “infestation” in the kitchen. Sure enough there are a thousand little ants just by the door. We run and douse them with enough “raid” to fill a bathtub.

I have three kids to help with homework; one is independent or I should say refuses to let me see his work. I listen to how everyone's day went, then showers, piano practice and a little free time. If I don't tell them to go to bed, they forget (but if I attempt to send them to bed early, it is treated as a crime committed against children everywhere.)

I still lay down for five minutes with my youngest when she goes to bed. She goes down at 8:15 and that 15-minute increment is critical to her. Then, I cut and bag the brownies, make lunches, make sure all laptops are charged-up, and check for correct shoes for in-school and after-school sports. Last, I confiscate all cell phones until morning as they text their friends incessantly.

Just when I feel like my "sportsmomship" might give out, my kids give me a hug and tell me I'm the best mom ever. I get re-energized and work a little longer as India and Korea are up and working. I have a glass of wine with my husband and ask him about his day. I usually don't remember his response as I am so exhausted. At ten, I go to sleep dreaming about ski vacations and sleeping in.

Every Sunday, we look at the calendar and figure out what items we have in addition to the regular routine. I slot them all into the schedule in 15-minute increments. My youngest son likes to play flag football and says he is great at "jucking." This is modern-day parent "jucking." And tomorrow I start booking the summer camps, trips and schedule. But at least I've made enough pasta tonight to eat for breakfast tomorrow.

Eileen Wacker, a Harvard Business School graduate, lived and worked in seven different countries, including the United States. Wacker now resides in Honolulu with her husband and four children.