



## kickin' it

One mother finds strength and sanity in exercise. > BY MEGAN AULT

**a**MID THE RAINBOW of plastic alphabet letters covering my fridge is a magnet that proclaims: Motherhood Is Not for Wimps. It was a gift from a friend who made caring for four young children look as easy as an Olympic skater performing a triple Lutz. Yet, I still wonder why, as a trusted friend, she never said, "Do not try this at home."

Now, with three sons under age 5, I stumble around the toy rubble mumbling self-help talk to myself: "You'll get through this. They'll grow up. You'll miss them. *You will.*" Then, my 2- and 4-year-old shove me into reality with heated negotiations over a Happy Meal toy, the baby wakes up, and the phone rings. The argument deteriorates into two tangled bodies, the baby's fussing escalates to a howl, and the answering machine records a message from the library about overdue books.

"I am just one person!" I want to scream. Instead, I ponder my options. Therapy? Too expensive for someone who haggles with a 4-year-old over buying generic vs. name-brand fruit snacks. I opt for physical release instead.

The next day, I leave the children with my husband and head for an aerobics class. But when I arrive, there's a different instructor than the last time I was here (could it have been a year ago?), and I find I'm in a kickboxing class. The instructor shouts, "Do you feel aggressive?" and we start punching at invisible opponents, making guttural noises.

The imaginary bad guys are coming at us from all sides, and we're supposed to be taking care of them faster than Jet Li on

espresso. So how come I feel more like Mr. Rogers after a glass of warm milk? I try to forget about the hairy Cheerios smushed to the bottom of my sock and the dried spit-up on the shoulder of my T-shirt and keep punching. It starts to feel good.

We move on to the second part of the class and begin dancing. My hips attempt to mimic the jungle-goddess swing the instructor is doing. Her movements take me back to the TV show "Solid Gold," where the dancers would slink around, oozing sexuality. I try to follow her, looking like the Church Lady.

Thankfully, she repeats the steps, and I get into the groove. The music is loud, I'm in the back where no one can see me, and I feel myself let go. The instructor smiles, beaming energy at me. She points a finger to her bottom like it's sizzling. I do the sizzle thing. I'm transformed. I am a Solid Gold Dancer.

Afterward, I feel so good, so ready to face my darlings, that it hits me: I have to keep refilling myself with good energy, or my children will drive me crazy. I need to feel this rush. I need to kick the crap out of invisible opponents and dance about it.

When I get home, everything seems under control. A tiny, evil part of me is disappointed. Doesn't my husband deserve a taste of what drives me to kickbox? Then my two oldest boys rush over, sending me to the ground with hugs. Soon, they're elbowing each other, and the baby starts wailing. Not much has changed since I left, after all. That's OK. I've changed. And it's a good thing, because motherhood is not for wimps. **mb**

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