

amid the rainbow of alphabet letters covering my fridge is a magnet that starkly proclaims: *Motherhood Is Not for Wimps*. It was a gift from a friend who made caring for four young children look as smooth and easy as an Ice Capades 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 the age of 5, I stumble around the toy rubble mumbling self-help talk to myself: *You have to get through this. They'll grow up. You'll miss them. You will.* Then my 2- and 4-year-olds 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 entangled bodies, the baby's fussing escalates to an insistent 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 is Saturday, and I leave the children with

my husband and go to an aerobics class. When I arrive, there's a different instructor from the last time I was here (could it have been a year ago?), and I discover I'm in a kickboxing class. I'm not sure I belong when the instructor shouts, "Do you feel aggressive?" 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 Bruce Lee on espresso. So how come I feel more like Mr.

Rogers after a warm milk? I try to forget about the hairy Cheerios smushed to the

## punch drunk

One harried mother becomes intoxicated with PHYSICAL RELEASE. By Megan Ault

bottom of my sock and the dried spit-up on the shoulder of my T-shirt and keep punching. It's starting to feel good.

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

Thankfully, she repeats the steps, and I begin to 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 knows. I know. She points an index 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: Like a car that needs gas, 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. ■

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