

---

Sociology Educator Scholarship

Sociology

---

Fall 2014

## Work-Family Survival

Jenell Paris

Messiah University, [jparis@messiah.edu](mailto:jparis@messiah.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc\\_ed](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc_ed)

Permanent URL: [https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc\\_ed/24](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc_ed/24)

---

### Recommended Citation

Paris, Jenell, "Work-Family Survival" (2014). *Sociology Educator Scholarship*. 24.  
[https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc\\_ed/24](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/soc_ed/24)

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

## It's About Work Life Survival

Sometimes there's real grace in just getting by.

By Jenell Paris Updated: November 16, 2018

My husband and I ask ourselves, Are we surviving this day, this life?

Sprezzatura! I jotted the word in the margin of my Western Civ notebook, wanting to practice its sound and remember its meaning: "Skilled and knowledgeable in many areas, the Renaissance man should display sprezzatura, an ease, or grace, that would add effortless beauty to his displays of skill," said Professor Porter.

That was more than 20 years ago, but today, Dr. Porter's voice and words came to me while I was flat-out screaming at my family. Why the "graceless" display of parenting? Consider our morning. Daddy starts waffles, but the waffle maker breaks and I insult his choice of waffle maker, something I had already done when he bought it. Toddler whips off diaper and poops on the carpet. In reaction, his twin vomits entire breakfast, also on the carpet. Toddler twins and crawling baby make a beeline for the mess to investigate, so I herd them upstairs. By the time I get clothes out of the closet, they've flooded the bathroom with an inch of water. I scream, they cry. I dress them: three shirts, three shorts, two underwear, six socks, six shoes. We head for the car, but two take a detour to hurl them-selves down the slip-and-slide, getting soaking wet. Back upstairs: two more shirts, two shorts, one underwear, four socks, four shoes. One toddler's car seat hasn't been replaced since it was moved yesterday by my horrible husband who does things like make homemade waffles and take the kids on outings that involve moving the car seat. I shout the F-word, which the twins chant as I install the car seat.

Eleven more hours until bedtime.

Yesterday, a woman emailed me asking for advice on "work family balance." I'm an anthropology professor and writer who has opined on the subject. Here's part of what I told her: I don't balance motherhood and work. It's impossible. You can balance an orange in one hand and a grapefruit in the other, but not if you're trying to hold a freshly bathed toddler and a filing cabinet. As it is for millions of other parents, work always wants more of me; my children are very young and need constant care. Work and family are a dripping wet toddler and a filing cabinet: not balanceable.

I went on to tell her that I strive for survival instead of balance. My husband and I ask ourselves, Are we surviving this day, this life? Are the kids surviving? Yes, we all are, so we're doing well enough! It's a low standard, but with three kids under age 3, we live pretty close to the bone. We are making it, but if you saw us, you wouldn't say we make it look easy. It's hard work, and we make it look even harder. Some parents have sprezzatura, and I admire them. But it's only one expression of grace. Our style is less like a well-muscled sixteenth-century Italian declaring devotion to a lover in Latin after winning a duel without a tear in his tunic and more like a three-legged squirrel scampering out of the way of a car.

We do what it takes to survive. That means lots of hugs, plenty of ice cream and an occasional tirade against small kitchen appliances. Like all other reasonably happy families, we get by on grace, just not the kind that makes it look easy.

Tags: Home Mom Stories October - November 2014 | Issue #35 Lifestyle