

Katrina Kenison - “Magical Journey,” Episode 17



Power of Moms
A Gathering Place for Deliberate Mothers

This inspiring episode introduces the author Katrina Kenison. Her beautiful message focuses on deliberate ways to feel contentment in each stage of motherhood, even as motherhood continues to change and challenge. Her writing came from considering questions such as: How do I live? How do I want to raise my children? What kind of family life do I want to have?

Her first book, “Mitten Strings for God” was written following an unexpected experience with peace on a snowy November day. As she and her son sat making mitten strings together her son declared, “I love this peace.” Katrina realized that most crucial moments of peace come only as parents deliberately and carefully create them. Additionally, she was not only responsible to feed and clothe her kids, but also to consider the quality of family life. “As the mother I wanted to be present and thoughtful, and deliberate in the choices I was making. I almost wrote that book to remind myself to do what I had said... My husband said that my writing that book did change the way that we lived. I wrote what I aspired to and in the process of writing it, we became that. The writing is the practice of thinking and figuring it out.”

Whether in a journal, a blog or a book that you may someday publish, it doesn’t really matter, the first step of actually living it is writing it:

- Write down the thoughts of your heart, the intentions and aspirations of your soul.
- Deliberately create moments for family that invite peace and connect deeply with one another.

“The Magic of Ordinary Days” started out as a book describing the pressure that teenagers are under. Katrina did a lot of research about college admissions, and getting burnt out. However, her own experience as a mother of teenagers was so confusing that she decided to write from what she knew and lived. Katrina realized that her children were becoming adults, going to be leaving, and family life was going to change forever. Additionally, Katrina’s dear friend was diagnosed with cancer. These two experiences encouraged Katrina to fully appreciate the final days with her friend, and the final days with her children being at home. It is so easy to take our own ordinary life for granted. Where kids end up going to school is not nearly as important as the realization that the times together are going to end. We don’t want to go through all these years and feel as if we missed it because we were distracted or too busy.

1. Appreciate the present reality before you today.

2. It is a tricky skill to distinguish between things that are necessary to do right now, and distractions.
3. The biggest gift that we can give our children is parents who are present and available.

What moms are facing today is so much more challenging because technology has invaded every aspect of living. Babies being born today are using and interacting with technology from the moment that they become conscious. The texture of our relationships could change because of this. Part of our responsibility of being parents is to think long and hard about our relationship with technology.

It is very difficult to shut the technology out of our lives. Realizing the strength of the pull allows us to take steps to counter it. Modeling for our children and allowing them to see our (imperfect) efforts in deliberately putting constraints on technology is going to have the biggest long-term effect. Katrina tried to unplug for a day and had a much more difficult time with it than expected. She made a deliberate effort to show her children that it is difficult for her to monitor technology use as well.

Creating moments of technology free time (such as dinner time, when you could turn the lights off and light candles instead) can really help show our children that we cherish our time with them.

- We have responsibility as parents to evaluate our own relationship with technology, how we want technology to be used in our home and how to model that for our children.
- Recognize that meaningful moments and close connection don't just happen. We really have to make it a priority.

“Magical Journey” chronicles Katrina’s new self-discovery as a mother who no longer has kids at home to care for. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Katrina had an empty house, and her dear friend struggling with cancer passed away. Katrina felt bereft, raw and lonely even though she had thought that she was preparing herself for this time.

Who am I now? The whole landscape of life had changed. Katrina tells how she wanted to make the best possible use of the years that she had left.” How do you live with that awareness of how fleeting and short life can be, and still love with joy? No one hits 50 without some kind of loss. Grief and loss are universal.” Mid-life is really the opportunity to embrace and love both the sadness and loss that is an inevitable part of life and, at the same time, the joy and beauty of new opportunities. It calls on us to accept and let go of our preconceived plans for our life.

It is human nature to want to dig in our heels and hold on to what we know because it is safe, even if we have outgrown it. The monkey bars from grade school illustrate the challenge of these years. One swings from bar to bar, and while doing so has a moment of being suspended in mid-air after letting go of one bar and before being able to grab the next. As a woman in her 50s, Katrina wanted to have the courage enabling her to move on to what she was called to do. Sometimes that means letting go of what our life has moved past, even before we are fully able to grasp what our future holds.

One of Katrina’s friends traveled to climb 4,000-foot high mountains—that was her path. Katrina’s journey was much more an inner one. Sometimes the best journeys we can take are ones that don’t require plane tickets and passports. It is coming to understand our inner soul.

These questions can bring clarity: What is my deeper yes? Where can I show more honesty? Where am I most needed? What are my natural strengths? What am I really meant to do without replicating what everyone else is doing?

Part of Katrina's process in this book was coming to peace with who she is and what she does herself. "I still feel that what I do is not enough. For years I have felt that I should be running committees at my church, and volunteering etc. I finally made peace with my own gifts. Even though I was getting literally hundreds of beautiful and thoughtful letters thanking me for my work, I couldn't really hear them because I was telling myself that I should be doing something better, different." What Katrina realized in the end it that what matters is the love that we bring to our work.

Katrina's son, Henry, who had a dream since he was a little boy of being on Broadway, is now a musical director at a very small country church. His choir has eight members and they are all older than 60. It is so far from his Broadway dream, but he is carrying his gift with love. It doesn't matter that it isn't Broadway but a geriatric eight-person church choir. Who is to say what is better? What he is doing is really special and filled with love. It doesn't matter what we are doing - as long as we are doing it with love we are bringing a gift to the world.

- Anticipating change in your life doesn't necessarily pre-empt the difficulty of going through it. The process of change will inevitably bring with it some uncomfortableness and vulnerability.
- When you find that the life you have been creating no longer fits, do not cling to it. Allow yourself to let go of those rituals and expectations that belong in the past in order to find your life in the present.
- When you find yourself on unstable ground, ask yourself what you can uniquely bring to the world.
- When you find that something that you are able to contribute, do it full of love, no matter how grand or humble it may seem.

What would be your challenge to the moms just starting this journey? A few guides:

1. A saying from a Buddhist priest reads, "Your life is your practice." Everything you do, every choice you make, every word you use is a part of your spiritual practice. Our practice becomes obvious in the way we treat our children, families and time. On the one hand, this idea is a relieving one. It is really simple. Slow down. Pay attention. Bring full focus to one thing at a time. To be really mindful that way is the biggest challenge of all. Your life is your practice, so evaluate how your practice is going right now if you are racing distracted and divided through your life, which is your practice.
2. Katrina's yoga teacher posed a question once that she often uses when flustered or stuck: What is the loving thing to do here? "Whether it is in a tough point with a child, or difficult issue in marriage, as soon as I ask myself that question I see the next step to take in order to be who I want to be." Our children can feel us switch from fear to love, and they calm down no matter what we do because they can feel it.

3. Slowing down: If I move slowly, does that mean that I won't be successful? How do I define success?
That is a really important question to ask. So many measures of success do not take into account how our soul feels success.

Books Authored:

Mitten Strings for God

The Gift of an Ordinary Day

Magical Journey

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