

Dads gain insight while raising their children

By Cameron Potts

Home-dad: That's his term. Ben Walker likes it. He says it sounds good, better than some other terms he's heard over the years. Home-dad.

Walker, at his Eden Prairie home near the border with Chanhassen, plays and cares for his two sons, Quintin, 6, and Zane, 18 months, while his wife works. He is a stay-at-home father, but he prefers the term home-dad. In August, Walker will have been a home-dad for three years, something he takes great pride in. He would not give up the time he's able to spend with his sons in order to go back to work now.

In Chanhassen, Craig Wallestad puts his 1-year-old son Nathan on his shoulders. "He likes to sit there. If I'm in a high-backed chair, he will just lean there and enjoy himself," Wallestad said.

Retired because of health problems after 20 years at Flouroware in Chaska, Wallestad helps raise his newly adopted son, getting a second chance to see a child grow. Wallestad has two teenage children from a previous marriage, but says he missed a lot when they were growing up because he was working. Today, he "is able to toss this little guy up in the air a lot more" than when his other kids were growing.

Differences

While their situations may be different, Walker and Wallestad share a common bond, men who choose to spend time during the day and care for their children.

For both, it is a joy to see their kids grow in front of their eyes.

Walker and his wife Maureen moved from Colorado to Eden Prairie three years ago when she was transferred in her job as a salesperson. At the time, Walker owned his own printing business, but made a conscious decision to raise his kids while his wife worked. At first, bucking the stereotype of men working was hard.

"My generation of men especially believe that the man brings home the money. Both the man and the woman can work, but men are the bread winners. That was hard for me," Walker said. "When I go out during the day, I basically see women everywhere."

His life changed drastically when he stayed home, going from being the boss of his own business to meeting the daytime needs of his two sons. That was a tough transition, he said. "The first year was hard because it was difficult to communicate with Quintin. It takes a lot to cope with everyday things that kids do at home," Walker said.

A year ago Wallestad retired, mostly because of health problems. Wallestad suffers from epilepsy and diabetes, leaving him unable to drive. The son of the founder of Flouroware, he and his wife Nina were financially stable enough to retire, allowing him to stay home with Nathan, whom they adopted from Russia last November. Wallestad plays with and cares for his son as much as he can, allowing Nina to do volunteer work at Wooddale Church, while still being home enough to care for Nathan herself.

taking care of him, feeding him, playing with him," Wallestad said — taking care of roughly a third of all of Nathan's needs, he explained. When Nina is busy with church activities, Wallestad takes a more active role.

"It makes it great for me because if I have to do some errands or run into church, I know I can leave Nathan with someone who will care and love him as I would. It is just great," Nina said.

"One of the first days I was gone out doing things, I came home and while Nathan was glad to see me, he wouldn't take his eyes off Craig. It was a great bonding experience," she said.

Patience

At the Walker household, Ben needed to learn patience, something he claims not to have an abundance of before he started. "Certain days you wish you were working at a job that was just eight hours. This is an all-day job," he said.

Maureen works some from the home and at times, Ben said, she sees him playing with the children outside, and wishes she could be part of that. He said their relationship works great because she will spend a lot of time with the children after work, giving Ben a break in his day.

Ben plans to return to work part-time once Zane is off to school. He said he still wants to be home when his children return from school, giving them a stable presence in the home.

Five days a week, Ben heads to the Chaska Community Center to work out, dropping the boys off to play with other kids at the center (Quintin goes when he is not in kindergarten). Ben has the chance to bond with other parents, talking with both mothers and fathers about how they raise their kids.

One thing I learned right away was to talk to women who stay home with their kids. You have to be both the mom and the dad during the day. You have to play with the kids, and have time to snuggle and read to them. That was difficult to learn at first," Walker said.

More children

The Wallestads are hoping to adopt another child soon, which means Craig will become even more involved in the day-to-day caring of the kids. Nina said that as Nathan begins to talk more, he still has a favorite word, something that makes her feel good about Craig being able to spend time with their son.

"Poppa is his favorite word. He loves saying it and knows just who that is," Nina explained.

Both Walker and Wallestad gain insight and inspiration from Minnesota Dads, an organization started by Peter Hoh of Minneapolis. Hoh organizes events for stay-at-home fathers to get to know each other and talk about their daily lives. Walker and Wallestad are not very actively involved, but they receive newsletters and information which helps them in their daily lives.

"I'm proud of what I do and who I am. This can work for anyone, but you have to be willing to put yourself aside," Walker said.



HOME-DAD Ben Walker takes time out during the day to read to his two sons, Zane and Quintin. Walker is a stay-at-home father, a job of which he is proud. (Photo by Cameron Potts)

TODAY'S QUOTE

► "I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection."
—*Stigmund Freud, psychologist*

StarTribune

Ways to make sure dads can participate equally in parenting:

For today's grandfathers, the first measure of self-worth was often as family provider. By contrast, their grown sons are likelier to share the roles of parent and provider, forming closer bonds with their children in the process.

★ From patriarch to parent



Star Tribune photos by Judy Griesedeck

Bob Lopp, left, and his son, Mitch Loppicello, right, play with Mitch's children, Meagan, 7, and Toby, 4. Bob and Mitch say their parenting styles are very similar. In keeping with the time, however, Bob says he felt more of the pressure of being the economic provider for his family.

► Before the baby is born, ask yourself: What are my dreams for this child? To be very smart? Athletic? Outgoing? A quiet poet? Each of you share your thoughts. Also, consider how your parents raised you, and what you want to copy or avoid. Share that.

► Learn to be clear, direct and honest in talking about what you want yourself and your spouse to handle in terms of child care. (Women, trying to be polite, are notoriously indirect. Men, on the other hand, sometimes hide their fears of looking incompetent by refusing to pitch in.)

► Stop thinking of Dad as the "helper."

► Avoid rituals that shut dads out, such as baby showers and children's parties with "too-cute decorations."

► Dads must share in the day-in-and-day-out chores of parenting and housework if they are to be truly equal parents.

► Share the role of "on-call parent," the parent everyone — teachers, doctors and the children themselves — goes to first with all child issues. (Or, if you decide to assign the role to just one parent, the other one should take the job long enough to understand the many demands that come with it.)

— H.J. Cummins



Mark Abraham accepts a bite of daughter Nicole's taco. Unlike his father, who worked long hours to provide for his family, Mark cares for Nicole, 20 months, and Eric, 5, while his wife, Brenda, works as a family physician.

By H.J. Cummins
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Joseph Abraham survived the Korean War to raise five children on his income from a small TV sales-and-service business, with a supportive wife and the same shoulder-into-the-wind concentration he'd learned in the military.

"I was working like mad to survive, from early morning, maybe 7 o'clock, to 12 or 1 o'clock at night," Abraham said of the shop in Glasboro, N.J., that he later converted to a Radio Shack franchise. "There were times I came out of the store so tired I could hardly get one foot in front of the other."

His job at home, as he saw it, was to teach his children that the world rewards responsible people. And if that meant occasionally spanking a disobedient child who challenged that lesson, well, he would be wrong not to do it.

"I felt the need of being in control of our children, letting them know they had a responsible father," said Abraham, now retired with his wife, Eleanor, both in their 70s. "I mean, a relatively strict father but a supportive father."

"I'm going to admit that with Mark there is a change, that all the things he does are dif-

FATHERS continues on E4:

— Expectations changed with the times.

Also on E4:

— Job stress can hurt fathers, families.

— Source: "The Involved Father" by Robert Frank (St. Martin's Press, \$22.95); paperback edition, "Parenting Partners," to be released in October (St. Martin's Press, \$12.95).

Dads of different generations doubtful they could swap roles

"I'm going to admit that with Mark there is a change, that all the things he does are different than what I did."

Mark Abraham is the youngest of those five children, now an at-home father in Roseville, raising his son, Eric, 5, and daughter, Nicole, 20 months. His wife, Brenda, is a family physician.

Mark Abraham describes his role as father this way: "loving, caring, giving, comforting, nurturing... and sensitive to the good traits of his children."

What a difference a generation makes.

It's a difference that to varying degrees popped up in interviews with about a half-dozen grandfather-father combinations, in anticipation of Father's Day today. For the older men, their first measure of themselves was as the family provider. The younger men more often see themselves as sharing the roles of parent and provider with their wives.

Both generations say their approach to fatherhood was shaped by the workplaces and the child-raising philosophies of their times. Which may be why, while all the grandfathers and fathers spoke of the love and pride between them, both generations typically said they probably wouldn't be comfortable swapping paternal approaches.

Some of today's fathers, for example, said one reason they're so involved with their children is that they wished they'd had more boyhood time with *their* fathers. And while most grandfathers boasted of their sons' close relationships with their own children, some couldn't help but wonder — in a larger-world kind of way — if some kids wouldn't be better off with the kind of clear authority figures that these men were in their day.

The always-distant father

Half a century of history primed the fathers of baby boomers for their role. By the 1920s, psychologists had pegged fathers as "guides" to their children, specifically in the area of "appropriate sex-role development," according to Jessica Weiss, whose new book, "To Have and To Hold" (University of Chicago Press, \$15), tracks 100 postwar couples in a University of California-Berkeley study from the 1950s to the 1990s.

Then the Depression and New

A man's portion

Though things are still far from equal, men in two-income couples have taken on a greater percentage of family duties.

Mid-1970s	Late 1990s
Housework (Cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry, etc.)	
11%	28%
Child care (Supervising, feeding, playing, etc.)	
20%	33%

Source: "Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework and Gender Equity" by Scott Coltrane

hiring men — only deepened the cultural expectation that a man works as the family provider and a woman raises the children. By the 1950s, fathers also talked about being their children's "companions" — that is, they took an interest in their children but were excused from the day-in-and-day-out work of raising them.

It's the Ward Cleaver and Ozzie Nelson mold, but it's true only as far as it goes, Weiss said. Many fathers in the study unhappily saw themselves more as a character in "The Organization Man," William Whyte's 1956 book about the all-consuming process of succeeding in corporate America.

About the same time, two other developments discouraged men's involvement with their children, Weiss said. For one, the implicit promise of the time was that "fatherhood" would be fun, a pleasant break for hard-working men. And when it turned out that parenting is dirty diapers and whining children as well as cuddly bedtime stories, some men just opted out, he said. Also, Benjamin Spock helped usher in the notion of parenthood as an actual skill, and men started to defer to their wives — at least in the basic mechanics of child-rearing.

Family-affairs experts see the remnants of that still working against some fathers: long work hours, wives who monopolize the parenting and a lingering twitch of worry that child care is emasculating.

On the other hand, other developments are expanding fathers' roles, according to Scott



Star Tribune photo by J
Simon Leppicello, 1½, waves at his grandfather Bob Lepp during T-ball at the home outside Stillwater shared by all three generations.

The Depression and New Deal programs — which favored hiring men — only deepened the cultural expectation that a man works as the family provider and a woman raises the children.

Coltrane, author of "Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework and Gender Equity" (Oxford University Press: \$14.95):

► Not only are many more mothers working, but they're earning enough to qualify as "co-providers" with their husbands. Men in such families are likelier to share housework and child care.

Bringing work home

One place where fathers may actually share too much with their families is in the stresses of their work.

Emerging findings from an unusual study show that when fathers come home from a bad day at work, their feelings of frustration and frazzle spread to their wives — what researchers in the Pennsylvania State University study call “crossover” pressures.

Then, as both parents succumb, they have more conflicts with their children over everyday issues such as curfew, household chores and civility among the siblings. All of which is bad for the children.

The same study of 200 families, however, showed that wives don't spread their work blues to their husbands. Researchers aren't sure what accounts for the difference, said Ann Crouter, human development professor at Penn State. It may be because many families still consider men's jobs and incomes more important, Crouter said. There's also reason to believe that women are more vigilant about their spouses' emotions.

Mothers aren't off the hook entirely, though. Questionnaires with about 1,000 school-age children in “Ask the Children” by Ellen Galinsky, last year showed that both parents are leaving their children with the impression that they don't much like work.

While 60 percent of fathers said they like their jobs, only 41 percent of their children thought they did. The numbers for mothers were 69 percent and 42 percent.

Crouter's advice, from her study of about 200 families: “Men need to be aware that their work circumstances get carried home with them whether they know it or not.”

— H.J. Cummins, staff writer

► As late as the early 1970s, only 25 percent of men attended the births of their children. Now it's 80 percent. And the earlier that fathers jump into active roles, the better.

► Fathers report pushing themselves to be more involved with their children, because they missed time with their fathers. Or, sometimes mothers who felt the same void now encourage their husbands' greater involvement.

Good all the way around

The benefits of father involvement reach every corner of a household and beyond, recent studies conclude.

There's evidence that it improves the men's work, and there are even stronger signs that it makes them healthier. Those fathers' contributions — besides sharing child-care responsibilities, they also tend to pitch in more with housework — help explain why their wives are happier with their marriages.

Also, the children benefit from the attention of one more supportive adult in their lives, and even more specifically, the slightly different attention typical of fathers, including their tendency to play a little rougher, more boisterously.

Variation on the theme

Then there are the fathers who say that their busy involvement comes by way of imitating rather than compensating for their fathers.

“He taught me a lot as a kid,” Mitch Leppicello said of his father, Bob Lepp. (Leppicello is the merged last names of Mitch and his wife, Jeanne.) “He always took us places; he did very little with his pals.”

“I was the coach of things I didn't even know how to play,” said Lepp, who with his wife, Judy, raised five children in Bloomington. Mitch was their second.

“I always felt a great responsi-

bility to be home,” Lepp said. It has become such a habit that, even now that he's retired, when some friends suggested extending their bicycling outing into dinner one day recently, “My first thought was ‘No, I'd better get home.’”

Necessity fueled the couple's approach to family. At first there was only Bob Lepp's salary as a social worker at Courage Center; only later did Judy Lepp start to work as a nurse. Those are the kind of salaries that send families camping, bicycling and ice skating together — instead of skiing, golf or keeping a cottage on the lake, Bob Lepp said.

Besides, the couple were both early feminists, they said; sharing housework and child-rearing was something their politics and principles said was the right thing. Which is not to say they completely escaped the influences of their time: Bob Lepp felt that the ultimate responsibility for supporting the family was his; also, his inclination was to do “outside” things with his children, such as sports.

He believes Mitch is much the same kind of father with his children: Simon, 1½; Toby, 4, and Meagan, 7. And he should know. The two families now share a big house on 4.7 acres outside Stillwater.

“I see a lot of similarities,” Lepp said. “He gets his kids involved in the world, and talks about concern for other people and for friendships. He encourages them reading books. He's interested in their education. And he teaches polite manners, for the sake of human courtesy. Ever little Simon says ‘Thank you.’”

“And his patience gets worn thin just like mine did,” Lepp said, “whereas Jeanne always stays even.”

If anything, Lepp is only more complimentary about the differences between him and his son: “When it came to discipline, we basically took the ‘No, don't do that’ approach. I see Jeanne and Mitch distract their kids from things, or give them alternatives I feel I've learned a lot watching them be parents.”

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Kim Ode

Dads and Daughters: a new family resource

Fathers use male clout to act as social and cultural advocates for girls' issues

★ **T**he relationship between a father and his daughter is often cast as king and princess, protector and prey, lion and kitten. This pairing can, to modern ears, sound quaint and even offensive, as we try to raise our girls to be strong and independent.

But everyone needs someone to watch over them, and a dad slips into this role at the first diaper. Wrestling pink plastic pants over chubby, churning legs, he imagines the evening when the new boyfriend lopes up the walk. He'll be waiting in the rocking chair on the front porch, doing his best Clint Eastwood impression, a shotgun resting in his lap. "Have her home by midnight, son." *Click-click.*

As time goes by, he learns that the more dangerous demons are less obvious.

Advertisements. Alcohol. Wonder bras. Pop lyrics. Fashion models. Marketing strategies. Diet books. Pornography. Job stress.

These are among the topics addressed by Dads and Daughters (DADs), a national advocacy organization based in Duluth. Its primary goals are to nurture deeper, more honest relationships between daughters and fathers, and to challenge the idea that girls are more valued for how they look than for who they are. Its mission statement: "Being true to our daughters so they can be true to themselves."

DADs began in the spring of 1999 after Michael Kieschnick, a philanthropist in San Francisco, had his social-activist roots yanked hard when his 9-year-old daughter asked him, "Daddy, am I fat?" He began researching eating disorders, which led to studying other cultural messages that the nation's daughters receive. Finding few resources with answers to his questions, he decided to become the resource.

Enter Joe Kelly of Duluth, father of two daughters, and co-founder of the award-winning, girl-edited "New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams." In order to serve as DADs executive director, Kelly asked just one condition: that he not have to move to San Francisco but could remain in Duluth.

One stereotype down, a million to go.

Such as this one: From Madison Avenue to Hollywood, the makers of memorable images are accustomed to hearing women protest something as sexist or demeaning or harmful. But men?

Oh, yeah. Fathers can be a particularly powerful group because they're *men* and are perceived to control the wallets that make the imagemeisters salivate. This may not necessarily be the way the world should run, but that's the reality and you go with what works.

"To have men — fathers — protest these images really grabs their attention," said Heather Henderson, DADs associate director. It's like the moment when the office lecher's daughter complains that some aging Don Juan is hitting on *her*. An ad exec getting an earful from an offended father might help remind him (or her) that this month's anorexic cover girl is someone's daughter.

For weeks, DADs has tried to get Simon & Schuster Interactive to halt its release of the CD-ROM game called *Panty Raider*, in which players strip supermodels down to their underwear, then provide photographs of them to aliens who "wore out" their one lingerie catalog — or else the aliens' "hormone driven anger" will destroy the Earth.

Shouldn't be that tough, huh?

In the success column, DADs has convinced Jewelry.Com to drop a sexually suggestive advertisement and helped persuade J.C. Penney to stop carrying T-shirts with misogynist messages. The group doesn't only protest. It applauded a Chevy truck commercial that depicted a sense of dependability between father and daughter, and cheered Omni Hotels for dropping in-room adult movies.

This is good news for daughters, but it's also good news for fathers who, through the chat rooms linked with DADs, find it easier to talk about eating disorders — stuff that doesn't come up on, say, the 16th hole.

"Men can be more than just a physical presence in their daughter's lives," Henderson said. "They're realizing that, 'I can also talk about this.'"

And, slowly, they can begin to move themselves beyond the image of the father on the front porch looking after his daughter's welfare. That image, Henderson said, while conjured in love and protectiveness, often conveys fear and a lack of trust. There are other ways to be a stable and comforting presence in a daughter's life.

DADs' tip for today? Take at least five minutes with each of your kids and thank them for the Father's Day gift they give you every day: the chance to be their dad.

The DADs Web site is <http://www.dadsanddaughters.org>.

— *Kim Ode's columns run Tuesday-Saturdays and Sundays. Write to kimode@startribune.com, or 425 East Grand Av. S., Minneapolis MN 55488.*

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SUNDAY / Family & Work

A BALANCED LIFE

By TARA PARKER-POPE AND KYLE POPE

Knowing When to Stop

A few weeks ago, we spent a weekend with our over-achieving friends. He is one of the most prolific people we know—he writes a weekly magazine column for which he often travels, has a booming free-lance business and is in the midst of writing a book. His wife has a successful corporate career, travels on business several days a week and often works weekends on projects she brings home.

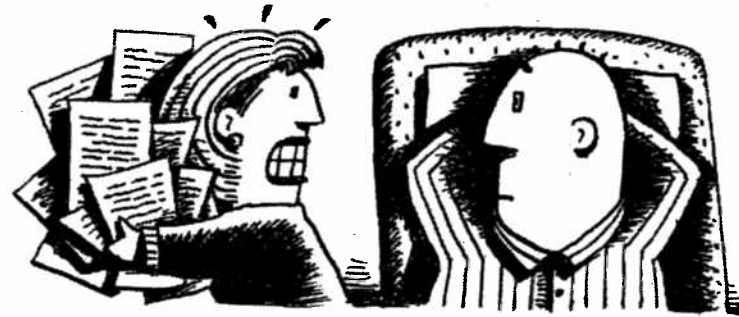
But when it comes to their time away from work, they lead very different lives. He finds time to exercise at the gym nearly every day, goes to several baseball games each season, regularly attends synagogue and often spends evenings with friends. Her life is so consumed by her job that she rarely arrives home before 9 p.m. and has little time for more than a brief visit with her husband before going to bed.

It surprised us that two people living under the same roof could have such vastly different approaches to their jobs and home life. Indeed, we had always thought that the struggle to achieve balance was hindered by external factors like a demanding boss, looming deadlines at work and financial pressures.

But our friends have taught us that the battle is much more personal—and that often one of the biggest obstacles in our search for balance is ourselves.

When our two friends were in college together, both were intent on achieving the 16 A's necessary to graduate cum laude. She spent hours studying in the library, while he hit the books just a few hours a week. They both achieved their goal—she got 17 A's and he got 16.

"I worked my tail off to get A's," she says. "He didn't." What is his secret? It's not that he's any smarter than his wife, or any more motivated. He simply



knows when to let go. "I was always happy to get an A-minus," he says. "I was happy to do what was sufficient."

He cautions that he's not advocating mediocrity—he just realizes what it takes to do good, even great, work, and when to stop. It's a strategy that he has adopted in his professional life, and one that he believes allows him to cater to his ambitions without giving up his entire day to work.

To some of us, this philosophy runs counter to years of conditioning. Since we were children, all of

us have been told not to settle for anything less than the very best.

It's a noble goal. But knowing when something is good—and when more tinkering won't make it any better—is a skill that not everyone, including our friend's wife, can master. During our weekend visit, she spent several hours working on a project. She finished it once, then went back and took a whack at it again.

Her problem, she told us, is that it's difficult for her to let go. In her view, "It can only be good if it's perfect."

The visit with our friends prompted us to take a look at our own work habits in the office and at home. Even though our friends don't have the demands of children, we think their experiences offer a good lesson for anybody struggling to give adequate time and attention to both their work and personal life.

This past winter, we both suffered our own workaholic meltdowns. Tara had taken on a book project and had begun writing a newsletter for a local charity. But before she knew it, the newsletter became an albatross. She struggled with production problems, often because the fancy graphics and photographs were more demanding than she could handle—and more elaborate than the project really needed. Instead of farming out the distribution to other volunteers, she ended up

stamping and mailing the newsletter herself. Meanwhile, her weekends were spent on the book project, which was taking longer than expected. Between her projects and her job, there wasn't even time to catch a movie or meet friends for brunch.

Meanwhile, Kyle's job had become so demanding he often worked Sundays and spent several evenings a week at work-related functions, instead of attending a class he had signed up for because he was interested in the subject. He began setting his alarm two hours earlier just so he could read magazines and the newspaper.

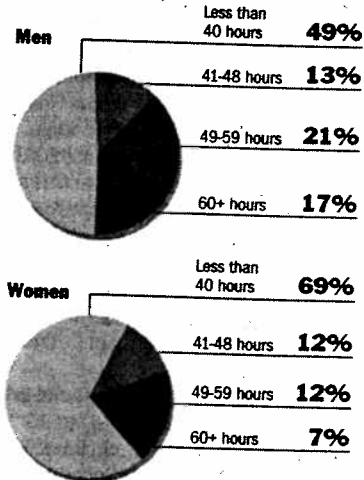
At the time, we felt as if we'd simply taken on too much. But looking back, we both could have managed better if we had adopted our friend's tactic of finding the fine line between perfecting your work and agonizing over it. The newsletter could have survived one issue without photos and could have waited to be mailed by other volunteers. Kyle probably could have skipped a few of his work functions and simply scheduled meetings at other times with those people. And who knows how many work hours we could have shaved off our week if we'd simply filed our articles when we knew they were done, rather than spending precious hours tinkering with minor changes.

At the end of the visit with our friends, we asked them both if they felt they were living a balanced life. As we expected, her answer was no. But to our surprise, our friend who has perfected the art of knowing when things are good enough confided that his work-life balance isn't good enough. The reason? "I never see my wife," he says.

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Working Overtime

Hours worked per week by managerial and professional employees



Source: U.S. Department of Labor (1998 survey)

Life is like a juggling act

Marriage, family and career vie for attention

Attention people of Eden Prairie! If you have more to do than you can fit into one day, I want to recommend a new hobby. For me, it all started when I was in high school with those cans of tennis balls. I remember fooling around with them one day, wondering how people learned to juggle. I worked for a long time, learning the pattern for the balls. Once I figured it out, I needed to perfect the technique: It took me months to become fluid, but I finally mastered three-ball juggling. After that I entertained myself thousands of times by juggling whatever I could throw in the air. Soon, no piece of fruit was safe in our kitchen.

Even though the zenith of my career has been performing at my own kids' birthday parties, over the years juggling has given me a lot of satisfaction. In fact, juggling seems to be an appropriate metaphor for life. With your busy schedule, do you ever feel like you are trying to keep three balls up in the air with only two hands?

I started to think of the three balls I juggled as representing three parts of my life — my family, my career and my self. I remember when I first got married, as wonderful as those first few years were, I was shocked by how time-consuming marriage was. I realized for the first time in my life that it would be hard to do everything each day that I wanted to do. At that time, my career consisted of going to school full time and working part time. When I got married, I discovered it was harder to find time to exercise every day, and I wonder how other people managed their schedules. I



Rev. Ed DuBose Spiritually Speaking

think back on that time now and laugh.

After I left school, I began working for the church. Soon, I not only had trouble finding time to exercise, but some days I couldn't find enough time to talk to my wife. Juggling was harder than ever. But I still didn't realize how good I had it.

Next came children. Suddenly, finding time to exercise wasn't as high of a priority as finding time to eat all three meals each day. I decided it was time to learn how to juggle four balls.

At first, it seemed impossible. Then I figured out the pattern and realized I just had to practice a few thousand times. Four balls seemed like a better analogy for life: career, family, spouse and personal. I have discovered that of the four main priorities, at any one time I can do three of them very well.

I can spend lots of time with my kids and my wife and do everything I need to do to care for myself. IF I don't spend too much time at work.

Or, if work becomes the main

focus of the week (as it often does) I can find plenty of time to read to my children, help out around the house and go on a date with my wife. IF I cut back on things like exercise, reading and sleep.

I think that I can do any one of these three things well if I commit about 30 percent of my time to it. The problem is that to do all of them well, it takes about 120 percent of each day.

I can do 120 percent a day if I have to, but only for about two or three days. Then I crash, think of Peter at that point, look at my two-page "to do" list and say, "The soul is willing, but the flesh is weak."

It is during these moments of angst about my personal limitations that I need to remember the old preacher's motto: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." I need to focus on each day's demands and look upon them as balls I can juggle in the air.

I have to warn you, it takes a lot of practice and all of your concentration. I hope life doesn't get any more complicated than it already is, because I've heard that juggling five balls takes a lot longer to master.

(The Rev. Ed DuBose, a pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran Church, shares this space with two other church pastors: the Revs. Marlin Meendering of Road Home Church, the Reformed Church in America, and Matt Marzluff of Eden Prairie Presbyterian Church. "Spiritually Speaking" is one of several opinion and commentary pieces appearing regularly in the *Eden Prairie News*.)