

How a Valentine's Gift Revealed Multi-Tasking Deficiencies

By Theresa Boedeker

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I check the dryer, hang up a few dress shirts, and head to the potatoes steaming on the stove top. They're not tender yet, so I set the timer for another 3 minutes and chop up some lettuce and tomatoes. I go back to the dryer to hang up some dress pants before turning the potatoes off. Then I chop up a cucumber, answer the phone, and yell at a child to cease and desist. I chat about my day, pull out the butter and milk, start mashing the potatoes, hang up the phone, and so, the evening continues. Without the ability to multi-task, I would get a lot less done. Sure, I have been known to burn things, forget things, not finish things, and overlook things, but the majority of time it works in my favor.

Since I can do two things concurrently, like pulling clothes out of the dryer and cooking dinner during

the same time period, I assume that others also have this ability. Like my husband; I can't remember ever seeing him multi-task, but that doesn't mean it never happens. And when he said he could not do it, I thought he was just being modest. Everyone can multi-task, I concluded, and I continued to believe it was one of his hidden talents.

Then one Valentine's Day, when I was collecting on my gift of a day off, I learned the truth about his multi-tasking skills, and it had nothing to do with modesty. Christian was about four years old when I left him in the care of my husband for the day. I didn't ask for much, just that he took care of Christian and didn't mess up the house too much. "Not mess the house up much" were the key words that had different meanings to me

and him.

When I returned and stepped into the quiet kitchen, I was greeted with a shock. It looked like a whirlwind had swept through my kitchen pulling half the items from the cupboards and tossing them indiscreetly on the counter, in the sink, and on the stove. Dirty dishes randomly lay throughout the room, dirty pans were scattered here and there, and toys were tossed on the floor. At first I thought some tragedy had struck, perhaps pulling them to the emergency room in haste. Maybe a phone call had jerked them from the house before they could tidy up. Some disaster had obviously kept them from returning the kitchen to some kind of usual semblance. I peeked into the eating area. There were toys strewn here and there, dirty dishes on the table, sippy glasses on the floor, and whole crackers laying a path to the living room. Concern gripped my heart. Were those two still alive?

Then I heard Christian's footfalls running towards me as he yelled out, "Momma, momm!." I turned toward him and saw my hubby following behind, a huge smile on his face. They were two light bulbs heading my way. I hugged Christian to me and asked him

about his day. He chatted about playing outside, eating macaroni and cheese, and watching television.

He wandered away and I raised my eyebrows at my husband. "Things go alright?" I asked.

"No problems," he said. "But he takes a lot more energy to watch than I thought."

"Macaroni and cheese," I said, heading to the stove and glancing into the five dirty pots littering the top of it. "How many pans does that take?"

"More than you think."

I looked at the floor and his gaze followed. "I was hoping for a bit of a cleaner house," I said, trying not to sound disappointed. In my brain I was thinking about how easy this is for me to do, especially now that Christian could play by himself for a while and takes a lot less constant watching.

"Well Theresa," he sighed, running his hand across his chin. "I can only do one thing at a time. I can either watch him or I can clean the house. I can't do both."

I felt like laughing at his comment. How hard would it be to put a few dishes in the dishwasher as Christian plays? To run some water in a pot after dishing out the contents? To move the crackers to a higher shelf after about 29 are scattered on the floor? To pick a sippy cup off the floor when walking past it for the 15th time?

And then I saw the seriousness of his face. His desire to please and do a good job was impossible for me to ignore. I looked at the disaster staring us both in the face and I finally understood. When he said he had a one-track mind, he meant he could only focus on one thing at a time and, literally, nothing else. If I expected a halfway clean house on my return, I needed to hire a maid for the day. Expecting cleanliness was setting him up for failure and myself up for disappointment. It stole the joy from both of us.

"Well," I smiled. "Looks like you chose to do the most important thing. Taking care of the boy. Thanks."

Relief flooded his face and I suddenly felt happy to see him.

"You want some help with the kitchen?" he asked.

Of course, I did. When he sets his energy to cleaning, and nothing else, he can produce a very clean kitchen, even cleaner than when I do it.

Then I noticed he looked tired and said, "Sure, but it can wait a little longer."

I often think my husband is like me. He can do what I do, think like me, and has many of the same life experiences. I forget how different we are; not like an oak and a pine tree, but like an oak tree and a butterfly. Part of my loving him is accepting him the way he is: flaws, quirks, personality, multi-tasking deficiencies, and all. And another part of loving him is viewing experiences through his eyes. When I step out of my failed expectations I can see the messy house as evidence of his love. Love for his son and love for me so I could have a day off. It's a gift I willingly accept.