

Putting the OM in MOM...

Five Steps to a More Peace-filled Home & Family Life!

By: Kim Muench



In 2007, shortly before moving across the country with our four children due to my husband's job transfer, I made the decision to create a memory with my eldest son who had just started college and would be staying behind. At eighteen and into playing electric guitar, I knew it was only a matter of time before he would get a tattoo...so, I suggested we go together and get "inked."

He loved the idea!

In the week before our appointment, I pondered what I wanted to have permanently put on my body. At first I thought, "I'll just do a little heart or flower...that would be cute." And then, the more I thought about it, the more I realized if I was going to put something on my body forever I might as well make it truly meaningful.

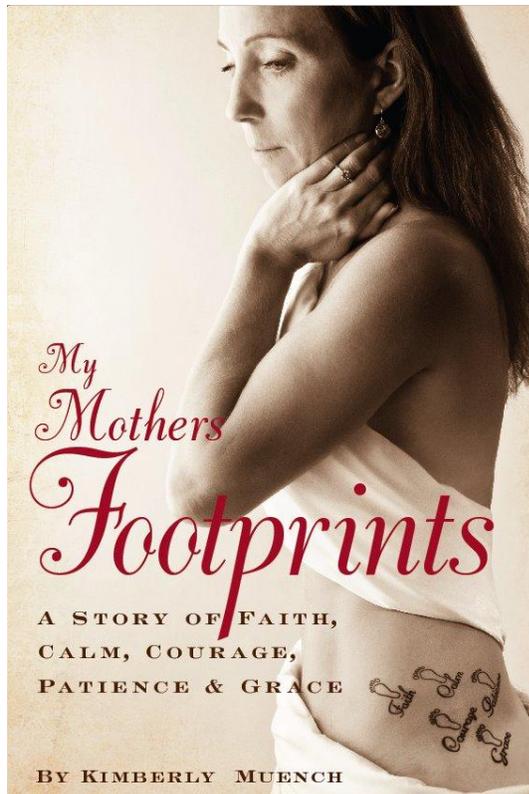
I'd seen plenty of tattoos in my life; portraits, scripture versus, dates of loved ones come and gone...it prompted me to think about the significance of the lessons I'd learned through the greatest experience of my life, motherhood. That thought brought on another, "What if I came up with a word for what each child has taught me about life?"

And the tattoo took shape from there.

The arrival of each one of my children has been unique, each one's temperament and personality traits has had a significant impact on who I am today.

I told the tattoo artist what I was thinking, and that I wanted to somehow incorporate the words with a symbol that stood for the journey aspect of motherhood as well.

On that cold, Wisconsin day in March of 2007, I got my first tattoo. So impactful to my life the tattoo was that I wrote and published a memoir in 2011 called: *My Mothers Footprints: A Story of Faith, Calm, Courage, Patience and Grace*. I used a picture of myself, showing the artwork, on the cover...



The crazy thing is the words *faith, calm, courage, patience and grace* also became the essence of how I operate in my everyday life. Especially in the (many, many) challenging moments of marriage and raising kids!

I chose the word FAITH as a representation of my eldest son Nick, who came into the world just shy of my nineteenth birthday. Deciding to become a single parent at the end of my freshman year in college was the first major struggle of my life. Having faith in me and faith in God that I would be able to become the mother Nick needed, was the basis of my choosing this word to symbolize what he taught me. And, for the few years after he and I visited that tattoo parlor in 2007, *faith* is exactly what I clung to as Nick spiraled into addiction during his early 20s.

Faith is not the same as religion. In fact, you don't have to subscribe to any organized religious denomination to experience a relationship to something larger than yourself, which for me is God. Having faith in yourself and in your children is a terrific way to take off some of the daily pressure and stress so many families go through.

During the worst part of Nick's disease, when I literally did not want the phone to ring for fear of who and what I might find at the other end of

the line, I experienced many a tear-filled and restless night's sleep, but there was one morning when I woke up and embraced the message I received during my restless slumber...**I would never truly know what my son's life journey was about...and *I had absolutely no control over the outcome of it...***all I could do was love him unconditionally, let him know this often through my words and actions, and not enable him in any way to self destruct.

Nick is now several years sober, and watching him put his life together after a number of setbacks has been one of the most inspiring things I have witnessed as a mom.

So, *the first step to a more peace-filled home and family life* is having FAITH in something larger than oneself...especially in the most trying of life's inevitable circumstances.



My second son, Allen-Michael, came into the world with about twenty minutes worth of effort on my part. Incredibly laid back, even as a baby, he has taught me the beauty of taking life in stride. While Allen-Michael is a very deep thinker, he also knows how to connect with people, how to reach out to others, even in the most humble situation. Allen-Michael is the most calm, centered individual I have ever met.

I have worked at approaching family life more calmly over the years. Practicing meditation, with an emphasis on gratitude, has gone a long way in helping me stay centered, especially in crisis-type situations.

For example, a few years ago when Allen-Michael was studying abroad in Rome, he began having some stomach issues. About two months into his four month stay, it was evident the problem was more than just an occasional quirky system. Of course Tom and I were worried as he saw the campus appointed doctor, who couldn't quite figure out what was going on. On top of that, as a parent you worry about the quality of healthcare in another country. He would get better for a few weeks, and then things would flair up again. Allen-Michael was a great communicator during that time, with us and with the resident professor in charge of his group while in Italy.

About three weeks before he was scheduled to return to the States, he was traveling in Poland at the time, Allen-Michael called home (late at night) to say he was in dire pain. He was with a group of about four guys and no one had a clue about where to go in Poland for medical assistance. We made some suggestions, we talked him through the worst of the pain, and he was able to fly back to Italy the next morning. My intuition told me he needed to come home early and not worry about finishing his classes. Allen-Michael told me his intuition told him to stick it out. As a twenty-year-old there wasn't anything else I could do.

He managed to make it through the semester and we had him prescheduled for an internist when he arrived back in Texas. In the end, things turned out okay.

Step two to having a more peace-filled home and family life is to remain CALM in times of trouble, whether that means a potentially dramatic dynamic, or even when your child does or says something you have a hard time reconciling.

The best way I know how to do this is to keep our family's schedule in check so that I don't have to feel rushed...which for me, leads to anxiety. I have done this by limiting the number of activities my kids are involved in, and making sure we have a family dinner as many nights a week as possible. Making time for connection, whether it's across the country or across the kitchen table, helps us build stronger, deeper bonds with one another.



My third son, Brigham, gave us quite a scare when he threatened to arrive only twenty-six weeks in gestation. As a result, I ended up in the hospital from Thanksgiving weekend until he arrived (only six weeks early) the first week of January. That was no small feat given I already had two kids at home, and it was the holiday season. Thank goodness for a wonderful husband and grandparents who were willing and able to pitch in while I focused on being a human incubator.

Early on, the doctor had warned Tom and I our baby may have some mental or physical problems due to his early arrival. We had to face the fact that we didn't know what might happen. For myself, that meant a lot of quiet reflection about having the **COURAGE** to accept whatever the circumstances might bring with his birth. Fortunately for us, while he was quite tiny at 4 lbs, with a few days in the NICU we were able to bring him home with no issues.

The third step in building a more peace-filled home and family life is to have **COURAGE**.

There is good reason why developing courage is vital when it comes to parenting, especially during the adolescent years. Using your gut instinct for your children's needs and development should outweigh the constant messages society tells us (through media, Internet, our fellow parenting community, even our own parents) about how our kids "should" look, behave, and achieve. Even what their social calendar should look like.

For example, many years ago, after my eldest had a birthday sleepover that got a bit out of hand, I decided no more sleepovers. Not our kids' going elsewhere, nor any in our home. With very rare and special exception this has been the family rule for a decade now.

It was not really a big deal with the boys, however when Mia was five years old she began to get invited to birthday party sleepovers. She was not at all crazy about our rule, because she felt she was missing out on all the fun. In fact, we had many conversations about it (with me explaining why we had this rule for our family) and it was a few years before she finally resigned herself to the idea that when she got invited to overnights she was picked up at 10 p.m. We often have her friends over for "movie nights" which always end by 10 p.m.

Some moms thanked me for this, some thought I was being overprotective and didn't understand at all. In fact, they had no problem letting me know this. I could have changed course under the pressure, but we had put this family rule place for good reason, and I wasn't going to let a few other moms sway my decision.

It's funny, now that our girls are heading into the teen years, some moms are trying to stop the sleepovers...and there is a lot of pushback from their kids. At this point Mia knows she sleeps best in her own bed and she really doesn't miss anything but sleeping (I say this lightly) when she comes home at 10 p.m.



The fourth quality, a word which aptly represents my fourth son, Maddux, is PATIENCE.

My first, and thank God only, experience with a colicky baby, Maddux was born prematurely as well at 35 weeks in the dead of a brutal Wisconsin winter. Fortunately, though it was an emergency c-section, we were able to bring him home right away. (So we could enjoy his incessant crying there...ha ha).

The fourth step to a more peace-filled home and family life is developing PATIENCE for problems that arise during the years we raise our kids (like weeks of crying...or sibling rivalry...or teens experimenting with drugs and alcohol) is necessary to maintain strong, consistent connections with our kids.

But, how does one accomplish this?

I have found that in order to be a patient mom, I have to take good care of myself. For me this means exercising six mornings a week. It also means an hour of television (Super Soul Sunday reruns are my favorite) with a snack and glass of chardonnay every night after kids are in bed. These are the two things that I never forgo because I know they contribute greatly to my being mentally available to all of the people and tasks that go on during each day.

And I never allow myself to feel guilty about this. So, my recommendation for finding more patience in the home is to take care of yourself by finding what helps you relax...maybe it is exercise, or a nightly bubble bath...maybe it's finding an hour daily to read a good book...whatever feeds your soul is exactly where you will find more patience.



The fifth and final quality I have found helps in creating an environment where each member of the family can thrive is **GRACE**, which is also the word I decided fit my fifth child, and only daughter, Mia. She (again) arrived several weeks early, but healthy.

How does grace help your home and family life to be more peaceful? Well, giving grace to ourselves or to another family member requires our being vulnerable. This means being able to forgive and move on in times of internal or external struggle.

The clearest example of grace I can give you is something that happened in my life just a few months ago. It was a difficult personal challenge that eventually led me to forgive myself, and the others in the situation.

I had taken on the task of inviting a parenting author whose work I greatly admired (and still do) along with three other women whom I'd recently met, we all very much wanted the event to take place. None of us had any experience with planning or executing this kind of gathering, but we had a great deal of energy and dedication to the outcome. Our group of moms wanted to bring the author and her important message to our town because we all felt very strongly this was going to positively impact many families.

The event itself was a success! We had over 200 parents, mental health professionals, and teachers in attendance. The venue we chose

came together beautifully; the vendors had good things to say about being part of the successful evening.

All of that being said, we fell short of the ability to make the full payment to our speaker. It was my job to share that information since I had been in direct contact with her for months prior to the event.

Hindsight being 20/20, the approach I took when sharing this news was the instigator to the fall out. The news was not well received. A woman whose work I greatly admire, and whom I was incredibly grateful for having made the trip to our town, didn't appreciate the delivery or the message.

Without going into full detail, unfortunately the relationship between me and the author, as well as me and the other women dissolved in an ugly way.

I spent weeks self-analyzing my part, my intent, and my shortcomings, until I realized none of that was going to change the outcome. Despite the turmoil, I had achieved so much personal growth in the months prior to the manifestation of the event, had learned so many life lessons before, during and especially afterwards. To waste another moment pondering the outcome was insane. The point of the energy from start to finish was that as many people got the chance to learn about her parenting movement. And that's where my focus needed to be.

Giving myself grace in this situation was a great gift. Ultimately knowing I had put myself "all in", using faith, calm, courage and patience in the months of organization and promotion, as well as putting myself out into the world in many ways that made me uncomfortable, but truly caused me to grow as an individual was the forgiveness I needed to move ahead.

Grace for oneself is a priceless gift. Forgiveness of others when you put in context that we are all doing the best we can with what we know, and our prior life experience plays a big role in how we respond to life's challenges, is also a priceless gift.

So is working at resilience! This is another wonderful aspect to work towards as a parent every day.

Raising kids, of any age, comes with great sacrifice, effort, and rewards as well. Children arrive in our life to teach us exactly where we need to grow. When we keep this in perspective, instead of thinking we always have to be in the driver's seat of their lives, we can relax and enjoy learning from them and about who they truly are, without expectation being placed on them for who we want, or need them to be.

Wishing you peace in life, and in your most precious relationships...

~ Kim

