

A Juggling Act  
Marla Estes, M.A.

Many people, both men and women, have to juggle more pursuits than they have time for. All I can do, though, is talk about my experience as a woman. My story is not an unusual one. Raised in a traditional household, where my father worked and my mother stayed at home, I believed that was the recipe for “happily-ever-after.”

I got married when I was 30 and in the decade to come gave birth to three sons. Although I had a “little” job doing bookkeeping and later a “little” business (importing American foods to France), my main activity was running the household. By the time I hit my early 40’s, I wondered, like in the old Peggy Lee song, “Is that all there is?” I felt guilty for my feelings of depression and dissatisfaction, and wondered what was wrong with me. After all, hadn’t I done all the right things? Husband, home, children, security? Don’t misunderstand – I valued my home life. Only I wanted something more.

Carl Jung said that often in mid-life we wake up wearing shoes that have become too small for us. At 46, going back to grad school was my way of stepping into a bigger pair. I spent the next four years getting my Masters Degree in Transpersonal Psychology. Then it all became clear. There wasn’t anything “wrong” with me; I had become bored and unhappy with under-using all that was inside of me. Something had been knocking at my door, not loudly perhaps, but persistently, and wasn’t going to be quiet until I let it in. To follow this call was an antidote for my dissatisfaction, and to become inspired was a remedy for my depression.

At the same time, that meant I had even more to juggle than before (although, gratefully, my husband was extremely supportive), when all I wanted to do was to follow the passion I had for my studies, eventually leading to my writing and teaching career, where my creative spark lay.

One outcome of this challenge was what I call the guilt-resentment continuum, which went like this: If I put myself first, I feel guilty; if I put others first, I feel resentful. I struggled with the feeling that I was “selfish.” Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst, thought the word “selfishness” was maligned, that in fact it was a form of self-love. There’s a difference between a ruthless, dog-eat-dog selfishness and a healthy, putting-myself-first, good self-care selfishness. On the other hand, we’ve probably all known those who were “selfless” but who were motivated by martyrdom and not true generosity, which doesn’t feel so great to be on the receiving end of! Care for self and care for others are not mutually exclusive, and the ability to do both simultaneously is a life-enhancing art.

Recently, I saw the documentary, “Who Does She Think She Is?” (details of upcoming free screening below) which follows five women artists and the challenges they face juggling all the various aspects of their lives: children, money, relationship, time management, creativity. They have opted to have it all, to not choose between career and children, responsibility and self-fulfillment. The tagline is: “Everyone expects women to choose. But what if you don’t?” Although the film is about female artists, it speaks to all of us who open the door to our own self-actualization, who want to finally find our own voice. Our creativity comes in countless forms.

Join Betsy Lewis and Marla Estes, M.A. for a screening of “Who Does She Think She Is?” on Friday, July 30<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 9:30 at the RCC-SOU Higher Education Center,

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