

# MOMMY AND ME

by Ellen Currey-Wilson



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author of  
The Big Turnoff

to rid his childhood of the plug-in drug, she realized her own somewhat unusual mother—both the good and the bad—lived on in her.

kitchen, and the roaches on the counters reflected her un-Brady Bunch cleaning philosophy.

She took lessons from the political dynamos of her generation, including Gloria Steinem, who once bestowed on my mother the coveted Wonder Woman award, given for courage and risk-taking. My mother took a lot of risks. Born in 1927, she was one of the first women to receive a PhD in political science, to teach Middle East politics, and to work for the CIA. She made sure that my sister was the first girl to take shop in junior high and that my brother learned to sew and cook as well as hammer nails.

I proved to be an inadequate seamstress, cook, and carpenter. Watching so much television probably didn't help. Still, my mother did sometimes call on me to assist with her political campaigns and I showed a certain talent, though perhaps a lack of judgment at times. When she was running for the Texas State Board of

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Ellen Currey-Wilson decided her son wasn't going to be hooked on television the way she was. But as she became more zealous in her mission*

I'd always longed for a *Brady Bunch* family, complete with a Florence Henderson mother, all neat and orderly, pleasing and perfect. Much of my childhood was spent in front of the television set, so I'd seen enough TV families to know what a "normal" mother was—and it sure wasn't mine. In fact, all my life people have said to me, "Your mom's a real character." This was usually after my mother had done something memorable, like showing up at a city council meeting to protest a high-rise building. "We don't need another phallic symbol designed by males insecure with their genitalia," she once shouted at the mayor.

My mother favored unusual apparel combinations purchased at Goodwill—leopard pantsuits worn with big, colorful cowboy hats. With a scotch in one hand and a long More cigarette in the other, she was the picture of eccentricity. She hung a FUCK HOUSEWORK poster in our

Education, my mother asked me to speak to a crowd. I was fourteen.

"Say something to help rally young voters," she told me. I stood at the microphone thinking about the young voters I knew and what they wanted.

"My mother is in favor of legalizing marijuana," I announced. My mother, who had vowed not to use any illegal drug, never asked me to speak on her behalf again.

Although my own son, Casey, has appeared in the newspaper during TV-Turnoff Week, I've been careful not to ask him to speak on my behalf concerning television, or anything else. And even though I've now written about him in my book, I do hope he won't feel obligated to be a poster boy for TV-free America. (My personal nightmare is ending up like Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who is probably afraid that someone will dig up more nude photos of her, or worse, catch her son having premarital sex.)

But no parent is perfect, and it turns out I'm not exactly the Florence Henderson type either. Our house is usually cluttered with toys and hiking boots, and without a Game Boy and television blaring in every room, we are far from the typical family I thought I wanted. When I found myself running to turn off the big-screen TV at the Meier & Frank department store so Casey wouldn't see a Winnie the Pooh video, or throwing

myself in front of the television set at friends' houses until I could safely distract him from *Arthur*, I realized I didn't stand a chance of being the mom-next-door.

It took me a long time to admit, though, that I was as different as my mother had been in her time. At first I tried to hide the unconventional way I was raising Casey. I feared people's reactions. When our family stopped watching television, I knew I was differentiating myself from my friends and I feared Casey would be ostracized for not knowing the theme song to *SpongeBob SquarePants*. But it turns out that my mother gave me some valuable attributes. I've got strong opinions and I've learned to stand by them.

I've come to appreciate the gifts my mother gave me, among them, the willingness to embrace controversy, the ability to relish debate as much as agreement (just ask my husband), and the strength to believe in my principles. When I found the courage to suggest that our pediatrician remove the television from her waiting room and to start TV-Turnoff Week at Casey's school, I knew that part of my passionate and fearless mother was living on in me. And although I don't use duct tape to hold my shoes together as my mother often did, someone will probably still say to my child sooner or later, "Your mom's a real character." ■

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—ELLEN  
CURREY-WILSON