

The nonbusy family

By [Debra Bendis](#)

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In her Motherlode post [“I Refuse to Be Busy,”](#) K.J. Dell’Antonia mostly bypasses some of the complaints of working mothers. She doesn’t, at least not in this post, discuss the pressures on parents who are pressing their kids toward the best school, the best jobs, etc. And while she gives a nod to [Brigitte Schutle’s plea](#) for “readily available and affordable day care,” Dell’Antonia doesn’t really address the very real economic issue of some moms and dads struggling to make ends meet.

But it’s what she *does* say in this post that I find encouraging. She echoes some of my own views on family and career with a couple of key comments and one implied truth.

The key comments? First of all, she debunks the spontaneous conversation comment of “I’m so busy” and claims that “we, as parents, choose some [not all] of what makes us ‘busy.’” I hope she can convince a few of her readers, including a few people I know who always bring up their busyness and seem to need it as a kind of affirmation of their worth. In my view, “I’m so busy” always stops a conversation.

Secondly, Dell’Antonia maintains that to have the lifestyle that she and her family have, everyone will have to give up some things:

I choose my volunteer commitment, and so does my husband, and we say no to other things; not “no, I don’t have time,” but “no, that’s not how I choose to use my time.” The result doesn’t feel busy. It feels happy. It feels good.

I don’t read this in many of the working-mom books out there. Some authors seem convinced that life is about “having” or “doing” *everything*, with no choices in view.

Third, she talks about volunteer work. Many of the essays and books I’ve read don’t mention this, implying that this is lesser work because it’s not part of a professional career plan. I worked part-time for many years as a volunteer lay leader / youth director / fill-in pianist / etc. in my congregation. It’s gratifying to see such work lifted up by a working mom / parent.

Fourth—the obvious but unstated truth. Although Dell’Antonia doesn’t articulate it in this post, it’s clear that she loves family life, is happy with the decision to have a family. A clue to this comes in her description of “down time.” “Busy isn’t right for my children,” she says,

who like to get good and deep into every activity from Lego building to some insane repetitive game they play in the space between the kitchen island and the family room involving a tennis ball on a string, and who need a lot of unstructured time in which to do those things.

With my own kids grown and away from home, I’m reminded of our family’s good times. I savor memories of fun that happened in unstructured times—sometimes in between other, organized activities. I notice too that the good memories outshine the memories of difficult times: the fatigue of a commute, the loneliness when one spouse was busier, the struggles during kids’ teen years.

My hope for today’s families is that they’ll have good memories. They won’t be able to avoid busy, but hopefully there will be opportunities to choose nonbusy and to savor unstructured time for insane tennis ball games, chaotic family table talk, and much more.