

Dear ThirdPath Community,

After returning home from a speaking engagement recently, I noticed for the first time in a long time I felt particularly discouraged.

The event I had spoken at was geared toward full time mothers who were in the process of returning to work. These were smart, accomplished, thoughtful women who had invested significant time in caring well for their children, and now wanted to return to their careers in some capacity as well. The participants asked wonderful questions and it was clear from the stories everyone shared that much progress had been made in the struggle to make the workplace more accommodating to families.

Of course there were also a few difficult stories told, where some of the women worried they would be forced to choose between work and family. But what I found most challenging, and what still had me feeling down even a few days later, was that none of the women's strategies to return to work seemed to acknowledge that **there might already be another eager adult right in their own homes ready to join them in solving their new work/family equation - *their husbands***.

Talking about the experience later with Hanne, we both wondered why it still seemed so difficult for women to remember that our male partners can be part of the parenting equation. Is it because so many of us still deeply believe that men and women are just programmed differently from birth when it comes to raising and caring for children? Does biology determine destiny in our parenting roles?

Many people seem to argue this perspective when we raise this question, but we at ThirdPath strongly believe this is not the case. Instead, ***we have based much of our work on the premise that men can play as key a role in nurturing our children as women do***. And that a significant part of what is required to increase men's involvement at home is simply the encouragement of men to take a first step.

***In celebration of Father's day***, we are highlighting the work we do with fathers by asking some of the men involved in this work to share their first steps to becoming involved parents, as well as their thoughts about the issue of whether biology is destiny when it comes to parenting. We hope you find their responses as inspiring as we did!

***We also want to encourage all of you to take that first step*** – whether it is for men to make more time for your children as a dad, or for women to support a man in your life to do the same. We are confident that any step forward you take will have a positive impact on the connection and well being of everyone in your family. And of course, when you are ready and would like to try for more, ThirdPath is always here to help with resources, support, and guidance.

Happy Father's Day.

/Jessica and Hanne

PS - Over the past week two journalists (print and television) contacted ThirdPath to find fathers who have redesigned work to be more involved at home. In both cases we had more dads for them to contact than needed! Look, even the media is catching on.

### ***ThirdPath Activities for Dads:***

#### **Dad's Sharing Care:**

Every other month, ThirdPath runs a men's conference call for fathers who are committed to carving out significant time for family. If you, or a man you know, might be interested in hearing more about this

group, email us back and we'll send you more information.

### **AND SOME BIG NEWS!!!**

ThirdPath will be hosting a Men's Conference in 2008 in Philadelphia. The conference will be geared toward men who are currently making, or would like to make, significant time for family. Look for more details towards the end of the summer!

Read on for inspiring stories of men who have already taken a first step to get more involved at home.

### ***Sean - father and primary parent of a young school aged daughter and son***

#### ***Is biology destiny?***

I think there is a certain biological factor when it comes to caring for kids because I just think there has to be more to the process of pregnancy than simply incubation. It does create an initial bond between mother and child. But that does not determine everything.

Once born, I think that a baby can be cared for equally well by both parents, and that a baby craves a loving relationship with both parents. The idea that there is a biological determinism that sets parenting roles flies in the face of my own experience, and what I have observed over the course of my life. There are many men who are very good at caring for their children, even better perhaps than their wives. Similarly, many women, despite any bond they may feel, are not good at caring for children, even if that is the job that they do every day.

***First step:*** Our first step was rather simple – my wife got pregnant. When this happened, lots of family history came forward for both of us, and the result was that we both wanted a parent to be at home with our child full-time.

At that time, she loved her job in advertising, and I was ambivalent, at best, about my job as a lawyer. I am not sure who raised the possibility of me staying at home first, but once it was on the table it just made sense. So after her maternity leave ended, I began to stay home with our baby son.

Eight years later, I am still at home, we have another child (a daughter), and although I have fashioned a career out of my interest in writing that includes part-time teaching at the college level and freelance writing, all my work is flexed around the children's schedules. So after all these years, I am still the parent who is with them a majority of the time.

### ***Bill – shared care father of three young boys***

#### ***Is biology destiny?***

The biology is destiny idea is an interesting one. But isn't there room to view things on more of a continuum, rather than as an absolute? I hope so.

***First step:*** The first step for me was taking paternity leave when I was at a large law firm. The policy was gender neutral and allowed for three months paid leave. Although not used very much by the men at the firm, I took advantage of it and that really helped give me clarity about how important it was for me to make space in my life for me to spend significant time with my children. I ended up extending that leave for an additional month (unpaid) and when I returned back to the firm, I negotiated a schedule where I worked one day from home. That was the start.

Ultimately I realized that none of the law firm environments I had been in were consistent with my goal of balance, and I moved to a compliance role at a financial services firm. After a year there, I negotiated an 80% reduced schedule.

Over time, as I reported to different managers, I had to continually advocate for maintaining a reduced schedule. After one manager insisted I go full time, I got creative and came up with the idea of a 90% schedule, which meant I would take every other Friday off and receive 90% of my pay. My wife has also negotiated a 90% schedule and is home on the Friday that I'm working and vice versa.

## ***Mario - shared care father of a nine year old son.***

### ***Is biology destiny?***

Clearly there are biological differences between men and women. However, it is not clear to me that those biological forces exert pressure in the same direction. I mean post-partum depression is biological and that drives women away from the nurturing role.

Overall though, I think that biology is the lazy-way to describe the "who nurtures" decision process. I think there are other forces at work in the decision.... sociological forces (values, traditions, acceptable behaviors, norms) and economics (who makes what, how much is needed). Some of these forces were put into play during courtship... some men want to be the bread-winners and only date women with less earning potential... this may pre-determine the "who nurtures" decision long before the baby arrives. And there may be other forces too that I am not considering... the long-term career plans of each individual, available support structures, etc.

***First step:*** Before my father died, I had wanted to make changes in my life. After his death, I felt the urgency to make them. My son was three and one-half years old, and up until then my wife had been the stay at home parent and I had worked full time. So the first step for me was to take a 3-month leave of absence from work to be with my family and explore new careers. During this period, I gathered information on the training time and cost to switch careers, as well as expected income and expenses in the career. And I built spreadsheets to figure out the feasibility for me and my family.

I talked to my wife a lot... I'm not sure if talking was helpful or terrifying for her.

After a year or so, I began negotiating a severance package for myself. It took about 5 or 6 months to finalize, but I subsequently left my employer and began my new more flexible career.

## ***Jim - shared care dad of a teenage boy and girl***

### ***Is biology destiny?***

Having been in a situation where life was redesigned, I strongly believe that biology is not destiny. Historically, there has obviously been a push to have women as the primary caregivers, but there is no question that society as a whole is better off with two parents sharing care. The father is just as capable in providing a nurturing environment, and the children involved benefit from having different points of care, not just being dependent on one person.

Recently, I interviewed the spouse of an accounting firm partner relative to a client of mine. During the interview, she couldn't say enough about how hard he works, he works weekends, they have a nice house, cars, etc. then she sort of hesitated and said something to the extent "he really doesn't spend any time with our kidshe is too busy." She sounded a bit sad and it made me wonder about our priorities as a nation and as a society. It also made me extremely pleased and satisfied that we were able to make big

changes in our home life that truly benefited all of us.

**First step:** I had practiced law for a dozen years, as part of an “expected” career path. While the work was steady, I had little time to spend with my family. Then some bad decisions on my part, spurred on by my dissatisfaction with my career, led me to take some actions to end my law career quickly. Suddenly, my wife and I took on dramatically new roles. The transition was difficult for whole family, but ultimately has been very rewarding.

So I guess you could say my first step was to determine exactly what our family needed. While this sounds basic, our experience with a sudden transition was such that we really had to evaluate our most core assets. My wife and I both felt we had some job flexibility, and that we could both care well for our children. In short, we had strength as a nuclear family, and took comfort in knowing we could go on from there.

### **Mike - shared care father of two young daughters**

#### ***Is biology destiny?***

While men and women do seem "designed" for certain roles within the family structure, maintaining a healthy, vital family and relationship is highly situational. Some couples may find the traditional roles work best, while others prefer an alternative approach.

My wife would go nuts if she stayed with the kids all day, every day --- and while I sometimes experience work/home conflict, I was clear I wanted my children to be raised by us (my wife and myself). I tend to be more patient with the girls than my wife --- each of us has some balance of ying and yang within us.

All men, women and relationships don't fit the same mold.

**First step:** Our shared care arrangement grew out of two primary intentions: (a) our desire to raise our kids ourselves (b) my desire to spend lots of time with my daughters --- especially during their earliest years

Given that I was traveling a great deal when our first daughter was born and my wife was making a good income without traveling, I restructured my life to work from home and be available for parenting as my primary focus. While this meant letting go of aspects of my work that I enjoyed, it was clear that we had a "window of opportunity" to be fully engaged with the girls during their pre-school years. We made this our priority and feel very good that we did.