

RELATIONSHIPS, FRIENDS, ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Married with children

Mom — finally — finds time for some fun

Next month, I will don a black wig, coat my face with heavy makeup and step onto the stage in my parish cafeteria. I will sing (solo!) about three dozen bars of a song and deliver (with passion!) four lines of dialogue.



Patricia Gallagher Newberry

My debut as a Nativity Player — as the housekeeper in *Man of La Mancha* — may be modest, but it marks a real milestone in my life as a parent. For the first time in more than seven years, I have been spending part of each week this spring on a strictly non-essential, completely self-indulgent pursuit: Having fun.

Very full days

Like many parents, I made fun a low priority after children began arriving.

There was the baby to feed and the diapers to change and the laundry to wash and the groceries to buy and the meals to prepare.

More recently, there have been the car pools to drive and the games to attend and the schools at which to volunteer.

In between, of course, there have been the paid jobs — the articles to write, the lectures to prepare and the papers to grade. But fun? That has somehow been absent from

the list of "things to do" in recent years.

As a young adult and a young married, I found plenty of time between work and other duties to have fun.

I spent a lot of time walking, reading, seeing movies, dining out and getting together with friends. No, I wasn't hang gliding over the Rockies or scuba diving in Aruba, but I had time for my own version of fun.

Since children, that time has evaporated.

These days, I walk just enough to keep the scale from groaning when I get on it. Pleasure reading is restricted to the summer months. Movies? Four or five in a good year. Dining out (Wendy's drive-through

doesn't count) and friends are hard to squeeze in, too.

The fun I have now is fun designed for kids — at the park or museum, the zoo or pool, or sometimes just the back yard.

Funny old lady again

So when I saw a notice last winter that the community theater group in my neighborhood would be staging *Man of La Mancha*, I was tempted. I started playing the show's tape in the car and singing along to the songs I'd learned as a member of my high school's *Man* production.

But I didn't think I'd audition. I didn't think I'd have the time for rehearsals. I spoke with friends, who have children, who were

equally tempted and said the same thing: It sounds great, but I don't have the time. It'd be fun, but my husband would kill me.

By January, I talked myself into it. (The spouse's reaction was tepid — "You mean you're going to sing in public?" he asked — but non-combative.)

Since then, I've spent many Wednesday nights and most Sunday afternoons in the cafeteria, singing my 33 bars and practicing my four lines.

I've had conversations with new people, some of whom I previously knew only by name or face and some of whom I'd never met before: I've been floored by the talent and dedication of a huge cast, most of whom

have plenty of children and other obligations, too.

At home, the laundry baskets runneth over, the meals are less than gourmet and the kids and mate miss their real housekeeper.

At work, students wait a little longer than usual for grades on assignments.

But in the cafeteria, I'm in costume and wig, up on stage for the first time since high school, playing the kind of funny old lady part I did back then.

I'd almost forgotten what fun it is.

Patricia Gallagher Newberry's column appears every other week. She welcomes mail at newgal@one.net or The Enquirer, 312 Elm St., Cincinnati, 45202.