

BIG ON LITTLE: Meher Marfatia

Love on the run

FUNNY, the most thrilling 'mommy moment' wasn't when the test confirmed I was pregnant. It came months after, on hearing the first foetal heartbeat. The discovered delight of that sonogram-amplified dhudup dhudup refrain welling from within was beyond words. Those special seconds defining the motherhood miracle threw up a paced sound, yet slowed me down. I'll be caught in less of life's rush-rush, I promised the swell of my stomach. I'm going to savour a gentle bringing-up-baby experience.

I wish the feeling had lasted a little longer, a reminder of unhurried love. Instead, of course, my world got stuck in fast-forward in that dreaded, frantic way new parents know too well. Hurling from day to day in a crazed whirl of what hindsight shows were undue anxieties, I grew dizzy and drained. Detached from accepting the pleasures of parenting as they unfolded, I chased some elusive 'perfect child' dream.

After mad months of juggling the domestic dips and disasters that go with first-time motherhood, two incidents brought back the value of slow parenting. One was a pure organic lesson the baby taught me. Exhausted from the bawling induced by his evening colic hour, I'd dropped into semi-sleep.

SLOW COACH

'Slow parenting means allowing our children to work out who they are rather than what we want them to be. It means letting things happen rather than jumping in and forcing them.'

'Parents of both genders are having kids older, or after many years in the workplace. We end up importing the office ethos into the home. We think, "Well, how can we parent better? Why don't we do what we do at work when we want to improve our performance: bring in the experts, spend lots of money and put in long hard hours? We will professionalize parenting."

— Carl Honore, author, *The Power of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed and Under Pressure: Rescuing our Children from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting*



Waking to find he had hopped atop, to flop face down on my tummy for contact comfort. Awake yet quiet at last. For five fully-in-the-present minutes I didn't stir. Outside the room the usual loud joint family bustle and boom could be heard. I chose to stay still, breathing in unrehearsed sync with this life pushed out of me half a year ago. Belly to belly, cheek to chest. We lay together, relaxed, listening. The fight was gone. When he looked up from the hush to beam a toothless grin, it dawned. The peace was always there. I just had to let it in.

Flash Number 2 struck later. At a parenting workshop which asked whether we spoke to children with our eyes as well as the mouth. It seems obvious to make eye contact as you talk, we thought smugly then. Only to be amazed how many of us don't. Not as much, as meaningfully. A manic dash between rooms trailing piles of laundry plus that book to quick-edit... and a carelessly tossed question: "Make it on time for football practice?" "Did you clean your room?" or "Homework done?" I was busier snapping instructions at them than expressing an interest in them. Then worrying why both my son and daughter answered in moody monosyllables! No wind-down chances taken, no attentive connect made. I could hardly expect that fine flow of communication we think we're entitled to from kids.

Can't hurry love. The joys of slow parenting are gloriously ours for the asking. Nourishing, nurturing, natural — unhurried love can clarify us. And transform children. Because they're worth it.

Meher Marfatia is the author of 10 books for children and two for parents. She has mothered her own kids well past the terrible twos and almost past the troubled teens. Reach her at: mehermarfatia@gmail.com