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by Vivien Santana Hughes



Mimi Lesseos: Mom of Action

“Might be fun to interview someone who could snap you like a twig,” said my editor of champion grappler/wrestler Mimi Lesseos, a.k.a. Magnificent Mimi, the mother of twins.

I’ll admit I struggle to lift my suitcase into the overhead bin. But I was game. Yet, it was with some trepidation that I called Mimi to postpone our interview. I mean, this woman *fought* for a living for 22 years. “That’s OK,” she said. “I’ll just take a bath with rose petals from the garden.”

Really? “I’m all about staying feminine in a man’s world,” Mimi explained later. “I used to go into the ring wearing pink boas and sequined fighting shoes. You can kick ass and be girly.” Love it!

Since retiring from fighting, Mimi has performed stunts for films including *The Scorpion King* and *Gangs of New York*, and boxed in *Million Dollar Baby*. She also fought – wearing a bikini – in plenty of B movies. “It became, ‘Let’s exploit Mimi,’” she says. So she mortgaged her house and started her own production company. She just released her seventh film, *Double Duty*, described as “a female Jackie Chan a la *Home Alone*.”

Raised in a tough Hollywood neighborhood, Mimi now lives with her kids on a ranch in Acton, north of L.A., where the twins are active in sports, scouts, dance and, of course, judo.

What were you like as a child?

I was the quiet, baby of five. When my mom would leave, I was constantly getting beat up by brothers and sisters. I went to my uncle [judo champion and stuntman Gene LeBell], who literally got me in a headlock and took me under his wing. I started taking judo lessons at 6 and fought my first pro match at 16. I became the strong one of the family!

You’re definitely tough. How tough was it becoming a single mom to twins?

I’ve been a single mom since I was four-and-a-half months pregnant. I had one of those runaway guys. I was stressed – how was I going to do this? I was a fighter, what did I know about parenting? And I had to do this by myself! Taking lots of baths chilled me out.

And exercise: lunges and walking.

How do you keep life in balance?

My advice is, put your whole heart and soul into parenting, but save some time for yourself. It’s not selfish. Sometimes, we parents get totally lost. Do what makes you happy – read a book, get a massage – even for just an hour a week and you’ll feel rejuvenated.

Do you feel like you always have to be strong?

Parents often feel that way. But you can sometimes feel like breaking down and crying. Get a good bottle of wine, find the best sad movie, and have a damn good cry. You’ll feel so much better.

What’s your best tip for moms on staying (or getting) in shape?

I’m all for walking – jogging really pounds your joints. Walk and get to know your neighborhood. Walk to the store or park a couple of blocks away. And it’s free. For fun, take a dance class. I take salsa once a week. Don’t wait for anybody to go with you. Just go!

How do you suggest parents empower their kids, especially girls?

Put your daughter in some sort of self-defense class, and a dance class, too. If your child is a loner getting picked on at school, reassure her or him that this is just one point in time. It’s not what anyone else says about you – it’s what you think about yourself. Then enforce how wonderful your child is. There’s a lot of bullying going on now. Parents need to listen to what their kids are saying.

Sounds like you speak from experience. Were you teased as a child?

Kind of, yes. [Laughs] I showed them! ♦

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a five-year-old daughter. She just signed up for cardio funky dance at the Y.



Martial artist/wrestler/stuntwoman/actress/writer/producer/single mom (phew!) Mimi Lesseos in fighting form, top right, values spending unstructured time with her 12-year-old twins, Nicholas and Sophia.