

THE WOMAN'S PAGES



A few nights ago, I heard KABC radio's Dennis Prager interview Maj. Rhonda Cornum, author of *She Went to War*.

"Are you a feminist?" he asked the 15-year army veteran.

"Well," she hesitated, "that depends on how you define feminist."

This is a woman whose very career has meant standing up for herself in the ultra male-dominated military. And while working as an army surgeon and helicopter pilot she was shot down and captured by the Iraqis during the Persian Gulf War. We have a tough, determined woman here—but she won't say she's a feminist.

"I'm an equal opportunist," she said. And, yes, this wife and mother does favor women in limited combat roles.

Recently, a male friend mentioned that now that I was "The Woman's Pages" editor, I'd have to dress differently (translated: more masculine) when those "feminist types" came into the office. It made me wonder, has the definition of feminist changed so much that I—an admitted mommy tracker—no longer fit? My handy Webster's Dictionary defines feminism as "the principle that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men." Sounds reasonable. Oddly, there is no separate definition for the person who advocates these beliefs, this word that gives us so much trouble. I guess they couldn't figure it out either.

I've tried to be an example of equality for my children. Nevertheless, my 5-year old son recently asked me if I was sad that I was a girl. "Of course I'm not sad, I love being a girl," I said. "We can do anything boys can."

"Well there aren't any girl presidents," my son said. Damn Washington. He had me there. "But that doesn't mean there *can't* be, and other countries have had them . . ." I replied. I hope he believed me.

Equality followed me home—I always expected that my husband would do his share. Why wouldn't he? And after the birth of our first child, that included changing diapers, especially the poopy ones that dripped into our son's shoes. As for me, I can serve cereal for dinner with nary a pang of guilt and I don't iron his shirts (my enlightened grandma taught me not spoil a man). However, I schlep the kids far more miles than my husband does, and most our tasks fall down traditional lines. What's important is that our roles within the family are a personal decision that works for us. In some families I know, the father is the main caretaker of the children. That works for them.

Because of the accomplishments of women before me, I've got choices. I'd like to see the look on my husband's boss' face if he asked for reduced hours to spend more time with the kids.

"The Woman's Pages" is a new monthly section for all of you—no matter which role you choose to take. One feeling most working and stay-at-home moms share is guilt about spending time on themselves. But in order to be the best parent (and spouse), you sometimes have to put yourself first. Where *L.A. Parent* meets your mothering needs, "The Woman's Pages" hopes to fulfill you as a whole person. One-stop shopping.

Each month, psychologist Leslie Maxson will answer your questions about relationships and emotional needs in "can we talk?"; OB/GYN Barry Herman will continue answering questions in "Inside Info" and writer Sandra Ortiz will report on the latest health and nutrition news affecting women in her "Body Shop" column. Coming soon: an opinion page, personal profiles and a calendar of women's events and opportunities.

This month, we interview a personal trainer on finding time to exercise and making the best of every minute. Although many of us dread it or say we don't have the time, working out regularly can increase your energy and reduce stress. (All the better to deal with the 6 p.m. whining wars.) And if your husband's not doing his share at home, turn to Page 76 for a story that can help you equalize your family's division of labor. In future issues, we'll cover topics from self-defense to sexuality, career management to the importance of pampering yourself. All with tips firmly rooted in reality—we are all busy moms, after all. Please feel free to write and let me know of other ways I can address your concerns.

Back to my power-suit-loving male friend . . . I said, "But I *am* a feminist." "Did your husband know that when he married you?" he half-joked. Of course. Like Maj. Cornum, he's an equal opportunist.

—Vivien Santana Hughes