

[Q TIPS]

PARENT TO PARENT

High-flying pilot, down-to-earth mom

By Heidi Stevens
Tribune staff reporter

Kim Strickland has tried sitting around and doing nothing. Honest she has.

"On a Saturday morning my husband and sons will be playing video games and I'll try to read the paper or do a crossword," said the 44-year-old North Center mom. "But there're just too many need-to's, want-to's, should-do's."

Strickland is more comfortable juggling her myriad identities: United Airlines pilot, author, blogger, mom of twins Ethan and Kyle.

So between piloting 767s and raising a couple of 10-year-olds, Strickland managed to write a novel, "Wish Club" (picture "The Jane Austen Book Club" meets "Charmed"), and edit her City Mom blog (acitymom.blogspot.com).

"I usually start writing at 10 at night when the kids are in bed," she said. "I stay up till 2 or 3 and then get up at 6:30 to get the kids off to school."

Strickland's husband, Jeff Sargent, is an information-technology manager for UBS. So are Ethan and Kyle being groomed to follow in any particular footsteps?

"I've done a fairly good job discouraging them from wanting to be pilots," Strickland said. "They're both fabulous creative writers."

Here, Strickland offers us a taste of her happy, hectic existence.

Your toughest parenting challenge: Being in two places at one time. This has been an ongoing struggle since my boys first began independent movement, with one crawling in one direction and the other crawling in, of course, the opposite direction. It's become even more challenging as they've gotten older, because now I'm not just required to be in two parts of one room, or one house, but in two different parts of the city.

Your favorite parenting moment: Does it reflect poorly on me if they've all occurred when both of them were asleep?



Photo for the Tribune by Yvette Marie Dost

Airline pilot Kim Strickland takes ground transportation, a.k.a. the "L," with husband Jeff Sargent and twin sons Ethan and Kyle, 10.

Something you wish you could go back and do over: Of course I have plenty of moments I wish I could do over: times I yelled when I shouldn't have; times I lost patience; times I taught my children colorful new vocabulary words while driving the car. But I think, even given the fantastical opportunity to go back and change those moments, I don't know if I would. If I didn't have failures as a parent, I would never have the opportunity to tell my kids, "I'm sorry," which is something I think is necessary for them to see and hear, and something I think parents in previous generations were reluctant to ever do.

Best piece of parenting advice: Always give your children choices. I think it's so important and helps them feel empowered. It's been an incredibly useful parenting tool for me, e.g., "You can clean your room today and watch a movie tonight, or you can clean your room tomorrow,

and hope the search party sees the signal flare you fire from underneath that scary pile of laundry and Legos."

Favorite way to stay connected with your kids: I enjoy the conversations we have in the car. We discuss the most amazing range of topics, from religion and philosophy, to politics, school, road rage, drugs. There's a lack of forced intensity—we're not face to face, there's no eye contact—which allows the conversation to go to a more intense place than it would at the dinner table or in the living room.

The quality you most hope to instill in your children: I want them to be unafraid to dream the big dreams, no matter how wild and crazy. I didn't grow up with that sort of fearlessness, the idea that good things can happen to me, and I want more than anything for them to believe they can achieve whatever it is they want for themselves.

Homework: Their problem or

yours? Theirs. Totally. I already did my homework. However, I think schools really try to make it my problem. Before my kids could read, they were bringing home homework with written instructions. It's like those placards in airplanes that say, "you can't read this, please tell flight attendant." Am I the only person who sees the ludicrousness in both of those situations? So, there are exceptions to the homework-is-their-problem philosophy. Certain special school projects always seem to require my assistance, a don't get me started on the science fair. After last year, I still can't talk about it for very long before my left eye starts twitch.

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If you know someone who would make a good Parent Parent: Spotlight, e-mail us at q@tribune.com and write "spotlight" in the subject line.