

The welcome

By Jennifer Fabiano

I had been gone four days. When I returned, my 13-year-old daughter hugged me fiercely. “Mom, don’t ever leave us again!” I smiled, glad to have been missed.

“Seriously, Mom. We’re even out of water!” she exclaimed in horror. The implied meaning was clear: things fell apart without me. Even a basic human need—water (in small bottles I keep stocked in the garage refrigerator)—had been neglected.

“Water, huh? What about the kitchen faucet?” I asked.

I almost felt guilty for being gone, but not quite. I had been in Wisconsin with my mother, visiting my 93-year-old grandmother, who’d had a stroke. We reconnected with many family members and spent precious time with my grandmother.

An added benefit was four days away from my “job.” No meals to plan, shop for or cook. No lunches to make. No ferrying kids to and from school and activities. No

homework to cajole my kids into doing. No laundry to do. No one’s needs to worry about but my own.

Don’t misunderstand. I love being a wife and mother. I’m good at my job and I take it very seriously. But I often feel unappreciated. I hadn’t realized that a small trip away could help my family see what I contribute. Absence really did seem to make my family grow fonder!

“I’m so glad you’re home,” my 15-year-old son said when we were alone. “I had to keep the kitchen clean, load the dishwasher and keep Dad and Veronica organized. And they kept arguing. It was terrible!”

“I’m glad to be home, too,” I said, giving him a big hug. In addition to being chef, chauffeur, maid and housekeeper, I’m the family peacemaker and emotional buffer. My calm personality tempers my husband’s passionate Italian nature. My daughter is just like him, and they often need a mediator.

“We really missed you, honey,” my

husband said as he hugged me then headed to the comfy family room couch. “I’m exhausted! It’s hard when you’re gone. You do so much!” He was soon asleep in his favorite spot, TV remote in hand.

Being missed is a gift—one that moms need now and then. It’s like the story of the craftsman building the cathedral: His effort and hard work is invisible. Only upon its completion can the full impact of all his work truly be understood. And only when my children are grown, happy and content, with families of their own, will I feel accomplished. But it’s nice to know that little things along the way get noticed.

I know I need to help my kids become more independent as they get older, but for now, I spoil them, nurture them and be the best mom I can be. But I look forward to the next opportunity to take another trip without them.

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Jennifer Fabiano, of Scottsdale, is the mother of Tony (16) and Veronica (14).