

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 26, 2006

Photography and parenting

Filed under: [artists & family](#) — alecsothblog @ 8:30 pm

This past weekend I was in Paris. Today I'm in New York. Next week Texas. Sure it sounds cool, but how does this mesh with being a parent?

Someone whose opinion I respect once gave me great advice: "Never stop traveling." With success, he explained, many fine photographers stay home and the work withers. After the birth of my first child another friend noted that there were very few great photographers who were also good parents. The reason, he explained, was that these photographers were always on the road. Needless to say, all this advice has caused me grief. If I need to travel to be a good photographer, how can I be a good parent?

I've started asking people this question: what great photographers have also been good parents? I ask curators. I ask other photographers. In response I've seen a lot of pinched eyebrows and shaking heads. The list is not long. One name I heard was Lee Friedlander. Can anyone out there come up with some more?

54 Comments

1. From looking at his pictures, I always figured Elliott Erwitt must have been a fabulous dad. Ask his kids, I'd love to know for sure!

Comment by [Michal Daniel](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [9:24 pm](#)

2. P.S. Mine is now 23 and in Prague, working for Isifa photo agency. Ax him.

Comment by [Michal Daniel](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [9:25 pm](#)

3. Don't ask Robert Frank. He had a very tragic history with two of his sons. He used to carry with them on traveling:

Comment by [Flaneur](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [9:50 pm](#)

4. Sally Mann? I'd like to think that given the nature of her work she was at least a good mom as well. She certainly speaks fondly of her kin in her books. This isn't supposed to pertain only to male photographers in the context of Alec being a new dad, is it?

Comment by [Asterios Moutsokapas](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [10:32 pm](#)

5. Mann is a good one....as is Nixon. But parents who photograph their children don't solve my problem. I want examples of photographers who travel and still manage to be good parents. I'm desperate.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [10:38 pm](#)

6. Isn't this an impossible question for anyone to answer except those concerned (parent and children)? How would I know (I'm a curator) whether someone is a good parent or not? I don't mean to belittle your quest, just not sure how it can be answered...for example, Flaneur's comment about Robert Frank, which is presumptuous to say the least (for starters, he had a son and a daughter, not two sons...)

Comment by [Paul Roth](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [10:50 pm](#)

7. I see your question as a very serious one. I am not a parent and don't plan to be for a very long time. Today I was sitting in a lecture by Colin Finlay and he said that if you love photography, you have to Live it and Eat it, i'm sure you would say the same. He mentioned 6 hours of sleep and no food in his daily life. I am a student right now and thats my life, and I'm not even working. I think that being a good parent is a very big problem for photographers. I dread that day that I have to make that choice. I respect your work and im glad you bring up these issues.

Comment by [Simon Ingall](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [10:50 pm](#)

8. Paul makes a good point. The definition of 'good parent' is pretty murky and probably best left to those involved. I guess I'm just looking for role models to justify my absenteeism.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [10:58 pm](#)

9. alec, i've been following a blog for a long time now and I believe Raul, the author, is a photographer. He takes amazing photos, and writes all about photography and being a father. I think you would enjoy his blog and reading how he has dealt with traveling and parenthood. He seems like a great parent to me. you may have to do some searching for the parts about his kid.

enjoy.

<http://www.mexicanpictures.com/headingeast/>

Comment by [Ross](#) — September 26, 2006 @ [11:21 pm](#)

10. Dear Alec,

I am a photographer who is as committed to my work as I've no doubt you are to yours. That said, I'm sure that you put in a lot more work and travel than I do. Not just because you are now very successful and much in demand, but especially because you have reached a certain maturity in your work that demands your utmost dedication now. I would very much want to reach even a fraction of the kind of success you have deservedly achieved, but I now have a 1 year old daughter and she has affected my life immensely. During this first year of her life I suffered a brief but deep depression because I was not ready to compromise my commitment to my work and her presence in my life has been overwhelming. I've never been so happy and so frustrated simultaneously. The answer is to find that balance between the personal and the professional. My wife is very supportive of my efforts and will do anything to help me accomplish my work. It is absolutely key to have a partner who shares your commitment. Keep travelling but come home often. I would love to spend three months on location, but nowadays I do it in one- or two-week stretches at a time. The commitment hasn't changed, just the scheduling. My goal is as yours: to be the greatest photographer and the greatest parent I'm capable of. I have faith that it is doable. If you'd like, I'll let you know how it goes. In the meantime, I am pleased to say that this past year has been rather prolific for me, all things considered, and my daughter is doing awesomely well. Good luck with your process.

-Carlos

Comment by [Carlos Loret de Mola](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [12:35 am](#)

11. Though not another recommendation, really only an affirmation towards Lee Friedlander... but have you read the forward to Willam Gedney's book, "What Was True"? The forward is written by Maria Friedlander, and opens with her discussing Gedney's interest in their home life, who was questioning exactly what you ask... "how she and the kids handle being married to a photographer who is away so much?" I find it interesting to hear Maria's perspective directly.

Comment by [Brandon Sorg](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [12:47 am](#)

12. Harry Callahan?

Comment by [Dylan](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [1:27 am](#)

13. Eggleston, Charlie Harbutt?

Comment by [Julian](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [1:51 am](#)

14. Why stop at photographers? Lots of working parents have hectic traveling schedules. I'm sure you could find a friend or friends of someone you know who spends a lot of time on the road while raising a family? Actors, business people, athletes, musicians? Anyone? Apparently Annie Leibovitz has three children and often brings them along on her travels. Do you have the opportunity to bring your family along while traveling?

Comment by [Terence Patrick](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [1:54 am](#)

15. eggleston is not a role model.

Comment by [david](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [2:21 am](#)

16. It's a very valid question, alec, and one that most photographers around me ask themselves now that they reach the age in which these choices present themselves.

As far as i can tell I have seen photographers who are very succesful in advertising who seem to have found a balance between work and kids. when they work that is all there exists, and when they have no assignments their kids are all that matters. The make enough money from those assignments to have someone else rum their studio and pick up the phone, and they hardly ever do any work outside of assignments.

The thing that gets me really worried too is that I never have seen a traveling, passionate documentary photographer mixing work with kids..

Comment by [Lodewijk Duijvesteijn](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [2:28 am](#)

17. This question tears me up at the moment. I am trying to push forward my photography, and at the same time trying to be a good parent to my two kids & one foster kid. It's virtually impossible. Fortunately I have one of the most understanding and supportive wives in the world, and I do get to go out shooting at night two or three times a week, and to other cities every few weeks, but even so I feel constricted.

Of course, having to keep up a(nother) day job to support the family doesn't help either.

Comment by [Dan Sumption](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [3:55 am](#)

18. I don't think that business has anything to do with beeing a good parent or not.

A child needs someone who gives love, confidence, love, a ear for a children needs, wishes, problems, love, tenderness, love, trust, love, stories. All these things you can give to your son when you're at home but also if you're on the road. More important is that he knows that you'll always be there for him whenever and wherever he really needs you. That's the deal.

Comment by [creezy](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [4:03 am](#)

19. And by the way: If any photographer was a good parent – who will answer this question? The guys who will look at this kind of parenship from teh outside? The parents themself? The children?

There will be three answers, I guess.

Comment by [creezy](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [4:06 am](#)

20. Wow, what an important question, one that goes well beyond photography.

Rich or poor, we all have a scarcity of time. Being great in a vocation whether photography or any other pursuit requires a good deal of that finite time. Being a good parent requires time too. Travel just makes it all the more difficult to balance. I face the same question as a group leader at my company, and as an amateur photographer. And my thinking is starting to lean towards the realization that if I want to be a great parent, I may have to sacrifice something personally in order to gain something greater for my son. Not a happy conclusion in some ways, but an amazing one in others.

I do question whether travel makes for better photography. Knowing a place like the back of your hand allows for an intimacy that, i think, is difficult to achieve in a short amount of time. 'Course, your work belies that statement, so what do I know.

As for who is a great parent, that's so hard to even evaluate since the only people who really know are the parents' kids and we have so little insight into that viewing from afar.

Comment by [Todd W.](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [4:48 am](#)

21. I spent over 30 years in the corporate world before trying to reinvent myself as a full time photographer. I traveled extensively and knew many others who did. Among them were some of the best and worst parents I've ever seen. I think one of the keys is to be really present when physically possible, acknowledging, hugging, eating, bathing, going to soccer games, validating, participating. When at home, long work hours get to frequently be a habit, not always a necessity. Think of little gifts, favorite flavors of ice cream, asking about their day, just plunging into their world. And calling while traveling, and asking about their day, not just telling about yours. The reason to find a role model is to convince yourself it's possible. Talk to all kinds of people with demanding jobs and ask them what they do. No reason to confine it to photographers. Asking the question says that you want to pull it off. I myself did only a middling job of it. In my years as a young parent, few asked the question and I wasn't tuned in enough to do it on my own. You'll do better.

Comment by [John Sarsgard](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [5:49 am](#)

22. Here are a couple good parents and traveling photographers:

Frank Gohlke
Mitch Epstein
The Bechers

Comment by [Schmagnumphotos](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [7:15 am](#)

23. Alec, I would give William Christenberry a call. He is a father and, in my book, one of the greatest living artists today – not only in his photographs. His son William III is also an artist and also teaches at the Corcoran.

Comment by [kathleen](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [7:56 am](#)

24. In earlier posts you've questioned the 'art world' thing, or so I interpreted your posts. What that means to me is that you may be questioning your definition of 'success.' Being an artist makes it hard to be a certain kind of success for your family. On the other hand, being an artistic success or at least following your own lights can be the biggest gift you can give your children if it teaches them something about how to live their own lives. Seeking financial success, to me, never seems work out in terms of the cost /benefit calculation; at the end of the day, you're always in the hole one way or another.

Parenting is a job description that changes and changes rapidly as your children grow and mature. Sometimes you're the last to know that the rules have changed. Early on they are very needy as I suspect you are finding; later, frankly, you may be the last thing they seem to care about.

Given those dynamics it's tough. But I think you may find chasing the buck, if that is what is keeping you on the road, may prove to be thin gruel if you find that your children don't end up knowing who you are or why you were never around. Maybe you have to negotiate a different success mix with yourself.

...edN

Comment by [ed nixon](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [8:05 am](#)

25. Welcome home, Alec. It would seem to me that it is all related to the kind of help you have at home. A supportive partner is essential. Not to worry. You have one of the best.

By the way, Danny Lyon's "I Like to Eat Right on the Dirt" is one of my favorite photographer-with-a-family books. So is Thomas Roma's "Show and Tell". It looks to me like their kids survived...

Comment by [Todd D](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [8:12 am](#)

26. Alec,
My drill Sgt. in the army gave me some very advice on being a parent (which I'm not yet) and being in the military. Everytime you're home spend every waking moment with your family. It's your job to show them how much they mean to YOU. Reward them for their support by just being there when you are there. And as your kid gets older, don't make promises, like dad will be at your soccer game ect...
He was a good guy and, as a young photog, I intend to use his advice when I'm ready.
As to other photogs, your buds at Magnum must have tons of advice! Those mentioned above, Mann, etc... rarely left home to shoot.

Comment by [imgiordano](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [8:48 am](#)

27. You should ask some musicians, there's a lot more touring musicians with kids. Jeff Tweedy comes to mind, but there's a loot.

Comment by [Nolan](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [8:50 am](#)

28. You might want to talk to Jonas Bendiksen and Ed Kashi about this..

Comment by [Martin Fuchs](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [9:40 am](#)

29. "To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail..."
-Samuel Beckett

The same can be said for parenting – fear of bad parenting leads to bad parenting.

Comment by [William K.](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [10:56 am](#)

30. As I take a break from processing the images for the jobs I've photographed the last two weeks (it seems as if I've been chained to this computer for about a week straight), I turn to Alec's blog for some thought-provoking comments. Little did I know he would pose the question I've been trying to come to terms with the last five years since my son was born.

Between the birth of my son and the conversion to digital for my commercial work I feel as I've been on an aesthetic death spiral. With increased costs of maintaining a household and supporting a family, I have to take more jobs that I would prefer to turn down. Many of these projects are mundane and without much financial reward and, frankly, truly uninspiring—I fear they're turning me into a hack. On top of this, the conversion to digital has forced me to constantly be at my computer in order to process and manage images, for communications, for bookkeeping, etc. I've had little time to further develop any talent I may have.

On top of this, I am a committed father, spending a lot of time with my son, attending his events, volunteering at his school, etc. Too often I steal away from my work hours to do something with him. I am fortunate to have this time with him unlike my father who was always gone. While this does nothing for my career, it is wonderful for my family and it is something I won't change.

Unfortunately, lost in all of this, is extra time and extra cash. My little guy started school this fall so I'm hoping this will free some time and I'm also trying to find a way to create interesting work here, in my locale. I've always found it much easier to travel and make interesting photos—it's easier to see. But here, the familiar, instead, has become the mundane. It takes a special eye and talent to carve out the gems within one's own milieu. I hope I can train myself to see that well.

So maybe if I can unchain myself from my computer, remove my rear from my seat, get out in the world again with a camera, and—oh yeah, start seeing things like Friedlander or Callahan—I may start making some decent images again.

Comment by [David Kern](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [11:30 am](#)

31. I am a parent of two little girls, and I travel a lot for my work. My partner in life also travel quite a lot for her work.

On top of that, I have two jobs: a day job and a photographer's job, which I am trying to take more and more seriously. Alec, I can see exactly where you are coming from, I and many around me have been through this question many times.

What has worked for me is to realize that you don't need any role model to believe that it is possible to be both a good parent, and have a travelling, "non-conventional" life. As every child, every parent and every child-parent relationship is different anyway, a role model will not help as it will be different from you, your child, your child/parent relationship. In addition, a good parent for someone is hardly a good parent for someone else, so there's no point in chasing the silver bullet. So stay positive and sleep less in the face of the huge amount of work that has just fallen on you, and you'll succeed the way you have succeeded so far (which I guess speaks for itself).

In any case, please... if not for you, do it for us, those who truly enjoy your work.
sebastien

Comment by Sebastien A. — September 27, 2006 @ [11:58 am](#)

32. August Sander seemed to have had a great relationship with his son Erich, I think

Comment by [Bill Sullivan](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [2:10 pm](#)

33. I agree with Martin, you should talk to Ed Kashi.

Comment by [Steve Miller](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [3:07 pm](#)

34. If you are still looking for good photographer/parent role models, my suggestions are Emmet Gowin and Abelardo Morell.
-Carlos

Comment by [Carlos Loret de Mola](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [4:37 pm](#)

35. How about Terry Richardson or Richard Kern?

Comment by [david](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [5:05 pm](#)

36. Alec,

In response to your post that noted the idea of a "good parent" as being a rather vague description of any particular parent, I instantly recalled Chapter 5 the book that I recently picked up and finished: Freakonomics by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. The chapter was called, very appropriately, "What Makes a Perfect Parent?"

Though it's not specifically related to the travelling photographer and their role in parenting (sorry!), I thought it might be a fun read if you haven't already discovered the book.

There's an excerpt here:

<http://www.freakonomics.com/ch5.php>

-Shane

P.S. I would imagine Elliott Erwitt to be a great parent. And I can say that Jim Dow, one of my professors, seems like he'd be a wonderful dad, as well. Does Martin Parr have kids? Haha.

Comment by [Shane Lavalette](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [5:26 pm](#)

37. Having to travel....it depends....in my life the family was and is still # 1.
Has my work suffered? Yes, for sure. In some respects.
I picked my priorities.
The cost of being alone but with some great photos to keep me company was too high.
And anyway, Andre Kertesz said "everything is subject...even the old boots you kicked off at the front door". There are many who made/make great images in their own backyard.
Is travel that important to be a good artist/photographer?

Comment by [Frank](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [11:04 am](#)

38. Alec,

Two kids make it a little harder. I have not traveled much, but I recently started my MFA photo studies after 11 years in newspapers. In a way newspapers were easier schedule wise, school seems much more consuming. I am able to reply to this because one is snacking and the other is sleeping. One thing someone said to me once was along the lines of being a parent is better than any picture I could make. I remind myself of that often.

Thanks for being honest about something that I think a lot of photographers do not want to talk about.

Tom

Comment by [Tom Leininger](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [2:17 pm](#)

39. I agree with the William Christenberry as-great-father (and great artist, and great man) comment, but I don't think that traveling once a year from DC to Alabama counts as a "traveling" photographer.

What about Garry Winogrand? His children adored him and have fabulous memories of going to the park, the zoo and all over New York with him.

Comment by [Pat](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [4:39 pm](#)

40. [...] In response to my recent post on photography and parenting Brandon Sorg mentioned Maria Friedlander's forward to What Was True, The Photographs and Notebooks of William Gedney. While I've long treasured this book, I'd never read the forward. What a shame. Maria Friedlander's prose is pure and honest and worthy of a lengthy excerpt: Most of the time we spent with Bill [William Gedney] was in our own home. He seemed content and comfortable in our family setting and, in fact, began to express a growing interest about our particular domestic style. Specifically, Bill began to question me about what it was like to be married to someone as focused on his work as Lee is. How did I handle Lee's lengthy trips away from home? What was it like to rear our children within this framework? Even as he questioned, I had the sense that Bill already had romanticized my role in my marriage. He often expressed his feeling that to be a truly committed artist one had to be free to pursue one's work, and the fact that Lee was able to do it while involved in a full family life must mean, according to Bill, that I was some kind of perfect wife for an artist. I told Bill it was not that simple. Photography was the fulcrum of Lee's life and I had accepted that for myself and for the children. It was an interesting life, I told Bill, one that could be so traditional and then way out there in the world – exciting and also very lonely. I had discovered that it was calmer and more fun at times for me to stay home with Erik and Anna than to accompany Lee on his working trips. On my own with them, I was free of the pressure to behave and make the children behave in ways to accommodate Lee and his work. I could experience a sense of freedom when I didn't have to deal with Lee's self-absorption, but I could also be angry with him for being away and miss him in equal measure. I told Bill that's what life was like, all of the above, sometimes all at one time. But I had the feeling Bill preferred the myth of Saint Maria [...]

Pingback by [alec soth - blog » Blog Archive » Maria Friedlander and William Gedney](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [11:54 pm](#)

41. Being both, I have to say you have to be one or the other. For children, nothing is more important than your steady presence. For someone to say otherwise is foolish and misguided. You will be the Sun to your child and how can one go a day without the Sun? Much less a week or a month. I faced these same decisions. My girlfriend ran away with my daughter while I was in Asia photographing, thereby obviating some of my choices. Having lived this way for 4 years, I have to say I'd rather have my daughter than my photography.

W.

Comment by [William L](#) — September 29, 2006 @ [12:34 pm](#)

42. Great photographers and great parents don't mix? Well then, choose.

Be a photographer and a great parent or be a great photographer and a parent.

Who needs great? What happened to happiness...?

Sean Cayton

<http://www.caytonphotography.com>

Comment by [Sean Cayton](#) — September 29, 2006 @ [10:29 pm](#)

43. Alec, being a good parent requires your presence. It's a simple formula, really.

Sam Abel mentions in his book *The Photographic Life* that he and his wife understood that there would be no children in the life they'd chosen, and I respect them both immensely for the clarity of that decision.

I know I'm not answering the question you really asked and not saying something you really want to hear, but it seems clear to me that, if being a great photographer requires a great deal of travel, it's a choice that's antithetical to being a good parent.

Comment by [Trevor Hambric](#) — September 29, 2006 @ [11:43 pm](#)

44. Alec,

have you seen van der elskens' films?

They are great, some of the most interesting documentaries I have seen.

One of his subjects is his family life. He made films about his kids since they were born till one of them decided to move to a squatter's house.

What is interesting is that besides expressing his troubles about their future he lets them speak.

He also has a one hour film about moving to the countryside with his young family.

Deep, humane records of his experience, specially interesting to other photographers.

Polish artist Pawel Althamer – he has an exhibition at the centre pompidou in Paris now – also reflects about the condition of being a son of an artist. He has done exhibitions only with drawings of his 16 year old son, he has taken his son and his friends to work on other projects, etc.

Comment by [andre principe](#) — September 30, 2006 @ [10:55 am](#)

45. I'm chiming in late, but I'd like to offer the point of view of a photographer who is also a wife and mother. First of all, thank you for posing this question. It is a terribly difficult one and also incredibly important.

I have to admit, I get prickly when I hear so many commenters propose that your success in both realms is dependent upon the support of your partner, which in 99% of the cases means: the Wife. I wonder how often husbands are asked to set aside all their goals and ambitions so their wife can pursue her art? Or how many fathers are willing to make parenting the sole center of their existence for the same reason?

I enjoyed reading Maria Friedlander's forward immensely! I appreciate her refreshing honesty, but still I do detect a hint of bitterness on her part. I myself would love to become a documentary photographer. Before I became pregnant, I was going to be a novelist and travel the globe. My goals have adapted to accommodate my family and my dreams put on hold. But I don't mind saying that I look forward to having an empty nest and unfettered freedom!

Parenting is hard, let's not tell lies. And of course it is worth all the trouble and heartache. There is no easy answer to your question, because if you compromise too much in either direction, you will sow the seeds of resentment within yourself, your spouse, or your children. You seem to grasp the gravity of the question, so you clearly are dedicated to finding a reasonable and creative solution. Best wishes to you.

Comment by [Renee](#) — October 2, 2006 @ [1:07 pm](#)

46. [...] Alec Soth dove into blogging a couple of weeks ago has already addressed topics like parenting and being a photographer, how he finds his subjects, and the controversy brewing around a photograph taken by Thomas Hoepker on 9/11. Alec even reprinted an email he got from Hoepker on that subject. Surprisingly, for someone who already has a lot to do, Soth's blog is written thoughtfully. He takes the time to solicit and respond to comments from his readers. A photographer blogging casually about his interests and reacting in a public forum to comments from those who have interest in his work is a rare treat for other photographers. Got a technical question about what film Soth uses, if he traveled the whole length of the Mississippi for his project *Sleeping on the Mississippi*, or if he uses digital cameras? Just ask. [...]

Pingback by [pixpro.eu](#) » [Blog Archive](#) » [Alec Soth has a blog](#) — October 5, 2006 @ [9:19 am](#)

47. Larry Towell...i don't know him, but looking at the pictures...he has to be a good one.

Comment by [Daniel](#) — October 22, 2006 @ [10:10 pm](#)

48. Yes. I am so grateful for this question and you have received so many wonderful answers (and not so wonderful). Trevor and Renee most recently have offered the most insight about this balance and sacrifice. Adjusting with another's needs in mind is not a bad thing, and can prevent some of the regret others have expressed. However, sacrificing from the life of photography could mean greater regret?

I am just beginning my journey with this balance of wanting to be with my son and still developing as a fine artist and professional. As a mother, I feel I have even less opportunities to be out photographing than say my husband, who can actually make it away with out the little one in tow. Although he is perfectly supportive, in our society Mothers seem to fill in that major domestic space. As all parents know the simple things become wildly complex. Like basement store stairs and a stroller. For me the act of physically managing a camera takes on new levels of preparation. I'm seeing how my whole experience in art making faces the same enormous growth and changes as my son in his development.

I'm surprised no one has mentioned Emmitt Gowin? Someone I would think could offer a lot of insight and seems to have extremely smart insightful children based on an interview I read with him not long ago (<http://www.johnpaulcaponigro.com/lib/artists/gowin.php>). He also talks about his parental emotion coming out as a teacher. Emmitt Gowin seems to make his relationship with his family sound less complicated than Maria Friedlander's experience.

Comment by [Leta](#) — November 3, 2006 @ [1:26 pm](#)

49. Thanks for raising this question. Glad to hear the womans voices because they are usually the main childcare providers. My daughters are in their early teen years and I have struggled with this question since they were born.

Before that I was out of the country fifty percent of the time. It was something that I needed to sustain my photography.

As Ed Nixon said Parenting is a job description that changes and changes rapidly as your children grow and mature.

Some of the photographers I admire like Mary Ellen Mark- I don't think she has kids. Eugene Smith- was not exactly a role model as a parent.

Comment by [Geoffrey Hiller](#) — November 10, 2006 @ [12:31 pm](#)

50. A lurker here...but just as of today. I'm a photographer and a parent...and pretty good at both. I humbly suggest a vigilant concern for time management and an overriding passion for parenting and photography...in that order.

Grace Paley paraphrased someone (Shakespeare?) when she said that life is short but art is long. I learned this one day in SanFrancisco from the 29th floor of the Hyatt Union Square looking down at a crosswalk and starting to spin in the presence of an assistant...I have to get outside and grab that light!

The shot that I learned to see? From the balcony with a long lens as a dozen people crossed creating their own universal shadows.

In other words, isn't great photography just as much about observing and experiencing and ingesting those morsels of commonality as it is about being there to record the moment ? Doesn't the ability to recognize the moment hinge on the collective experience of prior moments absorbed through a kind of pixelated (sorry!) memory bank?

My kids are not kids anymore (28 and 22). Because of that...in spite of that...my work has morphed back into a challenging blend of commercial and personal work (see EYEMAZING Magazine #4-2006) where each arena benefits from the other.

As I get older I don't feel a need to shoot as much (evidence my OneShot project) to apply my vision to a moment.

Sorry to ramble...just my .02

Comment by [Max Hirshfeld](#) — January 5, 2007 @ [7:34 pm](#)

51. You ask a great and important question. I'd be curious to hear what you think and what other think of the question, "What great photographer has also been a great spouse?" How do 'photographer-in-the-family' couples successfully keep their relationship a great partnership?

Thanks.

Comment by [anna n.](#) — March 20, 2007 @ [1:23 am](#)

52. I read this blog entry a few months ago and remembered it today when I saw the documentary film "Alice Neel", which was made by her grandson Andrew Neel. It is heavy on interviews with her two sons, both of whom feel that they were neglected as children. Interestingly enough though, they also both acknowlege that they are grateful to be her sons. My first thought when I orginally read the post was was that I wanted to say that traditional views of good parenting imply that consistency and routine are the best way to show your love and your

dedication to your children. While I believe this to be basically true, I also believe that the idea of putting your children first in your life is not the way to go about executing this goal.

I was dragged all over Europe as a child, travelling in a caravan and living subsequently in many different countries. Eventually, through a series of bad circumstances, I ended up by myself in Holland at age 14. I know that my parents live with guilt and regret over this – but I have to say that like Alice Neel's offspring – I have no regrets about the choices my parents made. The one thing that has buoyed me is that over the course of my life – when I lived with my parents and after we were separated – my parents always let me know, through words and deeds, that I came first in their thoughts and in their hearts – and as an adult I have found this to be more valuable to me than anything else in my life. I have met many young people in America who lived out their childhoods in one house, with parents who probably should have divorced but didn't because they thought it would be detrimental to the welfare of their children.

My advice to you is to always be true to yourself. If your children are able to see you taking risks, achieving goals, and – equally important – failing sometimes – they will take this in and you will see your ambition and your willingness to persevere despite adversity manifest itself in their lives later on.

Comment by [Margaret](#) — May 25, 2007 @ [7:36 pm](#)

53. Also – additional answers to your original question – Timothy Greenfield Sanders, Anette Aurell, Inez van Lamsveerde and Vinoodh Matadin and Mario Sorrenti are all photographers doing a great job as parents. If you can widen the field a little bit to fine art, Patty Smith & Fred Smith, Helen & Brice Marden, Julian & Jacqueline Schnabel and Francesco & Alba Clemente seem to have raised some pretty well adjusted children as well.

Comment by [Margaret](#) — May 25, 2007 @ [7:59 pm](#)

54. This is a great discussion. I have a three year old daughter. During the years between graduating college and her birth I traveled constantly. When she was born I forced myself to find engaging subjects to shoot that were close to home. Since then my shooting trips have mostly consisted of half day jaunts, usually starting before dawn, sometimes involving a stroller and diaper bag in addition to tripod and camera bag. I have found great joy in being there for my daughter day in and day out, and I am also very happy with the work I've made close to home. There was a time when I thought I had to travel to make good pictures, but not anymore. It is sometimes hard to see what is interesting about your immediate surroundings, but once you find it you are in a better position than anyone to capture it. That being said, my desire to travel hasn't faded, and I am looking forward to doing so more in the future. One photographer I know personally who continues to make great work and is a fantastic parent is Paul D'Amato. I don't know how much traveling he is doing recently, but when his son was very young he made several extended trips to shoot and just brought the family along.

Comment by [Mark Marchesi](#) — March 21, 2008 @ [9:50 pm](#)