

# LIGHTS! CAMERA!

## MOTHERHOOD?

From Film Production to Reproduction

by Jessica Stockton Clancy

“Jessica, go to two,” blurted the voice from the walkie-talkie clipped to my belt. When someone asks you to change your channel on a film set it means one of two things: They have a silly question like whether to order Chinese or Mexican for the crew dinner *or* there is some minor disaster brewing that no one else needs to hear about.

I spun the knob to channel two. “Go for Jessica.”

“The P.A. is stuck in traffic with the salad,” my assistant whispered.

I rolled my eyes and let out a groan. We were shooting a car commercial near Ventura, and our celebrity talent refused to eat anything but a chicken salad from a restaurant in Hollywood. A production assistant was sent to get it three hours before the meal break and now he was snarled in rush hour. The day prior the same actress had a fit over her hair, causing a two-hour delay.

Someone had to give her the salad update. As I knocked on her trailer door I decided that somehow I was going to make this woman like me. *I can't wait till this is funny*, I thought. After a sugary apology I climbed out with my head still attached. She even suggested we have a drink sometime.

*Ripple Dissolve.*

The walkie-talkie on my belt has been replaced by a baby monitor, my black laptop tote has morphed into a Petunia Picklebottom diaper bag and my cell phone is covered with drool. I thought 16 years in the film industry had prepared me to handle anything. That all changed the day I became a mother.

For years I had a bi-coastal life, jetting from my little apartment in Santa Monica to Washington, D.C., where my husband's company was based. “That’s a wrap” meant a mini-vacation from what I thought were long workdays. Days that involved sweet-talking cops about the parameters of our permit and anticipating *anything* that could possibly go

wrong. “Plan B” was my middle name. I dealt with everything from the simple to the serious. “Our director of photography would *really* like some banana cream pie, could you make some?” I begged the caterer. “Um, we had a little accident with that roller coaster shot,” I explained to the insurance agent after the demise of an \$80,000 lens.

In addition to my god-given limbs I had a pen hanging from my neck and a walkie-talkie on my hip, labeled with a piece of gaffer's tape and the word “PRODUCER” written in black Sharpie. This was the equivalent of a neon sign that said, “Problem? Come to me!”

Once I was pregnant I began to look forward to my “new normal.”

I would forego flying to L.A. to work on a high-budget sports drink commercial and enjoy a more *typical* routine. But within about two weeks of my due date, I began to get uncomfortable. I knew my life was about to change – and the producer in me panicked.

The early days with my daughter were a shocking contrast to my days on set, where I could solve any problem with a phone call and a purchase order. I couldn't recall a single thing I had done to prepare me for this mom thing. Let's see: I've Fed-Exed a car from Korea to Detroit, held auditions for sword-yielding ninjas, shut down major boulevards to use as locations. How did any of this apply to motherhood?

My “new normal” felt like a bad B movie; I was the zombie roaming the night, grumbling and stumbling, clad in a pink nursing bra. Though 4 a.m. wake-ups weren't new to me, I was used to being met by a caterer greeting me with espresso and an omelet made-to-order. Suddenly, I was the one expected to provide pre-dawn nourishment.

At the six-month mark, after working with a sleep consultant, my daughter began to sleep through the night. Clouds parted and angels





Jessica Stockton Clancy – and her two girls – in her new role as “Mama.”

sang. With rest came perspective and gradually I could zoom back enough to discover similarities between my work in production and my new role as “Mama.”

While producing shoots on distant locations I was the mother hen. Though I had never set foot in places like Lone Pine, my job was to project the sense that everything was taken care of and field non-stop questions: “Where should we go eat?” “Which van do I go in?” “Where can I buy a raincoat?”

These days I marvel at how one little person can produce the same number of questions as a film crew. “Mama, what snacks do you have?” “Where are my frog pajamas?” “Why can’t we go to the zoo?”

High-maintenance celebrities taught me the value of having “favorite things” on hand at times when cooperation was vital. I received detailed lists from agents or personal assistants: “Prefers white lilies in dressing room,” or “must have sushi for lunch.” You learn quickly that hell hath no fury like a volatile celebrity whose “needs” haven’t been met.

These days it may be dinosaur books instead of lilies, or string cheese instead of sushi, but I’ll gladly scramble to meet my daughter’s demands if it buys me some cooperation in the pediatrician’s waiting room. Though I’m catering to someone who has just gotten out of a car seat, not a limo, the principle is the same. It’s the small things that can save your sanity.

In hindsight my years in production were a lot like mommy boot camp: craving sleep, constantly on call, and keeping my “star” happy at all costs. I’ve been snapped at by irrational directors, and smiled as I faked my way through countless unknowns. So when I feel overwhelmed, or like I’ve been a bad mom, I remember that today is a wrap and tomorrow I’ll get my “take two.” At least now I’m guaranteed an “I love you” at the end of the day. Directors almost never say that. ♦

Jessica Stockton Clancy is an award-winning freelance writer. She worked in commercial production for more than 16 years, 10 of them in Los Angeles. In 2009 she became an instructor for The Momoir Project and teaches writing classes for mothers who want to develop their own first-person essays. Jessica currently lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and their two daughters.

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