

Advice from the Trenches: Super Mother-in-Law!!

Dear C;



My question is: How do you not feel completely inadequate as a wife and daughter-in-law when you have a Super Mother-In-Law? She's an amazing cook — all from scratch — and she did everything around the house and was home for her kids in the day, then worked at night. My husband frequently comments, "I don't know how my mother did it." Hint, hint. Well, neither do I!

While I understand that others enjoy this type of lifestyle, I am not the best cook or even close. I do try on occasion — my husband and I take turns with housework and cooking. We don't have children, but I am an extremely busy woman, working full time and participating in many activities that exist outside my home.

While neither my M.I.L. or my S.O. would ever make me feel bad about any of these facts (she's a lovely woman), it still is hard to stop the encroaching fear/paranoia that I am "less than" in their eyes.

Intellectually, I understand that her experience is based on a different time and place. The world and its expectations were different 30 years ago. That gives me some comfort. Still, when we attend holidays or even the occasional Sunday dinner, the one item that I've brought (IF I've brought one) is dwarfed by her huge food & treats=LOVE smorgasbord.

Signed,

Feeling Perpetually Deficient

Dear PD,

Wow. That is a lot to live up to. I suspect that even Florence Nightingale would find herself lacking if she stacked her chips against your Super MIL. I hear that Ms. Nightingale never married and couldn't cook worth crap. (Perhaps it was because she was a little busy with other things...such as elevating the role of women in medicine forever.)

Or we could compare Mother Teresa to your MIL. Mucking around with all those lepers, criminals and hos? How unladylike. I'll bet she sucked at dusting too. Or how about Joan of Arc? The poor bitch was burned at the stake when she was only 19 for all her mouthing off. Did she even BOTHER trying to please the men in her life?

Are you getting the point? There are a lot of different things to be. We all have something uniquely our own to offer. How about you? Oh, wait ... you never even mentioned what you do. But sweetie, whatever it is, your husband obviously digs it. You are the woman he proposed to and wanted to spend the rest of his life with. He could have proposed to some Betty Crocker or Martha Stewart type like his mom. He chose you. He liked you, he had fun with you, probably admired your drive and involvements. It sounds like you are someone he's not going to get bored with. Unless you keep up this tedious comparison game.

You know what would be really awful? Imagine a world full of nothing but Super MILs flying around in their capes, all of them trying to cook and clean and serve at the same time ... and the poor things would have no one to serve. Super MILs don't stop to sit down and eat, so there'd be no one to appreciate their efforts. No reason to actually cook. Not to mention, there would be no food left in the stores, unless some of the MILs became farmers and truck drivers and grocers. Or maybe they'd add hunting to their list of accomplishments.

So, back to your question. How do you NOT feel totally inadequate? Just stop comparing. Don't waste any more time on those pointless, fearful, self-doubting thoughts. Don't repress them, just replace them. Make a conscious decision to look at your own strengths and cultivate them. The next time you visit? Don't bring food, for god's sake, your MIL doesn't need it! Just enjoy her great hospitality. And then do something nice, in your own area of specialty, just for her. Put a lot of thought and love into it, the same as she does. She will make a happy fuss, even if she has no idea what it is. Best of all, you will now be an equal — one person doing something nice, and uniquely their own, for another.