

Memoir Focuses on 'Maxed Out' Mothering in the 21st Century

Author Katrina Alcorn to speak at LLLC March 20

By Lou Fancher



Katrina Alcorn

Photo provided

It's funny, we spend our childhoods practicing control – and a lifetime learning to let go of it.

From “Don't stick your finger into that socket; you'll die!” to “No matter how adorable you look in those pajamas, you can't wear them to school,” to “Don't text what you're thinking: you'll get fired,” growing up teaches us to stop. But maturity, it seems, is about release: not blaming others (let go resentment), not having it all (goodbye BMW), and not thinking the world revolves around you (hello parenting).

Oakland author Katrina Alcorn's memoir, “Maxed Out: American Moms on the Brink” (Seal Press), tells her story: a 37-year-old mother and working professional woman on the road to maturity. Alcorn will read and discuss her book at a Sweet Thursdays event at 7:30 p.m. March 20 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Alcorn is a mother, stepmom, wife, former journalist, blogger, and a freelance experience design consultant, a title meaning she analyzes customers and clients and designs websites and services to meet their business needs. She also speaks at conferences and appears as an expert consultant on local and national radio and television programs. She strives to maintain friendships, invest real, skin-to-skin time with her children, and at times in her life, has suffered clinically certifiable depression and panic attacks requiring medication and therapeutic intervention. In her free time – ha! – she's written her first book. To handle anxiety, she meditates, sending stress-filled bubbles into the atmosphere.

Alcorn is a busy woman, but she's not the only one – which is both the point and the purpose (and really, the societal problem) at the center of her memoir.

Her expressive narrative, bolstered by the inclusion of well-researched studies she references in

brief, chapter-concluding essays, presents a deeply human portrait. Blemishes, blushing embarrassment, blissful exclamations about her husband, Brian, and their children, all mingle with the flickering drama of female aggression in the 21st century. And it's this energy – the desire to be a major breadwinner, to stand out, to be first and foremost in their children's lives, to be a svelte, sexy, suave swinger dressed in a three-piece suit and toting a breast milk pump – that crashes Alcorn's cart.

In a series of episodes that read like a giant bowling ball headed for a perfect pin-smashing strike, Alcorn experiences nauseating, numbing panic attacks. “My heart fluttered madly. My hands shook...It was too hard to be there,” she writes. Eventually, her mind plays tricks allowing her to escape her own body and resort to puppeteering: plodding through meetings and conferences while “directing” herself as if from above.

Despite her pluses – a hi-tech job, an understanding boss, a supportive spouse, a housecleaner, attentive daycare – all the equipment the world tells women they need to lean in and have it all are not enough to save her from tanking. She quits her job and collapses, literally. It takes over a year for Alcorn to feel whole and human again. But along the way, she investigates the systems undergirding (but failing to defuse) contemporary life's pressures.

Competition from other women: Alcorn cites Cornell researchers' 2007 study showing mothers with resumés equal to those of non-mothers were 79 percent less likely to be hired and paid \$11,000 less. No sick leave: 145 countries worldwide guarantee sick leave; in the United States, barely 50 percent receive it. Lack of part-time options: 75 percent of Dutch women work part-time, with benefits. Across industries, not just in women-dominated fields, real-world examples cause Alcorn to question the cultural stigmas and corporate bias opposing a more progressive workplace in America. Childcare and family-friendly work environments shouldn't require advocacy; they should be a basic human right, she concludes. She ends the book with 10 suggestions “you can do right now.” Unfortunately they're not as thoroughly described as her personal stories, but some readers may appreciate the springboard they represent.

It's easy – even tempting – to criticize Alcorn's pain as the indulgent rant of a white, upper-middle class woman who doesn't realize how good she's got it (or had it). But that would be ignoring the more important aspects of her pain. It's not comparison that matters or will move the arguments forward. What matters is compassion – and that we not divide progressive energy and lose ourselves by infighting. After all, we owe it to the 1920s Suffragettes and women's-libbers of the 1970s who grandparent the sons and daughters of 2014 to preserve and improve upon their work. Women and men must be allowed the privilege of earning a living while raising a family in dignity.

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Looking Good in Lamorinda

It might as well be spring

By Moya Stone



You can find colorful separates at Lesley Evers in Lafayette.

Photo courtesy Lesley Evers

Around here spring accidentally sprung back in January. But in fashion the season officially launches in March, when we start thinking about bright colors, lighter fabrics, and new fashions for Easter, Mother's Day, and graduations.

Spring Picks for Lamorinda

Pleated skirts are big news for spring, and for the Lamorinda woman the look offers a perfect combination of chic and ease. Sport the pleats with a soft cropped sweater or form-fitted blouse and you are good to go anywhere in style. The button-down shirt is also on list of trends. A tailored classic, the button-down elevates jeans, skirts, and even shorts to casual elegance. Blue is the color of the season and I suggest pairing the shirt with another spring trend – crop pants. An excellent choice for the busy Lamorinda woman, crop pants cover a spectrum of local activities. Wear with flats and a sunhat on Saturday morning to the soccer field and in the evening for a quiet dinner out, switch to heels and a statement necklace.

This season Special Tees in Lafayette is stocking pastels and pale pink in particular. Also on trend for them are black and white stripes in jackets, dresses, and pants. Word has it from Special Tees that



Cinderella shoes at Collector Choice Antiques.

Photo Moya Stone

the boot cut is back on the scene edging in on the skinny jean for most popular pant.

Lesley Evers in Lafayette is known for her bright colors and bold prints, which are favorites for spring and summer. Evers tells me that for this season she's adding lots of separates, a logo jacket, a hoodie and “... a maxi that can be worn without the slip as a dramatic swim cover up.” Colors include pinks/oranges and blues/greens, and various shades of lilac.

Cinderella Shoes

Calling all ladies who wear a size 5 or 5 1/2 shoe, you will want to strut right on down to Collector's Choice Antiques in Lafayette. They have just received a collection of beautiful hardly worn shoes, mostly pumps and all designer brands such as Allure, Charles Jourdan, and one pair of never worn dress shoes by YSL. You can't beat the price of \$60 a pair.

Orinda's ReChic

Have you heard about ReChic in Orinda? Around since 2012, ReChic is a delightful boutique specializing in consignment clothing for women and men, girls and boys ages 10 and up. Proprietor and Orinda native Jennifer Vigo was inspired to open her shop after realizing that there was nothing in the Lamorinda area for consignment kids clothing. Additionally, ReChic offers a small selection of new clothes and gift items, many of which are made by Bay Area artisans. And there's more – located in the front of the store is the Social Lounge, a small space for kids to meet, hang out and even take a class. ReChic offers ongoing and one time classes in creative writing, basic auto mechanics, and teen yoga. A professional dietitian, Jennifer hopes to add nutrition classes soon. With ball and prom season coming up, ReChic is currently stocking an array of gowns and soon to arrive will be a line of (new) swimsuits.



Butterfly whimsy

Photo Richard Aiello

Catch the Butterfly Trend

Designers are using the butterfly motif on everything from scarves to dresses to handbags. How appropriate for spring as the delicate insect symbolizes change and transformation. What about a attracting a little change and transformation into your life with a vintage butterfly brooch? Pinned to a lapel, a hat or a handbag, brooches add a bit of whimsy to any outfit. I like to shop for brooches (and other treasures) at The Vintage Fashion Expo, which is coming up in San Francisco March 22 and 23. Over 100 dealers from around the country showcase their vintage wares including clothing, jewelry, and accessories for men, women, and children. More information can be found at: www.vintageexpo.com/.

It might as well be spring, so go forth in style. Moya Stone is a fashion writer and blogger at www.overdressedforlife.com.

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