

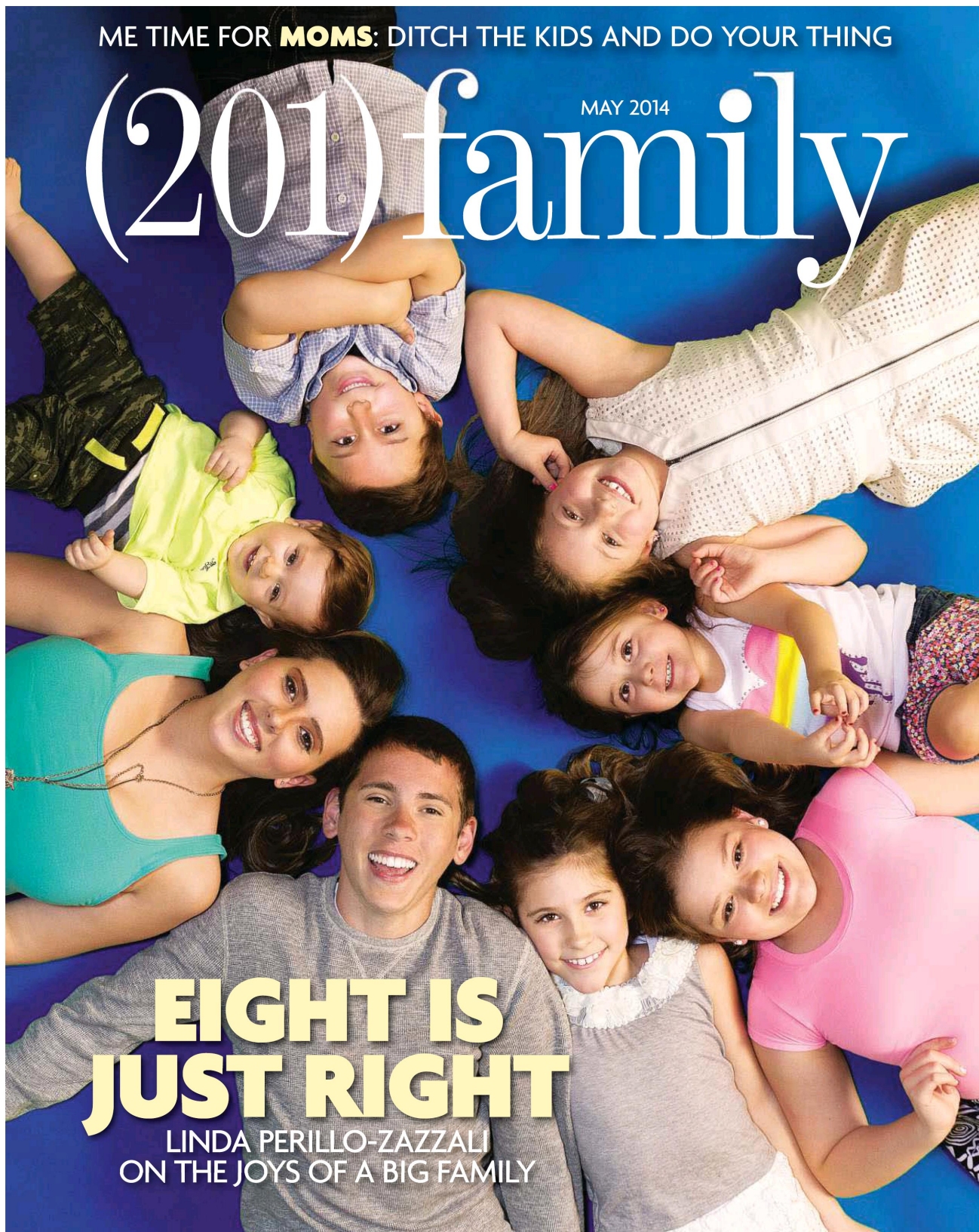
ME TIME FOR **MOMS**: DITCH THE KIDS AND DO YOUR THING

MAY 2014

(201)family

**EIGHT IS
JUST RIGHT**

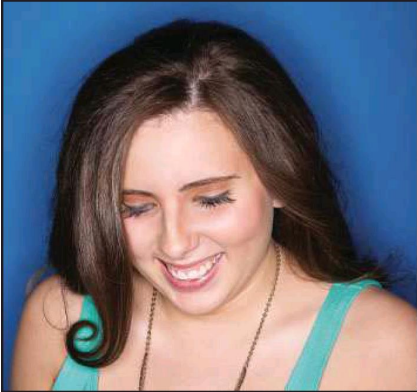
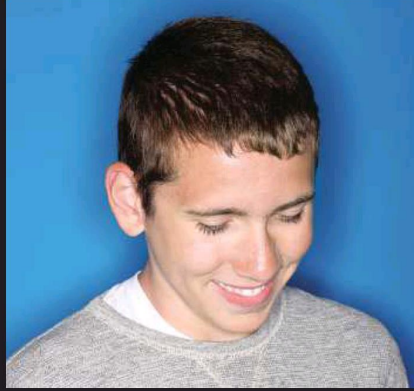
LINDA PERILLO-ZAZZALI
ON THE JOYS OF A BIG FAMILY



EIGHT IS JUST RIGHT

Linda Perillo-Zazzali of Saddle River on the joys of a big family

WRITTEN BY **MARY VALLO** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANNE-MARIE CARUSO**



When Linda Perillo-Zazzali goes out with the kids, they make their own crowd. She and husband, Albert, have eight children, ages 10 months to 18 years.

Family has always been important to Perillo-Zazzali. After she spent her elementary-school years in Pearl River, N.Y., Linda's family moved to Saddle River, where she still lives (across the street from her childhood home). One of her brothers, Steve, lives *in* the childhood home, and her sister, Christine, lives across the cul-de-sac.

Family influence, from patriarch Mario Perillo (founder of the family travel business) and her mom, Olga, is important to Perillo-Zazzali. (Linda's tribute to her mom, "On being a Motherless Mother," can be found on page 41.)

Although being a mother to eight children is the top priority for Perillo-Zazzali, she still finds time for the travel business, as well as her position as co-president of the Home School Association of Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Park Ridge, where she is also on the Education Foundation and vocal director of the drama club. In addition, she is a board member of the Italian Welfare League and a certified lactation consultant.

Linda recently spoke to (201) *Family* about the pleasures of raising a large family.

WHAT IS YOUR SECRET WEAPON?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: It's a toss between my husband, my phone and a lollipop! I hope you're laughing! My husband is much more conservative and logical than I am, so he puts pieces together I may not be able to in a pinch. It helps me focus better without stressing. I may be nervous about something and he always says, "Ok, look at it this way."

My phone – well, do I have to say it? Every mom today probably uses her phone as her personal assistant. I certainly do...from texting to tracking

Favorites

Linda shares some of her favorite Bergen spots:

- **ANITA EHRLER'S DANCE EXTENSIONS IN PARK RIDGE**
- **WILLIE WILSON'S THEATRE ARTS GROUP (THEATER CAMP)**
- **BROADWAY THEATER WORKSHOP (AT SAINT JOSEPH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL)**
- **DENNY'S CHILDRENSWEAR IN PARAMUS FOR AMAZING, FUN AND DISCOUNTED KIDS' CLOTHES.**
- **STATELINE DINER: I THINK ANY PLACE WHERE WE CAN GO WHERE THE KIDS ARE COMFORTABLE AND AL AND I DON'T HAVE TO DO MUCH CORRECTING OR "SHUSHING" IS A GREAT SPOT!**
- **DAIRY QUEEN FOR SOFT-SERVE AND BEN & JERRY'S IN RIDGEWOOD. WE LOVE ICE CREAM ANY TIME OF YEAR.**
- **POWERHOUSE STUDIOS FOR THE BEST KIDDIE BIRTHDAY PARTIES EVER!**
- **THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE, WALDWICK: WONDERFUL SUMMER DAY CAMP PROGRAMS.**
- **THAT LOOK, WOODCLIFF LAKE: HIP AND CLOSE FOR AWESOME MOM CLOTHES.**
- **OUR SCHOOLS: OUR LADY OF MERCY ACADEMY IN PARK RIDGE, THE ACADEMY OF THE HOLY ANGELS AND SAINT JOSEPH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL.**



the older kids to making appointments on the fly and ordering groceries while I wait for dance class to end. It's glued to me, and I hate to admit it, but it has become essential for me to make progress in a busy day. Oh, and yes, the lollipop. Most crying or tantrum-bound children can be soothed with a lollipop, and you get a good half hour of quiet from the enjoyment. I figured if my pediatrician can give them out, so can Mom. (Sorry to all the dentists out there!)

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR "ME" TIME?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: I am fanatical about keeping up my appearance. It's important for every mom to take care of herself, no matter what that means to them – from sweats to ball gowns. Kids pick up on your energy, so as much as humanly possible, you need to feel good about yourself. I hate working out so much that I don't bother with a gym membership. However, I work out every day in my bathroom (yup) at 5 a.m. with various DVDs. I trudge to New York City for my hair every six weeks and make sure my nails and feet are always done. I con-

sider these necessities versus luxuries.

I love to sing. I love to sing when/if I am alone in the car. I rock out from everything to Evita to Keith Partridge. It relaxes me. What the kids don't know is that by listening to and keeping up with their music, I become part of their world. I don't have a lot of time for expeditions to the mall or even the grocery store, so even if I am shopping for food and necessities, I do most of it online.

ARE YOU A DIFFERENT MOM TO NO. 8 FROM WHO YOU WERE TO NO. 1?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: My moral code will not change, and hasn't. We are practicing Catholics, and I stress certain standards of morality, including bans on drugs and drinking and, above all, overall comportment as a human being, and treatment of others. Where I have loosened up is on stuff like dropping a piece of food on the floor and giving it back to the baby if it's less than five seconds, or not freaking out if the baby gets a cold or a fever. I take my time calling our wonderful pediatrician, Dr. Hands. I remember someone gave my oldest son, Devin, >

ONE MOM'S STORY

whipped cream from a teaspoon when he was 5 months old. I completely freaked and thought he would go into shock. Now, by the time my babies are 8 months old, they are eating pasta and all drinking from a straw.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: Any mother can tell you, everybody offers you advice. They come out of aisle five at the A&P or meet you in the checkout at CVS while your kid is suffering from candy-rack arrest at the register. I have listened to some, but following my own gut works best. My best advice, however, was homegrown. My mother said: nurse your children. I certainly did, until 18 months, and presently I'm nursing Gianmarco. It is the most beautiful time in early motherhood, and the health and physiological benefits to both mom and baby are quite astounding. She nursed me in 1967 when it wasn't so popular. Mother knows best. I parlayed this into a small side career (when time allows) as a lactation counselor. My dad was full of wise, sage-like advice. He said, "Always have a Plan B." Don't get rocked by risks and detours. Put your galoshes on and move through the mud. He urged me to teach my kids that life was real: pets and people die, you can get sick and recover, wakes and funerals are part of life, and never operate out of fear. The more coping skills you have, the more your kids will have. It has helped me recover through life's patchy moments, therefore teaching my kids not to wither, but to move on when faced with roadblocks.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT A BIG FAMILY?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: There is always energy in my home. Always laughter. Baby and kids' laughter is the best. It is innocent and real. Most women my age are sad because they are sending someone off to school, just like I will be in September when Devin leaves. But I have the gift of still having young ones at home to help with the void



LOVE AND LAUGHTER Linda says having both little ones and teens in the home adds energy and lots of laughter.

and keep me young. I love watching them become what they will be. It's important to try not to impose your likes and dislikes on them, and observe the hardwiring. It's such a journey watching genetics present themselves. I love that! I see a montage of faces of grandparents, proclivities of parents, expressions of siblings, and on and on. It's beautiful to observe how they metamorphosize from that larva of a newborn into the butterfly of a human being.

DO YOU HAVE A TIP FOR KEEPING IT ALL TOGETHER?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: Parenting is not an exact science, but if you relax your expectations sometimes, you will see a different solution. There is a lot of thinking on your feet, and being rigid isn't always good. A flexible child is a happier child and a much more agreeable adult. I have seen parents completely over-schedule everything from eating to napping to potty time, and the kid can't function outside the box. Schedules are important too, but there has to be reality mixed in. Oh, and take care of yourself: Keep yourself healthy and feeling pretty. A mom who feels good about herself is the

best mom to her kids. What you give off is what they internalize, even when they don't verbalize it. This is the best journey you can ever be on. Love it and take in every moment. Remember, for better or for worse, it moves all too quickly.

IN THIS MONTH'S WHAT MATTERS MOST COLUMN, YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR MOM'S INFLUENCE. WHAT ABOUT YOUR DAD?

PERILLO-ZAZZALI: When I think of my parents, I cry. I cry because I cannot believe that they were mine. Sometimes I think God said, "OK, which ones do you want? Mario and Olga? They are the best I have here. Now climb into the womb and be good for 9 months and I promise you, you will be happy." He was right! I had a wonderful, loving childhood, which fostered my love of parenting and family. My dad was a generous, generous man, loving and loyal to family and friends to a fault with an unprecedented work ethic. He worked hard for his family and neither he nor my mom ever abandoned their immigrant roots. He always seemed to say and do the right thing...all the time. It was amazing. ❖