



Sex & the married mom

When you're an expert on sexuality, frank discussions just come naturally – whether at work or at home

BY PHIL ANDREWS
PHOTOGRAPHY • ALISHA TOWNSEND

When Guelph sex-researcher and media-celebrity sexologist Robin Milhausen was coming of age in Collingwood, it was her father who delivered the birds and bees talk to her.

Perhaps foreshadowing the arresting candour his child would come to develop

for talking publicly about sexuality and relationships, Ford Milhausen served it up matter-of-factly.

“He said: ‘Every guy is going to want to have sex with you. You’re going to have to pick the right one. Or ones,’” Milhausen recalls. “He was a pretty straight-up guy, although he didn’t necessarily want to see me talking about sex toys on TV.”

Indeed, her father, a former real estate

Robin Milhausen, the University of Guelph’s high-profile expert on sexuality and family relations, poses for a photo at Boon Burger Café on Quebec Street in Guelph.

appraiser, and her mother, Linda, an educator, did “see” their daughter’s 82 appearances on television’s “Sex, Toys and Chocolate,” where a range of sex and relationship subjects were probed, frankly. But they watched with the sound off.

“He was really, really proud of me, and he allowed me to pursue this topic without embarrassment or shame,” says Milhausen, now 41, and one of the highest profile faculty members at the University of Guelph and in her area of academic expertise: sex and relationships. She has a PhD in applied health science and is an associate professor of sexuality and family relations at U of G.

“I take any opportunity to talk about sex and relationships,” says Milhausen, who is an in-demand commodity as a public speaker, as a frequent media source and as an educator who routinely pulls in about 400 undergrad students per semester for her course offerings.

In addition to the “Sex, Toys and

Chocolate” gig on the Life Network in the early 2000s, she has been a sex and relationships regular on such TV shows as “The Mom Show” (Slice), “Re-vamped” (Slice) and the “Stephen and Chris” show (CBC). She has also been interviewed for articles or programs in publications such as Canadian Living, Maclean’s, the Washington Post, Chatelaine, the Globe and Mail and the Huffington Post. From 2006 to 2010, she was a regular columnist in this magazine.

“The media work is a ton,” says Milhausen, who asserts it also could take up more of her life. But if it did that, it would steal from her teaching-research time and from her time as a mom and a wife.

“I take the TV stuff sparingly now because it does give up a whole work day. Having children means I try to be very efficient between 9 and 3. Very efficient. I don’t waste any time between 9 and 3. And then, 3 to 9: I parent intently,” she says.

Her husband, Steve Jett, 39, a local psychologist whose practice specializes

in working with individuals dealing with conditions such as depression and anxiety, confirms his spouse has learned to say “no or maybe later” to professional opportunities since becoming a mother.

“Robin’s high profile generally means that she’s being invited to do many more things than she’ll be able to realistically take on,” says Jett, who met and became engaged to Milhausen when they were doctoral students in Indiana.

“She appreciates that life is a marathon, not a sprint. And that the moments we have as a young family will not exist forever. Each family moment is one to cherish, and exciting family moments should be sought out.”

When you speak with their children, it’s clear Milhausen does seek out and create special times with Leo, 10, and Molly, 6.

“I like to get my nails done with her . . . sometimes we go shopping. Usually for toys. Sometimes for clothes,” bubbles Molly, a kinetic, smiling sprite, who – like her brother – shares her mom’s sandy-blond hair.

Molly says her mom also reads to her – “old-fashioned things, like Goldilocks.”

Ferrying kids to school and other life commitments is another frequent Milhausen-the-mom duty. Molly, for example, needs to get to jazz, tap, ballet and hip-hop dance lessons.

“She’s got rhythm in her bones. She’s got rhythm in her soul. She can move,” says Milhausen, who has iPhone footage at the ready to defend this thesis. It’s an extended video of Molly busting out an impromptu and extended dance number at the family’s home in Guelph’s Sunny Acres neighbourhood.

Leo and his mom carve out time for involved discussions – often during evening sessions in the family hot tub. Milhausen calls the hot tub perhaps the family’s best investment ever for the chat sessions it supports with Leo.

It’s clear Milhausen “gets” her son. She knows to remove the crusts on his grilled cheese sandwiches so they’re the way he likes them. She also appreciates that what

Milhausen and media

- Milhausen’s CV lists more than 90 media interviews she has provided that led to published or broadcasted items. Among the outlets to interview her: Reader’s Digest, CBC, the Toronto Star, the National Post, CTV News, the Washington Post, Elle, Today’s Parent, the Huffington Post, the Marilyn Dennis Show and Chatelaine.
 - She was also a regular columnist in Grand magazine from 2006 to 2010.
 - Milhausen’s recommendation for the best book regarding advice on how to keep the spark alive in long-term relationships: Esther Perel’s “Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence.” Says Milhausen: “Every person alive should read it.”
- Milhausen on Twitter: @drRobinM

she does for a living and how she’s publicly described – “sex researcher,” “sex expert” and other labels – can be awkward things for a 10-year-old boy to confront with friends and strangers.

“I really actually hate that job. Because it’s

weird,” Leo says. “I know what to say now when someone asks me what my mom’s job is. I say: ‘a professor.’ It’s just a better way to explain it.”

Milhausen allows that her work encroaches somewhat on the family’s domestic scene. For example, there’s typically a considerable bag of condoms out in the open in their home – for her use at conferences.

Milhausen is also determined to talk about sexuality with her kids – employing plain language that might make many other moms wince.

“Parenting gives me a chance to put my money where my mouth is regarding the kinds of information I think boys and girls should have growing up,” Milhausen says. “They should know about their body parts and the correct terms for those.”

She says Molly knows she has a clitoris. “She knew about it since she was four.”

Milhausen says children’s access to the Internet is a game-changer in terms of how and when parents should raise subjects like

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Robin Milhausen enjoys a meal at Boon Burger Café on Quebec Street in Guelph with daughter Molly, 6, son Leo, 10, and husband, Steve Jett.

sexuality and healthy relationships.

“I think it is absolutely crucial now, in this day and age, with the Internet. I mean, every one of Leo’s friends has an iPod or an iPad and free access to the Internet, and somebody has shown them porn. So I just want to keep the lines of communication open so they will ask me a question when they have it.”

Milhausen says she is still interested in the study of sexual double standards and the sex scripts that young, adult, heterosexual men and women follow, which drew her into her field. However, of late, she has become professionally fascinated with new research into the sexual activities, behaviours and attitudes of middle-aged adults. She is also into the study of “post-sex affectionate behaviour” and its impact on relationship and sexual satisfaction.

“If you are kind and affectionate for six minutes after sex, it will pay more dividends than if you’re kind at most other times of the day,” says Milhausen, speaking at the quick pace that surfaces when she’s

unpacking juicy take-aways from her research.

Early in their relationship, Jett says he sometimes felt “awkward and uncomfortable” at the subjects that surfaced in conversations surrounding Robin’s research and when acquaintances learned she is a sexuality expert.

The spouses are quick to point out that they are quite different people. For example, Jett, a former college basketball player, is very athletic. Milhausen describes herself as “happy when sedentary.” Milhausen enjoys craft beer. Her husband does not drink.

But they’re as quick to speak to the strength of their partnership and of their mutual respect for each other personally and professionally.

“As a professional, Robin has prioritized developing the next generation of sexuality experts. It is a passion of hers,” Jett says, adding that her efforts in this regard have been recognized over and over again.

Milhausen says her work with her

graduate students is one of her greatest sources of pride and measures of success. And they let her know they appreciate her, too. Last year, the majority of her post-grad students returned to Guelph to thank her with a potluck tribute event at a local craft brewery. Her students also successfully nominated her for a Guelph YM-YWCA Woman of Distinction Award.

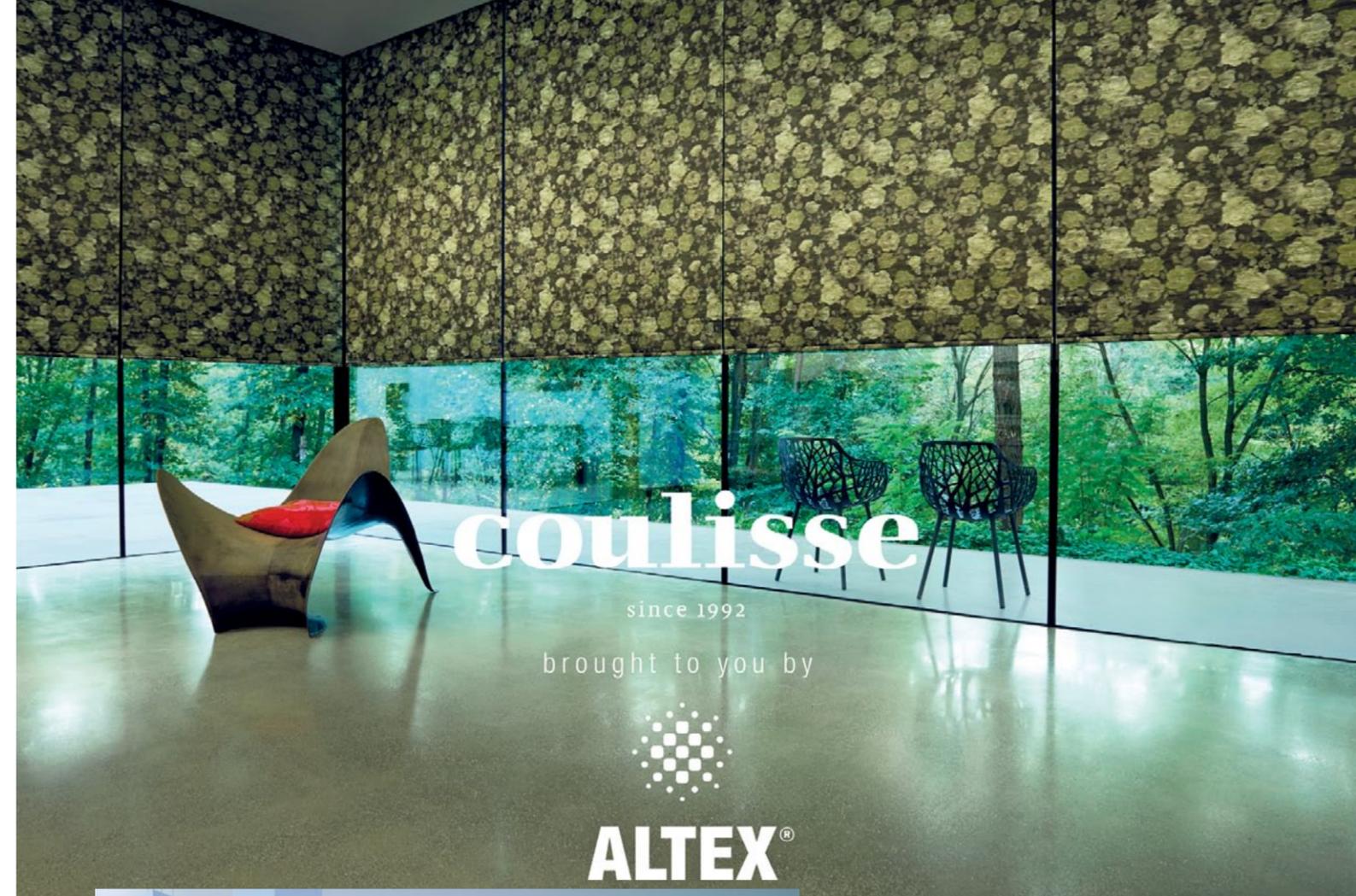
“The award was reading that nomination package,” Milhausen notes.

No doubt her father would have enjoyed doing so as well.

However, the man who delivered “the” birds and bees talk to Guelph’s most famous expert on the topic died in 2015 after a battle with cancer.

Milhausen says her father taught her the value of working and living with integrity, and his death was “a big change” in her life.

“He was a big champion of my career,” says Milhausen, who vows that the work he helped to support – though sometimes with the sound muted – will “absolutely” see many more chapters. 



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