



Team Spirit

Tracy Wilson Mourning, 40, wife of retired NBA star Alonzo Mourning and founder of Honey Shine, a girls mentoring program, says honesty and taking time helps her family handle their business **BY JAYME S. GANEY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFFREY SALTER**

ESSENCE: You have a teen, Trey, 13; a tween, Myka, 9; and a baby, Alijah, 10 months, how do you parent each of them considering the age difference?

Tracy Wilson Mourning: I have conversations with my children called "mommy moments." It's important to make eye contact with them so I can better read their reactions. For example, if something bad happens, I will ask my daughter, "What are you supposed to do?" I've coached her to respond: "Listen and know better." If we are consistent, our kids will have a chance to develop a natural instinct to always do the right thing. It takes a lot of repetition,

but it definitely works.

ESSENCE: You're the founder of Florida-based Honey Shine, and your passion is developing young girls. What impact does running this type of organization have on your parenting style?

Mourning: The Honey Bugs [her organization's name for participants] are honest and uplifting, and keep me on track. The daily interaction that I have with them teaches me how to listen and communicate better with my daughter, Myka.

ESSENCE: Give us an example.

Mourning: Last year, one of our 9-year-old Honey Bugs from summer camp was



complaining about a stomachache. After realizing her cycle had begun, I embraced her and called her grandmother. At home I did research online to figure out why young girls are starting their cycles so early. Then I spoke to my 9-year-old daughter about upcoming transitions in her life. This experience taught me to prepare my children for life's moments even if I'm not ready.

ESSENCE: Why did you go into philanthropy?

Mourning: The first time I heard the word *philanthropy* was from Bill Cosby. Through a chance meeting with Mr. Cosby, I received a scholarship to attend Howard University. In high school and in college I thought everything was about me, but raising and providing for my own children shows me that life is about serving others, especially those in need.

ESSENCE: So how did you reach that point in your life?

Mourning: It's work. It's not easy work, but it's good. Whatever you are passionate about will lead you to your purpose. We now have 500 women who volunteer with Honey Shine. Whatever gifts you've been given, use them to serve others. It's very rewarding.

ESSENCE: Over the years you've organized many fund-raising events. How do you persuade people to give during these tough times?

Mourning: I share the purpose of our organization with potential donors. This resonates because they see the importance of raising strong women. In addition, we provide different levels of giving. If you can't pay all at once, we have payment plans. Or if you can't come to every Saturday workshop, we invite you to come once a month. It's your way of serving, however you can.

ESSENCE: You were raised in a single-mother household, so how do you make sure Alonzo is involved?

Mourning: It's very important that Alonzo [who is vice-president of Player Programs for the Miami Heat] does his part. He has learned that just because you're a provider it doesn't negate the responsibility of parenting and he gets that. I've also learned to state my needs honestly. Sometimes I'll say, "I know you're working hard, but I need help." You must recognize that they are providing, but also ask for assistance. And he's honest with me, too. He'll say, "Babe, I need you to do this." It also helps that his father was hands-on with him growing up. Alonzo helps with homework, takes the kids for haircuts, goes to parent-teacher night, and attends school performances. He's a very present father. To make sure we don't miss anything, we plan our schedule months in advance.

ESSENCE: Between the kids, work demands and travel, how do you and Alonzo keep it all together?

Mourning: Respect for each other. We also laugh a lot, at each other and ourselves. And every night before bed, we get on our knees and pray together.

ESSENCE: Your home is reminiscent of a beautiful island oasis. Where do you two like to go for a little fun in the sun?

Mourning: We really love the relaxed island lifestyle. One of our favorite places is Goldeneye (islandoutpost.com/goldeneye), an 18-acre seaside retreat in Oracabessa, Jamaica.

ESSENCE: What do you think contributes to great intimacy?


Mourning: Listening to each other's needs. I don't believe in nagging or making demands. One trick Alonzo has taught me is that things work best when he thinks it's his idea. I'm okay with it being his idea because I know who influenced it. There was a time when I would say, "Didn't I just say that?" No more.

“The best thing that contributes to intimacy is listening to each other's needs.”

--TRACY WILSON MOURNING

3 WAYS TRACY FINDS BALANCE

- 1. BIKRAM YOGA.** That's the hot sweaty yoga. I use yoga blocks and a mat. This form of yoga is tough and it's work, but at the end of class you feel great while lying in corpse pose (called Savasana). You feel your body open up, and it helps get you to a place where you're not worried about things you can't control.
- 2. MEDITATION.** I'm a better listener when I meditate and I see things differently. I do it when I go to bed and want to be present with God. Meditation creates an openness. When I'm all wound up and rushing around, I feel
- 3. CLEANSING.** I do an annual cleanse and detoxification. Etti Ben-Zion, a local doctor, administers the cleanse. She uses organic fruits, vegetables and herbs. During the week I stretch, dance, breathe, juice, and meditate. The benefits are amazing. I pay more attention to people instead of overeating, my skin looks clearer, and I lose a little weight. To learn more about this detox process, visit dretti.com/index.php.



Passion is what comes naturally. It doesn't feel like work, says Mourning.