



*interview by Melissa Mills
photos by KS Photography. See ad on page 9*

Kelly Robinson

How does she do it?

Background

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Morgan, NJ (about a half hour south of Newark) and attended Sayreville War Memorial High School. I went to Juniata College (Huntingdon, PA) for my BS in Marketing/Communication, and Monmouth University (West Long Branch, NJ) for my MS in Education. I also have an additional 20 credits of graduate counseling courses from Lewis University (Romeoville, IL.)

Do you work outside the home? What is your occupation?

Only if you count the shuttle service I run getting my stepdaughter Leslie to and from all of her sporting events! Seriously, though, I find that as a stay-at-home (hah!) mom, I work more hours than when I was employed as a high school counselor. I hear the new term is Domestic Engineer—which essentially means, I take care of everything that pertains to the kids and our home.

I am the shuttle driver, diaper changer, cheerleader, finance director, chef, recreation and travel coordinator and loving mom, step-mother and wife. Before I moved to Chicago to be with Craig and the kids full-time, I was the Director of Admissions at Monmouth University. When I moved to Chicago, I worked in a high school as a College Counselor. My last full-time position was in the Student Activities Office at Brown University, prior to moving to Oregon. However, my current 24-hour position at home comes with benefits you don't get in an office. I wouldn't trade this position for any other.

What activities are you involved in?

Right now, all of my energy is invested in raising my baby and my 14-year-old stepdaughter. With a husband on the road each week, it is important that I am the constant in the kids' lives. When Austin is

older, and I have time, I'd like to volunteer in the schools.

Family information

Husband (name/profession):

Craig Robinson, Head Men's Basketball Coach at Oregon State University.

How long have you been married?

In June we will celebrate five years of marriage. This March will be our 10-year anniversary of when we first met.

When you married Craig he had children from a previous marriage. What did you do to help smooth the way and incorporate everyone into this new family dynamic?

I have to credit Craig for the way he raised the kids prior to our meeting and the way he introduced me to the kids. After one year of dating, I met the kids at a neutral site; ESPN ZONE. A favorite of mine and the kids. I was the first woman to be around the kids after Craig's divorce, so it was a new experience for them. Leslie (age six at the time) didn't leave Craig's side. Avery (age 10) put on a good front—but it was obvious neither of them were happy to see their dad on a date. Once we started playing games, I think I was less of a threat and the kids realized I was there to enjoy their company, not to take dad away from them.

As a child of divorced parents, I understood the feelings Avery and Leslie were having. All I wanted was to make them comfortable. I knew my place as Craig's girlfriend and eventually as his wife, and I respected their space and time with their dad. Our time together was spent playing board games, attending sporting events, working on homework and watching TV. I showed the kids unconditional love and let Craig be the disciplinarian. Our family dynamic today is not the same as it was nine years ago when I

met the kids, nor is it the same as it was five years ago when Craig and I married. What we have today was built over time and based on trust, love and shared moments of support and respect for one another. We've endured moments of joy and pain together and the love we share is everlasting.

Because you live in a relatively small town now and your husband is obviously a widely known face and personality have you seen changes in your lifestyle?

I wouldn't say there are changes in our lifestyle but rather changes in our family's privacy. Whether we are in a restaurant, the airport, the gym or the playing fields, there is always someone who stops us along the way to either congratulate Craig on his work with the Beavers or to send a message to the President and First Lady. We've met some great people along this journey and are very grateful for their support of our family and OSU athletics.

With a coach for a husband and him being on the road so much how does that change the dynamic at home and how you raise the kids?

Since I've known Craig, he has been coaching, so his travel is just part of our routine. We know that from October to March, he is on the road with games and up early for practice, weight training and video review. During those months, the kids depend on me more than any other time of the year. They know that their dad is focused on winning games and often distracted at home. In Craig's absence, I attend all games, parent-teacher conferences and school events and manage the house as I do when he is in town. Like most families, the kids are just as busy as the adults. My stepdaughter plays three sports in high school and competes the entire summer. My stepson plays basketball and is busy with year-round

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training. The kids are consumed with their activities when Craig is not around so they don't have time to dwell on the fact that he isn't there because they are focused on their activities and interested in what we will do as a family when he returns. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to travel with Craig and the team as often as we like during the season (when the family schedule allows). This helps all of us get some extra time with Craig and gives him an often-needed distraction on the road.

You also have some other pretty famous relatives that currently live in the White House. Has that changed how you live your lives and how you raise the kids?

What a thrill for our children to witness the historical moment of the inauguration of the first black President of the United States of America and to have the opportunity to sleep in the White House, Camp David and travel with the First Family. We are honored to have had these experiences and memories of a lifetime. While Austin will only read about these historic years, Avery and Leslie have been a part of the process. They helped their cousins prepare for their move to the White House—a move that none of us could possibly prepare for—yet our kids

approached it as “understanding what’s it like to have to move because your dad got a ‘bigger job.’” (Avery and Leslie had to move twice in their life for Craig’s career—from Chicago to Providence, RI and Rhode Island to Oregon.) While they couldn’t anticipate the life the girls would have in the White House, they knew how to help the girls navigate leaving friends and family and all that was comfortable.

We have not changed the way we raise the kids. Along with the benefits of having family in the White House, comes additional pressure for good decision-making. The kids understand that their decisions affect their high profile father and the First Family. They have more pressure to do well in all aspects of their life and are more guarded when it comes to friendships and new relationships. Avery and Leslie each have their own way to deal with the added pressure and fame. We are very proud of the way they have managed their academics and social situations over the past two years. We are constantly reminded of how kind and generous the American people are.

Children (names, ages, grade in school):

I have two step-children and Craig and I have a child together. I also have 15 young men that Craig coaches and mentors on a daily basis. I consider each of them part of our family and it is a lot of fun to watch them develop during their time at OSU.

Avery is almost 19. He is attending prep-school on the east coast and will start college in the fall. Leslie is almost 15, and she is a freshman in high school. Austin just celebrated his first birthday.

Does having the kids spread apart in age make things easier or more difficult?

I’ve been very fortunate to watch Avery and Leslie grow from adolescents to young adults. (I’ve known them for nine years.) I started this process in reverse. I’ve seen the academic demands, the social and athletic calendars, the relationship building, the dances, proms, first dates, break-ups and the eating and sleeping habits of teenagers. I am familiar with their athletic and social

calendars and I can anticipate and plan for their needs. Austin is another story! He tries to create his own schedule that generally conflicts with the others—naps when I need to pick Leslie up from practice, hungry when it is time to leave for Leslie or Craig’s games, tired when we are sitting in a gym for a few hours watching games, and a dirty diaper when we are at the softball field and there aren’t facilities with running water. It is an enjoyable balance and I can’t imagine life any other way.

How do you balance motherhood and children’s school activities and dinner and life and...?

I try to balance life for everyone in our home. I maintain a calendar on the computer that I share with Leslie, Craig, and Craig’s assistant to keep our life in sync. This way we are all on the same page and know what to expect for the week ahead. Each night we also talk about our plans for the following day. Everyone is aware of the other’s schedule for the day ahead.

Since I am home with Austin all day, I use that time to love him and hold on to the baby moments. We spend time playing, swimming, watching baby videos and taking long walks. I shift gears in the afternoon to prepare for the event of the evening (Leslie or Craig’s game, an OSU event, etc.) Depending on the evening schedule we’ll either grab a healthy meal on the run or we’ll have dinner together at home (I must admit, I don’t prepare dinner as often as I should.) I recently hired a baby sitter to assist me a few hours a week so I can get some basic household chores accomplished during the day. I’m a planner and to manage our home, it requires me to be organized—and flexible. Balancing the house is a work in progress - just glad I’m not getting graded on my progress.

How does your husband help with the family workload?

The biggest thing Craig did to help me recently was offer to pay a babysitter to assist me when he is not around. Craig

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Who is mom? Kelly's favorites

Personal interests/favorite pastime:

I enjoy biking, roller blading, working out and anything to do with being on the go—whether it's walking, playing tennis, or wiffle ball with the kids.

Favorite book(s):

A Game of Character by Craig Robinson. (This is the only book I've had a chance to read in the past year—other than children's books.) My favorite book to read to Austin right now is, *On the Night You Were Born* by Nancy Tillman.

Favorite recipe:

If I asked my family, they would say the Manly Quiche recipe. This is not your

ordinary quiche—the manly quiche is made with spicy sausage, bacon, hot peppers and an assortment of cheeses and the crust is prepared with hash brown potatoes. This is a hearty meal. I introduced this dish to the basketball team—and they were expecting a girly quiche with broccoli and cheese. They loved it! Visit www.mommag.com for Kelly's recipe.

Favorite movie:

Pretty Woman and similar categories of movies. I don't like scary or violent movies.

Favorite TV show: The Office

Favorite family meal:

I enjoy any meal that we can sit down and enjoy as a family. Unfortunately it is not as often as we'd like with busy schedules. My favorite meal would be New York-style pizza and a salad.

Favorite restaurants:

Wow, that's tough. In Corvallis, I'd have to say Del Alma is my favorite place to go with Craig when we go on a "date." There are many great spots in Corvallis—and we frequent quite a few for take-out on busy family nights. I have many favorites in different cities across the US. Our family favorite is Red Robin (which we call Red Robinson because we go there so often!)



Did You Know???

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understands the demands of the day and helps out as much as he can when he is around. He'll pick Leslie up from practice or take her to her friend's house, or stay with Austin when I need to go grocery shopping or run errands. He'll even do laundry when he sees the basket is overflowing. He is very supportive and knows what I do on a daily basis to make things work efficiently for the family.

Do you and your husband make "couple time"?

Now that we have a babysitter we get out about twice a month for date night. Generally it consists of dinner where we sit and talk about the kids and catch up on life. Sometimes our night out consists of Craig speaking at an event and I attend as his date. With the family schedule as hectic as it is, sometimes it is nice to be in the house together and not have to go anywhere.

Do you spend one-on-one time with each child often?

Absolutely. Leslie and I have probably spent the most time together one-on-one because I travel with her to all of her softball tournaments throughout the summer and she has traveled quite a bit with me to OSU games on the road. Now that Avery is away at school and Craig is in-season, Leslie and I have more alone time than ever before. We are together for meals, shopping, and discussions in the car after practice, and at the dinner table or just sitting around at home watching Austin play with his toys. We

also can be seen sitting next to each other cheering on the Beavers during football and basketball games.

My one-on-one time with Avery happened long before he got his driver's license. Before we moved to Corvallis, Avery and I use to go to the gym regularly and work out together. We would chat in the car on the way to and from and we'd encourage one another during endurance and strength training. Avery and I also spent time together supporting Leslie at her games. When Avery comes back to visit now, we have more quality time together with Austin. Avery just recently went to Austin's swim class and spent hours playing with his little brother.

We also can be seen sitting next to each other cheering on the Beavers during football, and basketball games.

Now that you have been here a few seasons, do you know the words to the OSU Fight Song?

I know the music to the fight song (and even Austin can recognize it now) but I don't claim to know the words well enough to sing along.

Mom's thoughts

Do you remember life BC (before children)?

I vaguely remember life before children; I was a single professional working 12 or more hours a day. Those days seem very far away. I LOVE being a stepmother to Avery and Leslie, and mom to Austin. I can't imagine my life any other way. They are the first thing I think about when I wake and the last thing I

think about before I close my eyes at night. They bring joy and love to my heart.

How do you make time for just you— Mom time?

I make time to go to the gym four to five days a week. I usually go when the babysitter is with Austin or else I wait for Craig to get home and sneak out for an hour. All I need for mom-time is an hour at the gym each day. (And an occasional day at the salon!) I love exercising so I put my workout on the top of the to-do list each day so I have more energy for the hectic family schedule.

What have you learned as a Mom?

Unconditional love.

Advice

Do you have any valuable parenting advice for other moms?

Well, I've only been a mom for 12 months and haven't had many major decisions to make other than breast milk over formula and Pampers over Huggies. There are many pieces of advice I would offer to stepmothers, but I'll save that for my book! In the meantime, I'll offer moms and stepmoms one piece of advice that I learned from watching my mom: LOVE YOUR KIDS. Don't worry about how many words they can recite at age two and read before age three, or how to prepare them for an Ivy League education before they start kindergarten. Don't worry if you can't afford the best clothes or the finest foods, just let them know everyday how much you love them.