



THE
church
across
THE
street

The CNN news anchor
talks about the challenges—
and tremendous joys—
of balancing work,
motherhood
+
faith

BY SOLEDAD O'BRIEN, NEW YORK, NEW YORK
AS TOLD TO ANDREA DAWN CLARK, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

MY PARENTS NAMED ME MARIA de la Soledad: Spanish for the Blessed Virgin Mary of Solitude. It's really no surprise, considering that faith has always been an essential part of my family's life. You might even say that's what brought my parents together. My parents were both immi-

grants—my mother from Cuba, my father from Australia—studying at Johns Hopkins University. And they both attended daily Mass at the church near campus. Every day my father would offer my mother a ride. Every day, she declined. Finally she said yes. One year later, the day after Christ-



HOMEBODIES
Soledad with
her daughters,
Cecilia
and Sofia.
"All seems right
when I'm
with them."

made over the most arcane facts. It was hard to imagine someone so completely full of life suddenly being gone.

The only consolation was that David died doing something he loved. At his funeral in New York at St. Patrick's Cathedral, one of his friends read a letter David wrote to his wife just hours before his death. "Yes, I'm proud of the good job we've all been doing here, but in the scheme of things it matters little compared to my relationship with you, the girls and God." David's words struck a chord in all of us. It made a big impres-

sion to know that in the end he was thinking about his family, his faith.

A few months later, when my contract renewal at NBC was coming up, that thought came back to me. I faced a big decision. An opportunity at CNN had presented itself. I was offered the weekday position cohosting *American Morning*—a more challenging job, a longer day. I spent several weeks weighing the pros and cons. Brad and I discussed what impact the new job would have on our family, and what it would mean for my career. I loved my job at *Today*, and the people



ANCHORED

Soledad with her mom and dad; on the set with Weekend Today cohost, David Bloom



I was working with. Yet the job at CNN was a great opportunity.

After 15 years with NBC, I joined CNN. The first few weekends after I started my new job were eye-opening. Brad and I spent those days enjoying the summer in the city with the girls. Walking around Central Park with my family I realized I wanted to find someplace where Sofia and Cecilia could play outdoors, swim in lakes. A place where we could take them on walks in the woods.

Upstate we found a beautiful little cottage with a wrap-around porch. Across the street was a lovely old church. Our first

Sunday there, we walked over and settled into a pew—Sofia leaning on Brad's shoulder, Cecilia nestled in my lap. It reminded me of my own childhood.

At coffee hour afterward, the pastor gave us a warm welcome and invited our girls to join the Sunday school class. I was thrilled to hear about all the activities we could get involved in—feeding the homeless, giving Christmas presents to underprivileged children, building homes for the poor in Nicaragua. We met our neighbors. It didn't take long for the girls to start running around with their new playmates.

With two toddlers in tow, Brad and I joke that if the church weren't right across the street, we'd always be late. Seriously though, Sunday morning Mass is again important in our lives, and it highlights exactly what's essential in life—my family and my faith. I still worry about the world our girls are growing up in. But I know they'll have a strong spiritual foundation to rely on—just as I had all those Sunday mornings ago. ■

For more on this story, see Family Room.

After
September 11
I searched
for a deeper
PURPOSE
in life.