Getting a Job or a Life

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Abstract

My goal for this paper was to justify my work-life as a mother, or a stay-at-home mom, to be a real job using a comparison with the traditional idea of a 9-5, collect-a-pay check job. It has evolved into a story of the working position of a mother and the transformation into a life for myself. I started out as a stay-at-home mother and then turned into a single mother attending college trying to get an education to find a traditional job. I relate my life with my children as well as the world around me.
I sit here, in my almost forty-five year-old body, and think, “What is the big picture?” I know, women usually don’t divulge their age, but I want credit for every year that I have survived to make it to the next. I am contemplating my work-life writing story. It has been a hard task, I have not “worked” a traditional job, at least not one that fits snuggly into the description of a typical “work-life” story, but my life has been work--all of it.

When I turned forty I was obsessed with reading the obituaries. The first thing I would look for was the age of the deceased. I would try to figure out how they died: natural causes, accident, illness (I already know what you’re thinking). Then I would read their life story--all three paragraphs, four if they were exceptional. Last of all, I would compare our ages to calculate how many years I might have left. Morbid, I know. It was just another time and another way to assess my life: my work-life. What had I done? How many years, on the average, did I have left to do something phenomenal so that my kids would write four paragraphs.

Some of my girlfriends came up with the theory that we, as adults, are exactly where we are in life because of the choices we made. There is no one to blame. It was our own free will. I don’t necessarily buy into this theory. It is my belief that there are things called “interpersonal choices” they include free will and an element of determinism. While we are free to choose, elements of determinism influence those choices. Social scientists always ask, “Did you make that decision, or was the decision made for you through family, social and cultural influences?” When I was younger I had plenty of free will, but if it went against what my parents wanted me to do a consequence, usually in the form of some kind of punishment, was received. So, they, my parents, were a factor in my final choices. The point of this crazy question is not to find someone to blame for a current situation or to take credit for the good outcomes. The point in my mind is this: However we might have reached our current place in life we have the opportunity to reflect, assess and learn, hopefully, to make better choices the next time or to repair the bad ones, but always to learn something. In my life there are things I have learned, things that I know for sure. I have also learned that I am still
not sure about other things and there are other things that I thought I knew only to come
to realize that I don’t know the answer at all. Over the years, I’ve earned some hard-won
wisdom, discovered life-lessons in unexpected places, and learned to recognize how
much I still don’t know. Welcome to my work-life.

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On the Job Training

My childhood was wonderful, nothing traumatic, normal aches and pains, but
overall I loved it. I went away to college, had a boyfriend and got pregnant. I was 19. I
chose to keep my baby and my parents helped me choose to get married. This is where
my work-life begins.

I was almost twenty when I gave birth to my first baby. Twenty is young, but at
least I would have been safely past the teen pregnancy label. It always bugged me that I
carried to a social statistic that is seen as a negative head count. This social
standing stirred the rebel inside of me to do everything possible to prove the statistic
wrong. I was determined to have a successful marriage and be a productive caring
mother. I was going to show society that my head count was a positive contribution.

On December 23, 1985, I clearly remember what was on my mind as I wobbled
out the door to give birth to my son, “My life will never be the same again.” I am sure I
did not realize the magnitude to which my life would be altered.

The very next day I prepared to return home with my bundle of joy. I changed him
from the hospital t-shirt into the clothes I had brought to the hospital and wrapped him
up just like the nurse had shown me how to do. We walked out into the hall to ask
someone what we needed to do next. The halls were empty. No experts standing by
ready to offer something inspirational maybe or just instructional. There was no one, so
we left. As I neared the hospital exit I began to feel a stirring of panic. No one seemed to
care that we were leaving with this little baby. No one checked to see if we were
capable, worthy, or even ready for life with an infant. No papers, no pop quizzes, and no
one gave me any instructions.
I had not finished my Christmas shopping, so we went to the mall to pick some things up before going home. (After giving birth five additional times, I don’t know how I went shopping the day after popping out an eight pound object.) We went to the center of the mall to have our baby’s picture taken with Santa. Santa took my son in his arms, looked at me as he cooed and asked, “How old is he?” I replied, “One day.” Kela’s first picture is with a Santa that has a look of horror on his face.

When I got home I unwrapped my baby, counted his fingers and toes, changed his diaper and the panic returned. “I have no idea what to do. I can’t believe just anyone is allowed to have one of these! They should at least come with a manual!”

The reality is: babies do not come with any kind of instructions. We know how they should end up. Society has social standards of characteristics these little babies should have. They should be law abiding, obedient, pleasant, productive little people that end up big people that contribute to the running of their community. The culture of religion tells us they should also believe in God and live a Christian life. The religious factor actually has a long list of things you shouldn’t do.

I started to read every book available. Dr. Spock was not an accepted resource any more. His methods of child rearing were outdated. The reviews came in as, “All Wrong.” Before I had given birth my husband came home and announced, “I want to raise our kids in the Mormon church.” They, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, have plenty of advice to give to parents on how to properly raise children. I also looked to the mothers that I thought were perfect examples. I used my mother as my last resource of knowledge. I was going to do everything right that I felt she did wrong with my siblings and me.

Looking back now, I realize that my mother was smarter than all of the books written. I would show her how to “correctly” wrap up a baby; she would smile at me and say, “Oh, is that how you do it?” (My mom raised four kids, worked in a pediatrician’s office for ten years, and had a daycare for several years when she decided to stop working outside of the home.) I would show her how to bathe a baby, use the new baby equipment, tell her what to feed and not feed a baby. I would read to her from all the how-to books that I was reading. I would tell her that Dr. Spock was a kook and on the
starship now. At no point did my mother ever smack me. She would just smile and say, “You are such a good mother.” I reveled in the fact that I was a good mother. I didn’t know what I was doing, but if my mom said I was doing a good job, then somehow, I was. When I did go to her for help she was never sarcastic, never condescending, always helpful. She let me grow into my position as a mother on my own terms.

Breaking into the field of spouse is not as hard as taking on the occupation of a new mom. That is not to say that being in a relationship doesn’t take work. It does. But it was my position as a mother that became my primary career path. I slowly began to realize I was my own boss. The basics are easy: bathe, clothe, provide three square meals. But every child is built just slightly different. What works well for one, does not work for another. The best thing you can do is smile, tell them how wonderful they are (even when you want to smack them) and let them become who they are meant to be, of course with gentle guidance and direction. As far as infant instructions and baby manuals went, I learned to use what was helpful and leave the rest behind. It worked, but the kids kept growing and needing more than just the basics.

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**Mid-career**

My position as a stay-at-home mother

There is a four-and-half year span between my first and second child. During those four years my husband finished college and started working. My next baby was planned, as well as my third and fourth. I came from a family of four kids and I was trying to mimic the family structure I was raised in. It was not until the arrival of my second and third babies that the running of my home started to feel like a real job. My husband would get dressed and leave. I was stuck at home making breakfast, washing dishes, cleaning up, making lunch, washing dishes, entertaining the babies, cleaning-up, changing diapers, making dinner, washing dishes, loads of laundry, diaper changes, toilet training, cleaning up mess after mess after mess. My kids seemed to be attracted to clean rooms. Once I cleaned one room the kids would all migrate there. I would go to
clean another room. When I returned to the first clean room, like magic in the reverse, it was a mess again. Every day was a repeat of the last. I would envy my husband who was leaving to build his career and earn a paycheck, society’s symbol of accomplishment and recognition of doing something productive. The religious culture was telling me that love at home was my reward. I felt like I was constantly yelling at the kids and could hear them fighting senselessly over a stupid toy. I felt like I was hopelessly failing. The positive reinforcements were not always tangible. At 5:00, a quitting time for regular jobs, my job was not even close to being done. My husband would come home and look at the mess and ask, “What did you do all day?” Then, he would retire to the living room to watch TV. I would then prepare dinner, feed the family, do the dishes, bathe the kids, start another load of laundry, put the kids to bed, and then straighten up the house.

From time to time I would read an article that would suggest I update my resume. What resume? I couldn’t figure out a way to translate the skill of multi-tasking my laundry and dishes into a business skill. I occasionally looked at the classifieds to see what requirements and skills were in demand. And then I would compare and contrast them with the requirements and skills I was picking up in my own job.

**Human Resource Manager for Fortune 500 Company**

**Primary Purpose**
Provides the overall development, management and administration of organization-wide human resources policies and procedures in accordance with sound management and business practices, and consistent with the mission and core values of the foundation. Also responsible for achieving specific goals set forth by Management.

**Essential Duties**
Plans, organizes, manages and directs the human resources program of Partners in Development Foundation, including developing sound personnel policies and procedures; providing timely guidance and clarification of those policies to program managers and other managers; monitoring implementation in day-to-day operations; acting as a liaison to Vice Presidents by regularly meeting and reporting on company human resources activities.

**Other Duties**
Perform other duties as assigned by Vice President of Administration/Secretary/Treasurer.
Work Hours
Monday through Friday, 40 hours per week, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, or as arranged with Supervisor.

Working Conditions
Majority of time spent working in the administrative offices of the organization, requires occasional travel to different Program locations on O'ahu and the neighbor islands.

Equipment Use
Personal computer, printer, copier, fax, files, office phone system, power point projector, other office equipment.

Minimum Qualification Requirements
Skills/Knowledge:
In addition to meeting the mental, physical, and communication demands listed above, requires strong knowledge of HR processes and functions, legal requirements, benefits administration; requires working knowledge of personal computer software applications such as Word and Excel.

Education/Experience:
BA in HR and practical working HR experience; or any combination of education and experience which would provide the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to meet the minimum qualifications to perform the essential functions of the position.

Compensation:
Salary will be discussed before hire. Applicants past history will be taken into consideration. Room for bonus’ as well as pay increases after periodical job reviews.

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If I were to put out an ad in the classifieds to replace myself, or the job that I was doing, it would look similar, but far more expensive to run due to word count.

Homemaker for Fortunate Family
Primary Purpose
Provide the overall development, management and administration of a small organization (aka: family) policies and procedures in accordance with sound management and family practices, consistent with the mission and core social and religious values of the foundation. The Pinto/Chow family is looking for someone to replace their mother. Must be able to make the house a clean, warm, welcoming home-on an ongoing basis. Some decorating, organizing, and a lot of patience needed; a current driver’s license is a must. Must be willing to assist the president/father of this family. Do not expect any help with your position from the president/father. (He is known
to add to the work load at a moment’s notice.) You must be able to work at a fast pace. Naps are not included, but can be taken if a time presents itself.

Essential Duties
Plans, organizes, manages and directs the family, including developing sound family policy procedures; providing timely guidance and clarification of those policies to the kids; monitoring implementation in day-to-day operations; acting as a liaison to husband/father by regularly meeting and reporting all family activities.

Other Duties
The president will expect sexual favors regardless of how tired you are. Having a headache is considered a lame excuse.

Work Hours
24/7, no vacations

Working Conditions
Majority of the time spent working in the home, requires occasional travel to and from different locations according to kid’s activities.

Equipment Use
Cleaning products, broom, vacuum, blender, dishwasher, washing machine and dryer (clothes-line experience helpful), car, personal computer, office equipment, medical supplies as well as several other household equipment not listed.

Minimum Qualifications Requirements
Skill/Knowledge:
In addition to meeting the mental, physical and communication demands listed above also requires strong knowledge in but not limited to:

(This is where the classified ad would change, there are additional skills that cannot go without being listed in detail.)

• Cooking
  • Must be able to plan weekly meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Must be able, on a moment’s notice, to include unexpected guests.
  • Must also know how to plan, cater and host as well as cook, for dinner parties, birthday parties or celebrations, for 8 to 150 people. (Numbers vary according to event.)
  • Must keep all meals healthy and be able to present leftovers the next night as a new dish.
  • Nursing and medical knowledge is a must.
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- Must know the difference between a high fever and low grade fever.
- Helpful to know cures for the common cold, toothaches, headaches, sprained ankles, tummy aches and other common injuries or illnesses.
- Must know how to keep a medicine cabinet fully stocked while being aware of all expiration dates on all medicines.
- Must know the different degrees of burns and identify when professional attention is needed.

Cleaning skills
- While you may have some assistance in this area, the majority of these tasks are your responsibility.
- Fingerprints are expected, but should be kept at a minimum. (Whites are not required to stay white.)

Organizational skills are a definite must!
- Current calendars with all of the children’s activities—dates, times, places etc.—updated weekly, if not daily.
- Birthdays, anniversaries, special events, etc., must be recognized with gifts, and cards sent out to family and friends—on time (with gift if necessary).

--Please note: You must be able to spot any talent and identify interests from any of the children, that requires grooming or magnification by an outside source. It is your job to find the right mentor for these skills.

--Please also note: While you may notice a talent, you must also be able to recognize lack of ability or talent, for example, if a child is unable to finish homework. It must be determined if the child requires additional outside help or if the cause is just plain laziness and the child needs some motivation. It is also your job to find that motivation which can vary drastically for each child. (While food enticements might work for one, a sticker might work for another.)

--For all extracurricular activities you must find the team mom to coordinate all snacks and parties with or volunteer to be that mom. (Volunteering for more then two teams is extremely unwise, but doable.)

Chauffeur Skills
--Must be able to drive children to their designated functions, activities, and appointments. (When deciding what activities to participate in, the driving schedule might highly influence those decisions.)
- Being late, 10-15 minutes, for pick-ups is okay. Forgetting a child is only acceptable once...per child. (This may cause great anxiety to the child and have long term psychological effects. Which ultimately will just create more doctor scheduling and more driving time for you.)
  • Doctor and dentists
    • Must be able to make and keep all appointments.
    • Must keep all medical records current and organized--at all times.

--Applicant must have good communication and mediations skills.

**There will be no pay attached to any of these duties. Applicant must be able to find other ways to feel compensated, mainly emotionally based.***

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It took me a long time to come to terms with my career choice, if a stay-at-home mom was even considered a career. I wanted to feel appreciated, have a sense of accomplishment, be valued. The most significant difference, between the human resource ad and my ad was one factor: compensation. I have realized that I needed to look for compensation from a different angle.
“Occupation? You name it that’s ME!”
Status

We rank each other, even strangers, by what they have--and by extension what they do. If we see a person driving a nice car, we think, “I wonder what he does for a living?” If we go to someone’s beautiful house, we wonder, “How much do they make?” When we meet someone for the first time, somewhere in that conversation it comes up, “What do you do?” We are not asking about extra curricular activities like surfing, hunting, or hobbies; we are asking what their job is. When we have the information, we assess, not out loud, but we still assess. Doctors automatically get respect just for having the title and janitors get put in a lower ranking, way lower. I have always had an issue with this. The title of stay-at-home mom doesn’t even make it into the ranking system.

On occasion I would attend conventions with my husband for his job. He is a financial planner (a glorified name for a life insurance agent). Once as we were sitting down for dinner, a woman dressed in her three-piece dress suit and power-heels, turned to me and asked, “Are you here as an agent or friend?”

“Oh, ah, as a wife. My husband works for Beneficial.”

“Great, so sweet that you could come along. What is it that you do?” The dreaded question. I HATE this question. I was tempted to answer, “Nothing really, I sit at home, bare foot and usually pregnant,” or say, “I do nothing but sit at home, eat bonbons, and watch soap operas all day.”

Think, think...I can do better. “Nothing, nothing, I do nothing.”

I want to say, “I am vice president of a “young” up and coming corporation. I am considering ousting the president for misuse of his leadership position. We are currently in the “education” phase. Everyone seems to be on-board with this phase. There is a lot of potential. Once the president is forced out of the house. I mean business. I plan to see extreme amounts of personal and business growth.”

Okay....

That is not exactly how it went. I replied as always, “I am a stay-at-home mom.”
“Oh, good for you. I am sure you will have a great week-end. Should be a great break for you. The pool looks refreshing.”

The woman, like so many others in so many similar situations, turned her back to me and look for someone else more interesting to converse with. I always felt like screaming. Or finding the nearest rock to climb under.

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Choices

I was always conflicted when I had to defend my choice or my position to the world. Society was telling me that to be a valued member of society I needed to have a career. One of my sisters was constantly spewing her feminist views at me. She preached about the oppression of women and how it was wrong to be subservient to a man. If I needed to get home to make dinner she would snapped, “Why? Can’t he make his own dinner?” I was aware of the feminist views towards my position. Linda Hirshman, an American feminist, heavily criticized professional women who chose to give up their career for staying at home to raise their children. (She is addresses “professional” women, which puts the traditional homemaker, like myself, even lower in her views. As if I had no aspirations to begin with. I didn’t start with a career outside of my home.) She once said, “I think there are better lives and worse lives.” Better lives compared to what? Worse lives? Again, compared to what? While she blasted stay-at-home mothers as being contrary to the feminist movement, I was a strong believer that it was the feminist movement that empowered me, as a woman, to make that choice.

Then I had the complete contrast of the feminist view from my religious affiliation. In 1981, the current prophet of the church, President Ezra Taft Benson, gave a talk to the members of the church. He spoke directly to the issue of where the woman’s place is:

“Before the world was created, in heavenly councils the pattern and role of women were prescribed. You were elected by God to be wives and mothers in Zion. Exaltation in the celestial kingdom is predicated on faithfulness to that calling. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother’s place is in the home. I recognize there are voices in our midst which would attempt to convince you that these truths are not applicable to our present-day conditions. If you listen and heed, you will be lured away from your principle obligations. Beguiling voices in the world cry out for “alternative life-styles” for women. They maintain that some women are better suited for careers than for marriage and motherhood.”
I was so happy to be a mom that I didn’t realize how ridiculous this statement was. Several women that I knew left the church because of this talk. I loved being a stay-at-home mother, but what I didn’t like was someone telling me that I had to, that if I made a choice to work out side of my home and to pursue a career I would be denied exaltation. This prophet made it seem like the “alternate life-style” was something crazy like being a hooker or an exhibitionist.

I had one side looking down at me for staying home with my children and the other side warning me that I had better stay there or else! I wanted the choice to be my own, of my own free-will, but I cannot deny that there were elements of determinism. I leaned on the scripture Ecclesiastics 3:1-9 for guidance. The first verse reads: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” I knew that when my children were older and they were more independent—that would be the time for me to focus on looking into a career for myself. There is a time and a season for everything, when to stay home with my children, and when to focus on my career. Whatever the season, a sense of humor is needed for this job. This I know for sure.

The work a woman does in the home—full-time, is valuable. Women who stay home make personal sacrifices that go unnoticed and without compensation. If you have a bad day at work, you still get paid. Whether I do a great job, have a bad day, get overwhelmed--there is no monetary reward at the end of the day. No salary is attached to this career choice. So, it is harder to view the position of a stay-at-home mom as a “real job,” but it is. One that does not come with instructions or a work manual.

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When to filter and listen to your inner voice

Like an intern seeking approval from upper management, I was always trying to do the right thing. Just as I gained complete confidence in my ability to manage one stage, a new stage would come along. Even though I had strong convictions, I was not always confident in myself. I started to look for more instructions. It took me a while to figure out how to trust my own inner voice. I was trying to look for everyone else to tell me how to do my job correctly. If they had written a book, were up on stage, or looking down from a pulpit-- they must be experts and know which instruction book was the best to get this mothering job done.

I went to several parenting classes. I started to see the secular world as completely evil. At times I was attracted to extremist because they had such a strong conviction in their beliefs. I went to one particular class about learning to teach your children by the spirit. The speaker admonished that the spirit cannot dwell where evil is
present, so, if you want to teach by the spirit, you must get rid of the evil. The speaker gave several examples of how Satan can be cunning. One example she gave was a song that had been my favorite since I was a child. Whitney Houston had, at that particular time, done a remake and it was a hit. The speaker started to go over the lyrics to *The Greatest Love of All*. The first line of the song, “I believe the children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way.” The speaker said Satan always starts with something you believe in, then he adds his deceit. “Give them a sense of pride, make it easier,” this was advocating a incorrect principle, we should not teach our children to be prideful. Parents should teach them humility. The song, according to this teacher, had a nice melody, catchy lyrics, but it taught bad values. We, as Christians, should not look to ourselves for self-love. We should look to God for the greatest love of all. “I found the greatest love of all inside of me.” Wrong! The greatest love is God’s love. I went home, listened to the song, and then got rid of it.

I was so desperate to do a good job with my kids. I was new to this job, I was young, and while I was confident about the first part of parenting, the baby stages, when they started to grow into little people, I was not as confident. I was looking for someone to give me another instruction book.

I got rid of the TV too. (I don’t regret not having a TV. It is amazing how much more time you have.) I would watch a movie and see all the evil. *Aladdin*—what a little sinner! I was appalled. We were socializing our kids into making this little thief into their hero. The feminist me threw out *The Little Mermaid*. How dare they marry off Arial, Did any one not realize she was only 16? I was driving myself, and probably my family, crazy.

What I have learned is that you have to take a step back and take a breath. You have to find a quiet place to stop and listen to your inner voice. I was so busy listening to the voices around me that I had forgotten that I had one too. I have to agree with Jimmy Buffet when he said, “It takes no more time to see the good side of life than to see the bad.” It’s all a perspective. If you look for the worst in any situation, you will find it, or you can chose to find the good, it’s also there.
Years later, I played that song again. It is one of the most beautiful songs. I do believe that my children are the future, I want to teach them well so they can someday lead the way. I want them to see all the beauty they possess inside. Too many in this world will tell them what is wrong with them. I want them to have a sense of pride. It does make life a little easier. I love to hear my children’s laughter, to remind me who I used to be. I want them to love themselves, trust themselves, and laugh. Maybe it was time to start writing my own manual.

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Creating my Own Manual

I look back at what I was trying to accomplish as a mother. It is ironically comical. I wanted to be socially acceptable, but I was trying to break some of the social realities for my kids. Without realizing it maybe, I was beginning to craft my own employee handbook, complete with mission statement and company policies. For example, I made sure all my boys had a doll. When I was a child my mom had brought home a record produced by Marlo Thomas, “Free to be You and Me.” Songs about giving boys dolls so they knew how to be good fathers and songs about girls pursuing their dreams; they didn’t have to get married right away. I loved these lyrics, “Every boy in this land grows to be his own man,” with the vocals of a woman. “In this land every girl grows to be her own woman,” with the vocals of a man. The main message is that little girls and little boys can be whatever they want, but having respect and compassion should come first.

I never dressed my girls in pink. To this day neither one of my girls will wear pink. I also didn’t have anything Cinderella or Snow White in our home. I looked for movies where the girl was the hero and saved the day. Mulan was played repeatedly in my house.

When my girls were four and six I needed a change. I went and cut off my long hair. The beautician said it was short and sassy, but my girls thought otherwise. I was taking a nap one afternoon and heard my girls as they stood over me discussing in hushed voices what they saw as a complete dilemma. “Just put it in her hair.” The younger one refused. She thought the situation was hopeless. The older one said, “If we
just put it in her hair she will look like a girl again.” The younger one didn’t seem to be convinced, “Are you sure? Why does she want to look like a boy?” “Well,” added the older one, “she still has boobs, so she still kinda looks like a girl.” Regardless of my rebellious attitude towards social expectations, these kids were going to be socialized. No matter what I did, they would still have to conceptualize what they thought was appropriate for a girl and a boy.

At a certain point, other people teach your children. You can only hope that the values you care most about stick despite what they may hear to the contrary. I always wanted my boys to view and treat girls with respect. I walked in on my 86 year-old grandmother telling my 15 year-old son, “Remember girls are like buses, when you catch one and get bored, jump off because there will be another one coming in 15-20 minutes. The next one might take you on a better ride, so don’t waste it all on your first bus.” When he got older, as well as all my other kids, I would catch her telling them, “Don’t ever buy the tools before you have tried them out first. You don’t want to get stuck with tools that don’t work and you can’t return.” She was not a believer of waiting until you got married to have sex. I was only lucky that she spoke in parables: if the kids were too young to get the message, they didn’t.

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Reality checks

Reality checks always come when you least expect them. I was driving down the road one day with all my kids, five at the time, with the radio blasting away. I was thinking to myself, “I am such a hip mom. I listen to good music. My kids must love it.” I was reveling in my hipness, bopping to the music when one of my kids yelled from the backseat, “Can you find some decent music to play? This stuff sucks!”

Or the day I was having slamming day. I had picked up my kids from school, taken one to soccer practice, another to dance class and then collected them all back up. We had stopped at the grocery store to pick some items up for dinner. Taking kids shopping is a major challenge. “Can I have this? Can I have that?” For some obnoxious reason there is always a big display of bouncy balls that are within a little person’s arms reach. So, while I was grabbing groceries I was also fielding bouncy balls and scolding my children to stop touching things. It always felt like I was taking the animals from the
zoo on an excursion when we went to the grocery store. I always wanted to loudly ask them, “Where is your mother?” I didn’t want the on-lookers to think these rowdy kids were my doing. Eventually, I got all the groceries loaded, kids loaded and was feeling good about my day. Driving down the road and mentally going down my checklist. I was thrilled that everything was done. Then one of my kids yelled up to the front, “Hey, why did you leave Kelsi at the store?”

I had inadvertently left one of my kids at the grocery store. Panicked, I flipped my van around and sped back to the store imagining the worst scenarios. When I pulled into the parking lot she was sitting patiently waiting on the bench. After that incident the kids thought it was hilarious to periodically yell up, “You did it again!” I would panic, slam on my brakes then Kelsi or someone else would pop up from the very back and they would all squeal with laughter. They were the only ones that thought it was funny.

To this day I do a head count. I don’t care how odd I look, “One, two, three, four, five, six. Okay we can go.” I don’t even attempt to figure out what child is getting counted: the key is to have six. If the count is not six, that is when I look to see which kids I have actually counted and whose head didn’t make the count.

Life happens, might as well enjoy the ride.

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**Set a good pace**

When I train for endurance races like triathlons or marathons, my coaches always warn, “Start off slow; take the first few miles at a slow pace. Give your body a chance to warm up. If you hit it hard right at the start you’ll burn out before you even hit the half-way mark.” I wish someone would have told me this when I first accepted the position of stay-at-home mom. When I started my job, I hit it and I hit it hard.

I made all the meals from scratch. My baby food did not come from a jar. I used cloth diapers, to save the earth. I sewed and quilted all my baby blankets. I was taking this position seriously, and I wanted to do a good job. No processed snacks, candy or junk food could be found in my cupboards. And, I documented.

I took pictures of everything my first baby did. He has three completed baby books, five photo albums documenting all his firsts: his first bath, his first Christmas—his first of everything, as well as all his seconds. When my daughter was born four years
later, I took almost as many pictures, but not quite. She has one baby album and one photo album. By the time my third child came, I was tired. The first things to go are photo albums. I took the pictures, took my time to develop them, didn’t always label them, and they rarely made it to an album. I would look at my children and think, “What kind of mother would not be able to know which child is which? I’ll always know.” So I didn’t stress about labeling pictures. Each child was so different and unique, I would never mistake one child’s picture for another. I knew their fingers, toes, and the curves on their face. I was always amazed that these children were part of me.

Some advice: LABEL YOUR PICTURES!

I really tried to get the third child’s baby album finished before the fourth one came. I was able to get number three’s memorabilia at least separated and into a folder, but certain parenting skills hit the wall before others. The first thing to go are photo albums. Every few years I would get the box out and work on a couple pages. When my daughters were in middle school I got out the boxes and started going through the stacks of pictures. As I was working on them the girls came to help. They love looking at the pictures of when they were babies. They both turned to the first page of their individual baby book and gazed at their first baby photo. “Hey, this isn’t me!” I looked. “Of course it is, you were such a cute baby.” Then the other daughter chimed in, “I don’t remember being twins.” She lifted her photo album up that displayed the same exact photo. I had given up years prior of ever receiving the mother of the year award and times like these only confirmed it. I was just happy to still have a sense of humor.

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Stepping Back

Not one of my children are built the slightest bit the same. They are all unique and different in their tastes and interests. In this regard my job has never been a bore. Once one child gets through the adolescence years, another one hits it full force and puts a different spin on it. There does seem to be one constant; when kids hit the teenage years they turn into different beasts. That was the only thing I had in life to count on. You would think that after going through it so many times I would catch a break. Not so. They, the kids, must have some secret handbook that instructs them on being the most disagreeable people possible when they hit their teenage years.
The hardest part of being a parent is stepping back and allowing your children to take the bumps and cracks of life. It is tempting to do everything for them, but it is not realistic. I am not sure when I realized this part of parenting, but I was not the only one influencing or enjoying my children.

My fourth, a son, was angry at the world and directing it all at me. Things were not good between us at one point. (Right when he hit his adolescence, 15. Go figure.) I went to pick him up from a friend’s house one night. My daughter was riding shotgun. I honked the horn and waited. My son didn’t emerge from the house. The father of his friend did. I rolled down my window and prepared myself for the worst. “Are you Kaimana’s mother?” he asked. I admitted I was. “I want you to know that I have had several young men come through my home and I have never been as impressed with a young man until your son started coming around.” I sat there stunned and speechless. He continued, singing accolades about my son. My daughter leaned forward and asked, “Are you talking about Kaimana Pinto?”

Kids use their home to let out all their grief from the world and then saddle up every morning and hit it again. Their world isn’t perfect and the load they carry is heavy. Patience is hard, but it pays off. I had to learn to take a step back and allow them to find the mentors that helped them get through the challenges of life, and they were not always me. I continued to teach my children to be the best person they can be and treat other people with respect, to accept different views and respect other belief systems. Then let them go out into the world alone.

I still have not learned all the lessons to be had about the position as a mom. I spent the first part of my life parenting and teaching my children. I am thankful that I was able to have the opportunity to work in the position as a stay-at-home mother. It was my first and most significant job. I constantly work on keeping an open mind to allow myself to learn more lessons. I find that as life moves on the roles are starting to change. My children are the ones teaching me. But I still had one difficult lesson to learn.
Another Beginning; or a Hostile Takeover

One night after the kids had all gone to bed I started to mop the floors. One of the kids had spilt syrup on the floor and had not cleaned it up. At any one time there can be, at the minimum, six pair of feet walking in and out of the kitchen throughout the day. Kids usually run in pairs, so that added another dozen feet pattering through the kitchen and everywhere else. So, twenty-four feet had walked through the kitchen and carried bits of this syrup throughout the house. As I was mopping I could not figure out where the syrup spill had started or where it ended. I continued to mop and think about my life. The stickiness was everywhere, thicker in some spots. Large areas were not sticky at all and it was only slightly sticky in other spots. That is how abuse is. After twenty-two years of marriage I couldn’t pinpoint where the abuse had started or ended. It was heavy in some spots, would stop for a while and be light in others. Like the syrup, you couldn’t see it, but it was there.

I loved my husband. We had been through a lot together. When I turned forty-one I had to make the hardest decision of my life. My husband had an anger management issue that usually ended up with one of my kids needing stitches or a wall needing patching. My oldest graduated and rarely came home, my next child was running away, and no one brought their friends over if he was home. This was not the home I had envisioned. The way things were going I was going to be sitting in the rocking chair, old and grey, with my kids refusing to come home because it was a toxic place.

My marriage was largely based on an interpersonal relationship choice that I had been making every year. It was not easy. The statistics say that fifty-two percent of marriages fail. My duty to society was to stay and be part of the forty-eight percent. My religion was telling me that the biggest failure in life is failure of the family unit. Failure at anything is hard to swallow. I started out trying to prove all the statistics wrong. I not only wanted to be a good mother, but I wanted to have the family that said, “Hey, we are making it. We are successful.” I have a quote from Catherine Aird hanging on my fridge, “If you can’t be a good example, then you’ll be a horrible warning.” I could see my
marriage, depending on the day, month and year as a good example or a horrible warning.

When my husband left our home and moved directly into a girlfriend’s house I was left with no source of income and no way to replace his income. I resented my choice, at that time, to stay at home, leaving me with no skills to get a job that could support my family. I resented the church. I resented them for constantly ramming it down my throat that I should be at home, put off my education so that I would be “blessed” in the long run. I went to them several times for help. Their stance throughout our marriage was to pray, to become more vigilant with the gospel, and to help him with his role as the patriarch of our home. All the council was directed at me, not at him.

When we went to see a therapist from church I was repeatedly advised to learn how to forgive and to be patient. Every week he was given a clean slate to “try again” and I was given another opportunity to forgive. I would leave the therapy sessions shaking from anger. He would get in the car smiling, “Well, I think that went well.” After one session he threatened one son with a knife. The next night he threw dinner plates full of food at another son. Again, forgive him, allow him to try again. It only empowered him and made our situation worse.

I have to say it again, I loved my husband. It was the abuse I hated. I wanted it to stop and him to stay. I wanted him to love our family enough to stop hurting me and the kids. When he left I thought he would miss us, me, so much that he would move heaven and earth to get help, to put our family back together. It never happened. He was loving his single life. He kept saying, “It’s amazing! The pressure just lifted when I walked out that door.” The abuse in the home stopped, but I was left dealing with six kids, dealing with issues of post-abuse, dealing with being replaced by the skank that worked at Foodland and dealing with my world caving in on me. I enrolled at Windward Community School, realizing that I needed an education or I risked becoming a checker with the skank at Foodland.

The Mormon church lives by the motto, “Families are forever.” The saying is posted everywhere. David ‘O McKay, the fifth president of the church admonished, “There is no greater failure than the failure in the home.” I felt like the biggest failure. I
couldn’t fix my situation and I couldn’t fix my husband. I was now headed to yet another statistic, part of the fifty percent of failed marriages. I hated to be a part of what is referred to as a “broken home.”

I was angry, I was resentful, and I was, myself, broken beyond belief. My position as a stay-at-home mother had blown up in my face. I had no retirement, no savings, I had nothing.

When I was done crying and feeling sorry for myself I realized that some of the things I knew for sure-- I was not so sure about. Even if you do what you think is right, it is not always right based on social standards or even cultural standards. I was doing what they were telling me, and it didn’t work.

The divorce added a completely new dimension to it all. I was learning how to reconstruct the details with the change in my life status. I was now a single mother and no longer home all the time to cater to all the family’s needs.

I had to remind myself to live in the present. I could look forever at the past and resent the choices I had made. The reality is that I couldn’t go back nor would I give up the years I had the opportunity to work as a stay-at-home mother. I loved the memories, the lessons and all the experiences. I could not dwell on the past. It made me worry about the future. I had the present to deal with. I started taking every day as a new gift. My family was not broken, it was just structured differently than the common social definition. We were going to define our own version of family. I can’t stress about what might happen in five years from today, or even two. I need to focus on this day.

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New Career Path

When I started school I had two objectives. The first was to somehow earn a degree that would help me secure a job and enough income to support my kids. The other was to find a career that I loved. In the meantime, school itself has become my new career.

Going back to school at my age puts you into the category of the “non-traditional” student. But I had to give it my own extra non-traditional twist. Not only was I attending
college but I was attending college with my oldest son. After he saw my first semester grades he registered for two of the classes I was taking. I like to sit at the front of the class. My son is the type that sits in the back with sunglasses and his hat tilted to the side. For the classes he took with me he would sit directly behind me. I think it may have been the first time he sat that close to the front. The first day of class he leaned forward and whispered, “Mom, you got a pencil?” I rifled through my ultra organized backpack, pulled out my pencil pouch and handed one back. Five minutes later he leaned forward again, “Mom, you got some paper?” Noone knew I was his mother, or that he was my son. I kept to myself for the most part.

The next year my daughter started going to school with us. I never imagined I would be attending college with my kids. She and I took algebra together. When the instructor would get frustrated and say, “You need to pay attention. You will use this every day of your life.” I wanted to raise my hand and tell her, “That’s not entirely true; I am forty-one and have never needed algebra or used any of this. Not once.” I once walked into class having completely forgotten about a scheduled test. To make matters worse, it appeared to be in a foreign language. Desperate, I leaned forward and told my daughter to move so I could see her paper. She did, but for the life of me, I could not see anything but blurs on her paper. I would squint and it just got blurrier. You know that you are a true non-traditional student when you need readers to cheat.

School has given me a new perspective to life. When I register for classes it is like being in a candy shop. I have changed my mind three times, as far as what I want to be when I grow up. If I know anything for sure, it is that nothing is for sure. The present is all that we have.

To be continued...