

So What's A Family?

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It all started out with the best of plans. I made the Honor Roll (most of the time) and graduated from high school, went to the right kind of college (Washington State University) and made the right kind of friends. In the first class of the first day of the first semester of my Freshman year I met the man who I would marry three years later and with whom I would have my children. Denny was an engineering student with good grades from a good family in Yakima, Washington, some 400 miles from our home. My parents approved. I seemed to have the green light to have the perfectly orchestrated Good Life and Nice Family.

A brief but full decade later I found myself a single mom with two boys in tow, one for each hand. I thanked heaven I had stopped at two!. One was a towheaded seven year old bundle of non-stop chatter and limit testing. No one knew how to spell ADD back then, let alone how to deal with it. His younger brother was a five year old would-be scientist, always experimenting and trying to figure things out for himself, regardless of the consequences. "See mom, the sun goes down over the mountains and goes around the earth, then comes up over there." By the time he was two, the police already knew him by first name. Even as a toddler he would strike out on his own cross country to explore the moment my back was turned.

Being the head of this remnant family would have been a full time job in itself, but I couldn't afford such luxury. A bigger challenge was figuring out how to earn enough money to keep us all together, sheltered, clothed and sufficiently fed. At first I worked for up to three temp agencies at a time, each offering contracts for brief assignments at minimal wage. My was-band's measly child support came to less than \$200 for both boys. It arrived MOST months, but not always on time. Even then, it barely paid a portion of the rent for our small apartment.

In addition to adapting to my unaccustomed role as the breadwinner, I was going through my own belated adolescence. Plunging headfirst into the emotional deep waters of being single in the "swinging seventies", I found the abundance of male attention spun my head around. The free love and sex was dizzying after having spent most of my life being a "good girl". After my recent bruising past of

non-stop tension and fighting with my ex, feeling wanted was exciting, but eventually became about as satisfying as a small handful of potato chips.

I found trying to do it all alone was exhausting. Sliding deeper and deeper into debt - both financially and emotionally - I was convinced the answer would lie in getting remarried. Two disastrous and brief attempts at remarriage seemed worse than the alternative. Somehow, the boys and I managed to weather it all.

When the boys were aged 10 and 12 and it was clear that yet one more marriage was ending, I came to them separately to give them the bad news. I apologized that we were going to once again be on our own, that this latest excuse for a family was just not working out. They looked at each other, then said to my total surprise, "But, Mom, we're our family - the three of us. Other stuff just comes and goes." What I had been trying to create all along was already present and strong.

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