

NEWS

Mom of three finds wisdom in her rearview mirror: My Turn



My Turn columnist Jonna Jerome.

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It's 2 a.m. I lie with my eyes closed, but nothing else is remotely relaxed about me. I am stiff with tension as I listen to my sweet, exhausted husband rumbling like a freight train next to me. I am always astonished he doesn't wake himself up.

I am just about to drift off when I hear what sounds like a seal coughing up a lung. I run into my daughter's room and reposition her on her pillows ... again. This has been happening for the past five weeks after a massive case of bronchitis.

As I stumble back to bed, my husband's alarm goes off at 5:30 a.m. Mine does the same shortly thereafter. I drag myself around the house, waking up the kids and putting the milk in the microwave and the bacon in the cupboard.

My teenager has gone back to sleep after I think he's already up and dressed. My kindergartner gets up even though he doesn't have to. Wait, he does have to!

Thank God it isn't my turn for the middle-school car pool — though I can hear the horn honking outside as my son tries to find his shoes. Three kids in three different schools makes for a complicated morning routine, even if all goes as planned. Today, getting out of the house feels like a botched moon launch.

I leap into the car with my homemade espresso hastily poured in an old sippy cup. My daughter climbs into the back seat with her backpack, my youngest close behind mirroring me in pajamas that, yes, I am still wearing.

I have a robe thrown over them and slip-on Uggs adorn my unpedicured feet. I would have preferred my yoga pants, which though they have not seen a class in months, are more passable as clothes.

"Mom!" my daughter squeals. "You're still in your pajamas!"

"I know, dear. It was that or not make breakfast."

I open the garage door and peel out, earning a dirty look from someone walking a dog in the alley.

"You're not getting out of the car, right, Mom?" I look at her worried face in the rearview mirror.

"Not if I can help it. And you are not going to tell everyone that I wore my robe in the car, right?"

"Got that right," she said. Nine going on 21. I don't know what it is about my daughter that turns me into a whiny 10-year-old.

I manage to get to the drop-off lane at school in the nick of time, then get stuck there, trying to get out again. My son's teacher walks over. Trapped, I have no choice but to roll down the window. I smile even though, behind my sunglasses, I am mortified. I try to hide my owl pajama pants beneath my enormous purse. In doing so, I tip over the supposedly drip-proof sippy cup, and soak my Uggs.

"Good morning! Just thought I'd remind you about the class pajama party today! And I was wondering if you could do me a favor?"

She pauses for a response. "Sure," I say, trying to sound enthusiastic.

"Katie's mom was supposed to bring popcorn and party favors, but she's got the flu." She waits hopefully.

"Sure," I say again.

She looks visibly relieved and waves at my son in the back. He appears ready for the day now though in his pj's. "I'll do it now," I say. I catch her quick glance at my attire.

"The party's just for the kids," she reminds me, then departs.

I pull out, pondering how I had sunk so low. Where is my self-esteem? Self care? Who the hell was I anymore? I used to have a cool job, an office with a door, and an interesting social life. At some point my husband must have thought I was attractive.

I figure I have 15 minutes before I have to be home and get properly dressed. I catch my reflection in the side mirror, and there is nothing but the ugly truth looking back at me. I realize I have turned into one of those moms — the ones I used to see skulking about much like I am doing now.

I used to wonder how they could go out into the world like that — unkept and haggard, looking more like they had just returned from a tour of duty than a nice suburban neighborhood.

Well, now I have a better idea how that happens, although I had once sworn I would never join the ranks. Of course, I had thought it wouldn't be my kid having a meltdown in Target, and that I would never frequent the drive-through of a fast-food restaurant more than once a week, or never EVER get my hair cut at Supercuts.

But then guess what? Life happens. It's not about me anymore, or at least not very often. I still have trouble explaining to friends why I can't meet them for a coffee, a lunch or a weekend.

Not only do I have the same issues many young mothers encounter, but I'm not so young and also struggle with an autoimmune disease.

My friends' children are in college. Or getting married. They have nothing in common with me anymore. I have the pleasure of being the oldest mom in the kindergarten class — by at least a decade.

As I arrive back at the house, I glance at my "baby" in the rearview mirror and marvel at how cute he is as he dribbles chocolate milk down his chin. He actually gives me a thumbs up and says, "This is the life, isn't it, Mom?"

I have never experienced such a day when all the world's greatest truths seem to be coming at me from the battered mirrors of my Honda Pilot. In that simple moment, my son jolts me back to a place of gratitude.

Truly, is there anything I would be doing at this stage in my life more important than this? While this madcap adventure called motherhood has hit me like a hurricane, the very clear answer is no.

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