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Mother's Day: A Journey



I was born on the second Sunday in May. My mom said that I was the best Mother's Day gift she ever received. It's a funny sort of a blessing to be born on the one day that we, as a society, acknowledge mothers and motherhood. As a kid, I often had to share my special day with my mom, and she often had to share her special day with me. I think we both would have preferred it if I had been born some other weekend.

For a long time, it didn't matter that I was a Mother's Day baby. Throughout my 20s, thoughts of motherhood were as distant as the space I tried to carve away from my own family of origin. I needed to grow up, and setting those hard-to-navigate boundaries with my own mother were essential. But I knew I wanted kids, and as the good child of the '80s that I was, I wanted seven

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children because, I reasoned, "Eight is Enough" had too many and the "Brady Bunch" had not enough.

By my late 30s, I was married to a wonderful man who wanted all the things I wanted when it came to raising a family and just about everything else. I had tempered my extravagant motherhood desires from seven to two children. I just wanted a family of my own, like so many other would-be-moms. I wanted to be a part of the "Mom Club," where you get to talk about birth stories, being thrown up on, waking every two hours for the first 18 months, Saturday soccer games in the pouring rain, not being able to sleep when your teenager is out on a date and all the other joys of motherhood. I wanted all that. I wanted ... I don't know, I wanted that depth of love and caring for another being. I wanted to be somebody's mother.

But then came the miscarriages. And sharing my birthday with mothers became a huge, crying-on-the-kitchen-floor problem. We had six in all: five pregnancy losses before the birth of our son and one after. It took five years of utter heartbreak over and over again until our son was born. I lost friends. I alienated colleagues at work, although I must say that being a teen parent counselor during my years of infertility was kind of a cruel, cosmic irony.

I truly hated my birthday during those years. I had to somehow celebrate my own mom while suffering the humiliation and deep grief of being infertile. I felt like my own personal rainstorm, a constant soggy darkness of deep grief, was following me. Of course, the enemy of fertility is a woman's age, so pairing Mother's Day with the reminder of being another year older felt like a slap in the face and a punch in the gut.

Then we had a miracle child. Not only had we had all those miscarriages, we also had several rounds of failed IVF. So when we heard a tiny heart beating eight weeks after conception, there was reason for joyful sobbing in the obstetrician's office. One anxious pregnancy later, our son was born and I became the mother I had always hoped I would be.

The thing about being a mother after infertility is there is no end to the gratitude. I'm not saying that people who became mothers with relative ease aren't grateful for their progeny, it's just I never forget how lucky I am. I spent five years facing my deepest fear, a childless life. Most people who have not experienced some form of infertility never look that particular fear in the eye. An underlying gratitude is the foundation of my relationship with my son.

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Even when my now 4-year-old son acts like a little tyrant, tossing the electronic devices he's not allowed to have across the room, I am grateful. Or when he soaks me with bathwater because he's convinced it's not hair-washing night, I am grateful. Or when he races around the house naked and refuses to put on his clothes and I am already 10 minutes late for work, I am annoyed and frustrated and sometimes I yell at him — and still I am grateful. I am grateful for all of it. For the laundry and the barf, for the Legos I step on and the 2:30 a.m. call, "Mommy, can I come into your bed?" I love being his mom, I love being in the club, I love watching him grow and change. I love talking to his preschool teachers about everything he is learning. I love reading the same book over and over again for months. I love early morning cuddles. I love saying what we are grateful for before I kiss him goodnight. I love taking him traveling. I love watching him build things with his dad. I love thinking about where to send him to kindergarten. I love it all. I am so thankful that I have this opportunity to be a mother.

This Mother's Day I will celebrate with my mom and my husband and son. We will celebrate mothers and birthdays and everything that has brought us to this moment. And I will remember that you can't have a rainbow without the rain.

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Ariel Frager



Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



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