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Introduction

I've always been fascinated with how the little things shape a person's life and that each person's life is different. I started this project with the same interest but I wanted to contact a wide variety of people. There was no common theme between the people that I would talk to and although that sounds like an abundance of content that would ultimately be beneficial for my project, it presented itself with a lot of conflicts. There was no way to narrow down a topic and no way to explain my project in simple terms because I didn't even understand it myself. While I was attempting to interview these people I discovered my interest in human connection and how people can affect other people's lives. This ultimately led me to motherhood. The most raw and natural connection between people. The maternal bond with their children is often indescribable and pure.

Mothers are the most fearless, selfless, and passionate group of people. They dedicate themselves physically, emotionally, and mentally to their child while helping them grow. Mothers drop everything in their lives to take care of their kids. The children rely on their mothers to put her needs and desires aside to take care of theirs. I wanted to discover this a little more and praise those mothers for their hard work and dedication. It was important for me to prove to them they have value and that their hard work is important.

Over the course of the past few months I have met a wide variety of mothers. I've had conversations that were emotional, uncomfortable, intriguing, and thought-provoking. I've met so many inspirational people and have heard stories that ranged from mothers who have changed for the better through their kids, mothers who would give up everything for their kids, mothers with disabled or ill kids, mothers who have struggled with their relationships with partners, mothers in relationships with same sex partners,

and many others including mothers who even regretted having children. I've learned a lot about the mothers in my immediate community but also a lot about myself through this process.

I wanted to analyze the relationships between mother and child and how they affect each other's life but also how motherhood changes a person. I've found that a common theme is that it changes your social circles and your life begins to revolve around your kid's needs instead of your own. Your life "no longer becomes about you... at all and more than anything, a mother's love for their children is unconditional.

In addition, I hope they enjoyed reflecting on their experience as a mother through talking to me and I hope they realized how valuable they are to their children and the world they live in. I hope to have had an impact on the mothers similarly to how they had an impact on me.

Robin

I, like many others, often take advantage of the little things in life. The simple act of communication is something that I would struggle to live without. However many people including Robin and her daughter Rachel, experience this every day. Rachel is a 15 year old girl diagnosed with Down Syndrome and Autism. Since she is nonverbal, it is very difficult for Robin to completely understand Rachel's needs and wants. As a result of Down Syndrome and Autism, Rachel still functions as a toddler in many ways and is often dangerous to herself and people around her. She will engage in Self-Injurious Behaviors (SIB's) and is very strong. Because of this, Robin spends 70% of a 24 hour time frame caring for Rachel. The pure dedication to her daughter proves Robin's strength and Robin has learned that "persistence is a great quality" but the most important things in life are love, patience, and kindness.

Robin is the picture perfect mother for Rachel. She loves Rachel unconditionally and fully devotes herself to Rachel's care while simultaneously recognizing and teaching her kids that she is her own person and has her own needs and interests and that they cannot completely rely on her. She has the best attitude and she "laugh[s] at adversity in some of the crazy situations [they] are in [because] it is much better than crying". She has fully accepted her role as a mother to a special needs child and takes it on with an open mind and a full heart. Although I would like to think I understand what she deals with on a daily basis, "no one really understands what it is like" to be in Robin's position. It takes a great deal of love, dedication, and compassion as well as a good support network. Rachel will never be fully independent although Robin and her husband are working towards as much independence as possible and improving her behavior so she is able to function in society.

Katy

A children's book compared pregnant women to kangaroos. The book explained that when a female kangaroo is pregnant, they carry the baby in the pouch similarly to a human carrying the baby in her belly (which is scientifically incorrect but serves the purpose of relating to kids). In the book, there is a mob of kangaroos that included an abundance of female and male kangaroos.

One of the female kangaroos wants to start a family but cannot because she does not have a pouch. However, another kangaroo mother graciously offers to carry the baby for the pouchless mother. The children's book is explaining surrogate mothers to children in a simple way that they can relate to. Katy used this metaphor to explain her surrogate pregnancy to her young daughter, Molly.

Katy always dreamed of having two kids. When she got divorced she realized that she would only have one, her daughter Molly. Katy loves Molly unconditionally and loves being a mother. She also enjoyed her pregnancy. She felt fulfilled and strong when pregnant with Molly which only led to grow the desire to have another child. When Katy was approached by her friend who was struggling to have a child, her immediate answer was yes. She knew that she wanted to help her friend have a family and that she wanted to be pregnant again. Her friend ended up getting pregnant without a surrogate mother but Katy was inspired. She wanted to help another family receive the "gift that you can't believe you are so fortunate to have". She found a couple in Missouri that was searching for a surrogate mother and Katy reached out to them.

As Katy explains, the process was easy. She had control over what directly affected her body and they controlled everything else. In her words, she was "the medium for that couple to have a child. It was and is their child." Patrick is now 3 and his family and him are happily living in Missouri. Katy hopes to take a road trip this summer so she can see Patrick for the first time since he was born and so her daughter, Molly, can meet Patrick as well.

Christy

Imagine being suddenly alone, six months pregnant with a 4 year old and a 2 year old. On top of being alone, you have just finished a stressful, emotional, and frustrating month of fighting with your partner and defending your kids. But that was only the beginning. Now, you must figure out how to raise your 3 kids. Christy was left with two kids and one more on the way after an emotional breakdown from her partner. She seemed to be upset when Christy continued to get pregnant but she was unable to. Instead, she wanted to take the 2 year old adopted son and leave Christy with the older daughter that she had given birth to.

Less than a year before, Christy and her partner were in a happy relationship. Earlier in their relationship, Christy had given birth to their first daughter through a sperm donor. Then, her partner attempted pregnancy. She was not able to get pregnant and went

through a difficult emotional time. Instead of the alternative option of vitro-fertilization, Christy and her partner decided to adopt. They adopted a boy from Guatemala and they were a happy family again. After two years they decided to have a third child. Christy attempted the pregnancy and again immediately conceived. This caused a breakdown from her partner 5 months into the pregnancy. Her partner distanced herself and showed no signs of connecting to the unborn child. She wanted to put the child up for adoption and take the adopted son while Christy took their oldest daughter. Christy, of course, would not consider this and within a month her partner was gone.

The negotiation of a separation of the kids “brought out a primal mother beast” in Christy and she felt a need to protect the children. This situation, although not ideal, taught Christy a lot about herself and motherhood. She found her deep strength that her children can count on when she acted on her maternal instinct. Christy also found the importance of relationships and in the end, love. She wanted her partner to be in the infant’s life but did not want to force anything on her former partner either. As a single mother, Christy is still discovering what it means to be a good mother but realizes that there is beauty in imperfection and nobody is perfect. In the end she is always “connected to [them] by love”.

Stephanie

Stephanie feels like she’s lost herself through motherhood. She doesn’t feel like herself anymore and she doesn’t feel like her marriage is the same anymore. Her life has changed tremendously because of her kids and she recognizes that they have taken a toll on her life, but she loves her boys and her dedication to their lives is undeniably remarkable. She works every day to make sure that they have everything they need and sacrifices her sanity for the sake of her three boys.

She spends hours planning fun camping trips, works extra jobs to send them to summer camp, and makes sure that they have family dinner every night. Even when we were talking on the phone, she continued to clean the kitchen. This of course takes all of her time and energy. She even recognizes that a life dedicated to her kids is “a lot of work but totally worth it” in the end. Stephanie has coping methods such as humor and a support network that consists of her sisters and her close friends to debrief a hard day with. Stephanie is so much more than a tired mother. She not only works harder than most to send her kids to a camp they otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford, but she also takes care of her own house and family, teaches her kids discipline, has found them the best possible school, and discovered that she was “much stronger... tougher... then she thought she was” through her experience as a mother.

Motherhood, although difficult, led Stephanie to find herself. She found that she was strong, that she can love unconditionally, and that she is a better friend than she ever thought she could be. More than anything, Stephanie came to realize that “motherhood isn’t naturally easy” like she thought it would be and that she is doing the best she can.

She has learned from her friends and the mistakes her own mother made and she “thinks she is doing a pretty good job”.

Nancie

It was six months after Nancie’s surgeries. Nancie no longer worried about her biopsy results and although Nancie generally prefers “natural choices to surgical ones”, she “was lucky to get the choice at all” to remove the mutated gene that was a risk for breast and ovarian cancer. She was sitting in her living room feeling content and free from her constant worrying but still a little uneasy about her new post-surgical body. Then her youngest son toddled over to Nancie. He struggled to climb into her lap on the chair that was taller than he was. Nancie was relieved from her self-conscious train of thought and pulled him onto her lap and he immediately rested his head on her chest. They spent the evening reading stories. They went through one book after another and he spent each story with his head on her newly reconstructed chest. Nancie and her son read all of his favorite books. When it was finally time for him to go to bed, he patted Nancie’s chest and lifted his head to look her in the eyes. He smiled and said, “Mama, it’s so great that you’re all better. This is my favorite place to read.” and then climbed off the chair and ran to his bedroom. Her son had made all of the “agonizing about what to do worthwhile” and Nancie no longer felt uncomfortable with her body in that moment.

Nancie still struggles with her post-surgical body but knows that she did everything she could do to stay in her kid’s lives as healthy and long as possible. She didn’t want to be distracted from her kids while worrying about her results and even worse, she didn’t want to be sick or dead when it she could avoid it. Her husband and boys were supportive and still are until this day. Nancie’s “love and devotion to her kids” is what pushed her to ultimately get the surgeries. She would do anything for her boys.

Susanne

Susanne graduated Law School at CU Boulder just last week. It takes an incredible amount of persistence and strength to finish Law School as a single mother of two kids. Susanne is someone that you can rely on to be fair. She wants her children to see her strength and reliability and use that to stay safe and healthy.

When Susanne had children, it opened her eyes to the importance of love and happiness. She understood the capacity of love that a parent can feel and she realized how much she was loved by her own parents. She also realized that she “could not waste any more time not being what [she] had always wanted to be” and quit her ‘safe’ career in nonprofit organizations to go to law school. The courage and strength involved in the decision to go to law school speaks to Susanne’s dedication to love and happiness in her own life. Her kids experience her love and support first hand. She constantly “ensures the well-being of her children” and is their source of unconditional love. I believe that Susanne is an inspiration to her children. They must see a

hardworking, motivated, and dedicated women to look up. She is a reliable and consistent person in their lives with good values.

Susanne is not only raising her kids to be “caring and productive adults who will add value to the world” but providing an example through her own life as well.

Kara

Emerson was born not breathing with a very rare diaphragm disease. She was immediately hooked up to an ECMO machine to help her lungs breath. It took five days for the doctors to diagnose Emerson’s disease. Her lungs had no room to grow or move so Emmy could not breath on her own. Kara and her husband lived in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) for 7 months before Emmy was discharged but that was only the beginning. Kara and her husband have two kids and a village to help. They needed a home nurse and a home therapist to live with them while Olivia was still unable to breathe on her own. She eventually grew big enough for her lungs to have room to breathe but was then diagnosed with Type I Diabetes. The combination of these diseases caused Emmy to be very small. She’s in the fifth percentile for both weight and height at eight years old but lives a normal life. She is funny and gets along well with her outgoing sister. They often put on shows together and entertain themselves for hours.

Kara takes on her responsibility to care for both her daughters but especially Emerson’s conditions. She guides her through the diabetic process and supported Emmy through all of the medical challenges in her first few years. Kara believes that motherhood forces you to be a better person because it teaches you your flaws and forces you to confront them for the sake of your kids. She believes that she is her girls’ “model to be a strong person, a strong parent, and a strong wife” while harboring a loving relationship. Her goal is to let her girls become their own person. She is creating an environment that they can be free to express themselves by not “pressing any limitations or judgements on them”. Emerson’s conditions altered Kara’s life but she kept her head high and worked through it with support from friends, family, and the hospital. She continues to give back to the hospital by volunteering in the NICU with a program to help families work through the process. Kara is compassionate and fully dedicated to the well-being of her children. Her courage and persistence leads her kids to view her as a consistent source of support and unconditional love and “it’s an opportunity and a challenge to have that relationship” with her kids.

Sally

The Episcopal Church is sacred to the lives of Sally, her husband, and her three boys: her kids grew up in the church, she raises them to “develop their own God-given gifts and potential, and Sally spent 16 years getting ordained to become a priest. The process was grueling but allowed her to have a very good sense of herself and the world around her.

Sally works hard for what she believes is important and good in life including her children. She takes care of them by doing “most of the traditional mom stuff” but guides them physically, emotionally, and spiritually through their lives. She’s brought religion to them in their times of need: moving to California and anxiety among others. She teaches them that they are part of a whole and that loving relationships are everything. She wants her boys to be good members of the community and good “members in the Body of Christ” and guides them to success. Her strength and persistence through the ordination process provides a tangible example for her boys and she consistently proves to be a loving support network for them.

Lisa

Lisa is the mother of nine children. Her husband, Rich, and her have adopted seven of the nine children from Haiti and China. Lisa “absolutely loves empowering young people to be all that they can be” and proves this by raising her nine children to be the best they can be. Their family is very involved in the Haiti, a third world country that needs compassion and support. Lisa is an inspirational mother and a fascinated driven person.

She has a very good sense of herself and a positive outlook on life that she shares with her children. She “found humility in finding that [she] hit her limit sooner” than she thought but compensated by helping the children she adopted. Lisa would go to the end of the earth for her children but realizes that she also has to care for herself before she can give to her children. She is an inspiration to many and a strong maternal figure to a large family.

Kathy

Kathy has witnessed that “children are children” no matter their age. Kathy and her husband have two younger boys but they host a teenage boy from Spain. Her family is interested in the world and interested in creating a community so sharing their cultural experience with a young boy seemed like a natural fit. Kathy loves all three of these boys and longs for them to be contributing citizens of the world. She wants to teach them to be independent and provide for themselves in a way that will benefit the greater community. Kathy is a strong woman who strives to be kind and fun for the sake of her boys and will dearly miss her host son when he leaves in October.

Jennifer

Jennifer and her partner, Rose, have been together for “18 awesome years” and plan to get married one day. Jennifer had a daughter, Samm, from a previous marriage but Jennifer, Rose, and Samm are now their own happy family. Samm instantly loved Rose and if nothing else, that shows that Rose was always meant to be in their family. The three of them are very close and Samm is lucky to have two mothers who love her unconditionally.

She “was comfortable with their family and she became very good at standing up for herself throughout the years” against people who were not as accepting as she was or as Jennifer’s parents were. Jennifer proves that she is courageous and authentic everyday while she has raised Samm to be confident and strong throughout their life. Samm is now 23 years old and lives on her own but spends a lot of time with both of her mothers. Samm’s untraditional family only made her “stronger and more compassionate with other people” and Rose must be the best for Jennifer and Samm.

Gretchen

Having children is nothing like Gretchen, a teacher, would have expected it to be. She is “humbled every day by the challenges of parenthood. Gretchen works with kids ages 0-3 with special needs and her daughter has mild cerebral palsy. Gretchen has always worked with people and more often children with special needs so I can assume that Gretchen is patient and compassionate with everybody she meets. She is exposed to a world that forces Gretchen to be the best she can be and opens up her heart to so many people.

Gretchen is strong, caring and supportive at her job but she takes all of this home with her to her own children. She believes that she has become a “more empathetic teacher and person from being a mother” because she now can relate to these mothers and children in a way that is difficult to understand without being a mother herself. I believe she has also become a more empathetic and supportive mother because of her teaching experience. Gretchen’s children are incredibly lucky to have a mother with such a great sense of herself and the world around her. She is caring, strong, and compassionate and that will only enhance her children’s lives.

Amy

Amy has three daughters ages 18, 16, and 9 but the youngest is a half-sister to the older two daughters. Amy has been married, and divorced twice so is a single mother to the three daughters. The relatively blended family is being raised to live their life to the fullest and participate in activities that bring them joy and fulfillment. Amy has learned what it means to love unconditionally and her girls “have taught her to enjoy the small moments in life because they pass so darn quickly”.

Amy has become a stable and reliable mother who has learned “patience and fortitude” through her daughters. She raises her daughters to form meaningful connections and value the important relationships. She teaches them that trust is the best foundation for a relationship and believes in “taking their ideas and perspectives seriously” but also not acting as their best friend. Amy and her daughters have a relationship built on trust, respect, and unconditional love.