



An August to Remember

Stopping to cherish my children

By Kelli Wheeler

August is a tough month for me. It's not because the kids are going back to school and I'm returning to the grind of coordinating schedules, homework and extracurricular activities—although that is daunting. (What is it, anyway, with kids going back to school so early in August? What happened to the unofficial end to summer and start of school after Labor Day? Don't get me started.)

August is tough because it is my own personal yearly reminder to cherish my children, taking joy in each of their smiles, laughs and giggles. It reminds me to be grateful for the opportunity to see them make mistakes and watch them grow, to drink in their innocence and be refreshed by it. It whispers to me to feel blessed to be a parent and the reward of overcoming the fights, the challenges and frustrations to get to that sweet spot of bursting with pride over your precious charges.

But why do I need August to remind me of this? I need my August memory jogger because it's easy to love your children when they are good and sweet and wonderful. It is when they test your patience, when they are less than angelic, when they fight, when they whine, when they need you even when you feel you have nothing left to give, that parenting seems like too tough of a job.

What gets me through the times when I'm having difficulty summoning compassion and

unconditional love is remembering August 1983. That is what makes me a better person, a better parent and someone who I think has earned the right to pass on a few words of wisdom.

Your children are, despite some days to the contrary, a miraculous gift: little reminders of heaven here on earth, physical representations of unconditional love.

I use August 10, 1983 to remind myself that having children to yell at, argue with me, turn my hair gray, test my patience, make my life more difficult and run me ragged is better than having no children at all.

That day has meant different things to me over the years and guided my life monumentally through its various stages, but it took on an entirely more profound meaning when I became a parent.

On that day, more than 20 years ago, I lost a sister. That is devastating in its own right, but my mother and father lost a child—something my heart recoils at, my mind races away from and my spirit whimpers in fear of when I even try to dip my toe in

what that experience must feel like as a parent.

My little sister was born August 21, 1976, and died 10 days before her seventh birthday in an accident in our home. Nowadays, every electric hairdryer comes with a safety plug and a tag that warns against using it near water—things we didn't have the day a blow dryer fell into my sister's bath. In an instant, our lives were forever set on a new course, for better or for worse.

I've tried to choose for better, but with my son quickly approaching his seventh birthday, old fears resurface and the unimaginable question whispers in my ear like a buzzing mosquito: "What if this was all I got?" I feel both bitter about being forced to contemplate this question yet blessed to have long ago gained such a clear perspective.

Tomorrow is not promised. Your children are, despite some days to the contrary, a miraculous gift: little reminders of heaven here on earth, physical representations of unconditional love. As a mother, you may have given birth to them;

as a father, you were a partner in conceiving them. But somehow, in a way we have a hard time wrapping our brains around, these precious souls chose us to guide them, love them and cherish them.

Funny how fighting can become music to your ears.

So get to it. You don't need an August to remind you of it. I hope my story can be your August. On those days when you're looking for your children's receipts to send them back, stop and ask yourself, "What if this was all I got?" Then go kiss them, hug them and take another look at that mischievous sparkle in their eyes.

Funny how fighting can become music to your ears.

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