

Arizona Foothills

THE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR AFFLUENT DESERT LIVING

A FAMILY AFFAIR

7 HOMETOWN BUSINESSES

BEJEWELED FOR SUMMER:
SILVER, GOLD,
GEMSTONES & MORE

"THE GARDEN GUY'S"
GREEN HOUSE



Dear READERS,



I USED TO MARVEL at my friends who attended parent-teacher conferences and Little League games during their off time ... moms who were well-versed in R.L. Stine and SpongeBob. I thought I had it made. I was a 31-year-old single gal who would meet up with other unattached friends for a drink or make my way to the golf course for 11 holes. Who would have guessed that MY education was just beginning?

I met my husband Kenn on a trip to Telluride with our morning show in 2002. He had three children who all joined him down on one knee two years later on Father's Day as he proposed. Pretty amazing stuff. At our wedding in October, Dane, 15, was the best man, Alex, 16, was one of the bridesmaids, and Dylan, 9, was the ring bearer. I can't imagine my life without these kids, but believe me, parenting has been a real learning experience.

At times I wondered if I was going overboard—attending their parent-teacher conferences, Little League games and an occasional “lecture” from Dad. But as my husband has always said, “Just be yourself ... Kids can't have too much love.” Now, one of my favorite times is helping with homework—I hadn't used the words “sin,” “cosin” or “tangent” in years. And thanks to my 9-year-old and his state report, I learned the state bird of New Jersey. (I didn't know it before, even though I spent time there.)

I've always believed that education is more than just what you learn in school. It's about leading by example. I'd like to think I've taught my step kids the importance of being involved and being accountable.

If you put off a school project until the last day, you have only yourself to blame for a rotten grade.

What my step kids have taught me, however, is also invaluable. I've learned that even if their team is down 15-0, they still want me at the game because there's a chance they could pitch. I've learned that even though I might hear “No, nothing's wrong,” they WANT me to pry. I've learned that even though they're not my biological children, the relationship I have with them and the role I play in their education is indescribable. I've learned I was right when I felt that the moment I met these kids we'd share a bond that would last a lifetime.

Dane left for summer camp not too long ago, and I couldn't stop crying. Alex wants to attend college at my alma mater and someday become a news reporter or anchor. Dylan would like to play the electric guitar and learn hip-hop—just for fun. So far, we've seen Usher, U2, Van Halen and Alter Bridge in concert, with Green Day on the horizon for October.

I used to think a good education meant being able to recite the 21 counties of New Jersey or write a great essay on the New Deal. Now I know it's about being a supportive, active and positive role model in someone else's life.

Warmly,

Tara Hitchcock Francis