

Natalie Morton

How does she do it?

interview by Krya Storojev

*photos by Livia Fremouw,
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Family

How do you balance motherhood and children's school activities and dinner and life and...?

Organization! I keep a calendar with me at all times. I do my very best to attend college while my kids are in school so I can stay available for my kids when they are home. My husband's schedule at LTD is crazy, so I have to count on juggling everything myself. I remind the kids the night before of what is going on the next day. We have dry erase boards attached to every bedroom door. I'll print out color coded notes sometimes, but only if it's a very busy day. Sometimes I have my 16-year-old start making dinner if I won't make it home in time. We stick to a schedule at night to make sure the things that have to get done—like chores, homework and showers—actually get done.

What activities does your family enjoy together?

Bowling, skating, swimming, hiking, hanging out at home watching movies. Every Sunday, the entire family goes to church in the afternoon and in the evening we let one person pick an activity that we will all do

together. Last week was roller-skating at Skate World on retro night, this week is bowling, the week after that is rock climbing. Doing it this way makes it possible for each kid to do something they really want to do, and exposes other family members to activities that they might not have tried on their own.

Do you spend one-on-one time with each child?

This is a hard one because with a family this big, and a husband who works a lot, I don't have a lot of chances to spend one-on-one time with the kids as often as I would like to. It's usually a matter of juggling. The younger kids look up to the older kids a lot, so sometimes it works out that my older stepson will stay home with one of the little kids and I can go off with another kid. My youngest is still a year away from school, so I get a lot of time with her daily. My oldest daughter and I will sometimes stay up a little later than the other kids so we can paint each other's nails and talk, and sometimes we'll get away for a mommy daughter date on one of dad's days off. My youngest son and I will go take the dog on a walk together; he also likes to go to the

grocery store with me. There are so many ways to sneak in that one-on-one time with kids, it doesn't have to cost money, take a lot of time or be planned in advance.

How does your husband (or other support system) help with the family workload?

My husband is great! He helps out when he can. It's hard for him recognize on his own what things need to get done around the house and do them without some nudging from me. But he lets me sleep in and will get the kids off to school in the morning, he'll give me a back and/or foot rub or cook a big breakfast in the morning.

What advice can you give about having a good relationship with all the children, especially your stepchildren?

Your relationship with stepchildren is always a work in progress. Find something you have in common and be open to things they like even if you don't necessarily like them. If you show that you are willing to be open to their ideas, they will be more open to ideas you have. Even if you don't care for the woman, don't say anything negative about their mother to them or in front of them. Don't have unrealistic expectations about your



relationship with your stepchildren; start slow. Remember to have one-on-one time with the kids and to try to treat them fairly because kids pick up on these things. One of the most important words of advice I could give would be to seek professional help if you are having a hard time. Being a stepmom is hard; don't be scared or ashamed to get help.

How do you encourage your children and stepchildren to get along?

Be aware of things they all have in common or things they all enjoy so you can make it easier to help them all get along. They will develop the necessary skills to get along without your help as time goes on. I try to put the kids in situations where they will all get along, like trips to the coast or to OMSI—they all like that, so they are less likely to fight and argue with each other. I just try to find ways to get them to all laugh and have a good time together. I think if they will have these good memories to look back on it will help them down the line somehow.

What gems have you found being a stepmom?

When I'm having a bad day and suddenly my stepson wraps his arms around me and tells

me it's ok. It's also great to see my stepsons helping their little brother learn how to ride his bike, or seeing my daughter and stepson jumping on the trampoline laughing together. I love when the kids beg me to make a recipe I introduced to them, or how my younger stepson has asked me to make him this certain birthday cake every year for the past four years because "it rocks."

Work

Are you a stay-at-home mom or do you work full-time?

I am a stay-at-home mom, but I am also a full time student at Lane Community College in the Medical Office Assisting program.

What is your profession and/or work history?

I was a CNA for many years, but after having my last baby, I needed to be home with my family. Now that my youngest will be starting kindergarten next year, I will be going back out into the workforce and with our economy being the way it is, you either need to have the education or experience to get a good job here. I love the medical field and can't see myself having a career doing anything but helping people.

Cover MOM Natalie with Matthew six, Heidi four, Jared 13, husband Scott, Draven 16, and Julia 10.

How much time do you dedicate to your professional life, and how did you make that decision?

More than I would like to right now. I go to school four days a week, and have about 10 to 15 hours of homework each week. I look at it as temporary though, and try to only let it consume my time when my kids are in school, doing extra-curricular activities or asleep.

Self

Do you remember life BC (before children)?

I became a single mom at 19. My BC life was high school. I had a part-time job, was involved in the marching band, drama, yearbook and track. I went from being a child to having a child. I know I missed out of a lot of things by having to grow up so fast,

Continued on page 12



Continued from page 11

but I am a firm believer in “everything happens for a reason.” I wouldn’t be exactly where I am today if it wasn’t for the choices I made in life—the good and the bad ones.

Do you and your husband have “couple time”?

We try to as often as our schedules will allow. Usually we will wait until all the kids are in bed and sneak off to a late night movie followed by happy hour at Applebee’s. There is a bar around the corner from our house that does trivia night, we really like this. Sometimes, our 16-year-old will offer to make a simple dinner, or I’ll prepare something for the kids to eat, and my husband and I can sneak off to our favorite hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurant up the road. Or, we’ll rent a Redbox movie, rub each other’s feet and snuggle in our room after the kids have gone to bed.

How do you make time for just you—mom time?

It’s hard not to feel guilty about having “mom time,” but it’s so important. What I do depends on if we have the money for me to go off and do something, and if my husband is around to be with the kids. I will go to a concert with a friend, go to a movie, and go grocery or thrift store shopping. Even just taking a nice long shower or walking my dog is enough “me time” to get me through to

the next chance I can have some more time alone.

Message from mom

What have you learned as a mom?

No matter how hard you try, you will never be perfect. You’re going to have days where you feel like a complete and utter failure or that your kids are holy terrors, but you’re probably being too hard on yourself. And through the good and the bad, it’s all worth it.

Do you have any valuable parenting advice for other moms?

Slow down and enjoy the little things. Your kids will remember that day you sat down in the dirt with them to watch the ants march by, or chased bubbles with them. There is always someone out there who seems to have life more together than you do. Just try your best and be happy with what you have and who you are. And remember that you are an example to your children; they are watching you even when you don’t know it. Be a good example because your children are learning how to be an adult from you.

You are a savvy shopper—tell us about couponing.

When there are coupon doublers in the Sunday paper, I buy multiple papers, usually 12. A couple weeks ago, they had the coupon doublers and five different coupon inserts, so I bought 20. I get most of my coupons by digging through the red boxes the Mission

has set up throughout Lane County that people throw their newspapers in.

Yesterday, I used around 80 coupons in all transactions. The most I have used during one shopping trip was 123. I remember that day well, because I saved 90 percent. I think my shopping trip would have been \$210, but I only spent \$18. I love when I can work the coupons to get awesome deals like that. I just don’t have the time to do extreme couponing like that all the time.

Tips from a coupon expert

» Facebook fan pages like Crazy Coupon Lady, Thrifty NW Mom and Coupon Connections are great ways to get a head’s up on current coupon deals and how to maximize your savings.

» Know the coupon policy of the store you are shopping at to avoid issues when setting up your coupon deals.

» Have a designated place to store all your coupons, and also all the deals you purchase.

» Sign up online to receive daily e-mails from social networking coupon sites like Groupon and Living Social.