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How I Knew It Was Time

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A parent's decision to go back to school

By Sarah Netter



Denise Younger had a comfortable job in investments, a husband and two young sons. But when a series of layoffs forced Younger to reexamine her career, she realized it was time for a change.

“I had gotten laid off from one company due to a merger and then another because they were closing,” Younger said. “As I was interviewing for investment positions, I started thinking that I didn’t feel in my heart that I wanted to continue working in investments.”

Younger, who lives in Illinois, had always wanted to become a teacher, but knew that

meant going back to school with a 5-year-old and a 10-year-old at home.

“I decided that if I was going to have to go back to school, I should seek something I have a passion for,” she said. “I was literally starting over. Here I was, 37 years old, and mixed in classes with mostly 18-year-olds, and only a few ‘older ladies.’”

Younger threw herself into her schoolwork, taking classes when her kids were in school or in the evenings when her husband got home from work. During the summer, her parents watched the boys so she could attend summer classes.

“I look back now and ask myself, ‘How did I do it?’” Younger said.

Younger was one of millions of college students—about 26 percent of the undergraduate population—raising children while earning a degree.

Women are more likely to balance a college education with parenthood, making up 71 percent of student parents, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research and the National Center for Education Statistics. A report put out by the IPWR in 2014 notes that student parents are most likely to be single mothers, with 43 percent of student mothers, or about 2 million women, raising children alone while going to school. Single fathers account for about 11 percent of student parents.

Rikki Price was a single mother when she realized it was time to do something different—for the sake of her two children.

“I decided to go back to school to get in charge of my life. I was with a deadbeat loser and I didn’t want the minimum wage life for my children,” the Ohio mom, now a

mother of four, said. “I wanted them to look up to me. And when life gets challenging for them in the future, I want them to be able to say that their mom got through the hard times and that they can too.”

Price enrolled in school, with her parents helping to watch the children while she was at work or in school. Part way through school, she met her husband and they moved out of state after he was transferred. Price stayed committed to her schoolwork. She continued working toward her degree even after finding out they were pregnant with twins. Price is set to graduate this May with a degree in liberal studies and is already making plans for graduate school to earn a teaching degree.

“It can be done,” Price said. “It takes time and patience.”

Both Price and Younger said the decision to go back to school changed their lives for the better. But they also made sure to carve out family time to focus solely on the children they were working so hard for. Price always took the summers off to spend with her children. And Younger made a point not to bring books or study materials to her boys’ sports practices and games.

“Getting my degree changed my life,” said Younger, who is now an elementary school special education teacher. “When you are finished, the feeling of knowing what you can accomplish is wonderful. You never know unless you try it.”

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