

HatchedUX

S1: USER RESEARCH

Insights:

1. Parenthood can be a central part of a person's identity and adjusting away from it can bring surprising sadness and self-reflection.
2. After children leave home, daily routines can change in subtle ways such as food preparation and sleep schedule.
3. Empty-nesters may have more resources for activities such as time and money than before children, but less energy.

Project Description:

Nested will be a mobile application that assists parents in emotional adjustments and lifestyle changes after their children move out of the house. It will serve as a social platform that connects "empty-nesters" through forums and advice panels, as well as a resource for discovering events, activities, social groups, and hobbies catered to their interests and new found free time. The application will have calendar, invite, and contact features to ease the challenge of creating new routines and reconnecting with peers. The social and emotional tools will serve to empower parents through their transition to rediscover their interests and identity outside of raising children.

Interview Questions:

1. How many children do you have?
2. How old are they?
3. How long has it been since you were "empty nested"?
4. What is your relationship status?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is your community like? What groups do you interact with?
7. What have you noticed is the biggest difference in your life since this change?
 - a. What are the benefits?
 - b. What are the downsides?
8. How have you had to adjust your lifestyle since this change?
9. How has your daily routine changed?
10. What did your routine used to look like? What does it look like now?
11. Do you find that you have more free time? If so, what do you do with it?
12. What is the most challenging part of this life change?
13. What do you miss? What is hard?
14. What is the most exciting part of this life change? Has anything surprised you?

15. How does your partner feel about the change? (If relevant)
16. (High level, remind they don't have to answer) Has your relationship changed with your partner? If so, how?
17. Has your relationship with your friends change? If so how?
18. What were your hobbies and interests before having kids?
19. How have your hobbies and interests changed before and after having kids?
20. What would you like to do or try in the near future?
21. How has the way you interact with your child(ren) changed since they left the house?
22. If there anything that you used to do with your child(ren) before they left which you no longer do?
If so, what?
23. Lastly, would you be willing to meet with me (us) in the future to provide feedback on our project?

Responses:

How many children do you have?

3.

How old are they?

23, 21 and 2.

How long has it been since you were "empty nested"?

3+ years.

What is your relationship status?

Married.

What is your occupation?

Right now, mostly mom, homemaker, I do a lot of work for my husband's company. Which probably takes up the majority of my time. I'm also on a lot of different boards for volunteer work.

What is your community like? What groups do you interact with?

We're very involved in my husband's work community, he's been working there for 25 years and we do a lot with his business partners and their "kids," who are in their 30s. We try to foster that community. That's a lot of who we do things with. We do a lot with actually our college group of friends that we went to school with 30 years ago, recently we've moved back into the city so we live close to a bunch

of those people so on weekends we'll grab dinner, or go to a ball game or something like that. And then of course, family. Outside of that we're still connected to our old neighborhood on Queen Anne and we do a lot with those old neighbors. We try to be involved with our kids and whoever they hang out with. We like to get to know and spend time with.

What have you noticed is the biggest difference in your life since this change?

My favorite thing about being an empty nester from day one is sleep. I love not having to wait up for curfew and just to make sure everybody's home alive and safe. That was the #1 thing I was like "wahooo."

What are the downsides?

I always worked part time but mostly I considered myself a stay at home mom. I worked during their school hours so I really missed them right off the bat. It was a weird feeling. I love love loved watching them compete in sports and that was just totally gone. Like what are we going to do on a Tuesday and Friday night when it's not game night it was just really strange.

How have you had to adjust your lifestyle since this change?

Way less food prep. Feeding those boys are you kidding me. So that's been kind of fun, cooking for only two people or being able to go out more often. Day to day, not really though. By the time they're in high school they're so busy and they have their activities after school so it's more like home is just a touch point, get fed, go. So nothing major.

How has your daily routine changed?

It used to feel like I was on a treadmill. You just wake up and start first thing in the morning. I love to cook so I would always make their breakfasts and lunches and dinners and all the prep for that is exhausting, although I do love it. And I was always really involved in their school and their sports and did a bunch of volunteer work for their teams and it kept me super busy. It was pretty constant.

What did your routine used to look like? What does it look like now?

Now I love not necessarily having a schedule. I just have my stuff I need to get done in a day or two or a week and I love the flexibility- just like what does today look like? Do I want to do something outside or do the rainy day things that I need to do. So that's what I love, not being chained to a schedule.

Do you find that you have more free time? If so, what do you do with it?

I'm just doing things I was always too busy to do. We're in the process of building a house so I feel like I can spend a ton of time on that. And not be rushed and be thorough and thoughtful about it. Whereas if I had all the kids at home I know I would be rushed. So, I appreciate having the time to do that. Also, I feel like when I do see the kids it's quality time not rushed or trying to do too much at once. It's such a different role- I've talked about this a ton with my girlfriends in the same position- it's such a fun role to have with our kids because we're not necessarily parenting anymore or laying down rules. Instead we're like how can I help you? What can I do to make your life a little easier right now? What can I do for you? And then I feel like the kids appreciate that. It's a really fun relationship. More adult and less about house rules. I was so burnt out of being the police.

Has anything surprised you?

When they left, I didn't like it. I was surprised how sad I was. Like after my first left, was probably when I was the saddest. Even though I still had 2 at home, he was just such a personality in our house. Sometimes good sometimes bad but still there. He went away to school at the beginning of September and I didn't realize that I was super sad until after I was out of it, probably January. I was like gosh I was really bummed out. With my other 2 kids that left at once cause they're twins, I think I felt better because I knew my oldest son going to school so close to home I was still involved in his life and I could still see him so I knew I would have the same with them. I was super excited for them because I knew what was in front of them and that they were going to love it. And I was close enough that I could bug em.

I also didn't realize how much I would still worry over them. I don't know if it's because I know what it's like being a college kid. I guess I just hadn't realized that that parent feeling never ends. It's constant, I think I am an over-worrier but still.

(High level, remind they don't have to answer) Has your relationship changed with your partner? If so, how?

I think it's gotten better in that we just kind of realized wow it's the two of us. Which is a good thing. And we talk about future plans, what we want to do together or plans for our family. The planning aspect into this next phase is fun and brings me back to be thankful for being with someone who is my buddy.

Has your relationship with your friends change? If so how?

The biggest thing for me that is difficult, I get this a lot- we were just at my husband's 30-year work party and everybody is like, "well, Melissa what are you doing now?" And it feels weird to me that my kids are out of the house, that I don't have a job. So most of my girlfriends are working part time and full time and

raising children so their lives are different. So I feel like I have to be respectful of them- like just because she lives up the street from me and she's home at 5 o'clock doesn't mean she wants to go walk her dogs with me at 5:05. The boundaries with my girlfriends- we're just in a different place a little bit. Some are empty nesters some aren't. And then some are working full time, some aren't. It's just kind of interesting. It doesn't mean that we love each other any less. I notice it more now that I have this free time. Or they will say let's go do something on a Saturday and I'm like I'm not doing that on a Saturday- I will do that Monday through Friday- but Saturday is for my family or my husband. I'm not doing that kind of stuff on the weekend with my girlfriends.

What were your hobbies and interests before having kids?

I was really into my job, I loved it. And then right after college we would work super hard then go to happy hour. Eric and I got married pretty young, I was 25. We've always refurbished homes, we bought this old house on Queen Anne and we've done this several times, but that was our hobby. Everyone else would be going to the away games but we'd be scraping paint. We loved it. We still love it. It was super creative and fun to do together and it felt productive, it felt like we were doing something of value for our family or our future family so it felt good. We have complimentary taste. One of the things we do every single day is we walk our dogs around the neighborhood and we'll take pictures of somebody's garden or somebody's roof or whatever to collect ideas.

How have your hobbies and interests changed before and after having kids?

I love playing tennis, I'm an avid tennis player. I would do that probably 4 days a week. But I have an injury right now so I don't know if I'll be able to go back to it which has been really hard. But it's only been about 10 days and I kind of love the schedule again. Usually I'd be getting up and going to the court, it became so much of my routine. So it's hard to answer this question because I'm in such this unknown again. I'm having this procedure done but if I can't go back to it, maybe it's time to start a new chapter or go back to work part time or do something I've always wanted to do. Which is fine, I've warmed up to the idea, I'm excited about it. It's interesting because of my situation because it could be super lonely. Like I'll do a couple of hours of work a day, but I'm still in my house alone, doing what I need to get done, but I'm still alone. I can remember when, maybe about a year and a half ago I had to consciously make sure I had one or two things scheduled with a friend I had to look forward to. So I'd be like this week I have a musical I'm going to Thursday night with my girlfriend and so from now until Thursday I'd have to earn that and get through my list of everything to do so I could really go enjoy that night out with my friend. So that's kind of what I've done to keep positive and feel

*productive and not feel lonely. But it makes me also really appreciate it, like the other night I got together with my book club. That's not a chore for me, I really enjoy it. Hearing about how everybody's doing, I really appreciate those connections more than I did maybe when I was raising children, I would rush through those things. **I feel more present. And appreciative of relationships.** You kind of start valuing what's really important to you and making sure that's part of your life. Because you get to choose.*

For how they've changed: the amount of energy you have is really different. I had newborn twins at home and I was running my own business and now my energy is a little bit more limited. Like we have sky is the limit for what you want to do for time or money. But when we were newly married all we could afford to do is remake old houses. But that happens for families, you get older and do better but have less energy. Mostly we pick our favorite things to do but what fits with having less energy.

What would you like to do or try in the near future?

We've always been skiers but that's one thing we want to do more of, and maybe travel more. On our bucket list. We've always liked to do active vacations- I would love to go to Switzerland and do that for a week.

What is the most challenging part?

The sadness. A lot of my friends find that most surprising. People congratulate you but we're sad it's over. You reflect back on your life, for me it's what I did for over 20 years and then they're out the door and it's just kind of redefining that identity of who you are. My girlfriends that have had these long careers don't get hit as hard with that because they look at all of their accomplishments in their career as well as their family. My best friend's boys are out of state, I don't even know how she manages. I would be so sad. I had it easy that they were local. It's so valuable to have those close connections that you can be real with. Not try to be brave or pretend it's all fine.

Do you have any other thoughts?

There's a lot of value in talking with other parents about their experience and their advice transitioning into this new form of parenthood

A forum on:

- *Social connection*
- *Fears and challenges*
 - *About what happens in college, safety wise*

- *How to handle things like allowances- what should you cover? This girl friend of mine said do not give them allowance on a Friday. Like how do you want to help them but not coddle them.*
- *When college is done, how do you ween off completely- car insurance or family phone plan, etc. I love hearing other parents' thoughts about this.*
- *What's giving you anxiety, what to do when you're feeling alone*

This could be such a big service to those who don't have a network or community. This is a hard time, difficult to navigate. It's such a big part of your identity as a woman and a mom. It would give me different perspectives on women doing life differently, like if they were a single mom. I would learn from them and be compassionate

Lastly, would you be willing to meet with me (us) in the future to provide feedback on our project?

Of course!