

Dearest Mothers

Written by By Veronica Jones, Melissa Larsen and Christine Whitton / Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

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For most moms, May 9 won't be about decadent spa treatments or gift bags filled with designer goods. It'll be about taking a break from work, opening from-the-heart homemade gifts and spending time with their most favorite people—their children. Here, some of our favorite local moms and their kids share their most cherished memories, the joys (and challenges) of motherhood and their Mother's Day plans.



Donna Gabrilson

Mother of Stacey and Shannon

Donna Gabrilson and Stacey Barnes get to experience a part of the mother-daughter dynamic that not many families get to: The two call each other co-workers and business partners as the owners of GoodyTwos Toffee Company. (Gabrilson's other daughter, Shannon, also lives in the Valley.) For Barnes, the opening of their Scottsdale storefront in 2008 is one of her fondest memories. "It was something that I always wanted for us," she says. "For me, [I get to work with] the person that I've looked up to my whole life."

Everyday, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed twosome work side-by-side to create some of the Valley's tastiest treats—and side-by-side is how it's always been. When asked about her most significant mother-daughter memory, Gabrilson recalls when she and Barnes ventured to California in 1994. (Barnes was a model for many years, and Gabrilson would travel with her to jobs and castings.) On their last day in the state, they experienced a frightening 6.2-magnitude earthquake—side-by-side—from the 25th floor of a hotel. "We were together, and we made it through it," Gabrilson says. "It was one of those moments that was somewhat life-changing."

This Mother's Day, Gabrilson says she doesn't need fancy brunches or spa treatments to enjoy her special day. For her, it's more about whipping up eggs Benedict and watching movies with her daughters at home. "Christmas is so crazy and Thanksgiving is a fun holiday for family, but I adore Mother's Day," she says. "It is a day of being surrounded by love." —*M.L.*



Brenda Warner

Mother of Zachary, 21; Jesse Jo, 18; Kade, 11; Jada Jo, 9; Elijah, 6; and twins, Sierra and Sienna, 4

Brenda Warner begins each weekday at 6:30 a.m. with a wake-up call to six of her seven children (her oldest daughter Jesse Jo is now a freshman at New York University) to get up, get dressed and grab breakfast before attending to her special needs son, Zachary. And with one hour to get the kids out the door and onto the school bus, the Warner household is anything but calm. "By the time 9 a.m. rolls around, you're ready for a nap," says this former United States marine and wife of Kurt Warner, retired Arizona Cardinals quarterback. "It's not for everyone, but it's all we know and we find the joy in it."

For Warner, her family is her number one priority. She works hard to instill great values in her children and smiles when she sees her efforts in their actions. For example, Jesse Jo is involved in her university's "Best Buddies" program that aids special needs adults. "I think, 'Yup, we are down the right path,'" Warner says.

To show their love and appreciation this Mother's Day, Warner's children will be taking a hands-on approach: "I am going to make [my mom] a bracelet because she always likes when I make her bracelets," Jada Jo says. Kade plans to make pottery for his mom. As for Jesse Jo, heading home this Mother's Day is all about time together. "I miss drinking coffee together in our pajamas," she says. "I have only begun to appreciate that now that I have moved out." —*C.W.*

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Stephanie Sandoval

Mother of Landon, 5, and soon-to-arrive son

Stephanie Sandoval, host of "Sonoran Living Live" since 2007, has spent much of the early part of her career focused on work—not necessarily on becoming a mother. Now, this 13-year broadcasting veteran is all about building blocks and baseball. She credits her husband of nine years, Carlos, for changing her mind. "I realized I wanted to do that [have children] with him," she says. Sandoval is now the mother of two and couldn't imagine life without them. (Landon is 5 and his soon-to-be brother is expected July 28.)

Sandoval, whose husband begins his work day as a personal trainer at 3:30 a.m. and doesn't get home until 8 p.m., starts her day at 5 a.m. and typically falls asleep by 8 p.m. "We're not the typical family because my husband and I have jobs with hours that don't really line up," she says. And yet the two still raise a family, maintain two demanding careers and manage a business together. "I have an awesome partner who helps me," she says.

Now, in her third trimester of pregnancy, Sandoval says motherhood has helped mellow her out (though she is still a self-described perfectionist). "I enjoy the challenges of it," she jokes. "But I don't like too many [challenges]." Being a mom has also helped her find a balance between work and play—and her chauffeuring duties. "I drive roughly 80 miles a day to and from work doing the 'mom taxi' gig," she says. "I also play superheroes, although [Landon] tells me I am not as good as daddy." —C.W.



Courtney Gauthier

Mother of Grey, 4 months old. Stepmother of Noa, 9, and twins, Eva and Elle, 6

Courtney Gauthier is the proud new mom of 4-month-old Grey Packer Michael Gauthier—but this is not her first go-round with parenting. After marrying husband Scott in 2007, owner of Scottsdale-based Gauthier Jewelers, Gauthier became stepmom to Noa, and twins, Eva and Elle, Scott's daughters from a previous marriage. "Their mom, dad and I have worked hard to mold these girls into the wonderful little people they are, and I am so lucky to be included in their lives," Gauthier says. "We are proud of our blended family and support each other on a daily basis."

For Gauthier (who is "Coco" to her stepdaughters), motherhood has made her feel empowered and earthy. "I feel as though I found this little piece of me that I didn't even know was missing," she says. And as for the girls, they're thrilled to have another sibling. "She gave us our little brother," Noa says. Eva and Elle add: "[And] we've learned about having a new baby and how to treat a little baby." For the Gauthiers, more really has proven to be merrier. "Now, with four small children, our home is organized chaos," she says. "But with lots of laughs, lots of noise...lots of everything."

For Gauthier and her family, each new day is something to look forward to. "Every day seems to hold another special occasion or a 'first' in Grey's life," she says. "The first day we brought him home, his first bath, the first time he fell asleep in my arms and his first smile is magic to me. But, hey, I'm his mom, and that is how it is supposed to be!" —C.W.

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Jordan Rose

Mother of Logan, 3, and Carson, 1

Walking into Jordan Rose's law office, Rose Law Group, you'll find two employees that you wouldn't normally expect to see: 3 ½-year-old Logan and his 14-month-old brother, Carson. Once-a-week daytime trips to visit mom's office are a part of the routine that involves Rose, the boys and husband, Jason, spending as much time together as possible.

As one of the Valley's most influential women, Rose has had to find the balance between career and family. "I have a really wonderful husband, and we have a great nanny who stays with them [the kids] during the day," Rose says. "We have a lot of family and good people to help."

Even though the boys have become pros with office "jobs," they have a lot of other things they enjoy doing with their mom. Logan has fun visiting the train park and snuggling at night. Though Carson, who has just started walking, is still too young to tell his mom what he loves, she thinks there might be another cuddler on her hands—he has been known to rest his head in her lap while she works. "That makes me really happy," Rose says. The family also cherishes Saturday morning walks to see the horses at a neighboring house. "If we see the horses, Logan always explains that it will be a great week," she says. "And if the horses aren't out then we have to go back and see them so that the week will be good." —V.J.