

# 'Enjoy the Ride... They Grow Up So Fast'

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## Joyride III

By Keith Forrest



Maybe the tribulations for my wife and me aren't quite the crying-yourself-to-sleep-because-you-don't-know-where-your-family's-next-meal-is-coming-from. I imagine that my mother felt that kind of anguish.

There has been much written about the joy of parenthood. I have built my writing career on a fortress of sometimes air-brushed sentiments about having kids.

But when you look up at the depths — that's when you really understand your own parents. Not the greeting-card type of revelation, but life in all its ugliness.

My mom was a single mother. She wrote about the joy and the pain as a Herald columnist for 20 years.

A few years ago, I came across an article she wrote in a Philadelphia paper about being on welfare. I didn't actually know until that moment we had been on welfare.

She shielded my brother and me from the ache. Somehow she gave an outward appearance of hope even in the face of insolvency.

My wife, Kris, and I have had our ears rippled with bumper sticker solutions to the trauma of parenthood. "Enjoy the ride," we have heard from many parents with grown children. "They grow up so fast," is another guilt-wrapped mantra that seems to complicit a myth.

Parenthood can be ugly. It can show us the worst side of ourselves. The struggle of trying to raise my brother and me must have made my mother feel like a hardened piece of gum on the bottom of a work boot at times.

My mother died well before my children were born so I never got to have an unbridled conversation about the pain or the joy.

I have four kids. They are special. They are unique. They are wonderful. And they are incredibly difficult. Not that kind of difficulty that we chuckle about in polite company. The kind of difficult that takes you well-beyond your breaking point.

Future joy isn't always enough to get you through present trauma. Raising four kids can take you well beyond a twisting knife in your stomach. There are times where I would prefer an actual scalpel in my gut.

People tell us that we have our "hands full" all the time because we have four young children. Our limbs are the least of it.

We are trying to maintain some kind of sense of self and sanity as we futilely respond to the demands of four children who are trying to hysterically garner some small sense of control over their world. Our two 2-year-old twins degrade into hysterics rather easily as they simultaneously seek independence and our security.

If they were the only challenge, it might tax us in unimaginable ways. But it injudiciously spirals beyond our capacity when it's synthesized into an abyss of additional pleading from our other two kids — five-year old Josh and seven-year-old Kameron.

All four are astonishingly complex and glorious. But the everyday moments long ago left grueling behind.

My wife and I stammer through this together. My mother did it alone.

We spend most of our time celebrating parents for the eventual outcome. Like sausage making, we don't really want to know what went into it.

Looking at it from where I stand now, my mother's mistakes seem trivial. I could already fill a thousand journals with my own parenting faults.

The real triumph is that my mom managed to claw her fingernails against the pit just hard enough for there to be another day. The brutality of parenthood can be unceasing.

I'm sure that you can "enjoy the ride" later. But maybe it's not hope that gets you there. Maybe it's something more primal. Maybe it's just keeping a tiny beam of light shining into that hole. I'm not sure that I know yet how my mother did that.

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