



STORIES

**“My daycare children always come first.”**

RECORDING DATE

**Thursday, September 28, 2020**

GUEST SPEAKER

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*Transcript made with assistance by Rev.com*

## **“Starting out with a lot of support from my sister.”**

I had a degree in machining in Germany and I always wanted to be a machinist. I thought it was the coolest thing in the world, but I had my daughter, and we figured out a way for me to be able to come back to the United States. I got really cold feet and I couldn't bear the thought of giving my daughter to somebody else to take care of. So, my sister was already doing family child care here in Madison. She sort of helped me along the way. I did my classes via correspondence course through the UW. Then I came and did my midterms and did my final exams. And so when I came, I had all that done. My sister lived in a beautiful community with townhouses and it was perfect for child care and there was an opening. Without having seen it, I sent in an application and the first month's rent and it was accepted. So, I lived close by her and that's how I started it - just as a single mom with my child. I just flew by the seat of my pants, basically with a lot of support from my sister.

## **“Can you go get a real job?”**

Most providers, traditionally family child care have the child care space within their own space. We are fortunate that most of it is on the lower level, but we have had children of all different ages. So we use bedrooms for children to nap in, or now for the virtual schooling, we are, the children use our personal space, my children's rooms.

When my kids were home in the summer, it was hard. I'm like, shh! you gotta be quiet in the kitchen. You gotta get your lunch before nap time starts!

I've always had, like everybody says, oh, you're home with your kids. My daycare children always come first, and even when I was a nursing mom - if I was nursing my own baby and there was another child that needed me, I had to latch off and help that child and then start again. You know, because it was my job and I had to, you know, help other people's children. I think like my boys both didn't seem too resentful. They were very independent, but both my girls were like, can you go get a real job? So we can go to somebody's daycare and we can be number one? Then, they were more, why are you doing this in our house? You know, they didn't cherish the fact that I was actually home with them the whole time as much as the boys did. They took it more personally, I think, more jealousy too, that the daycare children were getting all this attention. But they had the benefit of the backyard as the neighborhood park. Everybody says, can we come to your park? Can we come to your park? Because we've invested so much in making it the perfect play yard for the children. Good and bad for our own families.

## **Family child care can be a successful business.**

I actually show my kids the numbers. They know how much money we've earned and I have made a career out of this, financially too. I have always made a good amount doing this. When I hear other providers that are struggling with how much they earn, I let them know, you need to take more paid vacation, add something every year, a little something so that you can spend

time, just 100% for your family. Raise your rates a little bit every year. Our kids see that we've made a good living off of this business too. Which is not always the case for family child care.

### **This is a sanctuary for so many children.**

I guess I had a pretty tough childhood. My parents weren't as dedicated as they should have been. They made some bad choices and, for me, I think every child deserves a good start and a great carefree start in life. That's what I've always strived to do. I'm tough, I've got pretty strict rules, but I have so many hugs to give and we have such a wonderful environment where kids can just play and that's what they need. Especially now with COVID, this is a sanctuary for so many children. Everything here is pretty normal, except for more, more hand-washing and little things here and there, but just watching them smile and giggle and get all dirty. That's rewarding, to see that they can just be kids. We don't have a written lesson plan. We don't do a lot of assessments or anything like that. I do them in my head. I know what I need to add to my environment to help the children grow, but it's done so much behind the scenes. The kids don't see it.

### **“It's not always been easy to create a diverse program, but we've made it work.”**

A lot of my colleagues are, have not been taking, low-income children with subsidy because of all the problems with the Wisconsin Shares program, the payments and stuff like that. I stuck with it and stuck with it. I always had at least 50% enrollment of low income families and my private paying families understand the importance of having such a diverse group of incomes, of cultures. I'm pretty proud of that, I would say that, we've made that work. It's not always been easy, but we've made it work.

### **The child care union: An unrealized dream.**

It was like 16 years ago, AFSCME, American Federation of State County Municipal Employees, came to Wisconsin and they earned the right to form a union for family child care providers. They stopped by two or three times. One time actually the girl came in my backyard and I was offended that they just came into my backyard. So I said, I really don't do any visitors during child care hours - please leave me some literature. She actually left me some information about a meeting that WECA was doing where we could all go on our time, and I think we got even paid \$50 to come for a release time. I went to the meeting and Denise from the union spoke and it just made sense to me. I mean, growing up in Germany, you're unionized and every company, every type of work needs to have some kind of protection, or somebody speaking out for them. We have WECA here in Wisconsin, but they have not been able to get us all group health insurance under one umbrella or other shared services. How much they can politically advocate for us? It made sense to me. I ran and got elected to represent providers here in my area. I was on the board right from the beginning. Then once our contract was ratified, I actually got hired by ASFME to work for them full-time to be a child care advocate. I was still keeping my program.

My daughter actually ran my program for a while while I did that full time. I kept building the business, and so it was a little tricky, everything. But then Governor Walker came to town and Act 10 was enacted and it sort of sort of destroyed the union. We still have right now, I'm still on the board. We still have a union, but the membership is really down. Because right before Walker came, we had in the budget put in that we were employees of the State, and that wording was huge. I don't think they realized what they did when they signed off on that budget, but that's the first thing that Governor Walker struck out. So, it was gone because that would've been retirement and health insurance for us under the state because we serve. We serve the public and we felt we belong then, you know, those rights. We were so close to that dream being realized, and it was just ripped out from under us.

### **“There is only so much money you can make.”**

We're limited to how many slots. I mean, what other businesses are you limited as to how much business you could do? You have your car sales? You can sell a million cars. There's no, oh wait, you only get to sell 10 cars this month, and then you're done. You're limited to eight slots. Depending on if children are under two, we're limited, even more.

So, the number is eight, if you have one child under two - two is the magical age, then you can still have seven over two. If you have two under two, you can only have five over two. If you have three under two, you can only have an additional two. If you have four children under the age of two, you don't get to have any other children, unless you have a teacher with you. If you're two teachers, you can have eight children any age, but I can't have any more than eight children. We actually, even now, during the COVID asked for an exception to add school-age siblings to our numbers, so that we can protect ourselves more with our bubbles. These children wouldn't be going somewhere else, bringing COVID home to them, the siblings, and then then bringing it, and we were denied that possibility. It's not permitted.

### **COVID-19: “We were very, very cautious.”**

The bubble was the magic word. I think for me initially when it first started, I immediately called all families. This is going on. You know, and so we had two, we have four families with a total of nine children. We initially just asked the families - we have two families that are nonessential workers and the moms both said, "No, I'm staying home. I'm keeping my kids home. Don't worry about us. We're good right now". Then we have two families where there are essential workers. Both families said, we need some kind of help, but we don't need the children coming every day. So, I have a full time teacher, actually that works with me. So, what we worked out, because both families are private paying. I went to one family's home three days a week and my teacher went to another family's home three days a week. So we kept the bubbles really small. She was just there. I was just at the other place, and both families promised that they would keep their bubbles really small. No one went to the grocery store - everybody ordered their foods. So, that's how we initially started it and kept things going. After the first week, I think we had like one week

where we did major sanitizing here, every tiny little thing in the house was sanitized because we really didn't have enough information of how and what, and everything just clean, keep everything clean. So we did that with the private nanny care and it kept going and kept going. We kept checking in with the other families. I would record a lot of books and finger plays and send them out to all my families, so the kids could, you know, stay connected because they missed each other so much. Each family would do a little recording and we share that with other families and the kids would get so excited. Oh my God, my friend so and so is there. You know, to keep everyone connected. Then we decided June 1st to reopen and have all the children back in our program. Because that's when the other families were needing to go back to work too. We set up, we worked with WECA and WEESN and Tom Copeland and other providers, we all, you know, worked hard together to come up with a contract. One for my teacher - we did a memo to the teacher, our expectations, wearing gloves, wearing masks at all times and hand washing. We set up an outdoor kitchen, so all our care is provided outside right now. We have a full kitchen out there. All of the families had to sign a contract addendum stating that, they would follow certain criteria. No children were allowed to come with any symptoms whatsoever. We were very, very cautious, not even a runny nose. Even if it's from teething, we're not doctors, we can't tell. So, if any family member has any kind of symptoms the family stays away. Really, really strict rules for myself, my teacher, and for the families.

### **Living apart from family during COVID is a personal sacrifice.**

Then WEESN and Satellite worked really hard. They got us like disposable masks, and then we did get a few cloth masks. There was a provider that sewed them and donated them. So, you know, that was really cool to have providers having each other's backs like that. But it's so sad. I mean, I belong to a support group, Sojourn, and it's a group of seasoned providers that really have so much knowledge, and it's so great for our community. I think half of them aren't open. They had to close because they're older and they're too concerned about the risks to their family. I personally might, my husband and my daughter moved away to our cabin, and that's where they live now, so that they're not exposed to this all the time. My husband is a smoker and a higher risk, and my daughter, I don't want her getting sick. I don't know how she's going to handle this. So I take more precautions when I go back and forth, you know, I do go visit them on weekends and I live here by myself now. So that's an extra burden.