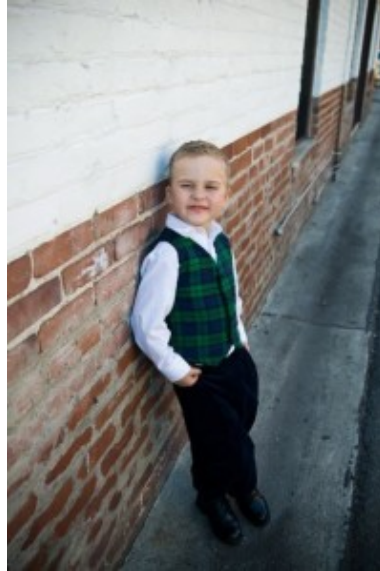


Proud member: Mom of a boy club



Ben at age three

The longer I'm a mom, the more I think "mommy wars" are a contrived battle. Bottle vs. breast-feeding. Working mom vs. stay-at-home. Private vs. public school. I believe we moms have more in common than we do differences. We love our kids and want what is best for them, all the other choices are just that: different choices.

Being the mom of a boy instantly puts me in a group with other moms who all experience a lot of the same joys and trials that come with guiding a boy into manhood. We're like a little club.

When my son Ben was 3 years old, I was able to quit my full-time job and be a stay-at-home mom for him and his older sister, Emily. She was in kindergarten and that left the days open for Ben and me to spend time together – just the two of us. At that time we had Disneyland annual passes and we would use them to hit the park for short excursions like riding the Monorail around the park or eating lunch on Tom Sawyer's

Island. We would do just one little thing then head back to pick up his sister from school.

Some days were spent just running errands together. He would hold my hand and in his other hand he would carry his plastic bag of trains. We would go in and out of stores or to the post office or the dry cleaner. Some days we would drop Emily off and head straight home to cuddle on the couch and watch "Little Bear" episodes or "Thomas and Friends." It was our time and we cherished it like we knew it was going to be short-lived. And soon enough, he was off to kindergarten and I started back working part time. POOF! It was gone.

He and I still talk about that special time. He remembers it clearly and we both get dreamy eyed and misty just thinking about it. It's like our little secret. I can honestly say it was one of the happiest times of my life.

Little 3-year-old boys grow up and become young men. That special closeness that we once shared now is ... different, I guess. He is 10 years old and will still occasionally hold my hand when we're out and about, but only when no one is looking. Cuddling on the couch is reserved for when he is sick or maybe – if I'm lucky – on a special night. I miss our closeness, but know that where we are now is right and appropriate for his age. I have to let it go. It's the hard part of being the mom of a boy.

That is why a young mom caught my eye in the market a few weeks ago. She was obviously frazzled. Weighed down by the tasks, extra Christmas chaos and the sometimes mind-numbing monotony of being a mom of a young child. She was pretty, but hadn't spent even one minute on herself that day. Her yoga pants, most likely worn for comfort, had not seen a downward dog all day. Her young son – about age 3 – was whining. "Mooooommy, I want some nanas!" He was grabbing at the bananas that were just out of his sticky fingers' reach. Straining every muscle to get hold of one he kept saying "Mooooommy,

nanas!"

Her head was buried deep in her list of items she needed to find. She would go from scanning it to looking down the aisle back to her list. She was on autopilot. "Give me a minute, honey," she repeated to him over and over. She was patient and sweet, but with every "honey" she became firmer.

The boy eventually turned his efforts to grabbing at her jacket sleeve. "Mooommmmy, mommmmy mommy!" he repeated. She finally looked at him said "What do you want!" in an exasperated voice. "I want some nanas, mommy," he said sweetly.

She snapped out of it, smiled at him and placed a few bananas strategically out of his reach in the cart. "OK, for after lunch," she told him.

I honestly must have been standing there staring at the whole scene. She looked at me and gosh she looked tired. I took a few steps up to her and I said to her, "You're doing a good job." She smiled at me. Then I said what I swore I would never say to a mom with a young child because it seemed so patronizing, but it just came out, "It goes by so fast. Try to enjoy it. Before you know it this time will be gone and believe it or not, you will long for it."

With that, she burst into tears. Which of course, made me burst into tears.

So there we were. Two moms of boys hugging each other crying in the aisle between the nanas and the prepared hummus. I would do anything to have just one day with my son at 3 years old again. She would probably do anything to have one day with a 10-year-old boy who knows how to blow his nose and get his own snack.

We parted ways and I waved goodbye to her son who gave me a big smile and wave. You know the way little boys do, so cute.

"Mommy, who was that?" he asked her. "Just another mom," she told him sweetly.

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My baby, Ben, now.