

AN ODE TO SINGLE PARENTS

By Susan Vogt

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My husband, Jim, spent July in Bogotá, Colombia several years ago on an immersion experience. Though it was significant for him to experience a developing country up close and personal, what I'd like to share with you are my musings about life at home as a single parent while he was gone.

I knew that juggling four children while still working half time would be a challenge, but I was braced for it. It helped that my mother came to visit for a week.

Most of my memories of the time are a blur right now but the words "never sit down" and "hot" capture most of it. Jim came back from Colombia with an extensive diary of his experiences and reflections. It was moving. My diary, however, consisted of a few notes scribbled on a torn back page of our calendar. It was rough. I used this to remember key items to tell him during our precious 10-minute weekly calls. To give you a flavor of the month, here is my recollection of one of the calls:

-It's hot.

-Our old VW bus was just diagnosed as having a burnt valve. Cost: \$400. Should we fix it?

-Aaron (9 months) just went on a nursing strike (a genuine crisis as any mother who has breastfed babies realizes). He cries when I leave him at the sitters.

-It's HOT! The baby just learned to climb the steps. Ugh!

-One of the kids pulled the phone off the wall.

-The storm door closure broke and the door flaps wildly.

-The paper towel holder broke.

-It's so hot it's hard to push myself to fix anything. Don't tell me how Bogotá is always a pleasant 60°!

-Went to a restaurant for a respite meal. (It's air-conditioned and I hate to cook.) The baby cried through the whole meal and trashed the place. The three older children complained that McDonald's would have been better.

-By the way, there have been a rash of burglaries in the neighborhood. Entrance is usually through cutting the screens in the windows, so I've been closing all the downstairs windows at night and alerting the dog. That makes it hotter. It's scary.

-I'm surviving.

-I love you!

-Do you realize how HOT it is here!

I don't mean to relate all this just to get sympathy. The month was not always so bleak. My July, however, was a powerful experience of what I intellectually realized for a long time – SINGLE PARENTING CAN BE HELL! I also say this with great humility since I realize that I certainly didn't feel the full brunt of what most single parents experience. For example:

-Our separation was supported by our love. (Most single parents are also trying to cope with overwhelming emotions of anger, bitterness, guilt, or permanent loss.)

-My single parenting was limited to one month. I knew it would end.

-Finances weren't in a crisis since I could still work.

-Since it was time limited, relatives and friends showered attention and support on our family. This would be hard to sustain over a longer period of time.

All in all, I was awed by the challenge that I know many single parents face on a daily basis. They, like me, do the best they can. I felt compelled to write this tribute.

We survive! We learn to fix a lot of things.