



Parenting for the first time after 40

Erica Ehm talks about her experiences and shares insight from her Yummy Mummy website By Laura Budd

Erica Ehm at 47, embracing motherhood and thoroughly enjoying time spent with daughter Jessie (5) and son Josh (8).



In the book *But I Don't Feel Too Old to be a Mommy* (HCI Books) Doreen Nagel writes, "Births to women over the age of 40 have doubled in the past 30 years."

In part, it has been suggested that the Women's Liberation movement in the 1960s played a role in encouraging women to establish self-fulfilling careers before contemplating marriage and children. That attitude, in combination with the birth control pill, made it possible for women to take charge of their lives in a way that deviated from the norm.

As time went on, baby boomers, especially women, became more psychologically aware and more emotionally secure. As such, many women today choose their career first, followed by motherhood later in life.

Erica Ehm, host of *MuchMusic* from 1984 to 1994, knew what lay ahead when she had her son Josh at 39 and her daughter Jessie at 42. She was co-creator, writer and host of the parenting show *Yummy Mummy*. She co-wrote the theme for the film and series *Pippi Longstocking*. And, she was contributing editor for *What's up Kids* magazine and wrote three stage musicals for the family market.

Nowadays, Canadian women look to her as a valuable resource for advice

on how to achieve balance in their lives, including mommy downtime. Erica shares her views with Active:

LB: Describe how motherhood affects lifestyle.

EE: Most women have no idea how profoundly their universe will shift when they have kids. Often they are overwhelmed with the responsibility and time required to take care of them. Somehow a "mother guilt" gene is triggered and women stop taking care of themselves. On becoming a mother, I started the *yummymummyclub* website. It allows moms to have some guilt-free downtime -- to commiserate and celebrate the realities and challenges of modern motherhood. It's the hardest job a woman will have.

LB: What are some of the challenges and advantages of starting a family in your 40s?

EE: Challenges appear in the form of lack of energy; learning to be unselfish after many years of being responsible only for yourself; giving up control since you've been independent and in control; harder bouncing back after pregnancy physically and emotionally. On the plus side, we are probably more financially secure and smart about money and ourselves, resulting in a

Evelyn playing dressup with Jessie.



better parent. We're more stable, in general, and we often really want the child. More patient, wiser, and have better perspective.

LB: Describe how motherhood affects relationships.

EE: Motherhood changes every relationship as we know it. You need to adjust self-perception because of how a woman defines herself. No time to primp in front of the mirror. Some women just give up. Your body is never the same so you need to love and accept an imperfect body. There is less time for a gym or exercise routine; eating becomes grabbing a donut instead of making a healthy choice.

There will be minimal time for friends and some lost along the way. New friendships will form with those experiencing similar lifestyle changes. Relationship with hubby goes from lover to partner raising kids. Sex takes a backburner. Mom starts focusing most of her love and care on the kids – this can be detrimental to relationship.

Being a parent helps you understand your family dynamics. I remember calling my mother after having my son and wailing, "I'm sorry Mom!" It's a major battle for women finding balance between working and being home with kids. My advice is to find a job you love, do it well, come home energized and be "on" and "there" for your kids. Or, stay home with your kids and don't feel guilty for not earning a salary. Taking care of kids, working in schools, and helping in communities is priceless work. The important thing is to make a decision that works for you so that you feel good about yourself and your life. Your kids will be fine either way.

LB: Do moms over 40 typically have more or less patience?

EE: I think most moms over 40 are more patient. They have better perspective and are wiser in the way they parent. My mother agrees that

she would have been a better mother if she had me in her 30s or 40s rather than at 21, when you still don't know who you are. Older women have more life experience, so we're better equipped to handle anything that comes at us – but, we get more tired doing it.

LB: Do you find older career moms change careers after having a child?

EE: Yes. Many women will continue to work but they will change how, where, when and what. Often career women will start their own home-based businesses or will work fewer hours. Their priorities have to shift to include raising a family. Often career women are burnt out by 40 and are looking for something different. On my site, that group of women is called Mothers of Reinvention. A friend of mine said to me, she'd rather work in an office all day, because being a full-time, stay-at-home mom is way too much work!

LB: Do you meet in person with groups of moms or is contact strictly through website?

EE: We're an online magazine that reminds women with kids they need to play too. We give women permission to take some "me-time" to get inspired and re-energized so they can be good mothers. If mommy's not happy, no one's happy.

LB: What survival tips do you recommend for new parents over 40?

EE: Create a support community made up of friends and family, and don't be ashamed to ask for help. Make sure you include your partner in all domestic chores and make it clear that raising a child is a two-person job. Do not criticize your partner (Delicious Daddy) if he doesn't diaper the baby as well as you do. They will learn. The most important thing is to get them involved right away and be an equal partner.

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Cyber Granny Guru

Erica's mother
Evelyn Hannon

When I was a little girl, I visited my grandmother every Saturday. I listened intently as she showed me how to sew and knit. I watched her roll her cookie dough and helped to put cookies on the cookie sheet. Grandma was my guru and our time together was sweet and simple. Fast forward to today when my grandchildren (all under eight) come to visit.

I have to compete with iPods and handheld video games for their attention, but this granny won't be thwarted. From the time they were tiny I've sat them on my knee in front of the computer keyboard. We've pecked on keys to locate The Wiggles, and later we learned to send e-mails to their moms. They're still awed by the Google search engine and use it in their school projects. In this cyber age, my motto has become, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em". Forget the cookies. I'm their Cyber Granny Guru.

Hannon also has her own company called JourneyWoman, which caters to women traveling the world (in groups or on their own). Check out journeywoman.com. Or call 416.929.7654.