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YummyMummyClub.ca (YMC)

Voices of Motherhood

Truth or Lies

What I've Never Said Before

2016

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About YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016

Motherhood is... many things. It is funny, and traumatic, and tiring, and wonderful - sometimes all in one day! It is an experience like no other.

This year YMC was happy to announce our fourth annual Voices of Motherhood writing contest. We asked for stories from moms all over Canada to submit stories, based on our 2016 theme of Truth or Lies: What I've Never Said Before.

We received over 190 stories - stories that made us laugh, cry, and nod our heads in agreement. No matter how varied our experiences, we had one thing in common - motherhood. Our judges had quite the task choosing only 10 winners from the collection of amazing stories submitted but they were up to the challenge.

We now present the winners to you here, and hope you enjoy these as much as we did.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Grand Prize Winner**

***A Partial Accounting of Lies I Have Told My Children*
by Christina Myers**

1. The drive through is closed for inventory. Maybe another day.
2. Because it's against the law to be naked in the yard.
3. The Easter Bunny won't leave eggs in a house where there is Lego on the floor.
4. That's a back massager. For adults.
5. I can't remember Daddy's password for Minecraft. You'll have to wait until he gets home.
6. I love playing Candy Land and doing puzzles.
7. Anecdotally, I have heard of children who lost an arm or leg from not eating squash. But it's up to you if you'd like to finish dinner or not.
8. No, I didn't make popcorn. I think you must have been dreaming about the smell. Go back to sleep.
9. I have no idea where the Nerf gun has gone.
10. I have no idea where the water gun has gone.
11. I have no idea where the stick you were pretending was a gun has gone.
12. Of course I didn't eat your Halloween candy! I can buy my own candy, thank you very much.
13. There's a global shortage of ice cream. Maybe another day.
14. The Kids Bop CD got a scratch on. Don't think it works anymore. I know, I feel sad too.
15. I never behaved like this when I was a kid. I would have been grounded for weeks!
16. It's bedtime. No, it's definitely bedtime. That clock is wrong. Trust me.
17. It's not spicy. You'll like it. Trust me.

18. The dentist is fun. No biggie. Trust me.
19. The indoor play place? Today? No, they had to close for repairs I think. Zach's mom told me. Maybe another day.
20. If you let me pull the tooth out, it won't hurt at all.
21. Mommy and Daddy are sad to be going to Las Vegas without you, too. But grandma really wanted you to come visit.
22. If you don't floss, all of your teeth will fall out before you get to high school. All of them.
23. Yes, I really want to go see Minions 2. I love Minions. Love 'em.
24. Hungry Hippos? Nope, haven't seen it. No idea where it is.
25. Yeah, I'd like to have another baby too, honey. Maybe someday!
26. A dog? Maybe someday!
27. Gerbils? I'll think about that. Maybe someday!
28. The grocery store was out of Frosted Flakes. Steel cut oats have the same basic flavour. Seriously.
29. I wish spring break could last forever, too, honey.
30. Shouting? Last night? From my room? Huh. Oh I think that was when Daddy and I were watching a scary movie. The characters were yelling a lot.

YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Second Place Winner

There is so much fear in this big love
by Kim MacGillivray

Where is your mommy?' I asked, kneeling down to his level, trying my best to be convincingly 'safe' in my face, my distance, and my voice. Three years-old, maybe halfway to four, his toddler tummy and height gave away his vulnerability against the vehicles radiating midday summer heat. He offered no response but a shuffling of feet, a quiet gaze toward the amusement park cries at our backs. I did not know this child, but I knew this nightmare. One of many unwelcome fears nestled in against my joy, ever present in motherhood.

'What is your name?' I tried again, gesturing toward my own family as reassurance of safety. But his young mind had taken refuge somewhere more comforting than this empty parking space. Silent and tearless, he rocked slightly, the breeze framing his face in a fan of fine blonde hair. His eyes averted mine as the colors of the sorrow spectrum ran through my mama heart. He did not see me, but I saw him as the very breath a parent was gasping for in this moment.

'Will you take my hand?' I asked. And hearing me now, he did. I hoped my own tears were not confusing as we stood and scanned and listened. I hoped he would not dart away each of the times his reluctant hand tugged free, only to quickly return. Finally resigning his hand to mine, he looked to my face as though to speak, but the fear had taken his words. In their absence, only a physical plea - neck tensed in effort, mouth wide and useless in a silent scream.

'I'll stay with him,' I said as security arrived with lights whirling and radios chirping. I wondered about his bedtime. I thought how deeply he would sleep tonight to repair from this. How someone would keep their tears quiet to take in his sleeping face, safe in his bed. Then, as silently as our encounter began, I saw the bounding man. His shoes barely contacted the ground in his stride, his body an animation of suspended limbs. He did not call out. There were no words or sounds in the window of humanity that opened up before us. Only quiet reverence for this intimate reunion as father fell to his knees, and child was taken into grateful arms.

'You ok?' my husband asked as we drove away, safe and secure with our own children. Yes. No. Maybe not ever with this coupling of joy and fear in my heart. I expected big love as a parent, but no one speaks of the big fear. The fear of the loss of this love is a tangible force pressing in against our happiness. Alongside

my gratitude, my joy and my love, it will always be there. The helplessness to fight against it my own silent scream. A soundless falling to my knees.

YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Second Place Winner

The Mother Lode
by Claudette Manzanares

I stood in the middle of the living room in my pajamas, panic flapping its wings inside my chest. Taking in big gulps of air, I watched my husband don coat and boots to get to work.

“I don’t know what to do! What do I do if he cries?” I burst into tears and swiped at snot with a flannel sleeve. I knew Dennis thought this was merely postpartum histrionics- after all, I had had my moments- but I didn’t think he quite understood the terror I felt at being left alone with our six-day-old baby.

You’re not a natural.

This nasty truth had been lurking at the periphery of my thoughts within hours of Hudson’s arrival. Today it was battering me.

“Honey, of course you know what to do! Just love him. I’ll call you later.” And with that, we were two.

The house was quiet but for the hiccuping of my crying. Once in awhile, static from the baby monitor would carry with it a newborn groan or sigh from the nursery. Still standing, I hugged myself and wept.

I wept for the mothering I hadn’t gotten growing up. Raised by an ill-tempered step-mother whose affection came with strings and went with name-calling, I had not had a good example of how to be a nurturing parent.

I wept at the perfunctory kiss my natural mother had glanced off my newborn and I, preferring to cradle a drink than her first grandchild.

Although these transgressions had been long since forgiven, the hurt they had caused was not buried deep enough.

I wailed at the embarrassment I felt at hauling these inadequacies into Dennis’ loving, grounded family.

Then the tears ebbed. I took one shaky breath, and another. Get a grip. Baby steps. Despite myself, the metaphor lifted the corners of my mouth.

As if on cue, the monitor came to life, Hudson's sharp wail snapping me back to the moment. My milk swelled in response. I looked down at my front, realizing I now had no clean pajamas and would have to do yet another load of laundry. I hurried up the stairs and into the nursery, where Hudson was pumping miniature fists over his face, enraged at waking up alone. Awkwardly, I reached into the crib to pick him up and slumped into the rocking chair. "Please don't cry. It freaks me out," I admitted to him.

Hudson buried his face into my chest as he and I engaged in an act so profound in its simplicity. It was bewildering that my body could produce milk that could keep another human being alive. I was mesmerized by Hudson's profile as he noisily downed his third breakfast, wincing at times at his aggressiveness, amazed that he knew just what to do. I was equally thrilled that I had managed to keep him alive so far on my own, even if it was just for a couple of hours.

"Claudette? I didn't want to wake you if you were sleeping, but I brought you some soup."

I startled and looked up to see my mother-in-law standing uncertainly in the doorway, not wanting to overstep, yet obviously yearning for me to let her be a part of this little being's life, of my life.

As I gazed up at her, she smiled and dropped her eyes shyly, and I was smacked in the chest by the realization that I had a mother right here where my own mothers were not, to help me, to love me in her way. And it was exactly in the way that I needed.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***Reflections*
by Taslim Jaffer**

Motherhood is a mirror. And it hides nothing.

Every dark, desperate thought and every lofty, glorious goal that has ever drifted in your head will reflect back at you when that mirror is held up. As you watch these beings grow, and then toddle away from your safe circle, you will find yourself simultaneously grieving the life you left behind, and vowing to change the world, one misguided soul at a time.

At least, that's how it's been for me. My journey is paved with love, anger, guilt, joy, gratitude, jealousy, and hope. It is the best of me, and the worst.

And I had no idea it would be this way. Nobody lied to me, but nobody told me the truth. I observed the clues with my childish eyes but didn't realize they added up to something big. The clues? My mother crying in her bedroom, exhausted and defeated. Her face lighting up when my brother and I returned from camp. The lovey-dovey nicknames she used for us, and the angry words that spewed from that same mouth. The many faces of motherhood that show up in that mirror.

It's a mirror you inherit when you promise to raise an extension of yourself. Because that's what these little people are. Every little thing about them that makes you tug at your hair or stare in wonder is a part of something that has come before. That's why you catch a glimpse of the recognizable or feel the gentle breath of *deja-vu* blow over you in a fleeting moment.

I watch my toddler grab a toy from her brother's hand, and yell, "Mine!" and I think of all the ways I announce the same thing – my studio, my kitchen, my special pens, my time.

I wrap up my oldest in my arms as she spills her heartache over this thing and that thing, and imagine my own pain smearing ink on my journal pages.

I hear my son murmur into my neck, his hands wrapped tight around me, "I just want to be home with you, Mommy." And I remember that last night I gripped my mother's shawl in bed as grief rocked my body, and I missed her hard after all these years.

Each child holds a shard of reflective glass for me to witness myself, unfolding or growing; changing the world or changing my mind; being all the celebrated or secret parts of me.

The women of my family tread through my mind, the ones who shaped my childhood and my consciousness, as well as the generations of females who exist only as names and stories. Did anybody tell them the truth? About the mirror? That you can't lie in motherhood?

I can't hide from myself in motherhood. And that has been my burden and my gift. I can't hide from myself and that has made it possible to try loving all of myself. If I'm not going to love all of my pieces then I'm wasting this gift of being exposed, of being vulnerable.

I'm moving toward a place that isn't about truth or lies. It's a place built on all of my experiences as a mom - all of the lessons I've learned, and all of the ways I've become more of who I am. A place I am honoured to stand on, a place I am proud to have reflected back at me.

Motherhood is a mirror. And it has shown me everything.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***A Baby At My Ankles*
by Kate Hathaway**

The truth is... I am terrified.

It's 5:00 and I have just gotten in the door from work. Without a moment to pause, I pick up backpacks, clean out lunchboxes, and try to answer all the voices that demand my attention. My husband is trying to tell me the news of his day, and our three year old is wandering around with wet underwear, screaming at her sister, making our conversation near impossible. I try to start dinner, while my six year old repeatedly asks me for a snack. All I hear is 'mommy, mommy, mommy.'

I steal away for a minute to myself, and that's when I decide to grab the pregnancy test that I had stashed away in my bathroom. I tell myself that I am being paranoid, but then again, my period is two days late.

My whole body goes numb, as I watch the second line appear. I am pregnant.

I am terrified.

I go about the rest of the evening on auto-pilot; cleaning up, trying to concentrate on all the little voices, and finally reading 'Franklin Goes to the Hospital' and tucking them into bed. Then I tell my husband, and instead of the instant joy and excited embrace that I was met with the last time we had this news, he looks at me with shock and fear. We sit there in silence and my mind floods with thoughts.

I think about having another C-section, possible 'complications', and more scar tissue.

I think about the trip we were planning, and I wonder if we will ever travel again.

I think about colic, bleeding nipples, sleepless nights.

I think about money, and how we will never have enough.

I think about my new job, and what this will mean for my career.

And I picture the scenario from when I came home from work tonight, except this time with a baby at my ankles.

I cannot possibly have enough time and love for three children.

The next week is a wave of emotions. I go about my everyday routines and start to try to understand how this is all going to work. I try to change the movie script that I had previously written for the upcoming year of our lives. I try to be happy. But every time I get close to acceptance, I think about daycare costs, or the stomach flu, or all that could possibly go wrong.

And then on Monday night, it happened.

I saw blood in the toilet.

My body is numb again. The tears sting my eyes, making the room before me a blur. I try hard to hold them in, but they overflow and fall silently down my cheeks. Somewhere along the way, I had fallen in love, and every part of my entire body wanted this baby.

I wanted the thrill of telling our two girls that they were going to be big sisters.

I wanted to see that little heartbeat on the ultrasound screen and see my husband's face light up with wonder.

I wanted to have another C-section and that indescribable joy when you hear your baby's first cry.

I wanted to feel a baby's soft breath on my cheek as I rocked them to sleep.

I wanted another little voice to call me 'mommy.'

I wanted that baby at my ankles.

In the days following my miscarriage, I feel guilt and I feel overwhelming sadness. I cannot even fathom ever not wanting this baby. I cannot remember feeling terrified.

The truth was... during the fear, there was love. There was so much love.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***Letters to June*
by Jenn Ashton**

Dear June,

First off, I love you June Carter and I'm dedicating my diary to you. Well, to you and Johnny.

June, I'm pregnant. I know it. I said it to George but I don't think he believed me. But you can see the bump, plain as day. I'm so scrawny, you can see easy enough. I guess it's ok, I'll get some books from the doctor. I don't want to tell anyone though, my mom will kill me, and I don't know what to do about George, I lied and told him I was already 16.

God please forgive me.

March 3 1979

Dear June,

I went into town to the doctor's office and told him I was pregnant and wanted some pamphlets and books to read. He asked if I wanted a test, but I said 'no', because I already know.

George isn't very happy, so afterwards we went to the health food store because my friend Leanne who works there, she has a special tea you can drink and it will make you lose the baby. We bought some and he's going to make it for me to drink. I don't think I want to drink it.

It was his 25th Birthday today and I bought him 25 bubble gums, the pink ones with the little comic inside. I don't think he thought it was very funny.

March 15 1979

Dear June,

I have been pouring the tea into the plant and sometimes down the sink. After the first cup I didn't want to have a miscarriage, it didn't feel like the right thing to do. The tea tasted awful and I told George that I don't think it's working.

We mostly stay in bed and watch TV, sometimes people come over or we make sticky popcorn with brown sugar syrup. I'm not very hungry, I only want to eat bananas anyway.

March 18 1979

Dear June,

It got really cold here and our pipes froze. I guess there's nothing we can do, but now I have to walk all the way down the hill and into town to the gas station to pee. It's far, and I have to pee a lot now. I don't know how long we'll stay in this town, George says he needs to find a job because his pogeys are running out. Some friends of ours moved to a place called Port Alberni on Vancouver Island and I said I was glad to go because that was my 'hometown'. George yelled 'no it isn't!' and it's true, I was wrong, I just meant that it's closer to where I use to live, but it was mean the way he said it.

George knows James, from when they use to live together in the apartment above a store down on Main Street. When I first met them, it was in Vernon. They were throwing popcorn at me and Jules in the movie theatre, they were two rows behind. We had some Southern Comfort in a wineskin and asked if they wanted some. After the movie we went back to that apartment, up the old creaky back wooden stairs and I slept with James and my friend slept with George. Afterwards George played guitar he was really good and I said I played too. I'm just learning, but I can already play 3 chords. He's going to teach me how to play Wish You Were Here by Pink Floyd.

I guess I knew right then that I loved him.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***Just the One?*
by Lori Ross**

It happens at the park, I'll hear it at a party, on vacation, sometimes even someone I don't know at my daughter's school will utter it, those three grating words that make my stomach turn, my hands want to coil into fists, and my brain poised to come up with the most hateful, sarcastic response. But I never do. I just smile and give them my party line, delivered smilingly, honed through the years to sound spontaneous, easygoing and laidback, yet still deflect the true source of the question.

"Just the one?"

"Just? Ha ha. Oh believe me, my daughter is not 'just' anything."

From there, we're both laughing, words like handful and character getting thrown around jokingly, as the raging need to say what I'm really thinking subsides and I remind myself it's an innocent comment, a version of small talk. They were only trying to make conversation.

Ooh, but if I could say what I wanted to, there are so many ways I would let people know what I'm really thinking.

Snarky: Oh my god, you're right. I totally forgot about my other child. Thanks for reminding me.

Truthful overshare: Yes, just one. We weren't able to have any others, never able to get pregnant at all again, despite all those hormones and tests and years of trying. Doctors never figured out why not even IVF worked. **Insert dramatic sigh**

Defensive: Just? Seriously? You think having one is a cakewalk? You try being your kid's constant source of entertainment. Playing princess and Lego and Xbox and Minecraft until you think your head might explode. You try having to be on ALL. THE. TIME.

Angry: Don't look at me like that. My daughter is amazing. She's not just anything except fabulous. Smart and funny and independent and kind. She's this incredible miraculous gift that I wake up every morning being grateful for.

Sad: Yes, just one. Sometimes I look at people with their big beautiful families, and my throat starts to close up, and I feel the tears coming on, because even though I have moved past the pain of infertility, I feel so incredibly guilty that I couldn't give my daughter a sibling. I worry that she's lonely, that she'll grow up selfish or narcissistic or awkward like people say only children are. Yes, I constantly worry about her, and I worry about that worrying, that she'll feel that pressure, and do everything she can to get away from me.

Philosophical: Yes, I'm not a particularly spiritual person but I've come to believe things happen for a reason. And I've made my piece with it. Mostly.

But I never say those things out loud, and I most likely never will, because sometimes that's too much even for me. But yes, I have just one. One beautiful, intelligent, caring, hilarious, talented, spunky nine-year-old daughter who I adore, and that makes me the luckiest mother in the world.

Just saying.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***A Letter to My Son about the Lies I Told*
by Ashley Perna**

There is a wonderful line in one of my favourite episodes of Doctor Who – an episode I can't wait to watch with you. In the final moments of the episode, the Doctor about the nature of choice. "Sometimes there are no good choices," he explains, "but you still have to choose." That's one of the fundamental truths of motherhood; one that nobody ever talks about. Sometimes there are only two options available, and neither of them good. In our case, I chose the only option that would lead to your eventual happiness, even though I had to lie to you about it at the time.

I never wanted to leave you. I missed five long months of your life, and that, more than living with his abuse, nearly killed me. I only saw you in brief moments – a meal here, a few hours after school there – and I lied to you the whole time. I lied about my own health, mental state, and safety ("I'm fine, baby, no need to worry"), my lack of housing ("I'm just going back to the office late so I can get a few extra hours in"), and even why you and I could no longer live together ("he's just being a bully, nothing more, and he's going to get help so we can go home soon"). Still, even with the benefit of hindsight, I'm not convinced there was a better choice.

At the end of the day, it was stay and continue to be abused, often with you as witness, or leave and lose my two weeks a month with you. There were no good options, but I still had to choose.

The truth is, during those months I ached for you. I often regretted my choice, not because I missed him but because I missed you. I never cried over the loss of that toxic relationship but always over the loss of you.

I had been blind for too long to how the abuse affected me but saw how witnessing it affected you. I see now how I should have made this choice years ago, but the truth is I didn't know how to recognize the signs then. He had me convinced they were signs of love and that my mental illness rendered me incapable of seeing them that way.

By the time I was able to see the abuse for what it was, it was too late to leave and still have the finances available to care for you. He'd often remind me that if, it weren't for his "kindness," I wouldn't have a "roof over [my] head", and he'd

remind me that I'd lose you. That was an unbearable choice, so I avoided making it.

Truth is, it was unbearable. Being without you was almost impossible to survive, but so was the abuse, so was knowing that you'd cower at the top of the stairs, listening to each and every word. Knowing now that I'm finally housed and have you back with me that the ongoing exposure to that level of abusive affected you – that, at just seven years old, you'd feel responsible for my safety to the point of having panic attacks – is even harder than being without you ever was.

The truth about the last five months, and, indeed, the years before that, is that I was living through hell, and there were no good decisions that would get me out. Still, I had to choose. I'm just grateful that my choice, as unbearable as it was, eventually brought me back to you.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***The Pruning Process of Motherhood*
by Andrea Marlene**

This is a well-known truth about becoming a mother: you risk losing yourself.

I was somewhat naive about what having children would do for me. I was in my late twenties and held a University degree and a good job. But I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. When, after the birth of my second child, the day finally came that I quit my job I felt free, unburdened and in control of my life.

That feeling didn't last long.

Being at home full-time with two small children was anything but the leisurely life I'd envisioned. Both of my kids were "spirited," which is a nice way of saying they didn't do what I wanted them to. But the most surprising thing for me as an introvert was how lonely life got. While it was nice not having to be sociable at a job every day, I hadn't anticipated the fact that I often couldn't visit with people when I did want to. Working around feeding and nap schedules made getting out of the house challenging. Having two spirited kids made it nearly impossible. At some point I just stopped trying.

My life became only about my kids. Taking care of them was all I did. I loved them like crazy and I wanted to be with them more than anything. But after a few years I forgot who I had been before they came along.

I'd lost myself in motherhood.

But here's what I've never said before: I found myself there, too.

Losing my identity was difficult but it opened the door to find out what truly mattered to me. I realized a lot of the things I'd done before I'd had kids weren't important anymore. Being stuck at the grocery store with a screaming toddler on more than one occasion helped me get over my concern with what others thought of me. That was one huge battle finally won.

After stripping away the unimportant things, I could begin to see what I really did care about. When my kids moved past the baby stage they could distinguish right from wrong so I needed to teach them real things about life. And that made me start to wonder why I thought a certain way, which caused me to start examining my own beliefs. I'd realized I couldn't teach my kids what's really important if I hadn't figured it out first.

And then something else happened: I started to feel motherly towards all children. Suddenly, I'd developed a social conscience that wouldn't let me ignore the needs of hurting or hungry kids in the world. And when another mother's child was damaged, my heart broke, too.

Your priorities shift when you become a mother. You want to leave the world a better place for your kids and that means working for the greater good of all.

In this way, losing myself in motherhood freed me to find myself and my place within the world as a whole. Motherhood is a refining process; your selfishness is stripped away and that leaves room for your heart to grow bigger. It's a pruning of the overgrowth so that something beautiful can bloom in place of what you no longer need.

Before you have a baby you know it will change your life but you don't truly understand how much it will change YOU.

This is the truth: I lost myself in motherhood. This is the greater truth: I found a much better version of myself there, too.

**YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016
Runner Up Winner**

***Sneaking Is a Career-Killer*
by Maia Gibb**

It seemed like a good idea at the time and I was stuck. My three-year-old son was sick enough that his daycare teacher turned him away at the door and I couldn't find a sitter.

My plan involves sneaking him into the office, making a bed under my desk so he can watch movies on my iPad all day while I meet my deadline. So, a little before 8, when my colleagues arrive, I arrange his blankets and pillow, toys and iPad like a cute baby bear den and explain carefully and slowly so that he understands: he must be quiet and let mummy work. Which I do - typing away, feeling all balanced and successful. Look at me! With just a little initiative and planning, anyone can achieve work life balance. It is possible to have it all. You just need to have the will to make it happen.

Just like Icarus, it seems I flew too close to the sun.

As I finish sending an email, a distinct odour wafts up and makes my heart begin to race. Under the desk Felix is sitting on his blanket. His pants are off and he is examining his hands, which are clutching handfuls of poo. "Hi mommy," he says sweetly smiling.

"No!" I stage whisper. "Don't move. I mean it, Felix. I will kill you if you move." He laughs because he suspects this is the beginning of a fun little game. I don't have any wipes, because that requires a level of planning I haven't mastered yet. So I grab the edge of his blanket and use it to scrape the poo off his hands. I'm consumed with fear that this smell will soon be detected by childless workmates who inhabit the cubicles around me. So I focus on containing the mess by stuffing his clothing, blanket and stuffed toys in my recycling bin and turning it upside down. In this moment, Felix manages to scoot past me, running bare-assed and laughing down the hallway.

I grab a handful of tissues and follow him trying to look casual while picking up small pieces of poo, before someone steps on them. I am forced to stop for a moment at the photocopy machine. "Yes, I did catch that webinar on new marketing ideas for attracting Millennials. Oh, I agree, it was very well done...." The whole time praying that no one else detects the little brown lumps I see on the carpet near Finance. I manage to break free, following the trail to his new hiding spot under an empty desk reserved for an absent co-op student and pull

him out by a sticky bare leg. Carrying him like a slimy football, I race to the bathroom and plunk him into one of the shallow sinks.

I splash water on his butt a few times before I glance up to catch my image in the huge mirror above the sink. My hair's a mess, my eyes bloodshot and weary. There is a wide streak of poo running from my forehead to my chin. And as my shoulders sink in defeat, the CEO walks through the door, takes in the scene before her and shoots me a look that can only be interpreted as, "And this is why you'll never advance in your career." Before hurrying into the furthest stall.

YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016

Meet the 2016 Voices of Motherhood Writing Contest Judges

Lori Lansens, Author

Lori Lansens was a successful screenwriter before she burst onto the literary scene in 2002 with her first novel *Rush Home Road*. Published in eleven countries, *Rush Home Road* received rave reviews around the world. Her follow-up novel *The Girls* was an international success as well. Rights were sold in 13 territories and it featured as a book club pick by Richard & Judy in the UK, selling 300,000 copies. Her third novel *The Wife's Tale* is currently in development as a feature film. Born and raised in Chatham, Ontario, Lori Lansens now makes her home in the Santa Monica Mountains with her husband and two children.

Gabrielle Johnson, Editor and Writer

Toronto-based editor and writer Gabrielle Johnson shops for work, play and therapy (not necessarily in that order). A regular contributor to Canada's top fashion, beauty and lifestyle publications, including FASHION, FLARE, Hello!, Toronto Life and Glow, she recently joined the Corus Entertainment team as managing editor of WDish.

Julie Cole, Co-Founder, Mabel's Labels

Julie is the mother of six and a co-founding VP of Mabel's Labels, the leading provider of labels for the stuff kids lose! Mabel's Labels has grown from basement start-up into an award winning, celebrity endorsed and international phenomenon. As company spokeswoman, Julie is well-known amongst North American entrepreneurs and her dynamic personality has led to numerous speaking engagements, from university business classes to TV appearances, including NBC's The Today Show, HLN's Raising America, Canada AM, Breakfast Television, The Marilyn Denis Show, Metro Morning, CH Morning Live, Better TV, The Mom Show, Fox 5 San Diego and WGN's Midday. She's also a well known writer in the mom space.

Scott Stratten and Alison Kramer, (UnMarketing)

Scott Stratten and Alison Kramer are cohosts of not only The UnPodcast, but five children, two dogs and two cats. UnMarketing is their fourth best-selling book together, which represent their thoughts on the changing world of business through their experiences of entrepreneurship, two degrees (Alison), not lasting long as an employee (both) and screaming at audiences around the world (Scott, Alison is more polite). They were put on this earth to remind the world that not all Canadians are passively polite. Businesses like PepsiCo, Saks Fifth Avenue, Cirque du Soleil and others have been brave enough to want their advice, to the point that Scott has been named one of the Top 5 Social Media Influencers in the

world by Forbes.com. They now spend their time keynoting around the world and realize they rank 10th and 11th in order of importance in their home

Erica Ehm, Publisher, YummyMummyClub.ca

Erica Ehm has gone from rock'n roll to rocking the cradle. She is the creator/publisher YMC which speaks the realities of being a modern parent. She is also CEO of Ehm & Co, which partners with brands and agencies to help them connect with moms. Erica's son Josh, daughter Jessie and hubby Terry give her the freedom to have a life that includes being a mom and wife, but also an entrepreneur, girlfriend, avid reader, part-time runner, and full time multi-tasker.

Jeni Marinucci, Editor-in-Chief, YummyMummyClub.ca

Jeni Marinucci is Editor-in-Chief at YMC, a freelance writer, and mom to a school-age son and a teenage daughter. She has a guilty conscience, a love for humour, and a questionable home-haircut. After her children were old enough to make their own sandwiches, she returned to University to complete her B.A. in English Literature—a designation which has provided her with an extensive library and crushing student loans. When no teaching college wanted her, she had to choose between taking orders through a drive-thru window or from an editor. She chose the latter. Jeni's son wants her attention and her teenager wants anything but. Her neighbours wish she would cut her lawn.

YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016

About YMC

Once you've felt the overwhelming, crushing responsibility of taking care of a child, you'll never see the world in the same way the same again. You're now one of the millions of mothers around the globe, and yet ironically, you sometimes feel isolated and alone.

YummyMummyClub.ca (YMC) is where women with kids can vent, laugh, share opinions, teach, and be heard. Our stories are written by moms, for moms (and a couple of dads). It's where you come when you need a few moments to yourself to be reminded you're not alone.

If you're trying to find the near impossible balance of raising kids while still finding time for yourself, YMC is for you.

Welcome to the club.

YMC Voices of Motherhood 2016

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TD and TD Reads are committed to making a positive impact where they do business and where their customers and employees live and work. And that includes supporting programs that ensure access to quality youth initiatives that focus on:

- Promoting children's literacy
- Supporting young people from diverse and underserved communities
- Promoting access to arts and culture for youth

Veritas

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Veritas is a North American agency that walks the line between public relations and marketing to inspire positive word-of-mouth and drive brand preference. The agency specializes in influencer marketing and reaching brand advocates through digital, social media, promotional and traditional channels. Veritas is headquartered in Toronto with offices in Montreal and Vancouver.

W Dish

www.wdish.com

W Dish is your source for the latest celebrity news, fashion trends and beauty must-haves.

Mabel's Labels

www.mabelslabels.com

Today, Mabel's Labels is the best-known brand of durable labels for families, and our growing line of products features baby labels, child safety products, sports labels, household organizational labels and seasonal items. They're extremely durable, they're laundry, dishwasher and microwave safe – and they're 100% guaranteed.