

HEART & SOUL: ‘Luckiest woman’ has seen the light

BY JENNIFER HANSEN
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LITTLE ROCK — “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

As recently as last week, I was still struggling with that one. Any answer I’ve come up with always seemed a little confining. There were so many things I’ve wanted to be and do.

Last week, however, the answer finally came. It arrived early in the morning, when the best answers usually show up. Ready? When I grow up, I want to be the luckiest woman in the world. In fact, I already am that fortunate person.

Oh yes, it’s true and I can prove it. Met my kids? Know my boyfriend? Been gazed at adoringly by my dogs? Then you know I’ve earned that title. Met my friends and colleagues? Sat on my cozy red couch and sipped coffee by my fire? Seen my house full of curious, delightful, odd things collected throughout my curious, delightful, odd life?

How about this - ever heard about the scholarships that allowed me to attend great schools? The jobs that changed my life, the friends who reached out when I needed a hand, the mentors who passed my name along?

Were there lean times, hard times, sad times, bad times? Sure. Were there disappointments, tragedies, betrayals? Of course. I’ve lived a real life and so have my friends, so we don’t need to talk about that stuff.

Now that I’ve finally figured out what I want to be when I grow up, I’m going to start reinforcing that goal just as I would any other. I’m going to focus on miracles, on gifts small and large, on the incredible good fortune that attends my every inhale and exhale.

When the alarm goes off in the morning, I’ll say - out loud - how lucky I am to wake up in a warm bed; how fortunate I am to have a fresh start to achieve something new; how good it is to see my sleepy son start his day. Each time I sit down to work, I’m going to remind myself how blessed I am to have interesting work to do and to get paid for doing it; how cool it is to have a computer; how thankful I am for every good idea.

Big deal, you may say. This isn’t so special, this is ordinary good fortune. Nothing here to earn me luckiest-woman-in-the-world status. And that’s where you’d be wrong.

For example, not too long ago I learned I was born with a condition that makes successful pregnancies highly unlikely. Until recently, this random condition was difficult to diagnose and in my case, never was.

Now, there are two ways I could proceed with information like that. I could focus on the fact that this finally explains my many miscarriages. I could go back and relive those losses, and the crushing despair that accompanied each one. Or, I could focus on the fact that miraculously, I carried two babies to term. One of them is my beautiful 19-year-old daughter. The other is my handsome 16-year-old son.

If you've read this column before, I don't have to tell you which part of that news I'll focus on. All I have to do is look at my children to know life doesn't get luckier than this.

Or how about this? Three years ago, God decided I needed one more child. Unexpectedly, and with not one minute of labor, a 17-year-old middle child was delivered to our family. She needed us, and our cup overflows.

Come some bitter day, perhaps one when the wind howls through sheets of sleet, when the electricity is out and all seems bleak, when life feels gray and grim and lonely ... come a day like that when I forget my status as the world's luckiest woman, kind reader, please ask me this:

How many people get to write a column about what's truly in their heart? How many are privileged to send a positive message into a challenging world each and every week? And how many can say, with absolute confidence, that they know exactly what they want to be when they grow up because they already are that thing?

Write to Jennifer Hansen at Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, P.O. Box 7, Springdale, Ark. 72765. E-mail her at:

jhansen@arkansasonline.com

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