

— YOUR KIDS AND MINE —

Your Kids and Mine

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Making a Big Change

Valerie rocked baby Jarrod as she fed him. Her mama had rocked her in this same noisy old rocking chair when she was a baby. Mama was gone now, and Valerie would never fix the squeak. The sound was too sweet.

Valerie sang softly. When her baby boy looked up and smiled, she knew that she had never felt so happy in her whole life.

But then she thought about what it would be like to go back to work. That time was coming soon. She would have to drop off Jarrod at day care every morning and pick him up after work. She wouldn't be able to get him off her mind all day long.

As she looked down at her baby, a tear ran down her cheek. "How can I possibly leave you?" she whispered in his little ear.

That night she told her husband, James, what she was feeling. "I've been thinking," she began. "Maybe I don't have to go back to work."

“I wish you didn’t have to, honey,” James said. “But we need two paychecks. What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about working at home,” Valerie said. “I’m talking about taking care of other people’s kids. You know—day care.”

“Here? I don’t know,” James said, shaking his head.

“I know there would have to be some changes,” Valerie said. “But think about it. My job didn’t pay that much anyway. After paying for day care, I’d be bringing in even less. I bet I could make close to the same amount right here at home.”

“I don’t know if I want our house crawling with kids,” James said.

“It would be only during the day,” Valerie said.

“We’d better think about this real hard,” said James.

The next day, Valerie went to see Nia, someone she knew who did day care in her home. Valerie wanted to pick Nia’s brain. And maybe even to see if Nia’s home could be a good place for Jarrod, if Valerie went back to her job.

As she walked into Nia’s house, a flying doll hit Valerie in the arm. Two little boys were eating their morning snack at the table. One of them had spilled his juice all over the floor. A baby was trying to climb the stairs. Another baby was in a high chair, crying as she waited to be fed.

Two bigger children were punching each other. Another child was screaming at the top of her lungs. The

TV was turned up so loud that it almost drowned out the children's noise.

"You enjoy this?" Valerie asked her friend.

"I'm used to it!" Nia said, laughing.

"You seem to have an awful lot of kids here," Valerie said. "Eight? Am I counting right?"

"Yeah, that might be one or two more than I'm supposed to have," said Nia. "But it's more money, you know?"

Valerie tried to talk more with Nia. But there was just too much going on around them. It was time to go. No way would she ever leave her baby at a place like this. And no way would she provide day care like this.

On the way home, Valerie spotted a sign on a house: "Lady Diana's Day Care." Cute name, Valerie thought. She walked right up and knocked on the door.

A large, older woman came to the door wearing a big smile. Valerie told her why she had stopped by. "Come on in and look around, honey," said the woman named Diana.

Inside, two babies and three toddlers were playing quietly on the floor. Soft music was in the air. The TV was not on.

Lady Diana showed Valerie all around. When two of the children began fighting over a toy, the woman didn't get upset. Instead, she calmly helped them work things out. Then she and Valerie sat down together for a cup of

coffee. Valerie gently placed Jarrod on the floor with the other babies.

“Here’s the way I look at it,” Diana began. “There’s day care and then there’s day care. If you want to, you can run a zoo. Or you can make a nice place for children to be. And keep some peace for yourself. You just have to plan a little bit. And even so, you have to be ready for anything. You never know what’s going to happen!”

“I grew up in a big family,” said Valerie. “I know what you’re talking about.”

“Now, I can see that you love your baby,” Diana said. “Do you love children even if they’re not your own?”

“I do,” said Valerie. “What would this world be without children?”

“Well, providing day care takes a certain kind of person,” said Diana. “You should be in good health and have plenty of energy. Does that sound like you?”

“Yes, it does,” said Valerie.

“You have to be able to keep your cool, no matter what,” said Diana.

“I do that pretty well.”

“You have to really enjoy being with children. Day care takes up your whole day. Why do you think they call it day care?” Diana let out a great big laugh.

Valerie laughed with her.

“You must have lots and lots of patience,” Diana continued. “And you must love children for who they are.”

Valerie said, “Oh, yes!”

“You must be able to keep the kids under control—but in a kind way,” said Diana.

“I learned about that with my younger brothers and sisters,” said Valerie. “And I took some early childhood courses in school.”

“Good for you!” said Diana. “It also helps to be a good problem solver.”

“I think I am,” said Valerie.

“One more thing,” said Diana. “Don’t expect to get rich from this kind of work.”

“Oh, I don’t,” Valerie said with a smile. “I only have to make enough so I can stay home with my baby.”

“Then, honey, you just might have what it takes,” Diana said.

“Do you really think so?”

“Sure, I do. Now, let’s talk business. If you decide to be a day care provider, you need a license.”

A license? Valerie hadn’t thought about that. And as Diana kept talking, she learned that running a home day care was a lot more than taking care of children.

As soon as she and Jarrod got home, she put him down for his nap. Then she went on the internet to find out what she would need to get a day care license.