

I Was Devastated After My Kids Left The House. This Is How I Rebooted My Life.

HUFFPOST: Brette Sember
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(Photo: Photo Courtesy Of Brette Sember)

2018 was a crisis year for me.

Our daughter moved far away after finishing medical school, our son moved out to his own apartment, I hit 50, and menopause hit the gas pedal with mood swings, bloating, cramping, weight gain, night sweats and hot flashes. The combination nearly broke me.

I missed my kids terribly and felt suddenly purposeless without them around. My hormones were on a wild, exhausting ride and hitting a milestone birthday was an additional blow. It was a perfect storm.

I saw no clear path out, but I was determined to find that empty nest freedom and joy so many people talk about, even though all I was feeling so far was deep sadness and loss.

Sure, I was happy not to have to deal with other people's messes, moods or laundry. I had a guest room to decorate, which made me happy. My husband and I started doing weeknight things like going out to dinner or to see a play, which felt unusual and fun. But my heart still ached.

Not only was our daughter not coming around once a week or so for a family dinner, but she couldn't come home for Thanksgiving. In the spirit of "we can make this work," my husband, son and I flew to her for the holiday, where I cooked a downsized version in her apartment the day after Thanksgiving. It was hard to give up the big elaborate family Thanksgiving at my house, with my turkey plates and my harvest décor and extended family, but being together was more important. Even so, it started the holiday season off on a sad note for me.

To try to head off the sadness of not seeing my kids on my birthday, I planned a getaway for my 50th. My husband and I went to New York City in early December and saw the holiday windows, the Rockettes, and an amazing musical. We ate fabulous food and hit all the holiday markets. It would have been magical if I hadn't been sick with a respiratory infection that lingered for three weeks, throughout December, both before and after the trip.

In retrospect, I can see I was depressed. I wasn't excited about decorating the house for Christmas (which I normally love doing) and probably wouldn't have done my usual over-the-top approach if our daughter hadn't been coming home for Christmas.

I was so thrilled to have her home, sleeping under our roof. I was happy our son came for the day, even though he went home to his apartment at night. Having all of us together at our house, just the way things used to be, was nearly perfect. But I should have known it was going to end badly.

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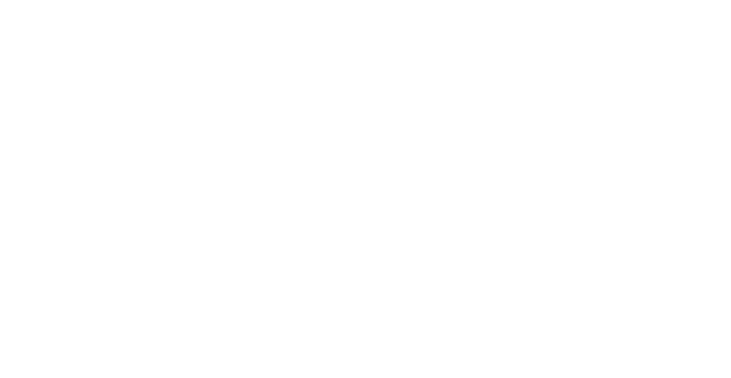
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