

A Note from Resident Services Director, Jessica Olis

Learning to Embrace the Beautiful Chaos

There are seasons in life when you can feel things changing all around you. Sometimes the changes are carefully planned, and sometimes they seem to arrive before you have had time to catch your breath. This has been one of those seasons for me.

Over the past year, my life has changed in ways I could have imagined, but probably never quite pictured exactly as they have unfolded. I now have a 10-year-old stepdaughter—who will be 11 very soon—living with us full time. We just made it through our first back-to-school routine together, complete with school supplies, schedules, early mornings and the inevitable question of, “Did you remember everything?”

Then came sports. I have quickly learned that being a sports mom requires an entirely new level of preparation. There are practices and games to keep track of, schedules to coordinate and equipment to acquire. I learned, for example, that when you order a volleyball online, it does not necessarily arrive inflated. Apparently, you also need a pump. And who knew that volleyball required kneepads? Every sport seems to come with its own collection of equipment that I didn't know existed five minutes earlier.

Somehow, in the middle of all of this, I am also continuing to grow in my career. My responsibilities have increased, and with that comes the challenge of balancing the demands of leadership and work with the demands of home and family. I find myself thinking more and more about what that balance will look like in the years ahead. How do I continue to grow professionally while also being present for the people who need me at home? How do I make room for all of the roles I am taking on without losing myself somewhere in the middle?

And then there is a wedding to plan—with just one month to go! I am also learning what it means to prepare to become a wife. That sounds like such a simple statement, but there is something meaningful about realizing that you are not just planning a wedding—you are preparing for a new chapter of your life and a new set of promises, responsibilities and joys.

Some days, if I am being honest, it feels like a lot. There are calendars, practices, meetings, work responsibilities, wedding decisions, grocery lists, laundry and all of the ordinary things that somehow become much less ordinary when your life is changing. There are moments when I wonder how I am going to keep all of the plates spinning.

But every once in a while, I stop long enough to realize something important: These are good problems to have.

The busy calendar means there is a child growing up and discovering things she loves. The sports equipment scattered around the house means there are games to go to and memories to make. The growing responsibilities at work mean I have been given opportunities to learn and lead. The wedding planning means I am preparing to marry someone I love and build a life together. The uncertainty about the future means there is still so much ahead that I cannot yet see.

Life changes don't always arrive in the neat, orderly packages we might expect. Sometimes they come with a little chaos, a lot of learning and a volleyball that needs to be inflated. And maybe that is part of the beauty of it.

I am learning that I don't have to have every detail of the future figured out. I don't have to know exactly how I will balance every responsibility or what the next chapter will look like. I can simply be present for the chapter I am in.

So, in the middle of the busy days, I am trying to make space for quiet moments—to stop, reflect and be grateful. Grateful for a family that is growing and changing. Grateful for a career that continues to challenge me. Grateful for the opportunity to become a wife, a stepmom and, hopefully, an even better version of myself along the way.

Life looks very different than I once imagined it would. And I am learning that sometimes the most unexpected chapters turn out to be the ones we are most grateful to be living.

-Jessica