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A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer: Hey, guys. Welcome to another Everything Always episode. Mike and I, today, are interviewing a couple that a mutual friend introduced us to. In fact, when we started the podcast, our friend said, "You have to meet this family. They are so cool." Trust me, they are. You get to hear them and hear about the way that they do family.

Blended families, obviously, already are not totally traditional and conventional. They do things in an unconventional way, or they sound unconventional. There's so much love and value and good stuff to learn from this family, and actually, shed a lot of insight for me, and I hope it does for other people too, in the way that you do family and how it's all so different, but nonetheless meaningful and loving.

I hope you guys enjoy this. The couple today we're interviewing are Aaron and Linnea Weikleenget. I'm hoping I said it right, I think I did. I asked them ahead of time, "Make sure I say your name correctly." Anyways, they're super awesome.

We laugh, we talk about some real stuff that's going down when you're first meeting and there's kids involved and maybe you don't have kids. We talk about what happens to kids when they have a new sibling that they didn't have before, and all the different dynamics that go on with a blended family. Theirs is a unique, awesome story for you to learn from. Enjoy.

All right. I'm really excited because today we have Aaron and Linnea joining us on the show. Actually, we got introduced to them because of a really good friend of ours, who we were working on the Blended Family documentary with [Renee Nakira]. When Renee Nakira first heard that we were doing a podcast, she's like, "Oh my gosh, you have to meet this couple. They are just brilliant. They have a blended family. I know you guys are going to love each other."

I was like, "Ah, they have to be on our show." I just heard little tidbits, but I am so excited that you guys are joining us today and we get to learn about your family. I know it's one that's unconventional, which I guess most blended families are unconventional.

Mike: I don't think a single one is conventional, yeah.

Summer: Welcome, you guys. Thank you so much for being here.

Aaron W.: Thanks for having us.

Linnea W.: Thank you. We're glad to be here.

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Summer: Let's let our listeners know about you and how you all came together.

Linnea W.: Aaron and I, we've been together for 10 years. When I met Aaron, his children were very little, they were babies. They've only ever known dad with me, which has kind of been in our favor, I guess. They don't know a past home life without me, so it's kind of made it easy, I guess, in a way for us to move forward in that way.

Brooklyn is now 11, Carter is 10. We were married, we were together for six years before we had a child together, which was unplanned. We thought, I was thinking we were just going to parent the older two for the rest of our lives and God surprised us with a third, which added a whole new element to our life.

One of the reasons I said that we were a little bit unconventional, Summer, is because we travel a lot. We're constantly on the road. We probably spend more evenings in hotels than we do at home. It's kind of offered some challenges as far as co-parenting because we are super involved with our kids and we spend a lot of time with them.

We don't have the every other weekend kind of schedule, so we really have to work hard with our travel plans. A lot of times, the kids will meet us or we'll fly up there to get them and fly them with us. We've never taken a vacation without them. They always are a part of everything. We just work really hard to keep them with us and to keep connected with them.

Our schedule is, gosh, we'll see them every three or four weeks, and we'll get them for about a week, five to 10 days, all of summer, usually all of winter. We just really have a great situation in that. For instance, my grandfather passed away last week in Chicago-

Summer: Aw.

Mike: I'm sorry to hear that.

Linnea W.: Our daughter, our older kids ... Thank you. Our older kids wanted to come be with us, so we flew them down to Chicago last minute on a whim and they got to spend time with grandfather before he passed away, and they were with us. We're really fortunate that we've been able to build a great relationship with their mom so that we can do those last minute details like that.

If we say, "Hey, we're going to be in Colorado in a couple of weeks," and we have to arrange flights for them to come meet us there, we're able to. When I say "unconventional," that's kind of, we don't have ...

Summer: It's like where we would have, oh, we've got a week-on, week-off schedule, or it's like

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every Tuesday, Thursday you've got these kids. Yeah, you do have a unique situation, but it sounds so, like you work it so well.

Mike: Can you tell us a little bit more about the co-parenting situation and how that works in terms of how you deal with time?

Aaron W.: Yeah. Well, I think one of the things that we skipped over is that we live in Mississippi and our two older kids live in Minnesota. We're between two different states also, so we're constantly flying, not only for work, but whenever it's time to see them or them to see us.

They're old enough now where they can fly unaccompanied, so we started flying them right into Jackson to come see us a lot of the times now, instead of staying up in Minnesota and getting a hotel. We owned a house up in Minnesota for a while, and then we're just never there enough, and the kids are old enough to fly to us.

Their mom's really flexible with us. She allows us to kind of really be last minute because that's the way, as entrepreneurs, our business kind of dictates us being able to be flexible, and she's really awesome in accommodating us with that. I think we work real well with that aspect.

Summer: That is such a blessing because Mike and I, being entrepreneurs, we know how that's something that can cause little rifts, or when one parent, one co-parent getting upset, because sometimes you can't be on a schedule, especially when you're an entrepreneur and you're traveling or things come up and you're like, "Ah, this is really important and I can't miss it."

It's also the time that I have my kids or it's the time I'm supposed to, whatever it is. It can cause some ... What word am I looking for?

Linnea W.: Waves, maybe?

Summer: Waves. There you go. That's a good way to put it.

Mike: Waves. That's a nice way to put it, yeah.

Summer: It is. Was it always like that for you, or did you arrive at that?

Linnea W.: Yeah, it's always been like that for us. We went into the relationship, and we've always just helped one another. I feel like we're more a big co-family, because we just all work together for when ... She lost her mom a couple of years ago, and so we had to step up and make sure that we were there more emotionally for the kids and physically.

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We just kind of take care of one another and we keep our, if there are issues between us as adults, the kids don't know about them. We just keep our adult issues to ourselves, and the kids want to be with ... When they want to be with us, they get to be with us. When they are with ... They don't have to worry about any of that adult stuff.

I think we just, without saying it, like we never sat down and talked about it and said, "This is how it's going to be." We just kind of, that's just kind of how the flow worked.

Summer: Oh my gosh. That is so awesome and inspiring to hear, because I know there's a lot of families that don't have it that way.

Mike: That's true.

Summer: Remind me again the ages of all of the kids.

Linnea W.: Brooklyn is 11, Carter is 10 and Scarlett is four and a half.

Summer: Scarlett is your daughter that you both-

Mike: Between the two.

Summer: Between the two-

Linnea W.: Ours together, yeah. When we met, I didn't have any children and Aaron had his two, which I just absolutely adopted as my own, and love them as my own. Of course, in the beginning, you have a couple of challenges, just trying to establish a new relationship between him and I.

I feel like we've forgotten about, if there were challenges in the beginning, we just kind of got past them. It's just taking one mountain as we go, and working through everything.

Aaron W.: Yeah. I think the first few years were probably a little bit more rocky than the last. Things kind of end up working themselves out. It's all good. Everything works out good. It's not saying that there's never ups and downs, but for the most part, I think we've done an awesome job, and we've been very blessed to have the situation that we do.

Summer: It sounds like it.

Linnea W.: We do. My husband does a great job of just keeping ... Making sure that those kids know that they are loved and that they are always welcome. That's just something,

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when we keep that in the forefront, she just kind of follows.

Summer: I want to talk a little bit about too, coming in. Like you said, you came in and you didn't have children of your own and I'd love to hear that perception. Because I know there's a lot of ... Or perspective is what I mean. There's a lot of women that we know of, or men as well, that go into a relationship and there are kids involved but they haven't had their own kids.

I'd love to hear what it was like in the beginning and then what the dynamic became once you did have your child, and the relationship between the kids.

Linnea W.: Yeah. It's funny, when I look back now and I realize, in the beginning, that I was a little bit selfish. You don't understand if you don't have children of your own. I hate to say "jealous." I don't know that that's the right word, but my husband's relationship with the kids and his love for them, there was just always a little bit, "I want some of that love." Never upset or begrudging him for giving them that love, but just not really understanding-

Summer: Well you're having to share. Gosh, I even had that being a mother, and Mike with his kids, there were times where it's like, "Oh, you're going to do that with them? I kind of wanted to hang out with you."

Linnea W.: I was more like the emotional, not really understanding, Summer. I'm almost embarrassed to talk about it now, because now that I've birthed my daughter and she is my responsibility 100% of the time, I get it. I mean, I totally understand that love and that connection that when you give birth to someone.

I always said, I love ... Brooklyn and Carter are mine. I talk about them like they're mine. As I said, I never thought, we never thought we were going to have any more children, so I figured, "I'm going to raise these two. We're going to all do this together for the rest of our lives." I've felt emotionally responsible for them and loved them that way.

It was, there's just that little unknowing, I guess, the emotional connection that Aaron had with them very early on. I feel like I was very immature. Not that we got into arguments about ... Well, we probably talked about it a couple times, but I remember feeling it.

Then when I had Scarlett, realizing and understanding. I even told Aaron, "I'm sorry, in those early years, for any trouble," because it's just, you just don't know. You don't get it until you have a child of your own. They were always our priority. I mean, they were always number one and we made a lot of big moves in our life for them.

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I mean, really, I feel like even in our entrepreneurial journey, the kids have always come first. Like if they want to go here, they want to live there or they want to do this, Aaron and I have to look about how we're going to craft our life around them. Luckily, being entrepreneurs has made it easier for us in our situation because we do have, we can take this week off every month or every couple of months.

The time that we get to spend with the kids is not just a day and a half or two days. We get five, seven days. We're all in, and we get to experience really cool things because we get to travel so much.

Summer: Can I just say how impressive and awesome it is too that you're just like, "This is how I was feeling." You're like taking responsibility for whatever you might have not done. Like not really understanding that connection, the parent-child connection until you actually had your own.

I just think it's so awesome that you see it that way. I would bet that that's why you have such a successful relationship with all of the parents is because of that. Where, I think, some people can have those feelings of jealousy or whatever it is, and it can really be damaging to the whole family. I think it's just awesome that you were just so mature. Like, "Yes, this is what I'm feeling," but you didn't turn it into something icky.

Linnea W.: Yeah, yes, absolutely. It is, it's hard to talk about. It's hard to talk about now, because I feel, and when I think back to that version of myself in that time, knowing what I know now, I would have done or thought differently. I wasted a lot of worry myself. Yeah, but life is growth and we are constantly evolving, so everything happens the way it should.

Summer: Oh, exactly. It's totally, that's like, you just nailed it. It's growing. It's never a waste. It's a waste, it's a shame if you never learn from it, but I think it's just so awesome that ... I've had those moments too, and it's-

Mike: Well, and kind of cool that you actually had the opportunity to have your own child and to have those experiences, so that you gained that knowledge.

Summer: Yeah, and you got to see it from, yeah, that, put yourself in those shoes.

Mike: That's why I've always, I've been trying to talk Summer into having a kid just between the two of us. She's like, "No way. We already have four kids."

Summer: What has the dynamic been between all of the kids, the siblings?

Aaron W.: Oh, they're awesome. My son, Carter, and our youngest, Scarlett, are ... The relationship with those two was just, from the very beginning, it was funny how awesome. They just

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connected in just a funny way, and they've always kept that connection. I mean, they're so good. I mean, we do a great job of keeping them in contact with each other through ... It's so easy with technology these days.

Summer: Oh, yeah.

Aaron W.: FaceTime and, I mean, you can just, you feel like you're right there sometimes, so it's, we have so much contact with them that it's, they all three love each other and no issues there yet. I'm sure once they get into teenage years we might have a few more issues on our hands, but right now, they're all fun and games.

Linnea W.: When they come and see dad, everybody wants to tackle dad and my husband is very physical and very ... I mean, just very affectionate with them. It's like a competition for dad's lap and dad's arms.

Summer: Aw.

Aaron W.: Yeah. I guess, that is one of the biggest struggles, is when they are with us, is trying to figure out how to give each one of them that time because we do ... It is so funny, because when we go and we're with them, we're with them, like Linnea said, for like sometimes 5, 10 days straight.

We kind of put work on hold during that time. We give 100% of our time to them. It's not really, they get, they go and hang out with friends or anything. They're with Linnea and I, 24/7, every single day, for 5 to 10 days straight. We just love each other, and we just have so much fun with each other. Play games, do whatever and just try to soak up as much of that innocence-

Linnea W.: Quality time.

Aaron W.: ... and awesome quality time, when they're this age.

Linnea W.: Yeah, and I think that's awesome. I'm glad that you brought that up. Because when they're at their mom's house, Brooklyn goes and plays with her girl friends, and Carter goes off and plays with his boy friends and they don't really ... I mean, they have their family time, but it's not as intense as it is with us. It's offered them an opportunity to really build their own relationship when they're with us because dad is like, "Hey, you got to love on your sister. You got to get along with her." Whereas, at home, we kind of gauge that it might, they're just, they do their own things.

Like Aaron said, we just put all our time and attention on them, so it's not like they're up in their rooms. Really, we are, we're with them and we give them a lot of attention and

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a lot of time when we're with them, and just making the most of the time.

Aaron W.: Most of our time has really been in hotel rooms. If you figure, you have five of us in one hotel room, so we're on top of each other and we just, we love it that way though.

Summer: That's so cool. I love that. Because, actually, I would think that it could cause more stress in a situation like this if you are traveling and if you are doing those things. It's so awesome to hear the things that you do to make it like, basically, it's like wherever you are, you're all together, so that's your home.

Linnea W.: Yeah.

Aaron W.: Yeah. Traveling was a part of our life before we had Scarlett together. Because for our business, we had been traveling for years. Yeah, Scarlett flew up, falling asleep breastfeeding on the planes. I mean, how old was she? Two months old, or a month old on her first plane ride.

Linnea W.: Yeah, yeah.

Aaron W.: Probably been on, I don't know, 100 flights since then.

Linnea W.: Originally, when they started flying, Carter was a little nervous, Brooklyn was all for it. Where we live now in Mississippi, you got to get a connecting flight from pretty much about anywhere, and the kids couldn't fly unaccompanied until they were, I think, eight. We would have to drive three hours to pick them up at another airport so that they could just take that direct flight.

Now they fly direct, and they'll choose. They like flying, I think, better than driving. They're just so independent. We're just so fortunate that they kind of run with the punches.

Summer: In all of this, because I'm sure there had to have been some challenges in the beginning, especially when they were younger. What were some of those challenges that you faced and how did you overcome them?

Or did you have any of those moments where you're like, "Man, I really wish I would've done this a different way"? Or something that you're like, "Gosh, I'm so stoked that we did it this way"? I know, and there's a lot of that, it sounds like. Yeah, did you have those moments early on that were challenging?

Aaron W.: Yeah. I'm sure we had a ton of them. Probably too many to remember, really, gosh, it's ...

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Linnea W.: When we started, our businesses were just rolling, and we actually had a couple companies when the kids were really little, and it was just so busy for us. I think if anything, Summer, like over, like looking back now, and as they're now almost pre-teens, like we're already seeing them as adults even though they're only 10 and 11. It's just like all of a sudden over the last couple of years they've just matured and grown.

Even though we've spent as much time with them as we have, sometimes we think, "Man, we wish at one point, we would've just settled up there and just been around the block and maybe ..." Because there are moments that we miss being far away, but this is our business is, this is where our company is.

Sometimes, I think along the way was, "Do we just throw everything away and just quit this company that we started and just go up there?" Just, if they need us up there or if there's problems or something, it's just hard to not be right around the corner, I guess. I think that's probably the biggest thing, of course, and my husband ...

I can't ever imagine sending my daughter away and not seeing her for a period of time, and of course, that's the hardest thing for Aaron, is not having all his kids all the time. Then especially, now that he's had Scarlett, that he has all the time, since we're together, sometimes I think he just misses the other two even more because he realizes just how much time he can spend with her.

I think, if anything, looking back, it's probably just that. Even though we spend, we give them probably 40-60, what it really comes down to, the time that we see them. It's just maybe being a little bit closer. We never had a legal parenting agreement drawn up. Aaron and Jessica just have always been, just very open about everything and just wanted to talk through things.

Sometimes, those agreements aren't very fun, they have to involve people you don't want. We just all kind of trusted, "We're going to do this on our own, together," and same goes for everything. We've just kind of taken it one step at a time. We're not really run by the system or by paperwork. We just kind of do what's best for all of us. Which I think, at first, I was a little bit nervous about, not knowing what it would look like.

Looking back now, and I'm very grateful and I think their mom is very grateful too. Because now, she's with somebody that has a child from a previous relationship and she kind of, and sees how hard it can be. Looking back and very grateful and appreciative of us now in everything, and how we handled it all.

Summer: Hey, guys, I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you for taking a chance on us and listening to our podcast. Our goal is for you to not only learn from us, but to learn with

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us. We've taken a leap on being pretty open about our blended family and how we do life in everything. We want to make sure we bring you all the things you want to hear, always.

Please, if you have specific questions like, "How do I get along with my ex?" Or, "How do I get along with his ex?" Or, "How do I set some boundaries in place?" Or, "Why doesn't my step-son like me?" Please, please email us with your questions. Email them to info@SummerFelix.com, because we want to answer those questions and we aim to bring you the best guests and conversations to address your most burning issues about everything, always.

Do the other two kids ever have, see that dad has his daughter that's with him all of the time? Has that ever affected them? Or gone like, "Gosh, I really wish I could have had you that much"?

Aaron W.: Yeah. We're starting to experience that a little bit more, recently actually.

Summer: Yeah, as they get older.

Aaron W.: ... with my daughter. Yeah, my daughter's starting to realize, yeah, how much time that she gets with us. It can be different because it's, you're spending so much time with them. Scarlett seems to be getting more toys or whatnot than they do because she's down here with us all the time. Might go and get a pedicure or manicure with mom. Just little trips like that and things that ... They just see themselves not being involved in.

It's been a little bit of a challenge for sure, but I think again, we do a really good job of keeping that open line of communication with them and letting them know, it's again, I always tell them, "You guys are more than welcome." Their mom's open to it if they want to come live with us too. It's, she's even put it at that ...

She's even come to the point where she's like, "If you guys want to go be with your dad, go ahead." It's like they want to, but again, that's such a familiar life to them, and they got all their friends up there at this point. They want to but, so we're just kind of playing it day-by-day with that. I think, who knows? Maybe one day, they'll want to come stay with us. We just, we kind of keep it up to their ... Let it be up to them, whether they do or not.

Summer: Yeah, I think, I think that's great. In the meantime, they're getting really good, healthy doses of both of you. It's different, it's different experiences, but at the same time, that's such a cool journey that they have. It probably makes them a lot stronger and adaptable in life just to have, going through all of that.

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Linnea W.: Yeah, we've seen that a little bit. It's just the time. They want you all the time, that's why. They want to be with you all the time. Like Aaron will be FaceTiming Brooklyn, and Scarlett will stick her head in and say, "Hi, sissy. Hi, sissy." You'll see Brooklyn's face go, just kind of get a little bit sad.

I mean, we addressed it with her right away and Aaron will just, "Are you upset about this?" He'll just call her out. "Are you upset about ... Because Scarlett's here with me and you're not?" After we just dropped them off, and she'll say, "Yeah." We'll just kind of talk her through it, and understanding that it's hard. Then again, leaving it in her hands, "Honey, you know, you can always come see us whenever you want, you know this."

It's almost like her life is so ... Their lives are so good on both ends that ... Which is how we try to make it for them. It's hard when they leave us. Carter cries all the time when he leaves us.

Summer: Oh, yeah. My daughter has gone through that, where it's like she's with us for a week. She knows I'm going to see her, but she'll have those mornings, still, at 11 years old and she's like ...

Mike: It's like the sad and like, "Oh, man ..."

Summer: It's the sad, like, "Oh, I'm going back."

Mike: It's not that she's sad that she's going to her dad's, it's just the fact that she's sad that she's going to be displaced from our house, temporarily.

Summer: Yeah. It's interesting because even with, in our family, there were times when I would have Logan and Chloe longer, and then Justin and Ashlyn would be going to their mom's, or it was like a shorter week or whatever was going on. Justin and Ashlyn would say, "You spend so much time ..." to their dad, "You spend with Logan and Chloe." These are their ...

Mike: I'm pretty sure their internal feelings were like, "Hey, we're feeling like we're being replaced." Overcoming those feelings has sometimes been a real challenge. We've talked on previous podcasts about some of the things that we do and strategies that we deploy to make each kid feel like they're special, so that they're not in competition with each other. A lot of that is focused time and energy on a one-to-one basis, which has been really successful for us, but still, like it comes and goes.

I think as they get older, it becomes easier or they become a little bit more understanding and a little wiser as to like the way that the world works and feelings work and those kinds of things, and it becomes easier. For the parents out there that are

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listening that have kids in that under 10 range, that's the time you got to really be on top of it, I think even more than when they become teenagers and older, and that you can have like more of an intellectual conversation about the situations.

Summer: I love like what you guys are saying is that you recognize it and you call it out and you address it. Whereas, I think for a lot of parents, and especially in a blended family situation, it's like, "Oh, that's too uncomfortable. I can tell that you're upset, but I'm just going to let you kind of deal with it."

Whereas, actually, calling out and going, "Hey, is this ... Are you feeling bothered by this?" Because we are adults and we pretty much know why, and actually saying, "Is it because of this?" That feeling of acknowledgement, for the child, like that alone just makes it so much better. You know what I mean?

I've just seen that with our kids. Like when you call ... You go, "Okay, are you feeling bad because Summer took out Ashlyn for a mani-pedi and you didn't get to go?" "Yeah," and then it's like, "Okay, you get it." It's just that feeling of going, "Okay, nobody's trying to leave me out or anything. They understand me, they get me, I'm not weird." That's just so important. I think the more that you get to have that, the more connected you stay, even when you are not together. You know?

Linnea W.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I know, I mean it's changed even with our son. I mean, at this age ... When he was real little, he was just very quiet, wasn't as communicative. Now that he is finding interests that are similar to dad's ... He loves football, I mean everything football. I mean, your relationship with Carter has even changed so much. I mean, apart from the co-parenting situation, them living in two homes, it's just him maturing and growing, and you guys are bonding a lot.

Brooklyn has always kind of been that with you and now she sees you and spending all ... It's just growth, I think. It probably is similar to what happens in regular families. It is just important, and we do the same as you. Mike, that you mentioned, and Aaron will have daddy-daughter time, daddy-son time. I mean, every time they're with us where it's just that one-on-one time, where I think that really helps, but it's just life, isn't it?

Summer: It is, it is.

Mike: It is. Linnea, I have a question for you. Going back, because on one of our upcoming podcasts, we're going to be talking with a couple of my guy friends that have kids who are dating now, and trying to figure out what the next step's going to be like. One of them has a similar situation. He has a daughter, and he's dating a really great woman who has no kids.

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I'm wondering what the dynamic was like when you guys first started dating and you didn't have children. Then you were introduced to a situation where you were stepping right into a blended family. Was that smooth sailing, difficult? Give us a little bit of that dirt.

Linnea W.: The first time I found out, I was like, "Okay, hell no." I was like ... We had, I mean, we got together, and then we were apart for quite a few months, seven, eight months. Aaron was trying to figure out that situation, because his children were still very young, and working on that situation with his kids' mom. Then came back and just laid it all out on the table for me.

I was like, "Well, no, no." I mean, not just one, but two. Not just two, but they're babies, and "What's your relationship with the ex?" Like, "How are these kids going to receive me? I don't really want to play the role mom and steal that from her." Because I was raised by a single mom, so that's one of the reasons I've always been so sensitive and so careful, because I understand and I see that.

I fell in love with Aaron, and I fell in love with his children. There was a lot to work through at first, probably more between me and the kids' mom. Just all the feelings that are there when you find somebody else, and then she has to think about sharing her children. There was a lot of that probably at the beginning, and it was really hard.

There were days where I was like, "Do I want to do this?" Because it just, it's not like they're going to be at the house in a couple of years. This is, these are children, these are kids, so they're going to be a significant part of our life.

The more I fell in love with Aaron, and our lives were just so intertwined, and we started our company and I was introduced to the kids right away. We just kind of all laid it all out on the table so we knew what we were working with, and just kind of moved along. At the beginning, it was hard. Now I am so grateful, I can't even imagine my life without our older two children. I love them so much.

It helps me to see my husband in a new light, because he's an amazing father and loves those kids, and has always provided for them and taken care of their family. It allowed me to love him in a new way, and it added a dynamic that I think all relationships have that, but I thought Aaron was worth it. I was just so in love with him that I wanted to make it work.

It was very hard at the beginning. Like we talk about it now, and people tell us all the time, "You have such a good situation. I'm so jealous of your situation." Well, it's been 10 years in the works. We worked on that, and really, it was a commitment once I decided that, and we decided that we wanted to be together, that we were going to

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make that a priority and make them a priority.

Mike: I think, a lot of times, single dads get into the framework that they have to look for like a single mom. That's the only way that they're going to be able to put a dynamic together.

I think maybe it could be a stereotype, but I think if you're a single mom, it's probably more common that a guy will come into the situation without kids and integrate. You don't think of it the other way very often, where it's a guy with kids and a kid-free female.

Linnea W.: Yeah.

Mike: Sounds like [crosstalk]. Anyway, but you see what I'm saying, that dynamic. I think it's really important to know, and this is really a great story, that it doesn't limit single dads from being able to feel like there's hope that there's actually that chance that they could meet somebody that doesn't have kids of their own and have a thriving relationship.

Linnea W.: I mean I always kind of just took on the role that I'm just going to be an extension of their dad when they're with us. I mean, very early on, I think I wanted to dig my ... Like throw my whole self into it, but not being a mom myself, not really even knowing ... I just was there to love them and take care of them when they were with us.

Their mom told me what needed to be done as far as diapers, and what food, and all that kind of stuff, and just kind of helped me through all that. I did go into it feeling kind of ill-equipped because I didn't have that experience but I mean, it came very naturally to me, and I rose to the challenge.

Summer: I think when you come into a situation and you're a female, and if you are, like I was a mother so it was like, "Okay, I know what to do with these kids." I think there was some trust with Justin and Ashlyn's mom knowing like, "Okay, well, she's a mother, she's a good mom. They're in good hands, it's all good."

With my ex-husband, he now has two more children with his wife, but she didn't have any children. It was just Logan and Chloe going over, and she ... I could see how you might go, "Well, you're not a parent, so how are you going to understand this and how are you going to understand that?" It's like I see both sides. I understand why there can be challenges and kind of rocky starts, especially with the two moms.

Linnea W.: We kind of all grew up together and grew into it together. When she, I think when she realized that we were, "I'm here to help. I want to be an extension of you when the kids are with their dad, and I want ..."

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Summer: Yes.

Linnea W.: I'd be very open in my communication with her, like what we needed to do, or if she was okay with this or that. I remember very early on when Carter had RSV when he was a baby, and he was having trouble breathing. We had this breathing machine she gave me and she just like hands it over and tells us, this breathing machine. He starts just wheezing in the middle of the night, and I'm thinking, "This baby is going to die. He's not going to make it."

I sit up on the rocking chair, and I'm holding him up. I remember, I was texting Jess, their mom, and telling her. It takes a lot of trust on her end, to trust your children with somebody else. I think keeping the communication open between all of us, and me just trying to let her know, "I'm here for the kids. I want to love on these kids just as much."

Summer: I think the moral of the story too is like when it comes to the kids, like really being a team, and it's not always possible. Even if it's not, if there's disagreements or things like that, as much as you can, just keep it about the kids. Like you said earlier, the adults, if there is anything going on, you keep it between the adults. You don't need to bring the kids in.

What I hear and what I love with what you guys have done is that it seems like everybody involved, all the parents involved have that team mindset. Like, "We are here, we're all parents. We're all here so that you guys can have this awesome experience. We are unconventional, but that doesn't mean it's any less beautiful."

Linnea W.: Thank you.

Summer: Well, you guys, I'm so happy that we got to really meet outside of some text messages and emails. I'm so happy Renee connected us and we got to learn about you here like with everyone, with all of our listeners and that they got to learn about you too because there's so much insight. My hope is that people listening are hearing and going, "Oh, yeah, there doesn't have to be just one right way." Like love is love, and love is done in so many different ways. It doesn't have to be a tight schedule or any of those things.

Like you do it, you do what works for your family, and you guys have really found that. It's, you guys continue to learn how to do that, because we all keep growing and evolving. You're just a very beautiful example of blended family.

Mike: Absolutely.

Aaron W.: Thank you, guys.

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Summer: Thank you so much.

Mike: Hey, guys, thanks so much for listening to our podcast. You know what they say? "If you can't find what you're looking for, then you need to create it," so that's what we did.

Summer: Yep. I scoured the Internet and looked for the tribe that spoke to me, and I just couldn't find the community that was raw, vulnerable and really wanting to make a change to the millions of families like ours, so I decided to create it. It took about one conversation for my husband to say, "I'm in," and here we are.

Mike: It takes listeners like you to keep it alive.

Summer: Please, if you liked this, write a review, take a screenshot, share it on your social media. Tell people. It means the world to us.

Mike: Remember to email us. We would love to hear from you.

Summer: Please, share this with someone you love.

Mike: Be bold enough to share it with someone that you don't.