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A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer: Hey guys! Welcome to another Everything Always podcast. It is just me today, but I have got a killer interview for you. It is so good. I am so excited to have my guest on the show because for you parents out there who are wondering, "Hey, what was it like growing up in a blended family? Maybe I can get that insight." It's kind of like looking at your child 20 years from now and getting to see what they actually thought and what were the things that might have been struggles for them, what were the blessings, what did they really think of the step parents and the living situation, all of those things.

Summer: This is a new friend of mine. Her name is Melissa Valder and I got to sit and have coffee with her and talk about all things blended families, especially growing up in one. I just learned so many things for myself and I knew that you guys would get so much value out of this. I just love how vulnerable she is in everything that she shares and how she grew up, what her custody situation was, what it was like with new siblings, with older step siblings, what happened at her wedding when she got married. All those things! There are so many good things and I am so excited for you to listen to this.

Summer: I'm going to stop talking because I'm already stumbling over my words and by the way, I'm also going to say one more thing before I stop talking. We might have some weird noises going on because my husband is walking around the house instead of doing this interview with us. He's talking up a storm with different people because, as you know if you've been listening, we've had some renovations going on, so I apologize for any of that. We'll do our best to edit it out, but if not, and you hear it, hey, that's just us. That's what's happening. Okay, that's all I got. Listen to the interview. You're going to love it.

Summer: Hi, Melissa.

Melissa Valder: Hi, Summer.

Summer: I'm so happy to do this interview with you. We met up maybe a week or so ago. We got to talk about some of what your experience was like growing up in a blended family and I was just like, "Oh my gosh! This is going to be so valuable for our listeners," because I've been wanting to have people on the show that talk about what it was like for them growing up in their dynamic. Yours especially was there's multiple kids and there's some on either side, and then you've got your parents trying to co-parent together. There was just so much that you shared with me and I just knew this was going to be so great, so thank you so much for doing this. I appreciate it so much.

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- Summer: Let's start with what your family looks like and what it is today.
- Melissa Valder: I'm a Peace Corps baby, so my dad met my mom down in Ecuador. She's Ecuadorian, he was doing some volunteer work. They met, they had me, and got married, and came back to the States. My parents got divorced when I was 8. My mom had an affair with my now step-dad who she married when I was 13. My dad re-married when I was 15. When I was about that same age, at 15, my mom had two more kids, so I have two step sisters. I'm 29 and my sisters are now 11 and 13. My dad re-married a woman who already had two kids, so I have step siblings. I believe they were in their early, to mid-20's when they got married, so I have less of a connection with them just because they kind of already had their own lives going by the time we all blended. I've been with my sisters since they were born. I saw both of their births and I'm extremely close with them.
- Melissa Valder: As far as the relationships go, I love all of my parents, all four of my parents. They're in different parts of my life. There were different struggles with each of the parents. I loved my step-dad right away, but when I became a teenager and was able to process what had actually happened with the divorce, there was definitely some resentment and anger that came out on my end towards him just because when I was eight, I didn't really realize what had happened, but coming into my teens and starting to ask questions and put things together, I figured it out. That led to difficulties with him and with my mom a little bit. As I've gotten older, I've really come to realize that at that time, everyone was going through their own pain and their own way of dealing with and coping with what had happened. They were all really just doing that in the best way that they could.
- Melissa Valder: It's interesting to be listening to your podcast and listen to parents as they're going through it and as they're in it. They're right there in that time-
- Summer: That very minute, yeah.
- Melissa Valder: And it's interesting to be coming into my 30's and looking back on, and reflecting on the experience as something that I kind of already gone through, but through the kid's perspective. It's been fun to listen to the parent's perspective going through all of this.
- Summer: There were so many things that you had said, and I'm going to try to remember them all. I almost wish that we had been recording when we met and had coffee, but I know it's going to come out. Let's go back to the very beginning. So your mom had gotten remarried and you were eight's years old approximately, or maybe nine at this time-

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Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Summer: And now there's new siblings. Let's start there. What was that feeling like and what was the relationship like with your biological father?

Melissa Valder: I definitely consider myself a daddy's girl from before they got divorced and for the few years into the divorce. Something that I really appreciate my dad doing through all of that was still being present for the things that I loved to do. He still took me to soccer practice. He still coached my team and my brother's team alternatively over the years. I know that between the ages and eight and 13, they didn't live together. She didn't move in until they were officially married. When she moved in, I think that of all of my parents, she was the one that I had the hardest time warming up to. A big part of that was me. I was a teenager and I think I was probably a little bit more on the bratty side through some of those teenage years. Maybe no matter what, I probably would have had that-

Summer: That like 90% of teens?

Melissa Valder: [crosstalk 00:07:14]. Yeah. It probably doesn't matter who it was.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: I was probably going to have that anyway. Something that my dad did, and you know, I don't fault him for this, I know that he still had a lot of pain and I don't think he had fully healed from all of the trauma and difficulties that came with the divorce. He told me a lot about their relationship and I was young, so when they would get into a fight or when she would do something that he didn't like, he would kind of use me as an ear, someone to listen. Naturally, as a kid if you're hearing those things, you kind of are resigned to think, "Well, I don't like her, either. I don't like her. I don't like that she's making my dad feel this way."

Melissa Valder: You've mentioned this on another podcast, to not have your child be your counselor because one, you're just processing it simply as a child like, "Okay, I don't like that person," not this is a relationship that has ups and downs like all relationships do. Everyone fights. I just decided that I didn't like her and that kind of backfired on my dad in a way because once they got married and he was wondering why I didn't like her, I still had this chip on my shoulder for her because I had been carried along the whole backend story line of the struggles that they were going through.

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Summer: It's so great to hear you say this because whichever parent you're talking about, and sometimes that happens when parents talking about their ex, it sounds like such a harsh word but the meaning of the word manipulate is to manipulate you into thinking a certain way about somebody. It just kind of happens because you're hearing those things and because you're so impressionable, and you're young, and this is one of your authority figures telling you this, of course you start to go, "Okay, well then of course that's my opinion, too!"

Summer: What did it make you feel like outside of opinions or having that chip? What did it make you feel like? Did you ever feel uncomfortable hearing certain things or did it make you feel like I'm his confidante? What were the feelings you had?

Melissa Valder: I think as a kid, I was pretty quiet and reserved and I don't know if it's the right word to say, but I internalized things a lot. When he would tell me those things, I would just kind of listen and absorb, almost like it was my duty to, like that was my job in that moment.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: So as a kid, you only know what your reality is in that moment, so as a kid, I didn't recognize that as being something wrong or something that shouldn't be happening-

Summer: Right.

Melissa Valder: That was my reality and that's what I knew. It's only today looking back, being able to see what those kinds of things did and how they impacted me, and how they impacted the way that I saw people, and maybe even the way that I communicated with her and with other people based upon those kinds of experiences growing up.

Summer: You have younger siblings as well that you're close to.

Melissa Valder: I'm very, very close to them.

Summer: And what's that dynamic like? What's the age difference there?

Melissa Valder: It's 15 years and 13 years-

Summer: Okay.

Melissa Valder: Age difference with my half sisters.

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Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: And it's really interesting because I'm like sister-mom to them. I'm not quite mom age and they think I'm cool, but I'm not quite sister because I'm not totally a peer. They talk to me differently than they do a mother or a sister. I'm really honored to be in this position for them because I think that it's really awesome for kids to have an adult in their life that's not a parent, especially when you're going through teenage years and there are things that maybe you don't want to talk to you parents about. Just having an adult to have your back that's not a parent is, I think, a really special thing.

Melissa Valder: That's something that I wanted to touch on too, in this talk with you, is that I think that step parents are in a really unique position to be that for kids.

Summer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Melissa Valder: Where maybe you're more on the side of a parent, but you have the opportunity to be that adult for a child that they can talk to about different things or just know that there's somebody else in their corner that's an adult that's going to give legit advice that-

Summer: Yes, exactly.

Melissa Valder: That's not a parent. I think that that's something that my step dad did really well. As soon as he came into the picture, he was taking us out to go mountain bike riding and he let me drive his truck off-roading when I was 13. That's how I learned how to drive. He was kind of like a big kid. He didn't have any kids of his own. He would take us to the mall and we would have those little poppers and we would throw them down from the second floor to the first floor [inaudible 00:11:56]. He was the person that in my life, when I came into my teenage years, I was 15, 16 years old starting to get into a little bit of trouble, he was the one that told me it doesn't matter what time, it doesn't matter where you are, or what you've got yourself into, you can always call me, and if you don't want me to, I won't ask questions. I just want to know that you're safe, like if you need a ride, if you're in a sticky situation, call me. I'm not going to be mad. You're not going to get in trouble.

Melissa Valder: Of all of the adults in my life, he was the one that said that and meant it. He's the person that, to this day, I know that he'll have my back forever and it's never something that was questioned. I think that as a step parent, that's a unique thing to have and that's a really special thing to offer to a new child in your life.

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Summer: I love that so much. I get chills when you... And I remember when you first spoke about him and I have that same feeling. I'm just like, "Yes!" I just want to applaud him because it's such a beautiful thing that he did because it really is about supporting you. I love that role of a step parent and being somebody, kind of like you said with your younger siblings, it's being that person that's not quite your parent, but I'm somebody who is a role model. I'm somebody who's there for you, who's rooting for you who you can talk to about anything without reprimanding or judgment or any of that. Sometimes I feel like because some step parents do take on that role as if I am going to punish you, I'm going to do all the things that a biological parent would, not to say that they can't, and we've talked about this on our podcast, but I think that first and foremost is understanding you can really form that bond a lot better when you come from the place that your step dad did. It's just so awesome because you can hear it in just the way that you're speaking about him.

Melissa Valder: Yeah, definitely. When my parents was really ugly. Someone did something ugly to the other person. There was dishonesty-

Summer: Hurt and pain, there was ego.

Melissa Valder: Yeah. There was an ugly custody battle. They didn't get along. I don't remember ever seeing them in the same room even. They didn't really get on phone calls with each other unless they absolutely had to. Through all of this time, I don't remember... I mean, it could have happened, but I don't remember my step dad talking badly. I don't remember him really even getting into that whole mess. When he was hanging out with us, we were doing cool stuff. That kind of thing was not in the picture. We weren't a part of it.

Melissa Valder: Both of them, I think because I was the eldest, I was in the middle of a lot of the fighting. I mentioned this to you when we spoke, there was a lot of fighting about money and things having to be 50/50. If I came to my dad's house with a field trip form that's \$25, he would tell me to go ask my mom for the other \$12.50 because he wasn't going to pay for the whole thing. Being in the middle of that kind of thing put a big weight on me for a long time.

Summer: I'm glad you're saying that because I think... And whenever I talk about these things, it's never knocking any parents or the way they do that, but the whole purpose is to have some insight into how your child might feel. I think that is something that does happen is children feeling in the middle of a money situation. That was like... I remember when we talked about that. That was a big thing, and I

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was like, "Man, I could totally see how that would feel awkward," you know? Sometimes it's awkward just doing that between... in a work situation or something like, I don't know. It's just-

Melissa Valder: Money is just an awkward thing [crosstalk]

Summer: Awkward thing in general, and then to be like, "I already know you guys aren't best friends, you're not getting along. I don't want to have to be in the middle." And you had said, which I thought was so true, you were like no, there's things like Venmo and ways that you can take care of it without having [crosstalk]

Melissa Valder: Yeah. There was another podcast where someone mentioned having a group text with all the adults-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: Which I think is awesome. Then those kinds of conversations don't need to be had through the child because the way that my brother and I, the way that our whole custody thing was arranged was we were 50/50, and it was every other day. So like Monday Mom, Tuesday Dad, Wednesday Mom, Friday, Saturday, Sunday were switched off. It was probably easy and maybe they thought more convenient to just tell me because I'd be seeing the other parent the next day, but it's still a lot.

Melissa Valder: I've done some personal development work and I noticed that I have a weird relationship with money. I've had to redefine what money means to me to not mean something that needs to be power struggled over or something that needs to be half and half no matter what. That's something that I've gone through in my marriage where I'm learning how to be more all in no matter what, not all of the sudden when it comes to be money, be weird about it.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: I think that that kind of thing started from the way that money was managed through the divorce. It's something that I've had to overcome.

Summer: I would think that's a huge thing that children witness between parents when they've gotten divorced. Money is always a huge thing. People will go back to court years later over money issues or it's like, "Gosh, when is this ever going to be settled," and kids are hearing about it. It's a big deal. As you know, when you're young, that's when you start to build the beliefs that you have and so, if those are the things that you're seeing, then of course you'd be triggered by that. Do you feel

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like there's any other things that are triggers or things that you attribute to the way you are in relationships in general because of how you grew up?

Melissa Valder: Definitely.

Summer: Yeah?

Melissa Valder: Yeah. I think that another thing that I've been working on improving is my communication, especially when things get a little heated, or if there's a disagreement. There is the possibility that disagreements don't have to turn into fights, which as soon as a disagreement turns into something where I see someone is opposing what I see, I get tense and I tend to shut down. [inaudible] experienced my parents fighting and being in the middle of it, I'm really good at shutting down. I'm really good at shutting down and being quiet, and just wanting to evacuate the situation as fast as possible.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: The way that's come up in my relationships and in my marriage now is when things get a little heated with my husband, and it's not even necessarily heat yet, it's just two opposing sides and we're working on hashing it out, I want to escape. I want nothing more than to just get out of it. That's been a struggle because obviously you can't always do that, then things aren't ever going to get resolved or fixed or I'm not going to get what I want or I'm not going to be able to compromise if I'm not there to handle it.

Melissa Valder: I think that communication is one of the big things in my marriage. I think that the blended family experience, I think that that did good things for communication for me, and also negative things, which is probably just life.

Summer: Right.

Melissa Valder: But you know. There's definitely that.

Summer: It's true. Either way, whether your parents are together or not, you're learning from both of them. If they're in the same household and however they communicate, you pick up on all that and then you learn more when there's another spouse involved. You get to see that. Do you feel like you've taken a lot of good things as well as lessons to learn from between both couples?

Melissa Valder: Yeah, I love how my mom and step dad, they both have their own passions and

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things that they do separately. I think that that's awesome and that's something that I'm definitely wanting to have in my own relationship, where we've got the things that we love to do together, but we still have our own separate things that we love to do.

Summer: Totally.

Melissa Valder: Girl time, guy time, things to do. My step dad is a very outspoken person. He's got a big personality. I believe that through him, I've learned to speak up better. I think as a kid, I was more quiet and reserved but because I have still a very close relationship with him, I feel like I've come into my voice as I've grown up. As I've recognized these things that have happened in the past and have worked through them, I feel like I'm coming into myself and like you said, seeing the good things from the relationships around me, and the individual things from all of my different parents, and taking what I love and leaving what I don't. I think that's been a pretty awesome experience, too.

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 us. We've taken a leap on being pretty open about our blended family and how we do life and everything.

Summer: We want to make sure we bring you all the things you want to hear, always. So 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. We aim to bring you the best guests and conversations to address your most burning issues about everything, always.

Summer: We had also talked about, which I thought was really interesting and helpful and insightful, was the dynamic between all of the parents together. Have they communicated, like you said... Have they ever had to communicate over something with... because of one of the children or... You said they're not in the same room, but have there been outings or things where all the parents are there? Is there a high five or you know what I mean? Like what does that look like?

Melissa Valder: Yeah, so my parents, before them, the only time that I've seen them in the same room that I can remember was last year.

Summer: Wow. Which is almost 20 years later, right?

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Melissa Valder: Yeah, 20 years later. So as a little footnote for the parents and step parents out there, your connection to your ex isn't over when they turn 18, necessarily.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: You're not free and clear necessarily, once that age hits. That's been an experience in my family. My mom and my dad really did not like each other. Still, they're not best friends-

Summer: Right.

Melissa Valder: But that was something that if you're a teenager and your parents don't talk, and you've living in two different houses, you'll learn very quickly which one is the more lenient one, and that's the house where you'll do all your naughty things.

Summer: Yeah. That's funny.

Melissa Valder: You know, you learn which parent is different and what the boundaries are and if the parents aren't talking about having the same boundaries at both houses, the child obviously knows that. If you've got a child that has a little bit of a naughty streak, that'll be something to consider.

Melissa Valder: I have a brother who's 25 who has had some... He's had some struggles and the first time that I saw all four of my parents in a room together was when we had to do an intervention for him. As I reflect on that, the struggles that he had didn't start last year. They started probably 10 years ago and because my parents couldn't move past their dislike and their inability to communicate with each other, they just avoided having to do that. I feel like that was to the detriment of the child, ultimately, because had they been able to move past that and sit down and say, "Hey, we need to talk about this. We need to figure out what we're going to do. Let's have a game plan. Let's get on the same page." If that would have happened 10 years ago, then maybe certain things could have been avoided or certain situations could have been prevented from getting worse.

Melissa Valder: My take away from that, and if there is one message for parents and step parents out there coming just from my experience through all of this, it's to really... I mean healing is normal. I get pain and that it's going to take time to be able to get to this point, but as soon as you can get to that point where you can be decent and communicative with the other parent... Because now when the kids are younger, it might just be around rides, or about field trip forms, or about curfew when they're

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a teenager, technology time-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: But down the road, it might be about, "Hey, I'm seeing these signs. Are you seeing anything weird over there?"

Summer: Right.

Melissa Valder: Or like we need to take certain measure or we need to have certain harder boundaries in both of our homes for these reasons, or we're concerned about this. That's really just... Even though as parents, you're not on the same team any more because you're not married any more, if you can look at it as being everyone's on the same team for the child, like you're in your kid's corner. Yes, that your ex spouse is in the kid's corner too, but it's about being in the kid's corner. I think that had my parents been in the same corner sooner, I think it could have benefited me, but it definitely could have benefited my brother.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Summer: It's interesting because you know that we're such fans of having boundaries in that relationship. We'll always talk about to have your communication be about the kids. I think sometimes it can go both ways where the boundaries are like wow, there's so much... You might be acting like you're still married when you're not, you know what I mean?

Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Summer: And it can make other spouses feel uncomfortable or it can cause confusion amongst the kids. At the same time, it can be the opposite where parents just aren't communicating at all, or talking at all. It's just as confusing and makes you feel insecure and I've seen it with kids. I see that stuff happen. But when something happens and they see that you're all working together, it's such a difference. I do group texts with my ex husband and his wife. We'll have... Most of the time, it'll be the three of us in communication, and even with emails. One is handling the schedule, one is doing this, and it's also just let's all be on the same page because we're all in it for the kids.

Summer: But we're not best friends. We're not all gonna go... You know, we'll say hi to each

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other. I'll give his wife a hug and I'll... It's very friendly, but we're not all let's go get margaritas together and have double dates and all that. It's not that. But what I know is that for my kids, it's an awesome feeling, even if they don't express it that way. I just know there's just this security. There's no worry about hey, can you ask Dad this, or can you... It's just a very like, you guys talk to each other. There's not that awkward feeling and I know that that's worked where I've seen the other side, kids feeling like, "Ugh, do you think you could ask Mom this?" It's like they're uncomfortable because they know those two parents don't like to communicate, or don't like to talk to each other at all.

Melissa Valder: Yeah.

Summer: Anyways, I just... That was just a great point. [crosstalk]

Melissa Valder: Kids definitely notice things, too. I know that at eight years old, there were a lot of things that I didn't process-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: But looking back, I noticed a lot. I noticed and felt good about my parents doing their own thing when I wasn't at their house, like getting healthy or hanging out with their friends, getting reconnected with family. I think kids really notice those things, even if it's not happening with them in the house. They see when you're trying to heal and when you're getting right with yourself. That, of course, comes back and shows itself in parents' relationships with their kids, when they're working to move on and working to get better, and be happy again.

Melissa Valder: I definitely noticed those things. I noticed my dad going to play golf more. He would go out on mountain bike rides and I'd come over to his house for the weekend and he'd be sunburned because he went on a bike ride on Wednesday when we weren't at his house.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: And looking back, I remember being a kid and being happy for him for doing those things because even though I didn't understand what the pain was all about, I knew that it was there, and it felt good to see him happy. There's a phrase about when you're in an airplane and they say to put the air mask on yourself before [crosstalk]

Summer: Yes.

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Melissa Valder: Parents getting healthy and getting right with themselves in order to give the best to their children-

Summer: Exactly.

Melissa Valder: In whatever situation, you know, blended or not.

Summer: It is an example of being your best to the people around you is first being good to you and making sure that you're good and healthy and emotionally stable and secure and happy, all those good things.

Melissa Valder: Yeah.

Summer: I wanted to go back because I didn't want to forget this. You had talked about, probably the first person that I've heard of, who's done every day back and forth. Usually there's... The common things are a five, two-two-five split, or it's one week on, one week off. Some people have it when kids are much older, I've heard of two weeks on, two weeks off. Not often, but I have heard of that. Or there's maybe just every other weekend, things like that. But you had quite the back and forth.

Melissa Valder: Yeah.

Summer: What was that like? Was that something you would... Are you glad you had it that way or do you wish there was a little bit more time at either house? How has that affected you in terms of today and your space?

Melissa Valder: I would definitely not recommend it. What my parents told me is that the reason why they chose... I think the court chose it. I don't think that that was their idea, but they said that my brother was young. My brother was... I think my brother was 4 at the time, and so they felt that he would need more time with his mom... Couldn't go so long without seeing his mom-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: Was the reasoning that I was told. But man, it was such a pain. It was such a pain. When I was younger, I don't remember it being so bad because you're not thinking about clothes or anything like that-

Summer: Right, right.

Melissa Valder: But I remember going into middle school and wanting to wear a certain outfit and

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having to think two days ahead for things. I am a really good planner, kind of to a fault because I can be a little bit rigid about plans and things having to have a certain order. It probably stems from something like that, although my dad's naturally like that, so it might just be a family thing.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: But yeah, I mean with outfits it was a pain. With books, like in middle school we didn't have lockers, but in high school I was able to just keep all my books in my locker so that I wouldn't have to worry about books getting stuck at one house or the other.

Summer: Right.

Melissa Valder: I mean something that I loved was the double holidays.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: I loved the... it felt like having two Christmases-

Summer: Two Christmases, that's what my kids say.

Melissa Valder: Yeah. Two Thanksgivings, sometimes. Maybe for when kids are younger it's not so bad of a thing. I would imagine it being more of a pain for the parents-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: But I think that in middle school, high school, maybe age 10 and up, I remember thinking about this being like oh, week on, week off would be cool. It was never changed, so until I turned 17 and saved up for my own car and decided I was going to stay planted at one house, we had been moving back and forth every day. It had its perk because we knew what parent we were with on what day in the week. My brother and I, we both played soccer and so my dad always planned so that our soccer practices would be on a day that we were with him.

Melissa Valder: But no, it's just a lot of moving back and forth. The positive from it is that I am super organized. I can unpack really quickly. We just moved in March and our place was totally set like two days later with picture frames up and everything-

Summer: Wow.

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- Melissa Valder: Because I have this nesting thing where it's like once I'm in a new space, I need all my stuff, and everything has to be-
- Summer: You're so similar to me.
- Melissa Valder: Organized.
- Summer: I'm all about being organized. It's been an ordeal, like us right now, because we're still living out of boxes. We finally have our bathroom done, like tonight, and a closet. I actually get to like, put clothes in a closet, actually get to put my shoes out because right now I've been like okay, here's the shoe box. Our bedroom is just like here's a wardrobe box. Try to find something. I just have like a limited amount of clothes I've been wearing. I'm so organized, like to have things in their place and I can only imagine... And I see that happen... Now the kids are... All of our kids do a week on, week off, so it's a little bit easier, but there are still times where it's like, "Oh, I have to go drive over to this house and get this or that."
- Summer: For the most part, it's... I know my kids will be like, "We have all of these books," and they're not in high school yet. Next year, Logan will have his locker, but... So they have a ton of books that they don't need every day. It's that same thing. You can't carry all of those. It's so heavy. Luckily we live so close to each other that it's just a, "Okay, on this day when I pick him up from school, I'll drive them by your house and they'll pick up what they need and then they've got it for the week," and then we've got two sets of martial arts gear, two sets of dance gear, or you've got your one dance bag that you bring with you.
- Summer: Things that you try to make it as easy as possible because it is a lot. Especially like you said, as you get older, you're worried more about your hair and your outfits and what are you going to wear, and all those things, whereas when you're little, it's just like okay, whatever's here, I'll just put on. I don't care.
- Melissa Valder: Yeah.
- Summer: But yeah, it's so interesting too, you know, now you're just like I want to be settled in my place.
- Melissa Valder: Yeah. I traveled for four months when we got married. We were backpacking, so I lived out of a backpack for four months and that... The change of scenery and place so frequently definitely tested that for me, but in a healthy way. For the first couple weeks of that trip, I had a lot of stress because there wasn't that control of my space so I was so used to feeling like I needed. It definitely helped break that a little

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bit. It's definitely still in me, though.

Summer: I think what's so great though, is hearing you, everybody has different life situations, whether they're in a blended family or not, raised by a single parent, only have a dad, or only have a mom, or whatever the situation is. You get to choose what you learn from it. It's so great to hear from you because I think a lot of parents worry about their kids and go, "Well, they didn't have,"... Well, I used to worry about that. I grew up with both of my parents in a very stable environment. I had everything I needed in my one room at my one house. I used to worry like, "Oh, my kids aren't going to have that and they're going back and forth," and there's all these things that you think about and stress about, but at the end of the day, look how much more flexible you are. Look at how organized you are. Look at the things that it actually... It's part of your journey that has made you stronger in areas that maybe I'm not, you know what I mean?

Summer: And just the way that you've got to see different dynamics in relationships, whether you liked what was happening or didn't like what was happening, you learned from it. I think that's what's so great is that everybody's journey is so unique and just because this one unit split apart and became multiple units, doesn't mean that it still didn't come with its blessings in your life, you know?

Melissa Valder: Yeah, definitely. Looking back, I couldn't imagine my parents still being together and not having my step, my half sisters. I can't imagine a life without my step dad.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: He definitely adds... he just adds a color and a flair to my life that is unique to him, and same with my sisters. So yeah, it was challenging and I think everyone can handle situations a little bit better or can look back and say, "I could have done things differently here." All of us take away things and limitations and whatnot-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: From what we experience as kids. It's just part of life. But yeah, there's something that beautiful that comes out of it and things that change you for the better as well. I'm happy to have had the experience, for sure. And still have the experience.
[crosstalk]

Summer: And still have it, exactly. It keeps going. Okay, I have one more question for you.

Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Summer: Because I have a feeling some, especially for the female listeners would be wondering this, as you are an adult now and you're married, did you have all of your parents at your wedding?

Melissa Valder: Yes.

Summer: And how was that with your... with the different parents? What happened? What was that like?

Melissa Valder: We had a pretty small wedding. There was 80 people. My husband has a massive family. We actually were planning on it being smaller, but that's what happens when [inaudible 00:38:16].

Summer: Yep.

Melissa Valder: All of my parents came for the wedding. I didn't feel... I mean, I was just in my happy-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: In my little happy place. But I know that as with graduations and things, they're just kind of on their separate little sides, meeting and talking to people separately. What I did want for my wedding was to be walked down the aisle by my dad and my step dad, whether they liked it or not.

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: It's what I wanted because it didn't feel right with either... you know, one or the other, or none. It felt right to want both of them. What's funny is that our wedding colors were kind of those jewel tones like purple and maroons and burgundies and they were both wearing purple ties and they both walked me down the aisle and it was beautiful. I cried. When we get the pictures back, people joked because at the time, they... It was just like all of the years before that, they weren't big fans of each other, but on both sides of the family, people were joking that they looked like they were my dads, that they were the couple.

Summer: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Aww.

Melissa Valder: Yeah, it was awesome because it felt good that at the end of the day, for a big moment like that, they could put that aside and do what I wanted and what I felt

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was just special and what I truly wanted in that moment.

Summer: Love it.

Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Summer: I love it so much. Oh my gosh. This has been so great. Thank you so much.

Melissa Valder: Yeah.

Summer: I feel like there's so many great take aways from this. I mean, it's so good. I love hearing it for myself and I know our listeners are going to get a ton out of it.

Melissa Valder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Summer: I appreciate you-

Melissa Valder: Thank you.

Summer: Doing this.

Melissa Valder: Yeah, thank you for having me. It was nerve wracking to share because I don't think-

Summer: It is. [crosstalk]

Melissa Valder: Like I told you over coffee, speaking to you is the first time I kind of laid it all out like that, so-

Summer: Yeah.

Melissa Valder: I hope that people can even just get a little something out of it.

Summer: Yeah. Oh, they will.

Melissa Valder: Awesome.

Summer: Thank you so much, Melissa.

Melissa Valder: Thank you.

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