

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer F.: Hello Everything Always family. It is just me today, Summer Felix-Mulder. My husband Michael is in the other room working. He wanted to do this interview that we've got in store today with me, but he wanted to do it while he was multitasking and working, and doing contracts, and I was like, "You know what? When we do our lives and you answer text messages, it just doesn't go over well." At least I don't think so. I don't think you can be so effective at multitasking. That's my opinion.

Summer F.: I wanted to give these ladies undivided attention and he wanted to speak with them too, but he also had some stuff to do. It's all good because I got to spend quality time with the Gipford moms and they are awesome. They are stepmom and bio-mom coming together and co-parenting and having an awesome family with the first, first thing in mind, and that is their children. And so the coolest thing about these two is that they came together and they wrote a book. They are the co-authors of *Stepmom, How We Navigated Divorce, Remarriage and Co-parenting With The Same Goal, Happy Children*. I'm talking to Erin and Tina today and we're going to hear some, actually a really, really, really funny story from the book. I'm so glad they shared it. I'm still thinking about it and I'm still laughing inside, it's so good.

Summer F.: They came together to write this book so that they could offer a raw, funny, and definitely sometimes awkward, but also really inspiring look inside the crazy world of co-parenting, because it is crazy. Things happen, arguments and stuff happen whether you're co-parenting really well or not. There's times you're going to disagree on thing, but somehow amidst all of it, they figured out how to do this successfully so that the children stay super happy and feeling secure, and feeling like they've got all of these people on their team, which is absolutely what I love.

Summer F.: What Mike and I just really want to promote hardcore for blended families. But, rather than just another 'how to' parenting book, they really wanted to provide something that was authentic and entertaining, of how they found a way to do this stuff together. The hard stuff, the rewarding stuff, and really keep all of the relationships healthy, and give an example for these kids. And it's just amazing and there's a lot of kids involved, so you'll hear all about that. We have in the show notes, all of the places where you can find the book, all the information about them, and I'm really excited for you to hear this interview because they're just starting this whole, doing podcasts and really promoting the book. So it's one of their first interviews and they rocked it. They did such an amazing job. I'm just still so impressed that they came together, not only how they've come together for their family, but really how they actually came together and wrote a book together. Like, what? That's super commitment. So really excited for you guys to hear this, enjoy, and please like, share, let me know what you think about it, and enjoy.

Summer F.: Hey guys, welcome. I'm so excited to have you on here. It blows my mind, your whole

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

relationship, all that you're doing and I definitely think you're going to be an inspiration to our listeners. So thank you so much for being here with me.

Erin: Great. Yeah, we're excited, honored.

Tina: Yes, very much so.

Summer F.: Before we dive in, I mentioned in the intro about your book, but the big question is, how did you even come together to write this book and commit to doing it?

Erin: I would say about a year ago, well, over a year ago now. I knew that I wanted to write a book, and I knew that I wanted it to be around co-parenting, because I've always been really proud of our relationship. I mean, the three of us with Shawn, my ex-husband, included, and I started writing it. I kept writing and deleting, writing, and deleting and it just wasn't coming, I wasn't excited about it. It just was hard and I knew that something was missing, and it was on my way to church on the morning of Mother's Day of all days that the idea just popped into my head like, "Oh my gosh, I need Tina to write this book with me." And you know how you get one of those awesome ideas and you know it's awesome because your whole body just gets excited, and I'm like, "Yup. Oh my gosh. I am literally going to ask my ex-husband's wife to write a book with me." [inaudible 00:05:17].

Summer F.: Have either of you ever written a book before?

Erin: Not at all.

Tina: Yeah. No.

Summer F.: You guys, what do you do now?

Tina: I am a daycare provider.

Summer F.: Okay.

Tina: Have been for the 13 years since I moved to Ellsworth. Before that, just worked in a group home. Loved it, but really love doing what I'm doing now.

Erin: Tina is definitely the nurturer and the caretaker in our family, and I have always said that that is why God gave us Tina because that's just not me. She is the ying to my yang and that [crosstalk] she picks up all my slack.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer F.: Okay, so all the questions, just so we can have like the high-level view is, how long were you married, how old were the kids, how many kids, ages of kids, all that stuff. What are the dynamics going on?

Erin: Oh Geez. Are you ready for this?

Tina: I was just going to say are you down?

Summer F.: I'm so ready.

Erin: This is Erin. I was married to Sean for six years. However, we were high school sweethearts. We met when we were 13 years old in middle school and we got married as soon as I graduated from tech school and we had two children, a son and a daughter together. And we got divorced when my son, our youngest was, just before his first birthday. So we were, and we were married six, six years.

Summer F.: Okay. And then he met Tina.

Tina: Yes. And I have a daughter from a previous relationship. I was never married, so my daughter was four when we separated. Also when Sean and I met, she was almost five, but then Sean and I got together. We had our first child, which was a boy, and then we had a daughter and you'll find all the crazy stuff in the book about that. And [crosstalk] rollercoaster. Our youngest is 10, the next one is 12, Erin and Shawn's son is 14 and then their daughter is 17 and my daughter is 17.

Summer F.: That is a big crew. I thought our crew was big. Oh my gosh, so you've got a lot of teenagers in there.

Tina: Yeah. Yes we do.

Summer F.: Okay, so the reason why this is just so awesome to talk to you, is because you already know this, and this is why the book is so great. This is so uncommon. Usually, you know there's the bad mouthing going on, there's the venting and there's like, oh my gosh, I can't be in the same room. All of that. What was it like when you first met and how did it evolve into you guys actually having the situation you do right now, that you can actually sit next to each other, compliment each other, write a book together. Like what? This is crazy stuff. How did you get here?

Erin: Well I think everybody will find it really funny that neither Tina nor I can remember when we actually met like face to face or were introduced.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer F.: Oh Wow.

Tina: Yeah. No, I don't remember [crosstalk] on my end, because I don't know what to expect. I've never been in this situation so I didn't want to deal with any crazy ex-wife, and you know, divorce is tough as it is, and then you throw a new girlfriend in there or a new boyfriend and then you're like, oh, then you have kids. Like, okay, where do I stand here? So yeah, it was something I avoided for quite some time.

Erin: One of the things I remember was whenever I would come to pick up kids when it was my turn, because they lived at the time in our marital home, like I had moved out, but they both lived there. So I would walk up to the front door to get the kids and I mean it must have been a couple months and I would hear Tina, I could hear her voice, you know, "Hey kids, don't forget your pajamas, or pick up your toys before you leave." But I never saw her so,

Summer F.: Wow.

Erin: Right. It wasn't until later, now talking about it, she's like, "Well yeah, I wasn't going to come out there." So that gave us time to kind of, I guess, I feel like, get to know each other through the kids, through text messages, through, non-confrontational ways before we had to go through that, which was nice.

Summer F.: Yeah. So how long did you say it was until you actually met, finally met?

Tina: I would say a couple months for sure. And like you said, we can't recall the day that it happened. It just-

Summer F.: So it must not have been that bad. That's what I keep thinking. Like it must not have been that traumatic.

Tina: It wasn't something that was so traumatic that sticks out in my head, so it's really odd that I can't remember it.

Summer F.: You do end up meeting, and what's the relationship like in the beginning? You know, what's going through your mind?

Erin: I mean we obviously weren't like buddy buddy or anything.

Tina: Wasn't looking to be best friends with my boyfriend's, but yeah, boyfriend at the [crosstalk 00:10:36]. But yet civil.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Erin: Yeah, we were definitely at least respectful and just, well, and Tina ended up becoming my daycare lady.

Summer F.: Wow.

Erin: Right. And so that actually could have been our kind of window into-

Tina: I would say it is.

Erin: Getting to know each other, because I would then have to drop, I started dropping the kids off. Shawn was already at work and putting them, you know, Tina took care of them every day while I was at work. So I just kind of started bypassing Sean altogether with kid questions, because he'd always say, "Well I have to get back to you. I have to talk to Tina and get back to you." I just started going straight to the horse's mouth when I had the kid question. And so yeah, I feel like we-

Tina: And I just think it built from there. Like instead of going through Sean, I would just, I'm a very upfront person, very-

Erin: Direct.

Tina: ...out-spoken and yeah, I just pick up the phone, text her if I had a question, if there was a concern, something going on with the kids, I would just ask her. I just, I didn't want to beat around the bush.

Summer F.: Yeah, exactly.

Tina: Just something that was natural for me. I just thought, you know what, there's no need to talk to Sean and have him talk to Erin.

Summer F.: Right. What are some of the, the challenges or things that have actually been hard with all of this in a big blended family?

Tina: It's always been not crossing that line.

Erin: Yeah.

Tina: I'm sure that I don't step on Erin's toes. Not that she would ever come right out and tell me I did, but I'm always been the motherly, so I never wanted the kids to ever feel like they were different. I know they're not biologically mine, but I love them just the same. Different love, but I love them as if they were my own. I want everything always to be

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

equal between the kids, so that there was never any, why does this, why is that? I want one of them to all feel the same and love. That would be, I guess some of the challenges, you know, like not stepping on bio mom's toes. Yeah. And then just raising two girls that are the same age with-

Summer F.: Yeah. I mean, how do they all get along or do they, is it just like normal siblings fight, sometimes love each other, or was it hard? You know, I mean, what are some of those things that have gone on?

Tina: For me, I would say that we've never identified as stepsisters, Half-brothers. It's, we're family, sisters. I didn't want them to feel like, oh, this is so and so and this is... I don't want them have to introduce like that. I wanted them to always say, "This is my brother, this is my sister." There were some challenges with the girls, years ago. Yeah, and I can say they are closer now than they've ever been, which is exactly what I wanted them to be.

Summer F.: I love that. I love that.

Tina: It's inviting each other to have each other through, being a girl first of all is tough, then I [inaudible 00:13:41]. So they just really have each other, and I stay pretty connected with them, you know, asking them how things are going. You know, what's up. My daughter is very close to me and I feel like April is too, which is my stepdaughter, And I feel like I can ask them, they'll tell me, I usually find out things that most moms probably don't know, but.

Erin: Yup, and see that's what I love. Tina asks the hard questions, where I tend to be scared to do that, so yeah-

Tina: I don't have much of a filter, I lay it out there.

Summer F.: Why do you think you co-parent so well together? I mean I want to hear the good takeaways that people can use in their own relationships.

Tina: I think number one is we respect each other, we communicate. Communication is key to any relationship, but especially for something like this. So there's been times where I'll send Erin a text message, when you have a moment I need to chat. There's been times where I'm like, I need to balance [inaudible] out for you, tell me what your thoughts are. And she's done the same thing. I'm not saying we leave Sean out a lot of the times, but I'll fill him in, and we'll bounce things off of him too. But I just think the respect thing has to be there for both of us, not just. I think once you have that, and let go of all the anger, you're going to have a much better relationship all the way around.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer F.: 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. 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 we get along with his ex or how do I set some boundaries in place or why doesn't my stepson 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.

Summer F.: What do you think? Like if I were to ask the kids how they feel you know, I've got two moms, I've got all these brothers and sisters. Like what do you think they would say about their family?

Erin: Well, I think to them it's normal. I mean, they don't know any other way because Tina has been in their lives since they were, I mean Lance couldn't even speak when he met, when Tina entered the picture and-

Tina: He was 14 months when I met him for the first time, April was four-

Erin: Yeah, and I remember there was, I don't know, the kids were maybe eight, between the ages of eight to ten, my kids, and we happen to pull out an old Christmas video of April, my daughter's first Christmas. And so it was me, Sean and April, sitting down in the living room, opening presents on Christmas Day. And Lance walks by and he's watching it and he's like, well, it's like "Mom, where's Tina?"

Erin: Well I had to explain, well honey this was before we, your Dad and I got divorced and your dad didn't even know Tina. And he was "Oh." That was just something he had never even thought before it.

Summer F.: Yeah. It's just their normal, awesome family.

Tina: Yeah. Yeah. Which is exactly what we wanted.

Erin: Exactly, exactly.

Summer F.: What was it like writing together? Like what was your process?

Erin: I would say that first day, like that Mother's Day when I came over there and kind of

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

pitched her the idea, I really didn't know how she was going to react. But she agreed and then we just kind of sat there on the patio, I will never forget it. It was a gorgeous day in May and we were sitting on the patio talking and we just started reminiscing about some of the, you know, some of our experiences, and she brought up things that I'm like, "Oh, I forgot about that." And so we spent a good 45 minutes just bringing stuff up. And we're like, "Oh, well there's our outline we're going to write about." So then I just kind of did a more formal version of that. Did I write chapters first?

Tina: Yep. And then I wrote my side or my viewpoint on each of our stories first and then she wrote her chapter second.

Summer F.: Can you share something from the book? A funny story or...she's laughing already.

Tina: Yeah, go ahead. I'll let you share the funniest part that you think. I mean, I know what it is, but I know mine yet. It's always been a funny story from me.

Erin: Okay.

Tina: What did you get the biggest chuckle out of?

Erin: Well, I, that's your part though.

Tina: I know that's why-

Erin: That is by far the funniest.

Tina: Well, needless to say, Sean and I are very fertile together.

Summer F.: Yeah, apparently!

Tina: Yeah, we were done after we had our son, because I had had a couple of miscarriages and had a rough time bringing him. He was premature, so we were done and we had a vasectomy done, that same day I decided to take a pregnancy test, and believe it or not, I was pregnant again, so-

Summer F.: The day, you found out you were pregnant the day that he got a vasectomy?

Tina: Absolutely.

Summer F.: That's amazing.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

- Tina: [crosstalk] So I had to tell him as he was on ice that we are [crosstalk] baby. And of course his response was this could have waited. No, no, no, no. Which is a good thing because he's, he has very strong swimmers, needless to say nine months later he still had swimmers. Yup.
- Summer F.: Oh my gosh.
- Tina: Yep, and I had thought, if they're still there, you're, next time you go in, I'm going into get my tubes tied.
- Summer F.: Yeah. Oh my gosh. Wow. That's crazy. I'm just like, imagine that state of like, okay, there's no more, and then boom, it's like, actually-
- Tina: We wanted more, but we have gone through [crosstalk]
- Summer F.: Yeah. Okay. Okay.
- Tina: I want to know.
- Summer F.: Okay, okay.
- Tina: You got to read the book because it's [crosstalk] emotional part too, if you get into that chapter. Our daughter was heaven sent. Let's just put it that way, and I'm glad she's here. I mean, she completed us and I'm glad, I'm really glad it happened. I'm glad I was able to keep her long enough to give birth, let's just put it that way, long enough to keep her inside because they could not wait to get out.
- Summer F.: Yeah. I'm so excited. I'm so excited to read the book and we're going to talk about all of that stuff, like where people can get it and all that, but we're going to wait till the end. Were there hard parts writing together? I mean, what was like, or was it just easy for you?
- Erin: I would never say it was easy.
- Tina: I think somewhat easy. I mean, we had a story. For me it was hard to write because I'm a talker, not a writer by any means, so that part was hard for me. It was a very emotional book for me. There's a lot of emotion that went into my parts and I think Erin had the same. Some of her chapters were very emotional, but did we have to argue about anything? That part kind of flowed really well together.
- Summer F.: Oh, that's awesome. How long did it take you, by the way?

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

- Erin: Are you sitting down? Another shocker.
- Summer F.: You're either going to, you're going to tell me, "It took us like one month." I don't know.
- Erin: No. Well we decided to do this on mother's Day of 2018 and we had to have, we decided we wanted to launch our book like exactly a year later. So Mother's Day of this year, 2019 and so that meant when we worked the timeline backwards, we had to have our first rough draft done and submitted by the end of October. So a couple months, June, July, August, September, four months.
- Summer F.: That's amazing. That's awesome. Wow. And especially doing this your first time. That's incredible. Like, I used to be a ghost writer, so I know all that goes into a book and the time and everything. And to have it launched one year later, it's just amazing, especially for your first book. So congratulations. So, so awesome.
- Summer F.: Speaking of the book, what are the big takeaways that people, and I'm guessing the audience is, you know, mom, stepmoms, people who want to co-parent together. What are the biggest takeaways that they'll get?
- Erin: Well, we decided from the very beginning that we did not want to make this in any way, shape, or form a self help book, you know? And so we, our hope and what we've gotten from feedback so far, I think we nailed that on the head because we just wanted to try to give people a different perspective, than maybe they're in right now. And we felt the best way to do that was just to share how we, how we do it, and our thought process, and what was going through our heads, what emotions we had. It's not like we say, do this, do this, do this, because everybody's situation is different. Everybody's dealing with a different person. We just want to inspire some people with a different perspective.
- Summer F.: Yeah, yeah, totally. Oh that's awesome. And what is the feedback that you're getting?
- Tina: I am surprised at all the good feedback that we're getting. You always worry like, did we do this right? Did we inspire somebody? And I'm absolutely amazed at the awesome feedback that we're getting. I mean it's just been, I've not gotten any negative.
- Erin: No, no. Which I'm sure at some point, something will come up. But, no you figure that the first few people that are going to be, "God, you guys, what were you thinking?" [crosstalk] been like that, so that's surprising to me. I mean I'm glad, because that's, was one of my worries. Like, they may not like the book-
- Tina: Right.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Erin: But words people have used is raw, and real, and deep, and inspiring. So I'm like, "Ooh, I can live with that." That's what we wanted.

Summer F.: Yeah, exactly. What advice in all of this, what is your big strong core piece of advice for co-parents?

Erin: Mine is that I feel like so many times people want to point a finger at either the stepmom or the bio-mom or the ex and start blaming and well he did this or she did this and it's, you have to really take those moments and turn them inward because I feel like relationships and connections start from within us. And yeah, we did have some hard times, probably more so with my ex husband than Tina, but I was able to turn it into lessons and okay, do I really want to argue with you for two hours or could I just try to see it from your perspective and apologize or whatever.

Summer F.: Yeah, that's so awesome. I'm just so inspired. I wonder, do you know other women in your situation that absolutely do not get along, but know that you guys do and have been inspired and maybe switched things up?

Tina: I'm not sure about that. We have a duo, a bio-mom and a stepmom that are at each other's throats. And we're trying to inspire them and it's one of them things where you think that you're just going to have to clean the slate, start over. And you know, more even go from there because you really just got to stop the fighting cause it's not doing the kids any good.

Summer F.: Exactly yeah, yeah.

Erin: We, I mean, we get people emailing us and pulling us aside all the time and telling us their situation and it's like, I've almost had to, my initial reaction is, "Oh well, you know, this is what you could do or you know, and," but it's like, they have to be ready themselves. They have to want to have that and be willing to do some things for it, so.

Tina: And one thing that we've, you got to realize that there's always three sides to a story-

Summer F.: Right? Oh yes.

Tina: In the truth, and it's like you're getting one side of the story versus both sides. And then somewhere in the middle is what really happened. So you're kind of trying to play this, you know, devil's advocate, trying to figure out what's the truth and what's not, and you're like, you just got to put the swords away. And put each other, put yourself in that person's shoes. How would you feel?

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

- Erin: That's the big thing. I remember doing that all the time. Like as a go to. Okay, calm down, put myself in her shoes right now.
- Summer F.: Yeah, yeah, exactly. It's so true. You're not only inspiring to other people that are reading the book, but you're such a great example to your kids, all the kids. And the fact that this is all just normal in their minds, it's just like, of course all of your parents just get along. And it's sad that for so many kids, it's not normal for them, you know? It's the normal for them is to be caught in the middle of fighting and, and all that. And it's just so rough. And that's the biggest thing that pains my heart is for kids to be so young, and you deal with enough drama in your life as an adult, you know, dating and just being a teen and all of those things. And to have to go through that within the safety of your own family and these people that love you is what heartbreaks me and my husband most. So it's so, people like you are just so awesome and to not only just have the dynamic, do what you guys do for your family, but then to come together and actually write a book is amazing. What is after this? Like are you going to, are you going to write more books? Are you like, what's your plan with after writing the book?
- Tina: You know, we've been asked that and we want it to go further. So everybody's asking when's the next book? It's like, [crosstalk] let's breathe for a little bit, and then like Erin and I've talked, we have so much more. We have, you know, this is just a small part of what happened. We have graduations, we have grandchildren that are going to be coming into the world. We have, weddings.
- Erin: We have college to figure out next year.
- Summer F.: Yep, oh yeah, all that stuff, it's that.
- Erin: So yeah, I feel like a sequel is definitely possible.
- Summer F.: Yeah, yeah, definitely. So where can everyone find, we're going to have, I do have all of your social media links and all of that stuff that we will post in our show notes, but where can people find your book?
- Erin: Of course in the only place for good books, Amazon.
- Tina: Amazon.
- Erin: Yeah, it is on Amazon. We have a paperback, we have a ebook version and I believe it's available on the Kindle Unlimited too.

EVERYTHING

Always **PODCAST**

A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Summer F.: Awesome

Erin: And then, yeah. And so you can search down there. Otherwise it's on our blog, which is gipfordmoms.com

Summer F.: and then she'll G-I-P-F-O-R-D moms dot com [inaudible]

Erin: I should say Gip Ford.

Tina: Yeah, but don't pronounce it like that in front of Shawn because he gets so mad. "That's not how you pronounce it." If I'm ever upset with him, it's Sean Gip ford.

Summer F.: Oh my gosh. That's so funny. No, it's silent. The P is silent. Awesome. Oh my gosh ladies, thank you so much for hanging out with me and this is, I'm so excited for you. I'm so excited for what the future holds and the lives that you will change. You just have to see it to believe it because most people don't believe it. Most people don't come out and share it like you do. So I know it takes a lot of courage because I know there's some funny things in the book. I'm sure there's challenging moments and all of that. The best though is finding out you're pregnant on the day that your husband gets a vasectomy. That is just classic. I thank you for sharing that, what a day. The day that we found out you were here with us. I love it. But thank you so much ladies, so excited. We'll have all of the links to all the amazing things that you do, and the book as well, the Amazon link, and just, I'm so excited for all that's in store for you guys. Thank you.

Tina: Yes, thank you.

Erin: Thank you.