

amazing MOMS

These women prove that a mother's love (and compassion and generosity and ingenuity) is like no other

by Melody Warnick



Her costumes spark joy at the bus stop.

Emily Blodgett
RIVERTON, UT

The unicorn dancing in the driveway? That's just 37-year-old mother of four Emily Blodgett. To make her kids laugh, she pulled on a \$20 unicorn head one afternoon in 2018 and started dancing as the school bus rumbled to a stop in front of her home. "Mom, what are you wearing?" her son shouted. The elementary school crowd whooped—and her own kids, now ages 14, 11, 10, and 6, were just the right mix of pleased and embarrassed. From then on, Emily donned a new costume most days (Ms. Frizzle! A gumball machine! Elf on the Shelf!) to greet her kids. The driver had to warn riders not to rush to the windows lest they tip the bus.

By the end of this school year, Emily estimates she'll have dressed up 300 times, including in a 12-foot "social distancing tutu" she crafted out of tent poles and 120 yards of tulle. Sometimes it's exhausting, Emily admits. Then she remembers that "there are a lot of kids who are going through really hard things who have told my kids, 'I look forward to this every day.' That fuels my fire."

Follow Emily on Instagram at @busstopmama.



Emily's Greatest Showman-style costume with social distancing-friendly tutu.

SCIENTIST: ELIZABETH BLODGETT. GREATEST SHOWMAN: KIM SIMMONS. COX FAMILY: DEAR KATE STUDIOS. COX BAG: COURTESY OF SUBJECT.



Nicole with her husband, Matthew, Leila (left), Nathalia (back), and Liam.

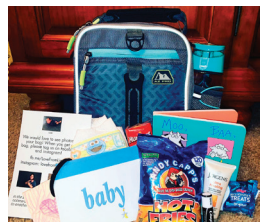
She helps NICU moms feel less alone.

Nicole Cox
GREELEY, CO

Nicole, 33, knows just how terrifying the NICU can be for parents. In February 2020, her son Liam was born at 34 weeks, weighing less than 4 pounds. He spent 25 days hooked up to an array of monitors in the NICU. The experience, says Nicole, was "like shell shock." Some days she felt totally alone.

Months after a thriving Liam came home, Nicole couldn't stop thinking about life in the NICU. She knew she had to do something. With donations from Facebook friends, local businesses, and others, Nicole and her husband started spending evenings stuffing bags with essentials, snacks, gift cards, and other goodies. Nicole even learned to crochet so she could include baby blankets. "For moms in the NICU, this stuff is beneficial," Nicole says. "It also sends the message 'Someone is aware of my situation and how difficult it is.'"

So far, Nicole's nonprofit, Nestled in the NICU, has donated more than 200 bags to local hospitals. Jessica Gomez, whose son Zayn spent time in the NICU, says having Nicole deliver a care package made a stressful time easier. "She knew everything my son was going through, and she knew that would lift my day up."



For ways to support, visit nestledinthenicu.com.



She's healing her pain by supporting others.

Rosilyn Temple KANSAS CITY, MO

Of the 500 or so crime scenes that Rosilyn has been to, the most devastating was the first. That was the day in 2011 she waited outside her 26-year-old son Antonio's apartment for a police officer to deliver the news that he'd been murdered. Her grief was intolerable. "I needed to talk to a mother who had experienced the same pain," she says. Soon after, she started the Kansas City chapter of Mothers in Charge, a national organization that supports families affected by homicide. In 2013, the police department began calling Rosilyn, 57, every time a murder took place in Kansas City—176 last year. Day or night, she'll show up to offer traumatized family members a hug, a hand to hold, and resources. "I just love on people," she says.

The support doesn't stop there. Rosilyn or a volunteer regularly checks in by phone to offer help; currently the team makes over 400 calls a week. KC Mothers in Charge also offers counseling with a licensed therapist. And with a grant from the Department of Justice, the group spearheads a neighborhood violence prevention program.

Despite her own trauma, the work "helps me through my own pain," Rosilyn says. "It's healing." In a dark and hopeless moment, "we are mothers who have been through the same thing, so we can help other mothers, families, and people through it."

A Facebook post inspired her to become a mom.

Andrea Conter ANCHORAGE, AK

In July 2017, a Facebook post appealing for "a safe, supportive, mentoring, loving foster home" for a college-age young man with the hashtag #ReadyToChangeALife? caught Andrea's attention. Teens are Andrea's jam—she's mentored hundreds over her 30-year career in retail—and the 56-year-old former bookstore manager with no biological kids of her own found herself thinking, *Wait, I can do this.* A couple of months later, 19-year-old Mitchell Hershey moved in. Andrea's parenting combined tough love and pep talks. When Mitchell grew comfortable with her, they had deep conversations about where he saw himself in five years and how he could get there.

A week before Mitch turned 21 and aged out of Alaska's foster care system,



Andrea officially adopted him at the local courthouse. With an ironic "It's a boy!" balloon in the background, Mitchell told the judge, "I just want a parent for once in my life." Five more foster boys have now spent time with them. "Even in the rough times," Andrea says, "the difference you can make in their life is huge. And the difference it makes in *your* life is tenfold."

TEMPLE AND LOGO: COURTESY OF KC MOTHERS IN CHARGE; CONTER: COURTESY OF SUBJECT; HENLEY: COURTESY OF NO LABEL AT THE TABLE; WOODS: HARPER RAE PHOTOGRAPHY; HALL: COURTESY OF SUBJECT.



Her bakery employs people with autism, and they thrive.

Shelly Henley CARMEL, IN

At age 18, Jacob Wittman wanted to be a chef. His mom, Shelly, worried that, like many other young adults with autism, he'd never get hired. Determined not to let him languish after aging out of high school, she decided they'd create a food business from scratch: a line of gluten- and dairy-free cookies, in flavors like chocolate chip, snickerdoodle, and Scandinavian ginger, that they initially sold at a farmers' market. When No Label at the Table took off, Shelly opened a storefront bakery-café in 2018. All 20 or so of her employees are on the autism spectrum.

Shelly thinks autism is an asset, especially if employees are matched with activities they love. For Jacob, that's cooking and recipe development—he's the mastermind behind the bakery's beloved lemon-almond cookie. Now working 30-hour weeks at No Label at the Table, "Chef J" has a loyal following. "The products are good on their own," Shelly says, "but then you know you're putting someone to work who would otherwise be sitting at home, and they're given a life of dignity."

Doctors once told Shelly that Jacob would never talk; she worked with him until he did. Now she's helping to create the independent adulthood she envisions for Jacob and her other employees with autism. "I really do feel I have a calling for this," she says.

After scoring a free trip, this mom turned around and gave it away.

Emily Woods FRANKLIN, TN

Emily, 39, was stunned when, out of thousands of entrants, she was the one who randomly won an Instagram giveaway of \$1,000 and a five-day Florida beach vacation. As a single mom with two young daughters, she could have used the prize. But she didn't hesitate to pass it on to someone she felt needed it more: her childhood friend Simon Hall.

If there were a Single Dad Olympics, Simon would win gold: He's adopted eight children, now ages 5 months to 22 years. The pandemic was hard on his work as a chef, so hearing that Emily was sending a vacation and cash his way "hit me at the core," he says.

For Emily, there are no regrets. "Of course it's nice to get gifts; I'm not gonna lie," she says. "But when I do something for somebody else, it's just the best feeling. It makes me want to do more good things."



Above, Emily with Tatum (left) and Lottie. Below, Simon with five of his eight kids (from left): Abby, Mason, Blake (in front of Simon), Hunter, and Nicholas.