[00:00:05]

[MUSIC]. This is Tell me Your Story, Special Edition, where we address relevant topics for our community.

The topic for this edition is about Mothers at Work. In the description of each episode, we will provide a content warning and resource for support to our listeners.

Today, we are back for the second round of a conversation around mothers at work. We brought back our guests, Carolyn Hubbard and Sasha Tulgan, but also we have a special guest today, [LAUGHTER] who is, Lakshmi Clark McClendon from the Dean of Students Office. Thank you for joining us Lakshmi. Please tell us a little bit about you and what do you do at Dean of Students Office.

[00:00:59]

Sure. Well, thank you so much. I'm really excited and happy to be here. I'm Lakshmi, Senior Director of Student Affairs and the Dean of Students Office at HLS. I've been at HLS for roughly 10 years now. My work is largely student affairs related. I support the office and students who have any personal or medical emergencies contribute to orientation planning, commencement planning, support for international students. I'm all around student affairs support. I love to here.

[00:01:32]

Thank you very much. Of course, hi, Sasha.

[00:01:35]

Hi, Edgar.

[00:01:36]

Hi, Carolyn.

[00:01:37]

Hi, Edgar.

[00:01:38]

Nice. Where we stopped last time about having the kids. Then some other questions related to that. I just want to remind everyone. Carolyn has two kids, very young. Sasha has also two kids, a little bit older. Lakshmi has also two kids and one already in high school. Can you tell me a little bit, while you were having the idea for name or sex, did you choose? Did you get you know, the sex of your kids?

[00:02:20]

No.

[00:02:21]

You did not.

[00:02:21]

No. I did not for either one.

[00:02:22]

Either one.

[00:02:23]

No.

[00:02:24]

Lakshmi.

[00:02:25]

I did for both.

[00:02:26]

You did for both?.

[00:02:27]

Yeah. I wanted to find out. Sophia, who's my daughter, she's 15 now. We wanted to find out. I found out she was a girl. Then for Ethan, who is now seven, I found out that he's a boy.

[00:02:41]

Sasha.

[00:02:42]

We did not intend to find out that was the plan for both. For the first one, we went in for an ultrasound at 18 weeks or so in the stenographer said something like, you want me to confirm it's a boy? Definitely a boy. Then we knew and it was whatever. It was fine. We were just happy we're having a baby. Then with the second one, we also said we wouldn't find out, we would let it be a surprise. But I had had so many ultrasounds at that point because as you know, we went through years of fertility treatments. I was basically an expert at reading sonograms, and so I saw it and I figured, that's probably a boy. But I'm also not a doctor or a Sonographer. I thought. We'll just wait.

[00:03:19]

It doesn't mean no. [LAUGHTER]

[00:03:20]

I did never tell what was on that screen.

[00:03:23]

Well, I've seen so many. Say, anyway, it still was a surprise and it was definitely a surprise to add them, although he expected it was a boy for reasons that were totally non-scientific.

[00:03:37]

I think with this one because many people with family or friends that would shared.

[00:03:44]

You don't know if you are looking at [OVERLAPPING] a fawn, a hippopotamus, an alien.

[00:03:50]

I just see those images, but I don't want to, you know, right? because I'm like look at their baby.

[00:03:57]

All you can say, it looks just like you [LAUGHTER].

[00:04:01]

Exactly. Oh my God It's just your husband's face and your nose [LAUGHTER]. I didn't see anything. Anyways. This is my curiosity here, what difference does it make? Because it doesn't look like you were either I don't want to know, and you're fine knowing. What happened to you? But Carolyn, what's the preference not knowing? Is just a surprise?

[00:04:27]

I think I was interested in having it be a surprise. I think Rob really felt strongly about not finding out as well. [OVERLAPPING] He said, there's so few actual surprises in life. Like I think we should. I was tempted. But he felt really strongly about it. With the second, when I was pregnant with Mason, I was so distracted with Vivian. I wasn't even thinking about it. What about you (Lakshmi)? What made you feel like, okay, I want you to know?

[00:05:02]

I didn't feel strongly, that I really want to know about this more. Since I was, wanting to plan a little better.

[00:05:09]

That's what we're thinking

[00:05:10]

Then also feeling, I knew. I had a little bit more of a connection like, there's my girls, just something like that. I didn't feel extraordinarily strong about needing to know, but I just wanted to know, and so it really wasn't a thing. Planning part of it for me was helpful.

[00:05:29]

Make it easy a little bit.

[00:05:31]

I know this is going to be Sophia.

[00:05:34]

I didn't know planning, so that wasn't an issue.

[00:05:36]

You didn't have a chance to write a plan.

[00:05:38]

I know I didn't. Then for the second one I was like, I don't know how to plan because we didn't do it and it was fine. We have a place for him to sleep and that'll be enough.

[00:05:48]

That's good too.

[00:05:50]

It was the same thing with Carolyn. I think also having gone through fertility treatments, we knew so much information at every step, like, when they fertilized, when they were a blastocyst, when they were being transferred, when they implanted, how many days? It just seemed, it would be nice to have one thing feel it was a little bit natural and surprising, of course that was ruined, but it was still fine.

[00:06:15]

What about names? What were the choices? How did you choose? Was there something planned way back? If you don't know the sex of the baby, how you plan for both, you choose for both in case you notice it's one or the other?

[00:06:30]

I had a strong feeling that I was going to have a girl first. I've just thought that throughout my life. I thought it was going to have a girl first. I had her name. Probably, it just clicked in my head, two or three years before I was even pregnant with her. I just loved the name. Vivian Rose is her first name, middle name. That was it. I knew it was a girl. That was it. There was no second choice. I didn't really have a boy's name planned. I was going to let Rob deal with it because he wanted them three M's for the boy's name because his grandfather had three. His initials are three m. I knew it would probably be an M name. But Vivian Rose, I knew that. Then Mason Rob picked. Mason was a month early. We had not settled on names. We were in the delivery room like, miles, from M's name back-and-forth, but he wrote Job Mason. Then Rob's middle name is Merrit and his grandfather's name was Merrit, so it's Mason Merritt.

[00:07:39]

Vivian wrote some very sweet.

[00:07:41]

It does.

[00:07:42]

[OVERLAPPING] [LAUGHTER]. That's the name that he wrote, [LAUGHTER], whatever you perceive are projected. Match with the personality of your bag or your toddler right now?

[00:07:57]

Like a rose.

[00:07:57]

She is sweet sometimes [LAUGHTER], but she is fierce.

[00:08:03]

Exactly.

[00:08:03]

She is a force.

[00:08:05]

She makes her statement.

[00:08:07]

She is a lot of feelings in a little tiny body. Mason is sweet. That's his baseline. He's a sweet boy. She has her sweet moments, but she is, I'm here. I know things. This is what I want. She's a force.

[00:08:25]

Lakshmi, did you choose the name ahead of time?

[00:08:29]

We did. Not very far ahead of time. There's no family history with either one of their names. Sophia Elisa. Elisa is my middle name. I guess there's some family history there. Then Ethan is Ethan Maxwell. The meaning of the names? It was more important to me. Sophia means wisdom, Ethan means strong. I think we chosen at some point during the pregnancy.

[00:08:55]

Because it seemed to talk about the meaning and the parts of the meaning of them. What's the meaning of your name?

[00:09:00]

Lakshmi is a Hindu goddess of fortune and prosperity.

[00:09:05]

Wow, that's beautiful.

[00:09:07]

Thank you.

[00:09:07]

It is very beautiful.

[00:09:08]

I did not like my name as a kid though.

[00:09:10]

You didn't?

[00:09:11]

Well, you know, it's hard as a kid to have a different name. I had to have folks call me Lisa for a long time. I was like I'm not Lisa.

[00:09:19]

But then later [LAUGHTER].

[00:09:20]

I'm okay with it now.

[00:09:23]

It is a beautiful name. It sounds beautiful too. I'm glad that you did.

[00:09:28]

I was nicknamed squasha as a kid. My name was Sasha and I was the shortest.

[00:09:32]

What have you done to [LAUGHTER] be called squasha.

[00:09:37]

So what about your kids?

[00:09:41]

I think for Ben, it was easy. I had always loved the name Benjamin and Adam’s. Grandfather was Papa Ben, which we later learned was Bernard. But that was after we named him Benjamin's, that was just fine. That was an easy one. Sydney, we thought much longer and hard because we had already used our boy's name. My mom's father was Sam Sydney, and she had debated naming me Sydney. Sydney for some reason, It just stuck. We wanted a name that wasn't so common, and we don't know many boys named Sydney. Of course, then we met my friend's cousin and her son, he was born two weeks after our Sydney and they named him Sydney. I don't know. Maybe maybe it's then coming back and fashion to name boys Sydney.

[00:10:28]

My father and my grandfather are Sydney [inaudible 00:10:30].

[00:10:31]

Well, that's wonderful so we have that point in common.

[00:10:34]

What changed in terms of relationships with your partners? You have a time before you had the babies. How much does it change? And this is our chance to say great things about your partner. How was the relationship, what changed, how much it changed, and what do you need to address and revisit in terms of your partners?

[00:11:02]

Well, for us, it was communication. You're tired. They're all these new demands on you. You just forget how to interact with the other person because there's a new human that you're responsible for. For us it was, it was the communication piece, so we're still working on. We were great at it, it was the two of us. But when you have a completely new life, you have to learn how to do that differently in a new way.

[00:11:40]

communication was one of the biggest factors maximum. Lakshmi

[00:11:46]

I think I would say just attending to the daily stuff that needs to get done and maybe that has a little bit to do with communication. I've met Andre when I was 19. Now I'm in my 47, so I've known him for 28 years. We lived in New York together for many years before having kids. A lot of our life before kids was like hanging out, partying, being 20 and 30 something year old in New York and just having fun. Having kids is fun, but there was life before kids in life after. I don't really remember a lot of our life before kids because it's just like everything is for us is just about family and kids now. But I think certainly having Sophia in New York was like a huge shift for us because it did require were both also working full time, managing our schedules, attending to the daily stuff that comes with being a kid, but then also having a child and a really big large city. I'm getting to work and go downtown and going to Brooklyn and then Bronx and then getting her to daycare. All of the daily things really require just a whole level of communication and planning and time management and not hanging out anymore. [LAUGHTER]

[00:13:10]

I will wait for that comment from Sasha because something is different. But how was with your side?

[00:13:16]

We were also in New York when we met, same as Lakshmi. Being in New York before kids is a special experience. It it's just we had such an extended group of friends, probably just like 50 close friends that we saw a lot of the time because it's New York. It's much easier to just be out and around all the time. I mean, I think I had an event pretty much every night. When you're looking at me and I like dazed way, but I realized when I left New York to go to Rochester, that was one of the first times I had gotten pregnant and I was amazed to realize how much social drinking there was because I would be out on a Monday night and people were asking me why I wasn't drinking. It happens so many times and I was only pregnant for a very short period of time. But I noticed that. It was a very different kind of life without those kinds of responsibilities. We were older when we got married, so we had an extended period of getting to be living that life. I remember a partner saying to me when I was working at a law firm, she had two young boys that were about the little younger than mine are now. She said, you have no idea how much time you have right now. I thought, oh, that's probably true, but she's exaggerating. Then of course that is entirely the reality. After having kids, I am a person who thrives on structure. I will say my life now is completely different. It's all structured around, but the kids activities are. But I don't mind that because it's easier to be intentional about things as opposed to like waking up on a Sunday and thinking, what am I going to do today? [LAUGHTER] But now it's just full of like soccer practice and karate and birthday parties and kids after school sports and balancing who's going to pick them up and where they're going to be in what afternoon.

[00:15:11]

If you and the partner conversation another chance, how is our partner in the relationship, hands-on? Help with everything? You still need to be told what to do? I have a sense, Carolyn, because of communication, where you're going with that. But what you can tell us about this?

[00:15:34]

I think about everything, and Rob just doesn't have that feeling, and not in a negative way, he just he just moves through life and takes things as they come and I'm more of I need to plan and I need to anticipate and I need to worry, and what can I worry about? I keep track of a lot of things. I scheduled the appointment so I know what's in the refrigerator. I know what to pack in their lunch.

[00:16:07]

He thinks it's a magical fridge that just manifests food [OVERLAPPING]

[00:16:11]

He's pretty good. I'll say I'll go to the store, but what do we need? And it's just that it's that.

[00:16:18]

Two different mindsets.

[00:16:20]

Yeah. There's a jealousy too, I think that he can walk out of the door and go to work and the kids will say buy. But if I try to leave they're crying and crying and it's not a good feeling to leave and I know they're fine, but there's this mommy, daddy strange dynamic with little kids where they just need or want mommy a lot. It's draining. He can take a shower without them pounding on the door. That's hard. I think that that's why I tried to plan so much is because I want to alleviate stress where I can so that on those it's difficult moments I can work through it.

[00:17:06]

If was the opposite, I know that he can go out and kids are grabbing my legs while he's going out and just go to your work. If was the opposite and you are leaving but they were just oh, you wanted to stay with me [LAUGHTER].

[00:17:20]

I would be very offended.

[00:17:26]

It's just saying, he can go wherever it wants and dealing with all this and then it's trying to go, and they don't do anything, then react to your...

[00:17:34]

No. They have to love me the most [LAUGHTER]

[00:17:38]

Lakshmi, how is Andrew?

[00:17:42]

He's also pretty easygoing. I tend to be the one who is more of a planner, a little bit more focused on career stuff like he has a very 9 to 5 job. He can leave at five and be home and detach from work. I tend to maybe work a little bit more and bring things home. He's very good at striking a balance, I think for me and with the kids. He does all the laundry, he does all the cleaning.

[00:18:13]

Great

[00:18:14]

Grocery shop. I'm really thankful for that. I'll do it, but since he does it. [LAUGHTER] I'm thankful for that. I think earlier on when the kids were very young, I was the one who was up at night with them. There was a little bit of resentment like, I need to sleep is really important to me at girls, like I'm not a morning person, [LAUGHTER] I need my sleep. The beginning, the earlier years, or maybe a little bit more difficult in terms of balance and who is doing what and responsibilities. But I feel like we're in a good groove. Now, he's a very involved parents as well. Like he's Sophie is a basketball player, so he's bringing her to the tournaments and driving all places and taking her out of state. He does that stuff. I think all in all pretty balanced. We do also have very different personalities. He's extraordinarily easy going, sometimes in my kitchen. [LAUGHTER] But it's catch many years to find our group.

[00:19:23]

Sasha.

[00:19:25]

We've talked about how there's so many influences from family life that come into a partnership. Adam and I came from different backgrounds. I had two working parents that were very much at least in their mind, they divided things. I think my mom felt like she did the lifted lots more of the planning and emotional labor. But they were partners. Adams family was much more traditional archetype of gender roles. Specifically in terms of a woman taking care of household things and the father working outside the home. We came at this from different perspectives and we've grown towards our own model over time, not without difficulty. I think I've said this to you before. I think there is Carolyn, I both experienced this with what we call dislike, invisible labor, emotional. Load of taking on the responsibility and part of it is just that we naturally do it. We don't necessarily delegate well. But it's taking on the responsibility of the planning, what sports are they going to be doing? What doctors appointments do they need? Where can we find a dentist? If we need this specialists, were the ones doing the research? Often Adam likes to do research, so often he's contributing to that, but often it's all be pushing it forward and he'll be in a helper role with a lot of those things. Then he likes to do things like car maintenance. He likes to take the dog for vet appointments. We fall into these roles of doing things that were both naturally inclined to do. I don't think it's necessarily even if you asked us to list out all of the things we did. I think we have different perspectives of how much we contribute, but we're both very much partners. We're both busy all the time and trying to strike a good balance between not spending time with the kids and also doing our jobs. I think I realize some of the times when I have things where I need to work late or come in at different day or change my hours. My default is always to say to add them, I'm assuming that you can cover this. Often he does. I think I don't give them enough credit for stepping in those situations. This morning I couldn't take my kid to school, so that we could meet here and Adam, just does that.

[00:21:50]

That's great.

[00:21:52]

Carolyn, On the other hand did have to do all. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:21:55]

I just walked out of the door.

[00:21:55]

[LAUGHTER] We did. We definitely have that where they want their mom, for sure. But Carolyn did drop off this morning and it was fairly traumatic.

[00:22:03]

Now you did. that's fine.

[00:22:04]

Yes.

[00:22:05]

It's okay.

[00:22:06]

We were both racing to get here in the car and she called me because she was stuck in traffic and worried she wouldn't get here. [OVERLAPPING] I'll let her tell you about the morning.

[00:22:13]

I bumped the Masons head on the car door. We're trying to get him in his car.

[00:22:18]

He was not a good feeling.

[00:22:19]

Was very sad about it as was I. Yes.

[00:22:25]

I'm asking these questions because I know relationships by itself is already a difficult thing because two different people. I think when you don't have anything else, other factors around to work that out sometimes takes a lot. That's the change that's happening in society in general. Like those 50 or 60 years marriage tends to be a different approach now because people are different expectation. But that the volume of that increases much more when you have the kids because then you don't even have the time anymore to go for that conversation. I know Carolyn for a while. Well, I have to go back on Lakshmi when Harry comment about early person my jokes, I was with her when you were working together and you need to reschedule me, I say, let's schedule this for 7:00 AM [LAUGHTER] It was really nice thing. Can you try to do that a little later in the day, but remember no. [LAUGHTER]

[00:23:24]

She's always flexible.

[00:23:26]

But Carolyn, I know this is very on planninh things. I will never forget the archives that you have with those folder with different callers name alphabetical in you know, by all other things, then don't move that.

[00:23:38]

Well, when you move to her files from DOS into the HR suite. I know you handle those with kid gloves.

[00:23:43]

I took pictures[LAUGHTER] [OVERLAPPING] I'm making sound like your were like a bad person. But then for example. I know a little bit of what he told me about a time that works together about Rob, which I love his personality as well. Because I think it gives you that balance that you need. Because you really are very planned and you have everything, which is a great thing. But you need that person that said, hey, can you just breathe a little bit and relaxed and you are like “I breathed, let’s go.

[00:24:16]

But seriously, it takes some week a long time to do anything. But it's because he wants to do it well. If he's doing the dishes, it will take a very long time [LAUGHTER]

[00:24:29]

Because he really wants to wash the dishes.

[00:24:31]

He gets a special polish because he takes care of the pots and pans. I'm just not like that. I'm just like, I appreciate that and I appreciate that that's his approach, but I'm much more. Let's get as much done as possible, as quickly as possible. He does bounce me.

[00:24:46]

[LAUGHTER] Now I have to ask another question. He knows how to work the rack if you need to put the dishes on the rack.

[00:24:52]

He's very good dishwasher. He's a good cook too. He's worked in restaurants previously, so he helped try recipe he'll whip things up. He's very good like that.

[00:25:03]

That's a great skill.

[00:25:04]

Andrew cooks too?

[00:25:05]

No.

[00:25:05]

No? [LAUGHTER] That's the thing actually. [LAUGHTER]

[00:25:12]

Nobody knows everything.

[00:25:15]

He takes the kids everywhere, he do the dishes, oh but he doesn't cook. What about Adam?

[00:25:21]

Adam has really grown since we've been together.

[00:25:25]

He knows how to award a food very well?

[00:25:27]

When we met, it was like the extent of atoms gourmet cooking was like turkey burgers on the George Foreman grill because he'd been single for so long. His parents never expected him to do anything. Especially with the pandemic, we did a lot of cooking together and now he's very capable. We have a few things. We have a consistent menu planning situation which is not very creative, but with corresponds with days of the week. He can handle all the things that we make. He's learned a lot. Now, we are really the food consumers though. Neither of us is really talented cooking wise. That's my sister and brother-in-law that are gourmet chefs. That generally works really well. I wish I could live with us and for various reasons. [OVERLAPPING] They live in the next town over, so that's great, but they are such phenomenal cooks. It's not fair that they have all of that talent and we have zero of that talent, but it balances out when we're altogether.

[00:26:25]

I think this is another aspect of what you were talking about that's important to stop with this idea that we are describing something much ahead of what in my generation like, what man, like you said.

[00:26:39]

Sure.

[00:26:39]

Family definition of what men and women and how it should be, women should take care of everything and then just work out. I think it's great that your partners, for example, when you say we are not the cookers here are doing all the thing but the preferred you are there, because there's a different vision in this structure that doesn't need to be that way. If you love to cook, go cook. If you love to do, if you want to do the dishes in a different and very thorough.

[00:27:06]

We should spend more time appreciating the things about what our partners control you.

[00:27:09]

All of you in the way you are balanced and every other.

[00:27:12]

It's an interesting discussion. All of us are women and all of us have male partners. There is some gender normative cultural influence here that we have to just name and acknowledged. But I also, I have a very feminist mother who fought through this issue was the only woman in her medical school class in the 1970s.

[00:27:30]

Wow.

[00:27:31]

She now apologizes to me because she says it's like, her generation fought so that women now can do all of the things, but all of them at once.

[00:27:40]

Yes.

[00:27:41]

It's not like they fought for partnership equality. It's they fought for having the opportunity to do all of the things. She's always saying, I'm sorry, I set you up. [LAUGHTER]

[00:27:54]

Well, that's a good thing. At least now you can have those conversations, which is true. So much that you have everything that you have nowadays based on effort that people did in the past, that we take for granted sometimes in many different parts of society and we just go for it. LGBTQIA+ plus as well, everything that happens. Let's move on. I will come back for certain other questions that we still have regarding kids. But I want know, you received your four months maternity leave.

[00:28:28]

No, I did not. We've talked about this. I got eight weeks of short-term disability, but I wasn't at Harvard at the time. Harvard has. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:28:36]

Perfect. Then that's two different aspects of this two. At Harvard with our great benefits, you can consider our great benefits, you get four months maternity leave.

[00:28:52]

With Vivian, I had 12 weeks and then that following, so she was born in September 2020. Then January 2021, there was some new edition where you could take an additional eight weeks.

[00:29:07]

Mass paid family leave.

[00:29:08]

Yeah. With Mason, I got 20 weeks.

[00:29:12]

Twenty weeks.

[00:29:13]

Yes.

[00:29:15]

Lakshmi with you as the same?

[00:29:18]

No, I think Sophia I had her when I was working at NYU, I think I had 12 weeks, I think. Then she was born in November, so I got a little extra time because we were close to break so it was like three plus months. With Ethan, I don't remember. I think it was also 12 weeks. I think at that time there wasn't the experience.

[00:29:39]

You were not in Harvard you were living in New York.

[00:29:42]

Well, with Ethan, I was at Harvard, yeah, and he was born at Mount Auburn and so I came back, I think at three-and-a-half once or something like that.

[00:29:49]

Okay.

[00:29:50]

Lakshmi shared with me a very special secret about Mount Auburn Hospital when I had Vivian, it was the salad. She made a very good recommendation on what to order on the menu. [LAUGHTER] They don't have Indian food, I guess. [LAUGHTER]

[00:30:08]

You should make an announcement, “if you are having your baby and want a good place with this salad. [LAUGHTER]

[00:30:16]

When she heard it was Mount Auburn like immediately those words flew out of her mouth, you have to order the salad. [LAUGHTER]

[00:30:24]

Here you go.

[00:30:24]

I was like five weeks pregnant.

[00:30:26]

Just to make this a little bit better. [LAUGHTER] The fact that Carolyn didn't have Indian food before she had Vivian at least she had. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:30:35]

I think she got the Mount Auburn salads.

[00:30:37]

I did. I get it more than once.

[00:30:38]

You should make this announcement.

[00:30:39]

Now I feel like my life is incomplete I haven't had the Mount Auburn post-maternity salad.

[00:30:44]

You didn't.

[00:30:47]

I tell students that. [LAUGHTER]

[00:30:48]

You should make a formal announcement that you're in a good place to go with good salad.

[00:30:57]

The important is the menu.

[00:30:59]

Even the nurse when we order she's like that's a good one. People get that a lot. It's a thing.

[00:31:04]

That's amazing. How far the hospitals are going to attract their clients. [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:08]

You don't get the salad in Mass General. [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:14]

Sasha, you said that you had three months only?

[00:31:18]

I didn't say that. I said I had eight weeks of short-term disability. It was not quite two months.

[00:31:23]

Eight weeks?

[00:31:23]

Yeah. With Ben, he was again in the hospital for 13 more weeks and so it was eight weeks of being able to be in the hospital full-time with him and then I went back to work immediately. Then with Sydney, I think I also had eight weeks of disability and maybe I added, I think he was born in October so I think I could add one week of vacation or something in December because everybody was off for the holidays and then I came back in January.

[00:31:52]

I need to keep going with you because Ben was in the hospital for quite awhile.

[00:31:57]

Yeah, the thing is I was at a different employer so I was at the University of Rochester and we did not have a maternity leave policy but because I had a C-section, that was the other thing. I think if I had a natural birth, it would have been six weeks. But because I was lucky enough to have a surgery, I got eight weeks which doesn't really make a whole lot of sense. It's not like the recovery. It's not at all focused on the bonding with the baby. It's just a recovery from a disability like a mobility impairment. Healing from my surgery, I got eight weeks for that. There's no conception of bonding with the baby or taking care of the baby.

[00:32:32]

Or even rearranging what you were having.

[00:32:34]

But I felt grateful for that because it was paid and I think my sister with her first two kids took off maybe four or six weeks and it was not paid.

[00:32:45]

Wow. Did that help Lakshmi and Carolyn the four months that you had or the amount of time that you had?

[00:32:54]

Yeah. I looked forward to going back to work actually.

[00:33:00]

You did?

[00:33:01]

Yeah, I did. To me it was a good amount of time. I didn't necessarily want or need more. I liked the stability of work. I had my office in NYU at the time and my office here and there was just something comforting about going to my own space where it was quiet.

[00:33:21]

Drinking hot coffee.

[00:33:22]

Drinking hot coffee and having time to myself.

[00:33:26]

That's what I think was interesting.

[00:33:28]

Being able to talk to adults just so that I actually looked forward to going back to work, not to sound negative about it. But being at home with a newborn it's a lot of work. Again, the stability, the somewhat predictability of a job was more predictable being with a newborn.

[00:33:53]

How was going back to work?

[00:33:55]

Well, mine was really interesting. Vivi was born September 2020 during the pandemic. My maternity leave officially ended, I think mid-December. I came back during exams. But remotely, we're all still remote. Daycares weren't open so when I returned from maternity leave, it was actually just me working from home with Vivian.

[00:34:21]

You did not have that break.

[00:34:22]

Did not have a break.

[00:34:23]

What Lakshmi is describing have at least a few hours.

[00:34:26]

She was robbed. [LAUGHTER]

[00:34:27]

I had to work from home with the baby.

[00:34:34]

That happened until the end, and then Mason came and then pandemic was still.

[00:34:40]

It's still pandemic. Vivian started daycare on her first birthday, so September 2021, she started daycare and then Mason was born October and I did my maternity leave with him. But I had already returned to work. When I returned from maternity leave from Mason, I came back to the office.

[00:35:03]

Another question, your husband's get time off as well?

[00:35:07]

No.

[00:35:07]

No.

[00:35:08]

Rob didn't?

[00:35:10]

I think Andre got like maybe two weeks.

[00:35:11]

Two weeks?

[00:35:12]

Something, maybe three or four, but not a lot. Not as much as I got. But he did get some.

[00:35:20]

Adam didn't get any?

[00:35:21]

No, I think some employers are really ahead of the curve here. I know with the law firms they offer parental leave so as not to make it a gender normative, and if a couple or an individual is adopting, they'll get the same amount of leave, but we were not in that situation. Adam, I think, took a couple of weeks of vacation. I think with Sydney because he was born in October Adam ended up taking a couple of weeks in December off. With Ben, we were both working at the university and it was the university hospital and so I think Adam took a more flexible approach to when he was in the office, which they may not have appreciated so that he could come into the hospital when he needed to be there, but he didn't actually get any time off.

[00:36:05]

The other one that I was going to say is, Lakshmi already mentioned that one. You said that Viv in her first year birthday she was already going to daycare. How long does it take after you have your baby after four months and you go back to work for the kids to be able to go to daycare?

[00:36:25]

They can go.

[00:36:27]

Anytime after the. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:36:28]

I think it's six weeks usually some places a baby can start at six weeks. But Mason was four months old when he started.

[00:36:35]

Four months. When you say they can go, why don't they?

[00:36:40]

Probably I had the full time, so I wasn't going to pay for daycare because daycare is incredibly expensive at least for me around here. I kept them both home as long as possible before I sent them to daycare.

[00:36:58]

Same with you Lakshmi, took a while or?

[00:37:02]

Yeah. I remember even we had to put ourselves on waitlist when I was six weeks pregnant because the waitlist tend to be long and both the New York and Massachusetts it's also extraordinarily expensive, so much it's like unfair how expensive it is. That was certainly a challenge for us. My kids are older now, so we pay for after-school for Ethan but it's not nearly as much as what daycare costs.

[00:37:29]

Well, having two kids in daycare at the same time, Carolyn's there right now, it's just absolutely untenable.

[00:37:36]

It's not fair. It's just not right.

[00:37:40]

You're talking about price, are they in the same daycare?

[00:37:42]

Yes.

[00:37:42]

Same place, at least that but it's still an absolute right to do it. In other cultures, in my family, for example, family support was always around because everybody. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:37:59]

That's an incredible thing.

[00:38:01]

None of you have that. I assume that many mothers, many families in these big towns, I believe, also wouldn't have because that makes a huge difference, does it?

[00:38:11]

Yeah.

[00:38:13]

Our lovely conversation with mothers at work will continue on the next episode. [NOISE] Make sure to tune in. [LAUGHTER]

[00:38:42]

[MUSIC]