



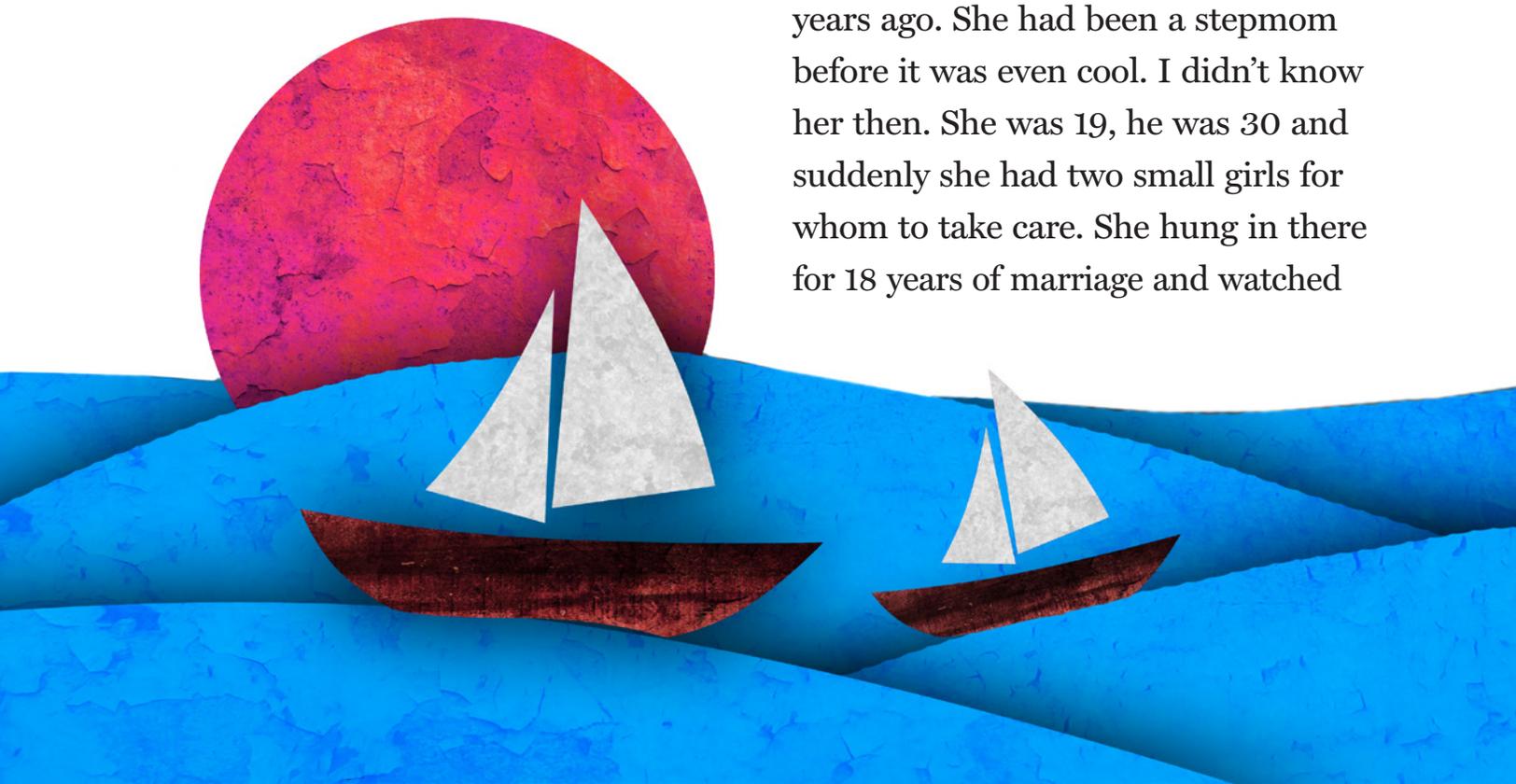
AS SEEN IN
StepMom
M a g a z i n e

Be the **Mother Ship**
Not the Mother



BY LISA BAGSHAW

This is sage advice I received from my friend Ruth over a cider-slash-venting session years ago. She had been a stepmom before it was even cool. I didn't know her then. She was 19, he was 30 and suddenly she had two small girls for whom to take care. She hung in there for 18 years of marriage and watched



Mother ship: A vessel that carries a smaller vessel that operates independently from it.



herself and those kids grow up. I know we all think there isn't enough information out there on being a stepmom these days, but 30 years ago there literally was nothing. She had to learn 100 percent through trial and error.

So, after letting me vent and guzzle for an hour or so, she stopped me and gently said, "Lis, you need to be the mother ship, not the mother." I stopped in my tracks because I knew this was going to be a good one. I put down my cider and told her to go on.

She described this mother ship vessel I was supposed to be as the calm within the storm. Despite all the drama, chaos and conflict, the stepmom as the mother ship is steady and strong. All parties can go to her for peace and wisdom. She is a safe place, nonjudgmental, nonpartisan and definitely nonreactionary. She lets everyone be heard and does not react.

Just discussing this mother ship concept with Ruth calmed me down. It made sense. At the time, it seemed like very big girl behavior and a bit of a stretch for this new stepmom, but I knew it was something for which I needed to strive if I was going to keep my sanity.

Throughout the years, I have struggled with many issues in this role of stepmom, and the biggest one has been figuring out my boundaries within the whole thing. At the top of that list was my boundaries with The Ex. My fear around her, especially

in the early days, was palpable. Her constant presence in my life crossed my boundaries and left me horrified. I spent a lot of my time and energy reacting and overreacting to her behavior because I didn't know what else to do.

This was not very mother shipish.

So, I started taking Ruth's advice, and the more I did the easier my life became. The calmer and stronger I was, the less volatile the situation became. I was conscious I was no longer part of the problem. And this is the real clincher. By being reactionary, too involved and too invested in things and people we cannot control, the worse we make our lives and the lives of those around us. Ruth would be proud.

Recently, we had an experience where my husband's ex sent him a long email, tracking her resentments and injustices since they split up seven years ago. It was full of threats, irrational thoughts and unreasonable requests. Having had years of practice of this mother ship routine, I read the email and then was silent. My husband was eager for my reaction, which he expected to be somewhere between outrage and panic. "What do you think?" he pressed. "Can you believe it?" I could sense his fear and knew if I added my own fear and emotion that things would escalate. So, I was calm and responded, "I wonder what is happening in her life to cause her to write this email?" I was nonjudg-

mental and compassionate toward her. I was strong. My reaction had a calming effect on my husband. He did not respond to her email, and she since has not brought it up. If I had overreacted, my husband would have been more upset, action (possibly regrettable) would have been taken and things would be a whole lot more hot and bothered at my house!

If you ever feel resentment, fear or anger toward what is happening with The Ex, the kids or your man, give the mother ship a shot. It means you choose to feel compassion for each affected party. It means you choose to act from a place of love, not fear. It means you choose to be detached from the drama and conflict that is not yours. It means you choose to make a positive difference in people's lives. It is very big girl behavior and feels very grown-up, but it is a gift of greater well-being to everyone involved, and I guarantee you will have a happier life.



LISA BAGSHAW is an Urban Stepmom (successful, childless career woman who meets a man with kids later in life) who married for the first time at 43. She balances a demanding career in media and life with her husband, twin 13-year-old stepsons, a dog and two cats in Vancouver, B.C. Catch her on Twitter at @urbanstepmom. She is currently writing a book, "A Survival Guide for the Urban Stepmom," and is open to any and all tips.