

JUDGE JUDY MADE ME DO IT

By Julia Bardsley

Judge Judy forced me to change my career. Allow me to explain. In 2012, my oldest son was 10 months old, my husband had just returned from a war zone, and the military moved us clear across the country away from all our family. And then I decided this was a good time to go back to work for the first time since having my son.

I will never forget the day we toured our first and only child care center. After introducing herself, the director took us into the infant room where our precious baby would be cared for. I counted six cribs in the room, two of which imprisoned crying infants. There was one child holding a rattle, which was the single solitary toy I saw in the entire room. Another child toddled over to some cabinets and began peeling the laminate wood off the side. And the TV in the corner was set to Judge Judy. Needless to say, it was a very brief tour. My husband and I tore out of there before I began sobbing, tears flowing nonstop. Don't get me wrong, I love Judge Judy, but she has no place in an early learning setting, unless it is to show young girls that they can grow up to be just as commanding and powerful as her.

Infant care was in high demand, leading to a two-year waitlist at the military child care centers. Thus, we were referred to family child care. Until then, I only had a vague idea that women sometimes cared for children in their homes. We found a great provider, but the separation anxiety was too much for our son. I quit my job and his provider suggested I look at becoming a provider myself.

Over the past 8 years I have worked tirelessly to learn as much as I can and provide the highest quality care for the families I serve. But I have also faced much adversity and have had to navigate a lot of outside turbulence. My childcare program became nationally accredited, I was awarded the Child Development Associate credential, received a 3 out of 3 star Quality Rating in the state of Georgia, and was even named a Children's Tylenol Teacher of the Year in 2020. I spearheaded much-needed policy changes to Department of Defense regulations that ensured military spouses did not lose their careers or incomes due to a soldier's permanent duty station move. I have gone on to receive first my Associate's degree, then Bachelor's degree, and now am working on my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education Leadership. All of these experiences have led me to where I am today. I know that we need to do better for our children, and I know that I possess the experience and drive to affect those changes.