

When Kids Don't Love You Like Pizza

by Barbara Zaragoza

We'd moved to Naples, Italy, in the middle of the school year. My husband and I were anxious for our two eldest children on their first day at the DoD school. The night before, our six-year-old stayed awake long past her bedtime asking: "What if nobody likes me?"

Our nine-year-old reassured her sister, "Just introduce yourself. You'll meet lots of new people. It will be fun."

That morning we left a first and fourth grader to the world beyond our control. By afternoon when I picked them up from school, my first grader skipped out with a smile.

"Mommy, mommy!" She took my hand. "A girl told me she loves me like pizza and that's a WHOLE LOT."

She'd made a friend. A best friend, in fact, who would stay close to her for the rest of the year.

My fourth grader, on the other hand, scuffled out of her classroom in silence. When we arrived home, she slammed the door to her room and dropped into bed. Nobody at school wanted to play her 'silly' imagination games. Several girls in her class had rolled their eyes when she introduced herself. Cliques had already formed. The kids teased her for her love of Harry Potter books.

After the first day, things only got worse. One boy began to play with her during recess, but the other kids teased them about being 'boyfriend and girlfriend' so their friendship ended. A long period ensued when

my daughter didn't know where she fit in. Every afternoon she came home crying.

"Why did you make me come here!" she'd say. It wasn't a question. "Why did you do this to me!"

I felt guilty, especially because I had welcomed the move.

My husband had deployed to Afghanistan and once he returned, I had searched for his boss at the annual Christmas party and asked when he planned to send our family abroad. A week later, my husband received orders to Naples. I was thrilled. I had visions of roaming the ancient ruins, visiting the Sistine Chapel, and traveling throughout Europe. All this came true. But we still had an everyday life of work and school to manage. And that meant, among other things, an adjustment for my eldest daughter.

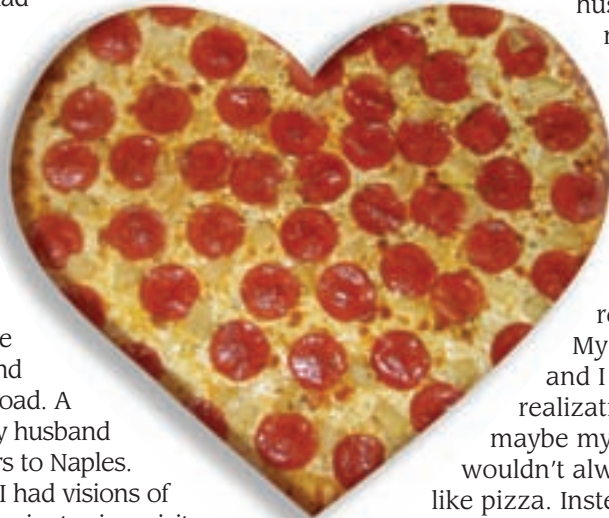
My husband and I wanted to fix it. First, we talked to the teacher who gave the class a lecture about teasing and cliques. We also went to the counselor who understood the stress kids experience in the DoD schools when they move. She too talked with the fourth graders about welcoming new students. She also assured us parents that our fourth grader would adapt soon.

We weren't so sure.

But the counselor turned out to be right. Within three months, our fourth grader had found a group of girls with similar interests. By the end of the school year, she told me she couldn't wait to return in September to be with her 'old friends'. In the end, there had been no way around the trial by fire for my eldest daughter. Her adjustment

turned out to be a matter of time. We parents could only soothe her through the tears and let her know this transition was indeed a challenge.

It took until the summer break for us to see the move as a growth experience. Our daughters had learned how to make their new environment work for them. My husband and I



now saw that we had given them a gift, not of instability, but of adaptability and resilience.

My guilt lifted and I came to the realization that maybe my children wouldn't always love me like pizza. Instead, a move meant that there would be days when they blamed me and lashed out at me in anger. In response, what seemed to help was acknowledging their challenges, standing by them, and most of all, just being patient. ●

Barbara Zaragoza is a dependent spouse living on the naval base in Naples, Italy, with her husband and three children, Nadia, Sofia, and Naomi. She's making the most of her time abroad and writes a blog about Naples called 'The Espresso Break' at <http://theespressobreak.blogspot.com>.

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