

## “Mature” Parenting Insights

*by Marietta Arce Valverde*

I became a mother for the first time at the ripe old age of 36. My second child was born a month before I turned 40! That’s not so unusual in the U.S. anymore but for Costa Rica, it was certainly not the norm 15 years ago.

I had wonderful pregnancies and deliveries and only worried when the genetic counselors informed us of all the things that could go wrong just because of my age. Well, it was their job and fortunately everything turned out splendidly.

As an older mother, I feel I have more patience than I would have had if I had been in my 20’s. I was fortunate enough to have had a ‘career’ so I knew what that was all about. My husband’s generosity, income and open-mindedness allowed him to accept my decision to stay home and raise our children.

We moved to Costa Rica when the children were 7 and 3. I was always amazed by the age of the mothers I interacted with, they could have been my children! I never made an issue or a secret of my age but it seemed to matter to others. They would remark that I had a lot of energy ‘for your age’, or that I looked very young ‘for your age’. I began to think more deeply about this; to quiz my children, subtly, about how they felt about my age. They shrugged off the question and assured me that it didn’t make any difference to them.

I’ll never forget one evening when I took them to eat at Tony Roma’s and the waiter asked me if I was out for an evening with my grandkids. Too shocked to think, I just answered “No, these are my children.” He removed himself quickly. I was puzzled as to why he would ask that. In a youth-loving culture, surely his purpose was not to make me feel old? As a service-oriented employee, surely he wasn’t trying to make me feel bad? I began to think of all the things I could have said, like “Why, is there a special price if they are?” or “Didn’t the boss teach you anything about tact?.” But in fact, I said and did nothing.

This kind of situation comes up every once in a while and I usually just smile at my kids and we accept that it is going to happen time and time again. I have assured them that if it doesn’t bother them, then it doesn’t bother me. They say that people are not mean, just unaware of the effect their words might have on others. I am grateful my children are so mature for I confess I am not always.

Some months ago, my daughter and I were shopping for shoes for her. The salesclerk took her away and I heard them talking over certain styles. My daughter made her decision and the salesclerk suggested she go see what her ‘grandmother’s’ opinion was. I cringed when I heard this, feeling anxious for my child. A few moments later, I heard my daughter’s voice, firm and proud, ask: “**Mom**, what do you think of this pair?” If she is smart, the salesclerk will have learned a valuable lesson; if not, I certainly did – I don’t need to worry about my kid or my age!