



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

Ep #34: From 10-Year-Old Babysitter to CEO: How Devon Clement Built Happy Family After

Today, we're doing something a little different on the podcast to celebrate my 13th anniversary in business, so stay tuned for that. And if you're looking forward to "Night Weaning" part two, that's going to come out next week. Don't forget to subscribe so you get that. See you later.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Margaret Mason Tate: Welcome, welcome to the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. My name is Margaret Mason Tate. I'm a coach and consultant in Atlanta, Georgia.

I'm taking over the podcast today to interview our founder and CEO of Happy Family After, Devon Clement.

Devon Clement: Hello.

Margaret: You have taken 30 episodes to let the good people know exactly who you are and where you came from, and I can't stand it anymore. So we're going to fix it.

Devon: Okay, I'm here. I'm ready. Lay it on me.

Margaret: Let's do it. Okay. So in the news, in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* this week, there is a mother who was arrested because her son, who was 10 years old, walked to a Dollar General. Now, the reason that I'm bringing this up, you may know where I'm going with this because you're my best friend, you started your entire concept of what you do now as an adult at 10 years old.

Devon: I did, yes. At 10 years old, I was walking up the street, not very far, but like three doors down, to babysit infant twins, eight-month-old twins, for my neighbor. I was thrilled. And not for nothing, the reason ... Well, not the reason I was doing that. I loved doing that ... What I did with the money I got paid for doing that, a whopping \$3.50/hour ... which was big bucks, let me tell you ...

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was so that I could ride my bike to the dollar store and buy shit there. So yeah, it was a different time.

Margaret: Yeah, absolutely. And I just think it's crazy that in the span of this short amount of time that we've gone from 10-year-olds who not only get this germ of an idea, but execute. I mean, you told me, I think a while ago, that you would walk and distribute "Welcome Home" baby cards.

Devon: So here's the thing. I was not trying to run a business. I was not trying to make money. I just fucking loved babies and I wanted to be with them as much as possible. So if somebody in my neighborhood had a baby, if a new family moved in that had a baby, I would go and I would give them a card that said, "Hi, welcome to the neighborhood. Your baby's great. P.S. I babysit. Here's my number." I'm obsessed.

Margaret: Did you make the cards?

Devon: I pulled them out of my stationery collection. Which is a big deal because I did not use the stationery from the stationery collection unless it was a very special situation. My mother tells me all the time that I actually said to her I was concerned about getting paid because I loved doing it so much it didn't seem fair.

Margaret: Wow. Okay. So then you chose to go to college and punish yourself because you felt like you had to earn what you wanted. So what did you end up studying? I know you taught after school.

Devon: Yeah. I graduated college and I went into teaching Special Ed. It was actually really similar to what I'm doing now in that it was parents who needed support being with kids, kids who needed help.

In a lot of ways, having a child who is not developing in the typical way is a lot like giving birth all over again, because you're like, "Now I have to deal with these new challenges and these new things," and there's not as much support and things like that. I mean, it was funny because I was 24 years old and these people in their 30s were asking me for advice about what to do with their kids.

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And I'm like, “?” But I actually did know. I had a lot of experience with kids at that point.

Margaret: I mean, at 24 years old, you were walking in with 14 years of experience. And then I know about all the paths that kind of had to converge for what happened on the magical date of 11-11-11, which is when you opened the biz. Can you tell me what you were doing in the years between that and opening?

Devon: Yeah. I loved teaching. I hated being a teacher. I do not do well working for other people telling me what to do, really. I do not do well working for bosses, and I did not like working for the school system. There was a lot of bureaucracy. There was a lot of social stuff with other teachers, like who could sit where in the faculty room. I was like, “I am not doing this again.”

Also, my personal life was kind of boring and I wanted to do something different and mix it up. So I quit my job and I took off traveling. I said, “I'm going to spend a year traveling and see where it takes me, see what's going on.”

And what I would do, while I was doing that, is I would live in different places and I would pick up nanny work and babysitting work and just do that, tutoring. Because all this stuff that I had experience with was really easy to do, and kids are kids no matter where you are in the world.

When I came back, I was working with a family that had twins. I've spoken about this a lot. Their mom is now one of my dearest friends and works with me. She is the one who floated to me the idea of postpartum doula, working with families with newborns. And I was like, wait, I love that. I get to use all the knowledge.

Also, I was doing a ton of research and learning and talking to people because what I really wanted was to be a mom. I wanted to be around babies, and I thought the way to do that was to get married and give birth to them. It turns out that's not the only path to getting to spend a lot of time with babies. Which is great, because you can just keep new baby, new baby, new baby. And you never have to have a three-year-old reject the dinner you've made them. Babies, they take what you're feeding them.

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Margaret: When I was a birth doula, I helped with this incredible home birth. I'm still very, very close friends with the person who gave birth. They actually tagged me in a bunch of photos this morning. It's really wild to know that I was a huge part of that. But I don't have to help raise that baby, even though she's a wonderful baby in the community and she's now eight years old.

Devon: It's like my foster kittens. People are always like, "How do you give them up? Don't you just want to keep them all?" And I'm like, not really. I don't want 12 adult cats. I want to trade in these big ones, let them go on to the families that are going to love them forever, and then I get new, tiny babies.

I think, as a side note, everyone has their ages and stages that they like.

Margaret: Yes. Absolutely. Yes.

Devon: A lot of times I hear parents critiquing other parents, or non-parents critiquing parents. Going, "Oh, her kids are in daycare. Why even have kids if you're not going to spend all your time with them?" And I'm like, "She doesn't want that. She doesn't like babies. She's not a baby person. That's fine. When they're four or five, she's going to love that age."

Or you're like me and you just want little babies. And when they get a little older and want to talk about Minecraft or whatever. You're just like, "I don't consent to this."

Margaret: "I don't have anything in common with you, child."

Devon: "Nothing in common with you. I don't like this."

Margaret: Well, now I will say there is one job that you had that was not postpartum doulaing, and did not have anything to do with babies, and it did help to launch this business. I mean, it just did. That is a fact. You have to tell us what it was.

Devon: Well, I was a waitress and a bartender in college. One of the waitressing jobs that I had was at the Olive Garden. I love that place, and I will not hear a negative word about it.

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Margaret: In fact, you will not. And I would like to go so far as to get really personal and really vulnerable and really transparent with the people here. What is your go to Olive Garden order?

Devon: Oh, I have got this down to a science. First of all, it's the apps. You have to start with the apps. Actually, this is difficult for me to talk about.

Margaret: Safe space.

Devon: They got rid of the stuffed mushrooms. They got rid of the stuffed mushrooms that were so fucking good. I would get an appetizer sampler that was ... you could pick three things ... I would pick calamari and two orders of the stuffed mushrooms.

Do you know, I think that they got rid of the stuffed mushrooms because someone sued them because they were too hot, which is a whole other thing that we don't need to get into. But it was very upsetting to me when I went to an Olive Garden recently and they were no longer on the menu.

Margaret: You get the breadsticks with the Alfredo dipping sauce.

Devon: I will also say they changed the breadsticks. The breadsticks when I worked there were so much crustier and now, they're not anymore. Then you're basically full. But of course, you've ordered an entree that you're going to primarily take home. A few different things I would go for: Tour of Italy! but replace the lasagna with eggplant parm. There was a mushroom ravioli that I don't think they have anymore.

Usually there's something that entices me on the specials menu. But here's where the rubber meets the road, Zuppa Toscana, the sausage and kale and potato soup. I just need a gallon of that a day to be truly happy.

Margaret: It's just salty enough. It's not too salty. It's just salty enough to make it absolutely incredible. It's fantastic.

Devon: And it has kale in it, so it's basically a salad.

Margaret: Yeah. Potatoes have all kinds of nutrients.

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Devon: Yeah. I mean, it's a vegetable and protein delight. And the servers are usually kind enough to give me some to go, even though you're not technically supposed to do that.

Margaret: Yes. Well, thank you for opening up. I'm so grateful. Hoping that we can keep that openness and vulnerability rolling...

Devon: Oh, and you have to get the raspberry iced tea and a dessert.

Margaret: My friend got Carrabba's delivery the other day and I almost screamed.

Devon: Oh my God, I love Carrabba's.

Margaret: The Chicken Bryan, girlfriend. Anyway, we're just going to have a whole episode about food.

Devon: You know what? Pregnant people, you don't know how to eat like we know how to eat. Okay?

Margaret: It's true. We have more jokes between us about food than probably any other thing. We get a seafood tower to split. Okay. So Happy Family After is the company now and it services all over the country, but mainly Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Manhattan, New York.

Devon: New York, and the suburbs. So, really, we go from Connecticut all the way down to Philly, the Philly suburbs. The I-95 corridor.

Margaret: Yeah. Yeah. Oh my, all the way down to Myrtle beach, baby. So you used to be Mama's Best Friend. And I, as somebody who has known you for 10 years, I love this change. As your friend and colleague, I champion this change. But I'd love to hear, and for everybody else to hear, what helped evolve the brand into that direction?

Devon: So I have to just take a minute and say that I loved Mama's Best Friend. I think the concept of best friend encapsulates what we do. And the reason I chose that name is because it wasn't even a hundred percent of postpartum doula business at the start.

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It was kind of me just doing whatever moms needed. I could tutor your kid. I could help them with their homework. I could babysit. I could be your part-time flexible nanny. I could do overnight care. I could help you with issues that you were having. I did a lot of special needs respite care and that kind of support.

In addition to the postpartum doula stuff, as I was developing that and growing it and didn't know if that was going to be my career. So my sister actually came up with the name. She said Mom's Best Friend, but that was a nanny agency in Colorado. So I said, "What about Mama's Best Friend?" Especially since I'm prioritizing the baby stage. And that's what babies say, Mama. They don't say, Mom, Mah.

And at the time ... this was back before the business anniversary. This was in 2008-2009. This is what I was doing. I was helping moms. And as we know, over the last 15 years, our understanding of family dynamics, gender identity, all of that has exploded. And not that I was opposed to working for two dads before, it just wasn't something that was on my radar.

And now I want to include every possible type of family: single parents, parents who maybe identify as female but don't identify as moms, or who gave birth but don't identify as being female, or families with two dads. All this stuff. I wanted to include every family.

I had help coming up with the business name. I love it. A lot of people don't get it. I get a lot of 'happily ever after, happily family after'. So I miss the best friend concept. Someone suggested changing it to Baby's Best Friend. And I was like, "No, we're not the baby's best friend."

Margaret: We are united against the baby, frankly. If I have to pick a side, I'm not on the baby's side.

Devon: I'm on your team. Grandma is the baby's best friend, let's be honest.

Margaret: And later, the dog.

Devon: Yeah. The dog is the baby's best friend. Grandma's the baby's best friend. I'm on your side. So that's where I really wanted to be inclusive of every

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sort of family. But I do miss that best friend aspect of things, because I think it's so important to what we do.

Margaret: I agree with you. And for anybody out there listening who doesn't get it still, let me explain it to you. Happy Family After, what? Happy Family After... Devon. After Devon comes over, it's a totally different ballgame, even if it's just once. I'm not joking. I've had a baby when we've been friends. It's a real thing.

I would love to know, not the new parents, but for the professionals out there who listen to this podcast, the nannies, the au pairs, the postpartum doulas, newborn care specialists. What is the most challenging aspect of your work now?

Devon: I'm at a place where there are very few challenges. A lot of that is not because people have changed or the clients have changed or the market has changed, but because I have grown and learned so much. Ten years ago I might've said, "Oh, it's difficult clients. It's getting people to pay our prices."

Well, guess what? Our prices are higher than ever and people pay them happily, because I am so much better at conveying the value of what we provide. Difficult clients, yeah, sure. There are people here and there that give us trouble. But I know what I can tolerate and what I can't.

We had a client earlier this year who wanted things her way. This was before her baby was even born, before we even got started working with her. She wanted us to do some things that were not in our typical business model. She wanted a guaranteed for one caregiver, no matter what. Babies come when they come. I can't promise you that this person is going to be sitting around for six weeks waiting for your baby to arrive.

You don't want to pay for that; you could, but you don't want to. You just want us to somehow magically make this person available to you. Anyway, that's not how we do things. I said, "Listen, I've told you multiple times this is not how we do things. If you are not okay with that, then I am fine refunding your deposit and having you find other care." And that's what happened. That's what she did. And I was like, you know what? Good riddance. We do not need that kind of stress.

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So just knowing the value of what we provide, knowing what is not worth tolerating, knowing what is not worth my time, energy, or emotional stress. And sometimes when there's an issue, we can deal with it and it's easy. But if it's going to be difficult, I would rather just cut them loose.

This has always been the case. Even back in the day when I was a solo care provider just hoping I would have enough clients to pay my bills. If I had somebody difficult, that wanted to book me out for the future, it was going to be a big contract, I was like, "Oh my God, this woman is crazy." I hate saying that. But, "This person is driving me insane, driving me crazy. And I really don't want to do this, but I really want to take this contract." Finally, in my heart of hearts, I said, no, I can't do it.

What ended up happening in that time period, and it didn't happen in advance, I got a last-minute client in that space and they ended up being one of my best and most favorite and most wonderful clients ever. So, not to be woo woo about it, but if you let go of something that is not serving you, something better will come along to fill that space. I have just found that to always be true.

I think that we hold on so tightly to things that we think are our only salvation, that we can't look for a better option.

Margaret: When your boat is sinking and you think the only thing that will save you is an oar, you have a real hard time accepting a bucket.

Devon: Yeah. Or you're clinging onto a life preserver and there's a helicopter dropping down a ladder, but you won't let go of the life preserver to grab onto the ladder. You've got to do that.

Margaret: What you just said was an unbelievable nugget of information for business owners and for independent contractors doing this kind of work. Which is go with your gut about clients and trust that more will come to fill the space. But I really want what the nugget would be if you could wave a magic wand and deposit one nugget of business wisdom into the brains of every brand-new postpartum doula, newborn care specialist, nanny, au pair. What would it be?

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Devon: I would say this to everyone starting any kind of business. Charge so much more than you think you should. And I'm sorry to the clients that are listening to this, but there's so much value in the work that you're providing.

It is effing expensive to run a business. So if you think, "Oh, if I get paid X dollars per hour, that's going to cover my bills. What about your taxes? What about your expenses running your website? What about hiring someone to do your bookkeeping because you're bad at sitting down and doing math homework?" If you don't send out your bills, then people are not going to pay you.

I mean, before I hired a bookkeeper, I had my clients begging me to be able to pay me... if I could tell them how much they owed me. And when you think about all of those things, plus the time, the energy... Okay, if I could work 70 hours/ week and make this much, and that'll be enough to get by. But it's not, you have gas. You have your car.

People don't want you to nickel-and-dime them. We get contractors sometimes asking us, does the client cover tolls? Do they pay for gas? I'm like, "No. Charge enough. Charge us, the company, enough that you can pay your tolls and your gas. And learn how to write that off." Also, that's a write off, so what are you doing?

I'm sure whatever work people are doing in their business is so valuable. And I'll say, literally, "Put my money where my mouth is." Because when I'm hiring someone, not for the business but to do something for me, I don't care if they're charging a lot because I know that it's valuable and it's worth it to me.

I've always said this. Having someone clean my house once a week is worth its weight in gold. I would rather go take care of a baby while that person is cleaning my house, and give every penny I make to the person cleaning my house, because they are so much better at it than I am. And I hate doing it. So if there's something that you hate doing, get someone else to do it, and do something that you love doing to pay for it.

Margaret: On that same line of thinking, you work with so many coaches and consultants, both personally and professionally, and it's one of the things that I've always admired about you. You have a willingness to surround yourself with

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people who think like you, want to be thinking, and have for a minute. Are there any folks that you want to shout out?

Devon: Oh gosh. I mean, I have worked with so many coaches and mentors and teachers. I'm just calling out some that have made a huge impact. Most recently, Kara Loewentheil *UnF*ck Your Brain*, the Feminist Self-Help Society. I mean, mind-blowing for so many things in my life.

You! You have just helped me tremendously with so much stuff, both professionally and in a coaching capacity, and just as friends.

Early on, I had two mentors in the industry, Debbie Aglietti and her former business partner, Randy Patterson. There's a lot that we could say about that. But before things turned bad, they were incredible mentors because they had built what I was trying to build, in the same way that I had built it. This was when I was sweating, working five to seven overnights a week, living in, spending three months 24-7 with baby twins, and trying to figure out how I could turn that into something that was not going to look like that forever for me.

And they gave me some tremendous pieces of advice and some tremendous support in the beginning. They ran a training organization that is still great, and trained many people who now work with me. Taught me how to spot someone in the wild who would be a great doula and convince them to quit their job and come work for me. Which happened many times, and still does. Shout out to Jill Sara, Erika, a lot of my team.

And then, yeah, I've had a few different business coaches. It's kind of felt like as I've evolved, the support that I've gotten has evolved as well. I never don't have it. I never feel like, okay, I've figured this out completely. I'm good. I don't need any more coaching. I don't need any more support.

I mean, I go through periods for sure, where I'm just kind of coasting, but...

Margaret: Yeah, the equilibrium part.

Devon: Actually, Liz Orr, who I interviewed on the podcast about Enneagram, she was a tremendous coach for me and still is.

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Margaret: I have also worked with her.

Devon: Yes. There are just so many people. And I just think, again, it's like having someone clean your house, having someone help you clean your brain.

Margaret: Absolutely.

Devon: There's also a workbook that has been tremendous for me called *Overcoming Underearning*. That has been tremendous in thinking about how to grow my business, how to have more clients, how big it could get. Because so much of it is mindset. I hate to say it, but it truly is.

Margaret: Your business starts in your brain. Well, actually, that leads into something else that I'd like to ask you about. And I know we joked about getting vulnerable earlier.

Devon: Listen, the stuffed mushrooms, I don't know how much deeper and darker we can get. So I'm ready.

Margaret: I would never ask you to go to a Chicken Select level, but how has being a high level ... By all measures, you are a high-level entrepreneur now.

Devon: Which is crazy to me, by the way.

Margaret: Yeah. Me too. As one of these personal relationships that I'm talking about right now, how has being a high-level entrepreneur affected your personal relationship?

Devon: I think by and large, it has been vastly good, vastly positive. It's funny, because I'll have friends, especially female friends or friends socialized as women, who I just think of as casual friends or acquaintances, people I know from social media say to me, "Today I had my annual review at work and I negotiated a raise and a higher salary and I thought of you. I was like, 'Devon will be so proud of me.'"

And I am proud of them, but I never told them to do that. Just by setting an example of someone who knows that they are capable of this level of

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achievement, of growth, is setting a really good example for people. And it's been difficult. I always feel like I have to disclaim my success.

I was babysitting because my family didn't have money for me to buy new school clothes, or to spend at the dollar store, or to go to the movies. I mean, I was babysitting because I love babies, but the money was not insignificant. I always had a roof over my head and shoes on my feet and food, but that was it. If I wanted to go on a class trip, I would pay for the admission with my babysitting money. I mean, God bless my parents. They worked so hard.

And I am still, to this day, paying for things with my babysitting money. It's just in a different way. And just to speak to that for a second, I actually hate the demeaning and diminishment of “babysitting”. People will say, “Oh, well, you're just glorified babysitters.” We should glorify babysitters. They do a lot.

Margaret: Let's glorify them more.

Devon: Let's glorify them more. And when someone in my industry is like, “Oh, well, I don't watch the baby because I'm not a babysitter.” I'm like, yes, you are. What is more important to a new parent, especially a brand-new parent, than having someone that they trust to leave their baby with? “Oh, no. Hire someone less qualified. Hire someone...” People say, “Ooh, are you going to hire the teenager down the street?” You should hire the teenager down the street.

Margaret: Listen, as a mother who has a 10-year-old who does babysit with my kind of supervision, I want my kid to be the person that they call. And we're losing such connection with any kind of neighborhood situation.

Devon: Oh, my God. I knew everybody in my neighborhood. And I would stay after the parents got home. I would stay and chit chat with the moms. And my mom said from that point, 10, 11, 12, 16, you're there for the moms as much as you're there for the kids. And that is what being a doula is. It's supporting the families. It's supporting the parents in whatever way they need. And sometimes that means babysitting.

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And you know what? It's just like when I was 12. The parents want to go out on a date night and leave me with the baby. I'll put the baby to bed. I'll put the TV on. I'll eat a slice of pizza. I'm happy as a clam.

Margaret: "Love to help you in this way."

Devon: Love to help you in this way. Sleep training, the third night of sleep training when that baby is down in two minutes and I say to the parents, "Hey, you guys want to duck out and go to dinner?" They leave a parent-shaped hole in the door, like a cartoon.

Margaret: Like a Kool-Aid man.

Devon: Like the cloud of dust. I'm like, "Cough-cough, okay, see you guys later. Bring me a doggy bag." And they often do, which is very nice. So they'll say, "Here's the menu. Tell us what you want and we'll bring you home a to-go order." And I'm like, "Thank you," click. Watching my reruns on their cable, which I don't have.

Margaret: The first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to evaluate what streaming services they have that I don't. I have a list on my phone of things that I want to watch. I would be watching *The Holiday*.

Devon: Oh, it's the best. Just to close the loop on that, I got to shout out to my girl Kristy in *The Baby-Sitters Club* for being my inspiration, my muse. From a fashion standpoint, I'm more of a Dawn or maybe a Stacey.

Margaret: Yeah. I had a big crush on Kristy.

Devon: Oh, yeah. She's your type.

Margaret: She's super my type.

Devon: I don't so much wear turtlenecks or play softball or like dogs, but I can run the shit out of a Baby-Sitters Club.

Margaret: You got that down pat. I don't want to close out, because I want to talk to you for the rest of our lives and have it be podcast throughout every country

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on God's green earth. But I almost didn't want to tell you that I was going to ask you this question because I really wanted it to be spontaneous.

But you wake up tomorrow and all of this was a dream. You don't own a caregiving business. You don't host a successful podcast. You're not working with babies. What are you probably doing instead?

Devon: Oh, that's a good question. And I did not remember that you asked me that. I think I blocked it out. I mean, I'll tell you what I'm doing and I hate it. I am married to, or probably divorced, from my college boyfriend and I have five children who are ranging in age from 17 to 5. And we live in a big house in a moderate suburb in New Jersey. And I'm on the PTA, I'm volunteering, and going insane slowly or quickly.

I probably have already run for the school board. I might be on the city council. I need something to do.

Margaret: Oh, yeah. Got to keep her occupied.

Devon: You know what? No, I'll tell you what I did. I probably started some kind of crafting business. Oh, you know what? I think I have an Etsy store or something.

Margaret: No, it's a knitting Etsy.

Devon: With my five children in a mid-range New Jersey suburb.

Margaret: Yeah, for sure. Your Saturdays are at the farmer's market, but not to shop. It's actually to sell your handicrafts.

Devon: Yeah. And I think it's popular. I think people like it. I think there's a lot of demand.

Margaret: It's good. It's got a cute Instagram for sure. Listen, Devon Clement, CEO and founder of Happy Family After, and host of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast, the podcast that prepares you for parenting. I am so happy that you allowed me to finally get you on the receiving end of some of these interview questions. I really appreciate the time that we spent together. I love you.

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Devon: I love you too. Thank you so much. This has been great. And I hope the people enjoy it as much as I did.

Alright, listen up, folks. We love to joke around but it's time to get real. And that real talk, it's all about giving your babies the roasting they deserve. Yep, you heard it right. We're calling for an epic Baby Roast.

We want you to drop a voice note on our website and call out your little ones for their adorable crimes. Did your baby spit up on your brand-new dress the second you put it on? Maybe they decided to scream through your sister's wedding vows? We want to hear all the juicy details.

Head over to HappyFamilyAfter.com, or hit the link in the show notes. Every page on the site has a button on the side for you to record straight from your phone. Your story might just make it onto an episode of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We can't wait to hear.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.