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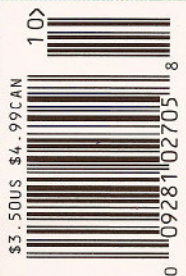
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OCTOBER 2007
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This Is How She Does It

KARRIE CLAYTOR

39, relocation manager for Accenture, Chicago, IL; single mom to Caitlin, 12, and Colin, 6

Whether she's at work

or at home, single mom Karrie Claytor, a relocation manager for the international consulting firm Accenture, keeps people moving—including herself! The Kentucky native assists some of the hundreds of employees each year who require transfers. It's a position that demands strong organizational skills, a knack for problem-solving and the ability to keep your head, no matter how stressful things get—the same qualities that serve her well as a divorced mother of two.

BY DENISE DIFULCO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THAYER ALLYSON GOWDY
STYLING BY ALISON WHITTINGTON



HAIR BY CHARLES BAKER STRAHAN FOR KUSKO MURPHY, WWW.ARTISTSBYTIMOTHYPRIANO.COM; MAKEUP BY STACY SKINNER FOR CINEMA SECRETS, WWW.STACYSKINNER.COM; NECKLACE (\$78) BY LUCINA, WWW.LUCINAJEWELRY.COM.

From her office on the eighteenth floor of Accenture's Chicago offices, Karrie's days are spent helping colleagues transition smoothly from city to city. But back at her suburban Arlington Heights home, it's all about moving her kids, Caitlin, 12, and Colin, 6, comfortably—even if not always seamlessly—between their homes at Mom's and at Dad's, not to mention to and from school and their numerous activities.

Karrie and her ex-husband, college sweethearts, were married for 11 years before drifting apart and finally splitting in 2004. She credits her friends, many of whom made daily phone calls

to her during this period, with helping her get through the split. "When you go through a divorce it obviously takes its toll, but I'm very proud of the way we handled it," she says, explaining that her and her ex-husband's priority was to ensure a nearly equal distribution of custody and assets. Their willingness to rein in their lawyers and play fair paid off in an amicable postdivorce relationship. She and her ex also make a point of never speaking ill of one another in front of the kids.

Colin was only 3 at the time of the divorce, but Caitlin, who was 9, had a lot of questions. "She sat quietly for a while after we told her," Karrie says. "Then she

wanted to ask all the pertinent questions. We wanted to make sure she understood it wasn't anything she had done. And she got to hear what we thought were the pluses, such as the fact that she'd have two houses to go to. She handled it so well that it helped me." Karrie got her kids involved in setting up their new households so they felt a part of the process. "We wanted them to feel comfortable with their new surroundings," she says, "not as if we were forcing them into a new situation but that we were giving them some choice in it."

Karrie and her ex share custody of their children. He has the kids Sunday



THREE'S COMPANY: Karrie and her ex share custody of Caitlin, 12, and Colin, 6, so when the trio is together everything revolves around the kids.

ON KARRIE: DRESS (\$80) BY NICOLE MILLER, WWW.JCP.COM; ON COLIN: HIRT (\$45) BY DIRTY LAUNDRY, WWW.DIRTYLAUNDRY.COM; SHOES (\$59) BY PATTONS, WWW.PATTONS.COM.



LOTS OF LAUGHS: The kids always have a great time with Karrie's parents, Ralph and Judy, who visit on special occasions and holidays.

“BEING A SINGLE PARENT HAS TAUGHT ME THAT THE RELATIONSHIP I HAVE WITH MY KIDS IS SO VERY IMPORTANT.”

through Tuesday; she gets them Wednesday through Saturday. As emotionally difficult as it has been, it's an arrangement that Karrie has worked hard to make the best of. On the days when Caitlin and Colin are with their dad and stepmom, who live just a mile away, Karrie handles the more mundane tasks of keeping up a home on her own—things like mowing the lawn—so that she has more time for her children when they're with her. That's also when she goes on dates with her boyfriend and takes time for her own activities, like tennis and playing the French horn with a community orchestra.

When Caitlin and Colin—who have widely divergent interests—are with her, however, everything revolves around them. “Being a single parent has taught me that the relationship I have with my kids is so very important,” Karrie says.

“The four days a week that I'm with them, my priority is making sure they know they're understood and appreciated.” Karrie also does her best to accommodate the individual interests and temperament of each child. While Colin is very physical and loves to be outside playing or practicing soccer, Caitlin prefers to be indoors, close to Mom. “It's a balancing act,” Karrie says.

When the children are home, Karrie's usually awake by 5:30 a.m., doing some quick sit-ups and push-ups before grabbing a bowl of cereal. Occasionally Caitlin will rise early to exercise with her mom, but the children generally don't drag themselves out of bed for at least another half hour. Karrie tries to ease the mad dash out the door by packing lunches, making sure the kids are bathed and taking her own shower the night before. But even the best-laid plans

ON COLIN: TEE (\$52) BY FLORA & HENRI, WWW.FLORAHENRI.COM; SHOES (\$50) BY PAZTOS, WWW.PAZTOS.COM; ON CAITLIN: GRAPHIC TEE (\$30) BY THE CHILDREN'S PLACE, WWW.CHILDRENSPLACE.COM; SKIRT (\$140) BY OULTY, WWW.OULTY-WORLD.COM; ON GRANDMA JUDY: SWEATER (\$50) BY HANNE BENARD, HOLLIDAY'S FASHIONS, MEMPHIS, TN, 901-753-9955; NECKLACE (\$375) BY DASHA BOUTIQUE, WWW.DASHABOUTIQUE.COM.

don't always ensure a flawless exit—just like in the moving industry.

"There are certainly times when the wrong outfit is on, the tennis shoes are missing or a book isn't in the bag," she says. "We try to be proactive, but it doesn't always work."

Karrie drops off Caitlin and Colin at before-care by 7:00 a.m. and then catches a train to Chicago. It can be difficult for her to be away from her kids all day. "I do feel a bit odd that I'm twenty miles away in downtown Chicago when the kids are in school and someone has a cold," she says. "I feel guilty that it takes me an hour to take the train to get home." When the kids are sick, Karrie can often work from home or get babysitting support from her boyfriend.

Karrie's commute, though long, can also provide some needed downtime. "That's when I find my forty-five minutes to myself," she says. "Most of the time I listen to music and relax." From the train station it's a brisk walk to work, which Karrie loves because it gives her another opportunity to keep herself moving. She arrives at her office around 8:00 a.m., working alongside about 20 others in the Relocation Management Solutions division.

Her job is similar to customer service, she says, "but taken to the eleventh degree." Not only does she patiently guide employees through the paperwork and ensure they receive their benefits, but she's also the person they call when their movers don't show up. Or if they miss a flight. Or when their cat gives birth in the back of a moving van en route to their new home.

"Transferring is an emotional thing for anyone," says Karrie's supervisor, Julie Grover, international mobility leader for the United States. "I've heard

Karrie on the phone with her counselees, and she takes the time to walk them through the process."

Before joining Accenture in 2006, Karrie honed her skills for 13 years in the relocation business. Accenture's flexible work policies were a huge draw for her as a single mom, especially since she didn't have the option of telecommuting in her previous jobs. Now she works from her home two days a week and sets her own schedule on days when she heads to the office. For those nights when she has a late meeting, or on the rare occa-

sion that she does need to travel, she calls on her ex-husband, her in-laws or her boyfriend for backup. Generally, though, she's out of the office by 4:30 p.m. and has picked up her children before 6:00 p.m.

The evenings she has her kids are filled with activities like the children's church choir rehearsal, soccer games (both her son and her boyfriend play) and the French horn lessons that Karrie gives on Thurs-

days. That means dinners are simple and quick—either a premade frozen meal (chicken cordon bleu is a family favorite) or something that cooks in minutes, like shrimp. Before bed, both kids join Karrie in their home gym or hang out and watch TV with their mom. It's a lot to squeeze into a day, but that's all part of Karrie's strategy. "I don't feel like I'm missing anything," she says. She credits her mom for her positive attitude.

"My mom has done a lot of work with the homeless," Karrie says. "She'd pick somebody up and say, 'Do you have kids? I'll take you shopping and I'll buy them gifts.' She'd go above and beyond." Like her mom, Karrie goes above and beyond at work and at home. "Giving to others gives you a positive outlook," she says. "It helps you to be happy with what you have." ■

Karrie's Tip

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

With the demands of work and school, I don't always block off enough "just for fun" time with my children.

BEST SOLUTION I'll

usually try to have a spa night with my daughter every week. We'll light candles, put on music and do manicures and facials—even massages.