

Musical Mother

This Virginia mom knows how to rock.

"I'm not cool, trust me," protests the smiling woman, pushing long blonde hair from her face.

Debbie Bergeron sure looks cool, though, in jeans and bare feet, authoritatively strumming a guitar in the music room of her home near Manassas, Virginia. Before she can continue her thought or the tune, daughter Annabel interrupts with a request—and it's not for a song. The 6-year-old insists that her hair needs attention. Debbie complies, seamlessly exchanging guitar for brush—musician to mom in a millisecond.

Her ability to complete conversations or songs becomes even more dicey with the arrival of her husband, Mark, and their other children: Harrison, 14; Samantha, 12; and Connor, 10. Cheerful chaos ensues, and that's just how the mother in the middle of this madness likes it.

"I have always considered myself a stay-at-home mom," says Debbie, even though she founded a tutoring business soon after she became a mother and quit her teaching job. "I absolutely want to be with my kids."

Still, something seemed missing.

"Just being able to play the guitar and sing every day is awesome to me."

Debbie Bergeron



ABOVE: Debbie and her son Harrison practice in the family music room. Daughter Samantha also plays. RIGHT: Annabel (left) and Samantha primp with mom. Music matters to Debbie, but moments like these matter more.

In between carpooling, after-school activities, and grocery shopping, a nagging question kept returning: "What can I do to fulfill my soul?"

Learning Guitar at Age 35

That's when the mother of four added music to her jam-packed repertoire. "I have always loved music," she says. As a child, she learned to play the piano. But her musical interest lay dormant until Mark bought her a guitar. Even then, her busy life pushed aside her desire to learn to play—until her eldest daughter asked for lessons.

"I'd listen to Samantha practicing, getting better, and I'd think, 'It's so silly not to just do it. Why am I just sitting here saying, 'I can't do this?'" Debbie recalls.

So, at age 35, the intrepid musician-in-the-making began guitar lessons. Soon she formed a band with three other like-minded mothers, and they called themselves *MomsOnTheEdge*.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK SANDLIN

Mama's Music

From there, her musical odyssey "took on a life of its own," including Debbie hosting the Washington, D.C.-based venue of Mamapalooza. Held in cities all around the world, the annual event showcases mothers performing music in every genre.

Last year, Debbie stepped on stage at the Mamapalooza event held in New York City. "I traveled six hours, stayed overnight, and played three songs," she recalls with a laugh. "I had the best time!"

She's unplugged a bit since then. Logistics (band members live in different cities) prevent much playing time together. But Debbie still takes the stage solo at local venues and performs the songs she wrote for her CD, also titled *MomsOnTheEdge*. ▶



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A Talented Community

The same moniker serves the Web site Debbie and her friends created. They wanted to reach women who desired to "take the soul off the shelf," as the lyrics to one of Debbie's songs suggest.

"I just knew I was not the only mom who had this feeling," she says. "I thought it would be great if there were one place where we could all commune and share and appreciate what the other one does, even if we are not winning Grammys." Mom artists, writers, musicians, and others who want to share their talents find a supportive community at the site.

No Stardust Here

Debbie suffers no delusions of grandeur. "The reality is, when you have kids, you have to put things on the back burner," she says. "I can still play and have fun, but I can't really market my music without losing too much of what is really important to me—my family." Practice often turns into a family jam session because Samantha and Harrison play as well. Debbie says, "I just jump in there and play when I can, maybe 10 minutes before we leave to go to football practice."

When she lands a gig, Debbie's built-in fan club—her family—often goes with her and hoists a homemade, heartfelt sign that reads "Our Mom Rocks!"

How cool is that?

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

For more information: Visit www.momsontheedge.com.