

A girl named Lesley made a possibility possible and agreed to tell the story of how she found a life and a family at the end of the countercultural road trip. Today at 27, her dreamy son named Otto, 4, sits at her kitchen table drawing Pac Man and a fire creature inspired by the Dungeons and Dragons poster that hangs over his bunk bed, a gift from her partner Craig. Their other son, the mesmerising Cash, 2, who wears his hair long and under a trucker cap, is out of the house with her mother who is visiting. Lesley is soft-spoken and articulate, with hair like Brett Anderson during his prime, and works at a vegan restaurant. She grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the border of the conservative American south. Today she lives in Provincetown, USA, a progressive beach community at the tip of a land mass that curls into the Atlantic Ocean like an arm flexed to produce a bicep. She and Craig dated during the first summer that she lived in Provincetown. She moved to San Francisco and then back to Provincetown, and in with him, initially as really good friends, after she broke up with her girlfriend. They talked about having kids because they cared about each other. Six months later they talked about having kids again. At that point they were a couple. They did not marry, they just knew that they would have a child together. Lesley discovered that she could get pregnant by just thinking about it. So she thought about it.

Did having a family ever seem like a challenge because of how the culture defines a family?

I always wanted children in my life but I didn't know how it would happen. I didn't know if I would be a single parent or if I'd have a girlfriend or a boyfriend. I didn't have any prescribed notion in my head of the way things should be.

And I had kids when I was 23, so I was still idealistic. But finding

a place where I was comfortable was a challenge. I'm comfortable in Provincetown. I never wanted to raise my kids in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Why not?

There were a lot of closed minded people and I looked a little different. I would hang out at coffee shops and go to the waffle house and it was fine, but if I wanted to go to the mall to shop for my family for Christmas, people would say stupid shit to me.

What did you look like?

By today's standards I just looked like a teenager. I had piercings and wore weird clothes. I guess I was atypical for Raleigh.

How do you identify sexually?

I don't know that I do. What does Megan call it? Omnisexual. I couldn't say that I prefer men or women. I've definitely been with both. When I was first attracted to anyone, it was to women. But I had no idea what to do with it. None of my friends came out in high school or even a few years afterwards and that was a really hard thing. The first time I tried to come out to somebody they just laughed at me. And that was a friend who is now a dyke.

When did you come out?

I was in Nashville when I first had a relationship with a woman. I was 19. And then I came to Provincetown where it's just do whatever you want to do and not a big deal.

How do you understand omnisexuality?

It's funny because I'm a straight girl to everyone because I'm with a man and therefore you're straight. And Megan's usually in a relationship with women so she's gay. But that's always been funny to us. We talk about it. You hear comedians in Provincetown telling you how bisexual women are really straight women who are bored, and bisexual men are really gay. That's the attitude I get even here. But I feel totally accepted by all of my friends and it doesn't matter and it's fine.

Do you ever have to be tough about it? Does anyone give you a hard time about certain choices you've made?

I thought having kids would be weird for some people that I knew, you know, the whole breeding thing. But everybody was excited. It was unbelievable. Telling people, I had definite feelings of trepidation, but I did it and people cried because they were so happy, people that I never expected would feel that way. I feel really lucky that I have this amazing community around me.

You found a place where you can live a life that you want to live.

When did you start looking?

Probably when I was still in high school. I dropped out in eleventh grade. But I was only gone from home for six months. I left when I was 16 with my closest friend. I ended up sleeping in bushes and houses under construction for a while. I moved in with a bunch of guys I knew from going to parties.

What kind of parties?

Raves.

Were you a raver?

I never identified as one, but I sure went to a lot of them. We were going to raves because it was something to do. Our big idea was to go to California, to Berkeley, a wonderful place where there was a lot of music and people who were cool. I was 16 so of course my idea of the world was completely unreal, although Berkeley was actually very much how I envisioned it. But somehow we got sidetracked and decided to go to a Rainbow Gathering in Florida because we didn't have any money. But we never made it there either. We ended up doing a lot of drugs and hanging out with people we met when our station wagon broke down.

How did this go over with your family?

My mother was really angry with me. My father was devastated. They knew where I was. I called them. I didn't want them to think I was dead. I love my parents. I just didn't love the particular situation I was in. My brother was getting in a lot of trouble and it was really unpleasant at home. I felt very ignored and unhappy and there was a lot of yelling so it seemed much more desirable not to be there. I ran away for the first time after I pierced my eyebrow. Just for a week.

Did you go through a heavy drug phase?

I did.

When did you come out of that?

When I was 22. I decided I wanted to have kids and I just stopped completely.

Did you do it by yourself or with a programme?

Just by myself. I was mainly a lush at that point. I wasn't doing a lot of drugs.

Back then could you imagine the life that you have now?

I couldn't and I think the only reason I did that many drugs was because I was depressed, that I didn't feel safe and comfortable in life. I had some really good friends but I didn't feel that the world was there for me. And that I had a place in it. I felt like I was constantly struggling to find that. And then failing and then getting really fucked up because I didn't feel like I was capable of finding a place where I could be happy and be myself and feel safe.

Who did you want to be?

I don't know. I wanted to feel comfortable in my own skin. I had always been really shy and nerdy. Even as a teenager I wasn't accepted by the alternative kids. I had my own friends but we were all the rejects. Which was great, I loved them, we were awesome. To me we were the coolest people in the world.

Did you see a future for yourself through all of this?

I had daydreams. I didn't think realistically about where I was going. I just thought that at one point I'm going to really, for real, get out of Raleigh and life would be better. That's as far as I got.

Were you looking for something in particular?

I was just living. I wanted to do everything. I had goals in life, like I wanted to be a social worker and work with teenagers, if I ever decided to go back to school. But I just wanted to see more. So I travelled. I was in San Francisco for a little while and then I

hitchhiked for a couple of months. I ran out of money and ended up in Provincetown. There were so many people and they were doing whatever the fuck they wanted. People were just living their lives. It was a different reality. I stayed for a summer, because I wanted to save money and move back to San Francisco, which I did, but I just got really, really fucked up, I had a hard time finding a place to live, and I had a job that was not what I wanted to be doing. And then I came back to Provincetown and stayed. I thought I would come here to regroup and then maybe move to New York. But I never left or seriously considered it once I was here and made friends. It never made any sense to go anywhere else. And then life started again.

How would you characterise your youth?

There were a lot of really good friends. I can be nostalgic for it even though it was random.

But the world could see you as a fuck-up.

Oh yeah. I'm sure. My mother did. She was hoping for my redemption all of that time.

Do you feel that luck plays into having found this life? Or were you driven to find it?

I always feel lucky but I definitely tried hard to have this. It's just amazing how much people care about us. It overwhelms me.

Do you feel that the people with whom you spent your chaotic younger years would be critical of your life now?

No.

Do you feel like you're selling out to some kind of social norm by having a family?

No.

You don't feel that there were countercultural values that were compromised?

There were, but for me having a family was never a negative thing. Anywhere there will be a scene and whatever is important to that scene. I could never figure that out. I can't relate that way.

Is being countercultural important to you?

Being who I want to be is important to me.

A lot of people are very impressed with you and your family.

That's my sense too! I don't know where they all get it from. We really care about our kids. We're very involved in their lives and we work hard to make it work.

What is atypical about your family?

Nothing. I don't know. Everything? I suppose it depends on the comparison. I don't know a lot of families. My family includes a lot of people who aren't my biological family and that's atypical in this world. Megan was there when both of my kids were born. Otto has been saying since he could talk that she is his best friend. I don't even know where he got that concept. She's probably going to be his first crush, too.

Mark Jacobs