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By Lisa Frydman

Mom spinning many plates finds hope in sitting service

Yes, there is a God. And she appeared briefly before me at Fox & Obel, of all places. I'm a member of that not-so-exclusive club: Single Full-Time Working Mother (SFWM). There's no daddy in the picture, so let's just say that with a kindergartner and a second-grader in tow, home in the 'burbs and job in the city, life is more than harried – it is the ultimate balancing act, which I have yet to master. I call it “Ringling Mothers: The Greatest Show on Earth.”

The coordination of schedules can be exhausting. And oh, the guilt. Every parent knows kids need and want their mommies around after school, when they're sick, at their performances/games/activities, and especially in the background – just to know you're there – even if they have no interest in talking to you.

Most days my juggling act works, but when it doesn't, life is a frenzy.

So when a press kit arrived a few weeks ago at the office titled, “Sittercity.com: Bringing parents and sitters together ... on your schedule, and on demand,” I lunged for it.

Thumbing through the pages, my pulse raced. Is this for real? An online service boasting more than 2,000 sitters and nannies in Chicago (and 50,000 nationwide).

What if... I thought wistfully... what if someone among them is my sitter soul mate? Someone who could work within my crazy schedule. Someone who could turn off the TV and teach my children, laugh with them, inspire them. Someone who could give them healthy snacks and not junk to shut them up. Someone who could fill in the gap because Mommy has to work.

And so I dialed.

“It's true, we've arrived,” the Sittercity.com publicist said. “This is our 15th city. We're launching our first event here next week – can you be there?”

I entered Fox & Obel, notebook in hand, pictures of my girls in the other – half Mommy/half reporter. The gimmick is called “Speed Sitting.” The concept resembles speed dating, in which you have five minutes to potentially meet Mr. Right, a bell rings and then you interview Mr. Right Next To Him.

It all comes down to chemistry. We know within the first few minutes of meeting someone if there is love potential, so why waste an entire night on a bad date? Hence, the same goes for finding nannies and sitters. Who has time to waste? I certainly don't.

It was a lively venue. Nearly 100 parents and sitters, balloons, and a face painter and even baby-sitters on hand for those who brought their kids.

“This is Vegas for Mommies,” I thought, sitting down assessing the competition, “and I'm feelin' lucky today.”

And there she was: The One. I found her on my very first interview. My heart beat wildly. Could it be? Big personality, nice smile, very flexible, a photographer who just graduated from Northwestern looking for part-time work, loves kids, first aid certified, yada yada. Every answer to every question was a resounding YES. I squeezed my pen tightly, ready to sign the dotted line.

Then came The Sinker: no car, but she's working on it.

And so the hunt continues. Only this time, with hope and a place to lay my hat. So if you're looking for this SFWM, I've moved to Sittercity.com, with no plans on checking out.

Want more information? Visit www.sittercity.com or call (888) 211-9749. The company currently has no plans for other speed-sitting dates in the Chicago area, company President Genevieve Thiers said.