

it still feel like home or the familiar place it used to be? If not, what made it seem strange? Share your thoughts and feelings about the experience.

Monique Rizer

When Students Are Parents

The following essay was published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2005. For more information about Monique Rizer, see her Profile of Success on page 133.

Guiding question How has being a parent and student affected Rizer's decisions?

1 Crammed behind my desk, I fidgeted and shifted my eyes to observe the other students in the room. I tried not to look the way I felt—like I didn't belong there with them. I couldn't help noticing that all the other women were wearing shorts, sandals, flirty summer dresses: appropriate clothes for a warm September day. I tugged at the baggy clothes hiding my postpartum weight. I thought of my six-week-old son and hoped I'd make it home to nurse him at the scheduled time. The thought of him reminded me that however odd I felt, I was going to stay in college this time.

2 It was the summer of 1998. I was a twenty-year-old new mother and wife, and it was my first day of class, though not my first day of college. I'd begun my long journey through higher education three years before, but my plans to attend full time after high school graduation were put on hold when financial difficulties forced my family of eight to move. I then found a local community college and felt prepared to start again, but instead the registration papers sat abandoned in my car, where I practically lived since home was a 32-foot trailer filled with seven other people. In the summer of 1996, I packed my bags and left to live on my own; I enrolled again the next spring and had my son in July 1998. I knew I had to stay in school and go full time. I wanted more for my son and myself, even though I wasn't sure what exactly "more" was at the time.

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