

## **Busy Mom Eugene, Ore.**

On a Wednesday afternoon, 34-year-old Vanessa Castañeda walked into Starbucks holding her baby daughter, Selene, on her hip with her oldest son, Benicio, following closely beside them.

For half an hour Castañeda multitasked. She chased Selene around the coffee shop, fed her a cake-pop, stood to rock her and bounced Selene on her hip, all while answering questions.

Castañeda was born in Yorba Linda, California, but grew up in River Road, Oregon, next to Eugene. Her dad drove from Los Angeles to Eugene when he worked for Suzuki Motor Corporation and loved Eugene so much he rented a house the next day.

A mother of four, Castañeda said Selene's been the mellowest of her and husband, Elieser's, kids. Selene was the COVID surprise baby. "I love my other kids, but my god it's like night and day," Castañeda said as she sat down on a swing in Emerald Park and held Selene in her lap. Selene is a beautiful baby girl. With big eyes and light-colored hair, Castañeda said Selene looks like how she did when she was a baby. At one-and-a-half-years-old, Selene is inquisitive and wants to get into everything, Castañeda said.

Castañeda is a part-time barista at Vero Espresso House and a full-time mother. The oldest, Benicio, is a sweet nine-year-old who always makes sure people feel included. The twins, Emery and Emile, are six. "Emery loves to hug. Any time she wants to give someone affection, she gives it a hundred percent," Castañeda said. "Emile wants to do everything his big brother does. He likes to check in with other kids if they fall or something or if they don't seem like themselves," Castañeda said.

Castañeda's husband, Elieser, works at a bank Monday through Friday and Castañeda works at Vero Saturday through Tuesday. On a typical Monday, Elieser gets Benicio and the twins up around 7:15 a.m., allowing Castañeda time to sleep after a night of getting up to feed Selene. Her husband takes the dog out and gets himself ready for work while she wakes up. Castañeda gets Selene ready, and finishes getting the other three ready. Then her husband takes the three to school and goes to work.

Castañeda drops Selene off at her mother-in-law's house in Springfield and then rushes back to Eugene for work at the cafe. "Mondays and Tuesdays are nightmare days,"

Castañeda said as she watched Selene toddle through the play structures like a drunken sailor.

When Castañeda was in high school she dreamed of becoming a photojournalist, but a bad back injury ended that dream when she was 20. “Now I know what that kind of schedule looks like and there’s no way I’d be able to do that with kids, and spend time with my kids the way I’d want to,” Castañeda said. “I don’t wanna make it sound like “oh my dreams all failed,” but I definitely learned a lot of hard lessons.”

Castañeda took up running this year and said it’s opened her eyes to what she’s capable of. In the past she couldn’t run around her apartment complex. “I just kept adding and trying and like two weeks ago I ran 13 miles, so it’s crazy what you can do,” she said.

At three o’clock on that typical Monday, Castañeda finishes work and drives to Springfield to pick up Selene and then to El Camino Del Río Elementary School to pick up Benicio. Castañeda takes the dog out when they get home and picks up the twins from their after-school program at 5:55 p.m. “By this time everyone is pretty worn out, it’s been a busy day,” she said. Her husband gets home around 7 p.m. They make an easy meal for dinner, relax for a second, and by 8 p.m. it’s time to get ready for bed.

Castañeda thinks she’s been dealt a pretty good hand. It doesn’t matter if where she is now is where she wanted to be because she’s happy. “As far as I’m doing now, I’m actually very happy. I’m very content,” she said. Her partner supports and cares for her. She’s healthy. Her kids bring her immense joy. She’s financially secure. “I feel like I’m finally starting to achieve the things that have just taken time to get to, like these races and traveling and the adventure part,” she said.