

First for woman on the go

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"The little change..."

that helped me bond with my mother-in-law"

From the moment I said 'I do,' I felt like my mother-in-law couldn't stand me. It was obvious she didn't think I was good enough for her son, even though he and I have a wonderful marriage. She'd never call me by my name. Instead, she'd sarcastically refer to me as "Beauty." And there were other signs: She'd "forget" my birthday yet always remember her other daughter-in-law's. Plus, she'd have me buy gifts for her to give to my kids but never say thank you—or pay me back!

"Humor put the focus on what we share."

Finally, after years of this treatment, I couldn't take it anymore. We needed to call a truce. And since I've always believed that a little humor goes a long way, I said to her, "You and I have something in common: We both love the same man. And since you

are his mother, you'll always be first in his heart." She laughed nervously at first, but then she smiled. She liked hearing that my husband had loved her longer than he'd loved me.

After that conversation she was kinder to me and even called me by my first name. And I started to look at *her* in a different light: Instead of my picky mother-in-law, I saw a woman who has faced some tough decisions in her life, so I made an effort to be kinder to her. I did little things to make her life easier, like pick up her groceries and invite her to lunch. I even threw her a birthday party at my home.

And my solution worked! The ultimate sign of acceptance was when she came with me to visit my mother, who had Alzheimer's. She was so warm and comforting. I'll never forget when we walked out together and she said, "You're such an angel."



Debbie Mendel, 45,
Lawrence, New York

"Now I show others they can conquer anything, too."

All this triggered a pleasant chain of events. I felt in control of my life and wanted to help other women feel empowered, too. So I left my teaching job to write a book and go into stress management. I decided to use my experience with my mother-in-law to help others understand that you can overcome anything—and bridge any gap—if you stay positive, keep your sense of humor and let your inner light shine through.