

Pampering Her
Employing Family-Friendly Policies
A Father's Admiration

Volume 11, Number 4
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THE AMERICAN FEMINISTSM

Feminists for Life of America[®]



Take care of Mom

THE AMERICAN FEMINISTSM

Feminists for Life of America

"When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society—so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has been greatly wronged."

Mattie Brinkerhoff *The Revolution*, 4(9):138-9 September 2, 1869



Take care of Mom

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THE AMERICAN FEMINIST™ The quarterly magazine of Feminists for Life of America **Editor** Cat Clark **Editorial Board** Therese Madden, Maureen O'Connor, Molly Pannell, Marie Smith, Lisa Toscani **Creative Director** Lisa Toscani
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Established in 1972, Feminists for Life of America is a nonsectarian, nonpartisan, grassroots organization that seeks real solutions to the challenges women face. Our efforts are shaped by the core feminist values of justice, nondiscrimination, and nonviolence. Feminists for Life of America continues the tradition of early American feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, who opposed abortion. Feminists for Life of America recognizes that abortion is a reflection that our society has failed to meet the needs of women. We are dedicated to systematically eliminating the root causes that drive women to abortion—primarily lack of practical resources and support—through holistic, woman-centered solutions. Women deserve better than abortion.

The opinions expressed in *The American Feminist* by individual authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or beliefs of *The American Feminist* editorial staff, FFL's President, Vice-President or the Board of Directors.
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Celebrity Challenge to Change the Culture

Monthly Donations

A former FFL Board member, a member of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Circle, challenges FFL members to begin or increase their electronic donations now.

All monthly online donations and electronic fund transfer donations, either newly received or increased by December 31, 2004, will be doubled in the first month by this generous feminist.

Please join our core support! (Sign up for electronic fund transfer on page 31 or go online today at www.feministforlife.org.)

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Patricia Heaton
Two-Time Emmy Winner, Honorary Chair



Margaret Colin
Honorary Co-Chair

Feminists for Life's powerful Women Deserve Better® message is spreading—inspiring students on college campuses, legislators on Capitol Hill, and most recently, leaders in other countries.

This success is because of you, FFL's members and supporters.

Honorary Co-Chair Margaret Colin and I are proud to add our voices to yours as FFL changes the culture and advocates woman-centered solutions.

Margaret and I are putting our money where our mouths are.

We will double every gift that comes in by mail or the website (www.feministsforlife.org) before the year end.

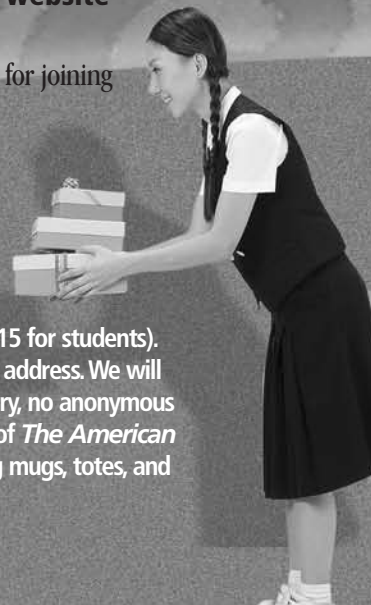
Thank you—for your belief in the strength and dignity of women, and for joining this celebration of every precious life.

Because women deserve better,

Patricia Heaton

Give the Gift of FFL!

Gift memberships are still just \$25 (or \$15 for students). Please enclose the recipient's name and address. We will notify them of your thoughtfulness. (Sorry, no anonymous gifts.) Gift members receive a full year of *The American Feminist*. For other gift ideas, including mugs, totes, and books, see our Covetable Stuff!®



N u r t u r i n g



The 40 weeks of pregnancy are a time of major change for women. The mental and emotional preparations for a new baby combined with the intense physical changes make for a nine-month roller coaster ride. While nurturing and celebrating the new life growing inside them—and eagerly anticipating their newborn babies' smiles—many women feel empowered by learning as much as they can about their pregnancies. Ricarda Ganjam, mother of a toddler and a newborn, says during pregnancy it was “important to understand the changes my body was going through and share them with my husband. There are several great websites that provided detailed pregnancy calendars. Reading this information and sharing it with my husband helped us both to feel connected to the changes.” Rita Ledbetter, a nurse-midwife with thirty years of experience, encourages women to “read pregnancy books and go to childbirth classes.” Knowledge displaces fear of the unknown.

The first trimester is a time of intense, rapid fetal development that requires a surprising amount of energy. “I had to redefine some of the things I used to do,” says Ganjam, “because it simply took too much energy and time.” Heather Dixon Kraham, a mother of a preschooler and a toddler, urges mothers to listen to their bodies and be realistic with themselves. “If you're tired, you should rest. If you're feeling overwhelmed, try to scale down activities.”

For many women, the fatigue and nausea often associated with the first trimester of pregnancy nearly disappear during the second. Bursting with new energy and armed with knowledge of what is happening to their bodies, many pregnant women turn to exercise, with the approval of their doctors or midwives, as a way to relieve stress and maintain their health and energy. “I swam

New Moms



at least three times a week followed by a long hot shower and essential oils,” says Kathryn Haines, a 30-year-old mother of a toddler. “I found that keeping my body and mind in shape was very important. The swimming took care of both because I was able to meditate while swimming.”

As a mother’s body changes, she finds that clothes that fit yesterday don’t today, she can no longer see her feet, and getting out of a chair can take a few minutes. These rapid changes can seem just too much, but Susanne Tyrrell, a mother of three, advises “taking each change as it comes and working through it...because one small change is easy to handle.” Many mothers recommend that a woman take care of herself just as she would if she weren’t pregnant. Gone are the days of enormous tent dresses and maternity shirts covered with hearts and flowers. Today’s maternity clothing is stylish and affordable. No matter what a woman’s personal style, she’ll be able to find a maternity version of her favorite miniskirt, leopard print shirt, or classic pants and tailored shirt. “I am not what I’d call a high-maintenance person, but I always tried to look my best, because that helps me feel my best,” says Ganjam. “I bought a few maternity pieces that were in line with my normal style.”

Personal treats can be a wonderful way for mothers to care for themselves. Ganjam and Kraham, for example, enjoyed occasional pedicures and regular haircuts. “If your feet look and feel good, you do too,” says Kraham. Kathleen Buckley, single mother of a one-year-old, also stresses the importance of taking time for oneself while pregnant. She explains, “During my pregnancy I was not only dealing with the physical and emotional changes of expecting a new baby, I was also dealing with the stress of being laid

off from my job and moving from the city to a more rural setting." She advises, "I learned the important lesson to make your pregnancy what you want it to be. Take the time to plan the nursery and go shopping, but don't let it run your life. If you'd rather spend the day with your feet up eating a pint of ice cream, by all means do so!"

Life with a Newborn

"What am I supposed to do now?"

This question faces many new mothers once they are on their own with a newborn.

Although they require a lot of gear, newborns do not come with an instruction manual. While adjusting to the physical, emotional and lifestyle changes of having a baby, many new parents appreciate help with the basics. Having someone help with the laundry, prepare some meals, watch other children, or run errands can give new parents the time they need to be with their babies. FFL member Ashli

McCall spent most of her pregnancy on bed rest and recalls that "it was a little harder for me to get back on my feet and into that active mothering role. Friends and family supported us by bringing meals every week and by throwing us a second shower after the baby was born, which covered things we still needed after the first shower. Family was also very supportive in remembering our older child and making lots of special time for him, which encouraged him and gave us a much-needed break and bonding time with the new baby."

Some women find it hard to realize that they need help and to ask for it. Buckley recalls that when her son was a newborn she was surprised to realize that she could not do

everything just like she did before the baby was born. "I consider myself to be an independent, competent woman," says Buckley. "When friends or family would offer their assistance, I at first turned them down, thinking that I needed to learn to do it all myself. Then I realized how ridiculous I was being. These people really wanted to help me! And they enjoyed seeing and playing with the baby. Now, when friends come over, it is not unusual for me to say, 'Do you mind playing with Joey for a minute while I use the bathroom?'"

For some mothers, being at home in the middle of the day can be a shocking new experience, especially when they find they do not know anyone else who is home. While on maternity leave, Ganjam sought help from others in her Washington, D.C., neighborhood. "I got involved in a great support group of other new parents in my community. It's terrific to know that there are so many other new and experienced parents living within a mile radius of my home."

Ganjam's community group hosts playgroups for children of all ages, beginning with a group called "Eaters and Sleepers" for babies aged 0-6 months.

According to Ganjam, "At this age, of course, the real focus is on information-sharing between parents, getting used to getting out of the house with a baby, breastfeeding around other people, and just general exposure to other styles of parenting. Being able to talk to other new parents was comforting and reassuring and helped to give me confidence in the decisions I was making as a new mom."

With the changes a newborn brings also come unexpected joys—first smiles, a tiny hand holding yours, the warmth of a napping baby on your shoulder. "Sometimes, even though I was dead tired, I would get up at night and sit looking at Joey in his cradle," says Buckley. "He was so cute when he slept! I would say a prayer of thanksgiving that he was



healthy and happy. It was great therapy and would rejuvenate me almost more than an extra five minutes of sleep.”

Buckley continues, “I can’t explain it exactly, but I think I am a better friend, sibling, daughter, etc., because of having a baby. I have learned patience. I have a better sense of enjoying each moment. I don’t fret the small things. I look to share others’ happiness more than I ever have. I want to make myself a better person and surround myself with good people who will encourage me to be better.”

Returning to work from maternity leave can be stressful for many women. Ganjam eased her transition back to work by arranging child care for her son while still on maternity leave.

“The best thing I did was to hire a nanny early,” she said.

“The nanny started part time when our son was four weeks old and she has been such a valuable part of his upbringing. By having her start so early, I was able to see her in action on a regular basis, provide my thoughts on how to handle things, and just feel comfortable with her. I realize this may be viewed as a luxury that not all people can afford, but I think there are creative ways to get help. A friend of mine who was scaling back her expenses... joined a babysitting co-op; another friend has a relative come over to watch the baby a couple of hours each week.”

Many women find that having a baby requires a big—but not insurmountable—adjustment in their professional lives. Ganjam and her husband found themselves redefining their roles at work after the birth of their first child. “At work, we no longer volunteer for every after-work activity; we simply prefer to get home. We are truly selective when it comes to spending time away from each other and our son.” Ganjam found that by presenting her employer with clear priorities and goals, they were able to find a balance that worked for everyone. “I work primarily with men, many of whom have children. I have found I have to be open about my enthusiasm for my family (and most of the men share the same enthusiasm). When I returned from maternity leave, I made it clear that my priority was to work with a client in the [local] area so that I could successfully transition back to work and feel good about the decisions I was making. The people in my company were very supportive of helping me find the right situation to come back to and, to be honest, their support has exceeded my expectations. I have found that when I prepared a logical work plan that accounted for work

needs and my own personal needs, people are willing to work with me. They see that I am serious about my work but that work is not the only thing in my life. To date, I have been able to add value to my team, complete work on time, and feel good about my balance of work and family.”

Buckley returned to work when her son was three months old. At first, she was unable to find a balance between the demands of work and home. “I found that I was trying to juggle these two jobs and did not feel like I was ‘finishing’ either one of them. When I was at work, I was thinking of all the things I should be doing at home. When I was at home, I was constantly on the phone with work. So I had to come up with a compromise.” Buckley now writes a prioritized “to do” list for the next day before leaving the office and one before going to bed. “I can forget about work when I’m at home, knowing that when I return there the next time, I will have everything ready to go. Same with when I am at home. It has greatly reduced my stress level and allowed me to enjoy the moment of each task without having to worry about what is not getting done.”

Women who stay at home with their children also face challenges in balancing family, home and self. According to Kathryn Haines, “It took me awhile to figure out what (besides taking care of my daughter Khady) would make me happy as a stay-at-home mom. When Khady was eight months old, I started a regular yoga practice. Yoga has helped me find the balance between being a good mom and taking care of myself. As my practice deepens, and I complete teacher trainings, it has also opened up possibilities for a future career.”

Yet the extroverted Haines yearned for interaction with other adults. A former Peace Corps volunteer in Mali, West Africa, Haines reminisced about the Malian culture where women spend their days together, sharing household duties and raising children. “I struggled with the decision to return to work in order to find the adult interaction I needed,” Haines said. “Slowly, an alternative began to emerge.” She teamed up with a Malian friend and together they care for their daughters, serve as nannies for neighborhood families, teach yoga and host a number of playgroups. Haines says, “I am as busy as I was before I had Khady (which I love) and almost never alone (which makes me happy).”

A large, faded black and white photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair holding a baby in her arms. The woman is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The baby is wearing a striped shirt.

Time Off for Mothers

During the first month or two after their babies are born, many mothers have trouble seeing beyond the intensity of round-the-clock feedings, constant diaper changes and irregular sleep schedules. But as their babies begin to mature and form their own personalities and schedules, it is essential that mothers take time for themselves. A jog in the park, coffee with a friend, or even a movie with her spouse can help a mother maintain her balance and also help her take better care of her children.

Christine Lowe, mother of a developmentally disabled three-and-a-half-year-old and a six-month-old, cautions mothers against holding themselves up to an unachievable standard of perfection. “I wanted to be the perfect mom, but I hated the person I was becoming. The challenges of caring for my... developmentally disabled, hyperactive son were becoming overwhelming.” Lowe reached out for help at the school her son attended. Social workers there discussed the option of “respite care” with her, explaining that respite care allows parents to leave their child in the care of one of the licensed homes affiliated with the school for a period of up to two weeks. Lowe accepted the respite care. During the next two weeks, “I got some perspective on how much strain I was under and how unrealistic my expectations of myself were. I felt like I finally joined the real human race, where people were not superhuman but just ordinary humans who sometimes needed to ask for help. Towards the end of the two-week period, it began to seem too long. When my little whirlwind returned, things did not seem nearly so unmanageable.”

The interests, hobbies and social activities a mother had before her baby are still important. “One of the most important things that my friends and family can do for me is to

continue treating me like the person that I always have been,” says Buckley. “I needed them to realize that I was still the same person with the same interests and personality, I just had a baby to bring along now. We could still go to the mall, or for coffee, or even hiking, I just had to make a pitstop at the playground and haul baggies of cereal with me.”

Nan Madden, mother of five grown children including FFL board member Therese Madden, encourages mothers to pursue interests outside their families. “It is sad to see mothers ‘sacrifice’ themselves for their children and let themselves get out of shape physically and intellectually—mothers who use their children as an excuse for not taking care of their health and who can’t discuss anything except the accomplishments of their children or the latest program on TV.” Madden acknowledges that outside interests can carry some risks and “at times, the family is sure to make her feel guilty about not always being available to them 100% of the time. But in the long run, she will be a healthy, mature, and most important, a loving mother. And her family will benefit from her example and from her wider perspective on life.” Madden continues, “Now that our five children are grown, I can look back and realize that part of my success as a mother was my ability to recognize that, as much as I loved my children, I had to take care of myself. And I knew instinctively that if I failed to care for myself, both physically and intellectually, I would not be able to care as well for my family.” *



Molly Pannell works at home in Washington, D.C. caring for her two beautiful boys. She previously served as Public Education and Outreach Coordinator for FFL.

Imagine a man so committed to pro-life feminism that he could be a former vice-chair of Feminists for Life and yet still have only the barest inkling of the strength of women. That would be me.

I thought I was a progressive thinker. I am a committed pro-life feminist. I chose to be a stay-at-home dad, home-schooling my two pre-school-age daughters. My wife and I chose to practice natural family planning, so I knew which hormones were pumping through my wife's body and when. During her pregnancies I pampered my wife with full body massages and foot rubs, and I did her household chores in addition to mine.

But I balked when Leslie said she wanted to try a "natural childbirth" for our third child. "What?" I cried. "No drugs? No epidural? A birth center instead of a hospital? A midwife instead of a doctor? Returning home the day of delivery? What madness is this?" Leslie explained to me the philosophy of natural childbirth: viewing the birthing process as an

empowering thing that women do, rather than a technologically-involved thing that happens to them. It may not be for every woman, she said, but after the birth of our first two children she decided she wanted to do it.

I wondered how this could be. The first two births had been so orderly, so by-the-book, so...so...painless. Well, ok, painless for me. But still, the epidural had prevented me from seeing my wife in whatever condition caused the women in the other maternity rooms to let out those tortured screams I had heard. What would it be like to watch the woman I love suffer unbearable pain?

What I did not know—what I could not know until I saw it with my own eyes—is that for a woman, a mother, there is no such thing as pain that cannot be borne on behalf of your child. Sure, as a pro-lifer I knew it intellectually. But nothing compares to the actual experience of it.

Yes, the pain was excruciating. During labor, Leslie used the whirlpool, the

breathing techniques—but it was still agonizing. Through practiced breaths she kept repeating the same words: "I can do this...I can do this."

It was the most incredible thing I had ever been a part of. It was like some Olympic event where an athlete, through sheer force of will, pushed herself beyond the limits of physical endurance to win the gold. If that sounds trite, let me be clear: I am in awe of my wife.

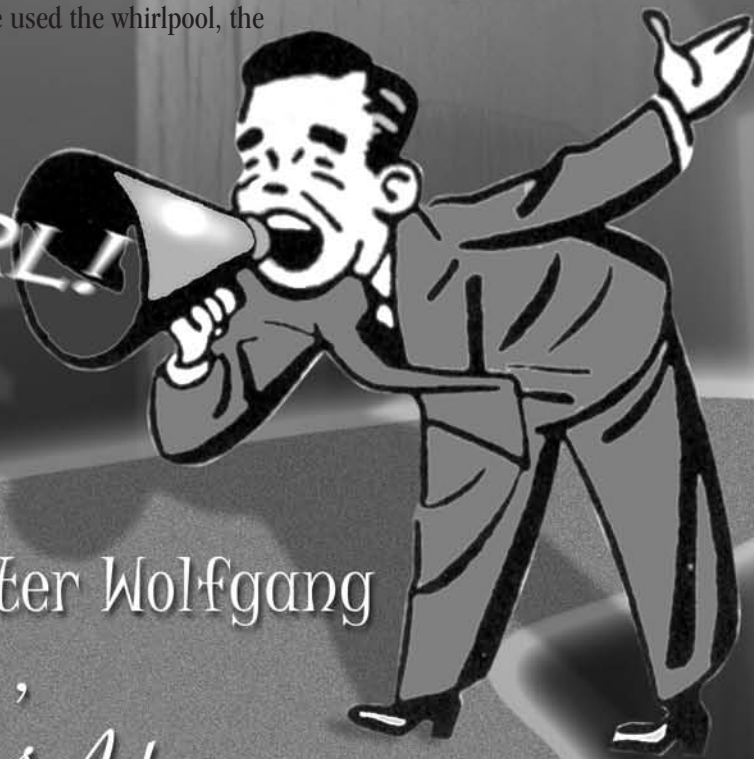
Leslie's heroism inspired me with a renewed zeal for parenting. I tackle new family responsibilities with vigor, not as mere chores. And though I loved being the full-time at-home parent, she wanted more well-earned time with the children, so I've returned to work.

The result, by the way, was the birth of our first son, Isaac. At last, another male in the house! But be a good boy, Isaac, because we're surrounded, and these women are tough!

YOU GO, GIRL!

Peter Wolfgang

A Father's Admiration



10. Don't... be quiet while the baby is sleeping.

If you get them used to quiet, they'll sleep only when it's quiet! They don't expect it, so don't start it. The same angelic child under whose crib I used to vacuum during naptime ten years ago can now say from the backseat "Bye, Mommy, I love you" at 5 am in the airport drop-off lane without breaking a REM cycle.



9. Do... be nice to your piggies.

Just because you can see your feet again does not mean that you should try shoving them back into your pre-pregnancy shoes right away. Just as round is a shape, slippers are shoes. Your feet will thank you.

8. Don't... spend so much time

capturing the moments on film that you miss them. While pictures are wonderful ways to relive the memories of babyhood, you can't replace them with the actual experiences! Keep it simple. Place a few disposable cameras around the house wherever Baby is likely to be. Then all you have to do is reach, snap, and get back to canoodling. Or enlist a friend to take photos.



SALLY'S

Do's and Don'ts

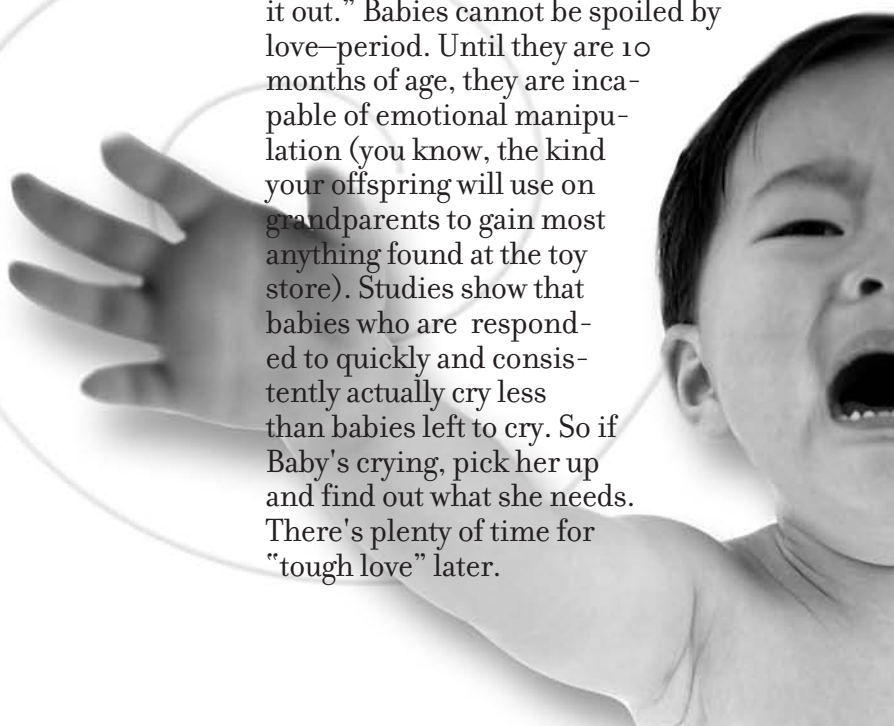
(Drum roll, please)

7. Do... be selective

with your baby gadgetry. Diaper Genies—yes. These little wonders keep your house from smelling like, well, a diaper. Baby wipe warmers—no. The warmers are not portable. The harsh reality of room temperature wipes is going to set in on the first diaper change away from home. Do we really want to come unraveled on the diaper deck at the store?

6. Don't... listen to Mom, Grandma, or Aunt Myrtle

when it comes to letting your baby "cry it out." Babies cannot be spoiled by love—period. Until they are 10 months of age, they are incapable of emotional manipulation (you know, the kind your offspring will use on grandparents to gain most anything found at the toy store). Studies show that babies who are responded to quickly and consistently actually cry less than babies left to cry. So if Baby's crying, pick her up and find out what she needs. There's plenty of time for "tough love" later.



TOP TEN for New Mommies

please.)

5. Do... invest in quality foundation garments.

Gravity doesn't take maternity leave—'nuff said.



4. Don't... feel guilty

about withdrawing from the world for a while. You're adapting to having a new person in the house and establishing a new family. That takes precedence over everything! So turn on the answering machine, turn off the cell phone and computer. Take the time you need and deserve in your own little protected mommy-baby bubble.

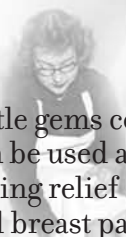
2. Don't... try to be Supermom.

When Baby sleeps, sleep. Other responsibilities aren't going anywhere – and babyhood only happens once. Newborns don't have a lot of awake-time, so don't waste a moment of it being groggy because "those dishes just had to be done."



3. Do... invest in

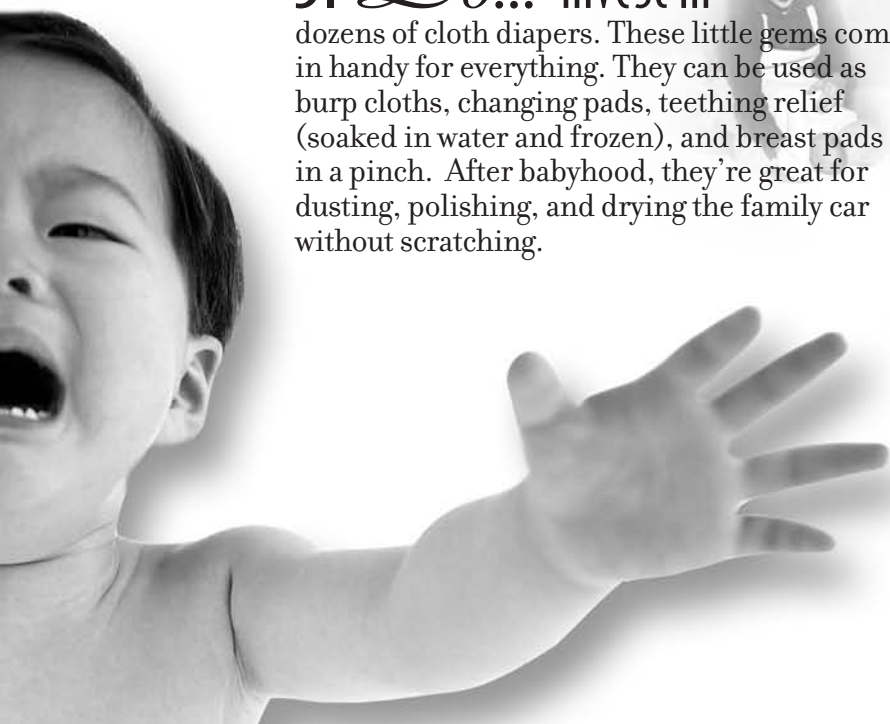
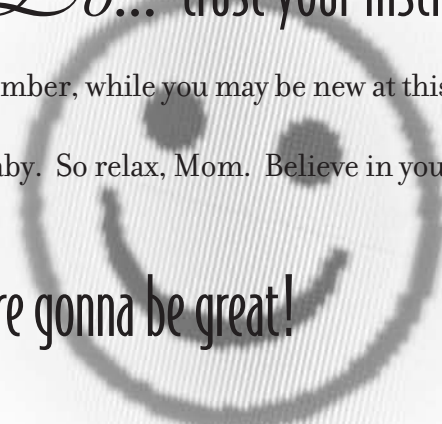
dozens of cloth diapers. These little gems come in handy for everything. They can be used as burp cloths, changing pads, teething relief (soaked in water and frozen), and breast pads in a pinch. After babyhood, they're great for dusting, polishing, and drying the family car without scratching.



1. Do... trust your instincts.

Remember, while you may be new at this, so is the baby. So relax, Mom. Believe in yourself.

You're gonna be great!



Therese Madden
FFL Vice Chair

Employing Family-Friendly Policies



When Patricia found out that she was pregnant, she tried to hide it from her employer.



An immigrant from West Africa, Patricia was a laborer and performed in a job that required considerable physical activity. Eventually the work started to affect her health and five months into her pregnancy, she informed her supervisor. Concerned, her supervisor immediately contacted his manager, who insisted on an immediate meeting with Human Resources. Patricia's supervisor and manager argued that she should take unpaid leave for the rest of her pregnancy, a situation which would have put Patricia and her family in extreme financial stress. With the intervention of Human Resources, they were together able to devise creative assignments for the rest of Patricia's pregnancy, allowing her to continue to contribute in valuable ways to the needs of her unit while protecting both her health and the health of her unborn child.

When Amy found out she was pregnant, she was excited. She had dropped out of college and gone to work for the summer in a national park's concession, where she met another worker and fell in love. The romance, the setting, and then the pregnancy seemed ideal to her. Unfortunately, the reaction of her child's father was not romantic: he repeatedly demanded that she have an abortion. Amy decided that she needed to return to her parents' home to avoid his wrath. He followed her when she went to discuss leave of absence options, shouting that she was "ruining his life" and insisting that she abort. Seeing the circumstances and the need, her employer "bent the rules" about leave (she was not eligible based on her relatively short tenure) and granted her the absence. This allowed her to take care of herself and her child's immediate needs without additional concern about future employment.

When Gina found out she was pregnant, she was a manager in a mid-sized firm where she had worked for approximately a year. Shortly after her wedding, she discovered that a horrible spell of “food poisoning” was in fact severe morning sickness. New on the job and in a high-profile position, she had concerns about informing her employer but was unable to disguise the high number of absences that her difficult pregnancy was requiring. She was surprised and grateful when needed accommodations were eagerly made. Her employer was similarly thankful for the important services she continued to provide to their customers, despite her need to reduce her schedule during her pregnancy and to take a leave of absence after her son was born.

In each of these cases, women found themselves worried about informing others of their pregnancies, concerned that they would be perceived as less valuable if they did not fit the childless model of the “ideal worker.” Each experienced different reactions, some of which initially confirmed their worst fears. Women frequently report that the support they receive even in organizations that style themselves as “progressive” often fails to meet their needs to balance family and work. A lecturer at a prominent liberal university’s law school felt obliged to return to work after only six weeks of unpaid leave and then faced criticism from her female supervisor because she was no longer available to work extended overtime hours. An employee at a well-known women’s advocacy group found that she had to work “full-time or nothing” and so ended up leaving. A human resources manager at a company in the hotel and restaurant industry requested and was granted a part-time schedule but was dismayed to find that the employer had reduced her salary by half yet had made no such adjustments to her workload. An attorney at a northern California law firm reported no flexibility in her firm in terms of flex time or job sharing; after giving birth to her son, she therefore opted not to return to either that firm or to the practice of law.

Pregnant women and parents deserve better. We deserve to have our procreative capacity celebrated in practical as well as emotional ways. It is in an employer’s best interest to retain talented staff by identifying creative solutions that allow workers to continue to contribute during and after their pregnancies, while balancing each individual woman’s changing needs to care for herself and for her children. This concept also applies to the evolving needs that fathers have to balance time with family with contributions to their profession of choice.

There is no formula of support that every pregnant woman or parenting family requires, just as there is no menu of options that will work for every employer, because employers have different needs based on the type of service they provide, the size of their workforce, and the relative strength of their financial resources. Finding ways for pregnant women and parents to continue to contribute their expertise to their chosen fields of work while handling the changing needs of pregnancy and family requires good faith, cooperative efforts and clear communication from everyone involved. When that occurs, everyone gains.

Feminists for Life is an example of a small employer that has adopted family-friendly practices that work for the needs of their employees. FFL has a comprehensive telecommuting policy that allows staff to live in locations of their choice, near family and/or in areas that match their interests and economic choices, even though they are geographically distant from the “corporate” office. “One of the best parts about working for FFL is that I don’t feel forced to choose between my family and my career,” explains Sally Winn, FFL’s vice president. “While I get all of the personal enrichment of a challenging job that I love, I am allowed to raise my daughters in a small-town environment in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. It’s truly the best of both worlds.”

Similarly, part-time employment policies allow staff to balance family, school and other personal priorities with the opportunity to make important and much-needed contributions to those whom they serve. “Working for FFL at home has allowed me to adjust my work schedule according to my son’s needs as he grew,” says FFL’s information management specialist Coleen MacKay. “I’m able to earn money, make a real contribution to a cause I believe in, and be home and available whenever my son needs me. So many stay-at-home mothers I talk to say they would work at other jobs if they could have such a flexible schedule. Shouldn’t we as a society be trying harder to take advantage of all that talent?”

This model is also used by larger employers, reports Theresa, who recently returned to work in her chosen field of information technology. She spends most of her time at a computer that her employer arranged at her home. This allows her to support her family’s income needs while juggling the challenges of three children under the age of five by working late at night and while they are at school or day-care.

Other employers have adopted generous leave policies, allowing lengthy absences, which can include paid leave during all or part of the absence. The City and County of San Francisco, for example, which employs approximately 30,000 people in a variety of professions, allows up to a year's discretionary leave, which can be extended for another year by mutual consent, and provides that a minimum of 12 weeks be paid leave, even if the employee does not have lengthy tenure with the employer. Other employers have followed suit, recognizing that family-friendly programs help attract and retain top-quality candidates.

Job sharing is another creative option that works for some professions. Krista is a third-grade teacher in Vacaville, California, a town with a population of about 100,000. Since having her first child five years ago, she has shared a job with another teacher, typically on a schedule in which one works mornings and the other afternoons. Within her school district, flexibility occurs with the agreement of both teachers, so that some elect to work 50% of a normal schedule, while others work less, or more. Krista reports that the schedule allows her to go to school with her daughter Brooklyn, now five, teach all morning, then return home with Brooklyn in the afternoon. In addition, since she has elected to be on a 40% schedule, she has Wednesdays off and typically uses that time to volunteer in her daughter's classroom. Despite these benefits, she reports that there are significant challenges associated with job sharing. She suggests finding a partner with a similar work ethic and with similar priorities, noting that they share a physical work space, work together to coordinate the division of tasks, and also work together to make decisions about how to communicate about the non-teaching aspects of their duties. "We share 30 students and their families. To meet everyone's needs and concerns, we need to know who's had a rough day, whose mom called, who didn't do their homework, who isn't feeling well, who lost their spelling words, who's having a conflict with Johnny, who's bringing birthday cupcakes, etc." Ultimately, however, it is an arrangement with many rewards. "I cannot imagine having to work full time when my daughter was little. Job sharing was a way to bring in some income without having to put my child in day care all day. Now that she's entering elementary school, I'll have the flexibility to work more if that's what my family and I choose."

continued



Voices

OF WOMEN WHO MOURN

Editor's note: This story of despair and healing after abortion was written by a Rachel's Vineyard retreat participant and is reprinted with permission from Rachel's Vineyard.

After making me lie down for 30 minutes, another nurse dismissed me. I tried to tell her how much pain I was in and what had happened. It was as if I had said nothing. Painfully and slowly, I dressed and walked into the waiting room. I looked at A. He looked at me. If I had had a weapon, he and everyone else in that clinic would have died, myself included. My feelings for him were far deeper than mere hatred. I fantasized about annihilating him (somehow), making him beg for mercy first, as I had in the clinic. Finally, even my hatred drained out of me, leaving only a despairing blackness. I was at the end of the road, with no salvation for the likes of me. I had finally struck bottom.

With quiet deliberation, I took my handgun from under my pillow, checking to make sure the clip was loaded. I chambered a round, walked into my living room, sat in a chair, put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. To this day, I cannot think why the gun did not fire. I had always kept it in perfect working order. Still numb, I called my only friend, S, and told her what I tried to do. She lived quite a distance from me, but she was there in only a few minutes; under five, I think. She put me on her lap like I was a child and rocked me for a long time.

I cannot describe the healing I have received from being present at that wonderful retreat. Thanks to Rachel's Vineyard retreat, I can look in a mirror without hating the reflection I used to see.

Connie

If you or someone you know is suffering from an abortion, you can contact Rachel's Vineyard at 877-HOPE-4-ME or through their website at www.rachelsvineyard.org.

WE REMEMBER



Rebecca Tell Berg

1987-2003

Rebecca Tell Berg, a 16-year-old girl from Uddevalla, Sweden, died on June 3, 2003, after taking the abortion drug RU-486.

Berg was just over seven weeks pregnant when she decided to have an abortion. She went to the hospital a week after consulting a gynecologist and was given three 200-mg RU-486 pills, known in Sweden as Mifegyne. She returned in the morning two days later and was given two misoprostol pills to induce contractions.

Berg was kept at the hospital under observation for eight hours to ensure that she did not suffer excessive bleeding. She was given pain medication and, after scheduling a follow-up visit for a month later, was released in the late afternoon.

Although Berg lived with her mother, she stayed with her 19-year-old boyfriend, Niklas Mattsson, after the abortion. Mattsson encouraged Berg to return to the hospital after her pain and bleeding persisted for days, but hospital officials had told Berg that bleeding might continue for two weeks. Six days after the abortion, Mattsson found Berg dead in the shower. Berg's mother was informed by police that her daughter had died.

The coroner's report confirmed that Berg died as a result of blood loss following a chemically induced abortion.

Berg's mother, Catharina Tell, blames the hospital for her daughter's death.

"Rebecca didn't want to have a chemical abortion, but the doctor told her it was much better than having a suction abortion," said Tell, whose daughter informed her about the abortion two days before dying. "I can't understand that I wasn't told about Rebecca wanting an abortion.... She was just 16 years old." "From what we can see," Ingemar Persson of Swedish Medical Products commented, "all the rules were followed and the girl was given the correct dosage."

In the RU-486 death of American teen Holly Patterson, the California Department of Health Services reported that Planned Parenthood failed to follow its own internal policies for informing women how to use the drug. Authorities report that all of the country's rules were followed when RU-486 was administered to Rebecca Tell Berg, however.

Source: *LifeNews.com*.



Benefit options styled as "cafeteria plans" likewise offer equitable options that can specifically benefit parents. Janelle, an attorney who specializes in child welfare cases, reports that her firm allows employees to choose from a range of benefit options that include child care subsidies or equivalent amounts in health club or educational subsidies. Some employers offer child care on site, which allows parents to have convenient access to their children during the day and feel reassured about the quality of care being delivered. Other employers may offer adoption subsidies; for example, Kevin, a regional manager who works in a Midwest office for tax preparation specialists H&R Block, reports that his firm offers employees up to \$3,000 in reimbursement for adoption expenses.

None of these options offers a recipe that would work for every pregnant woman, every parent or every employer. However, it is important for all involved that creative options be considered and implemented to mutual satisfaction. Above all, none of us should forget to approach these options with creative enthusiasm and congratulate our staff, coworkers and friends on their growing families. In the example of Patricia, the laborer who initially felt that she would be forced from her job during her pregnancy, the meeting concluded with congratulations from the HR professional to Patricia on her pregnancy. To her surprise, Patricia reacted with tears of gratitude and a spontaneous hug, saying that no one previously had treated her pregnancy like anything other than a problem, an appalling scenario for a large and progressive employer who should be better equipped to handle such an issue as a routine matter. Patricia deserved better, as do all women and parents in similar circumstances. Creative and proactive approaches can help ensure that parents do not feel torn between their profession or livelihood and their need to care for either themselves or their families. *

Therese Madden works as the Director of Human Resources for a California employer and lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband, Charles Williams.

Angela Lanfranchi, M.D.

Breast Health Benefits from Giving Birth

Breast cancer, the most common form of cancer among women in the United States, strikes one in seven women, according to the American Cancer Society. Although the exact cause of breast cancer is not known, some factors that increase a woman's breast cancer risk include family history, smoking, taking hormones (as found in hormone replacement therapy and birth control pills, patches, and implantable hormonal birth control) and postmenopausal obesity. Fortunately, some risk can also be reduced through lifestyle changes, including full-term pregnancy.

A full-term pregnancy benefits a mother by giving her lifelong reduction in her risk of breast cancer. Before a woman becomes pregnant, about 70% of her breast tissue is Type 1 lobules, where the most common form of breast cancer arises. At the end of a full-term pregnancy, 70% of her breast tissue is Type 3 lobules, which are cancer-resistant. A new mother has fewer places where cancers can arise, thereby lowering her risk of breast cancer. Her risk decreases further with each additional pregnancy.

The earlier in her life a woman has a full-term pregnancy, the lower her risk for breast cancer. Compared to a

woman who has her first child after age 30, a woman who has a child before the age of 18 has a 75% reduced breast cancer risk, according to the American Medical Women's Association. For each year a woman delays a full-term pregnancy, her risk of breast cancer is increased. A woman who has a full-term pregnancy at age 30 has a 90% increased risk of breast cancer compared to a woman who gives birth at 20.

It is necessary that the pregnancy be full term in order to benefit from breast cancer risk reduction. Pregnancy ending in a spontaneous abortion (commonly referred to as miscarriage) confers no decrease in risk of breast cancer to the mother. An induced abortion can increase the risk of breast cancer in the mother proportional to the length of pregnancy before the abortion occurs. During the first two trimesters of pregnancy the breasts enlarge, as every mother knows. They enlarge by increasing the number of Type 1 and 2 lobules, thereby increasing the number of places that breast cancers can arise. It is only by completing that pregnancy that the cancer-resistant Type 3 lobules develop, lowering breast cancer risk.

In addition to the health benefits that breastfeeding offers children, there is

a health benefit for the mother as well. Breastfeeding decreases the mother's risk of breast cancer. A *Lancet* study published in 2002 reported that the longer women breastfed, the lower their risk of breast cancer. If a woman breastfed for a year, she had a 6% decrease in breast cancer risk. If she breastfed for two years, there was an 11% decrease in risk. The advantage was cumulative, so if she fed two children for one year each, she would have an 11% decrease in breast cancer risk.

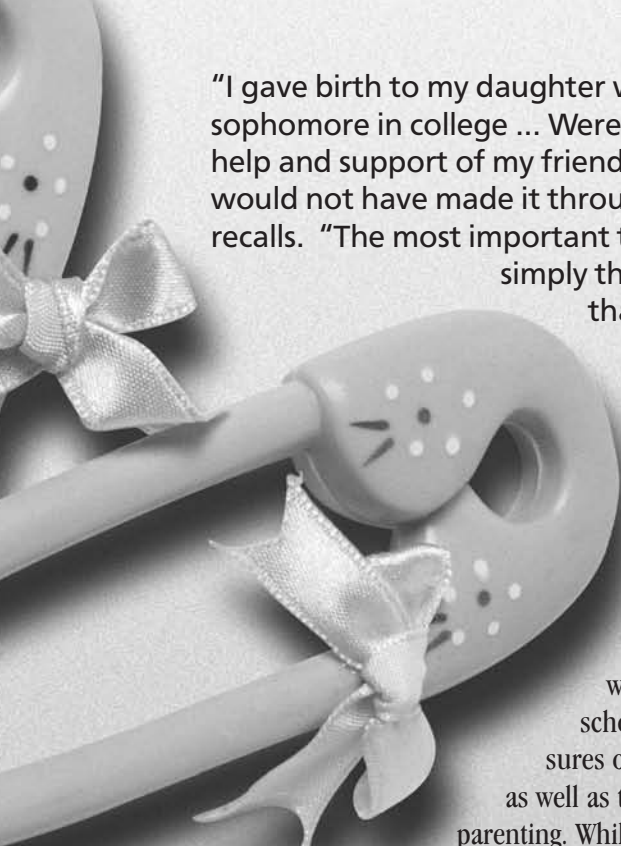
All women, whether they are mothers or not, should strive to reduce their risks of breast cancer and increase their chances of survival through regular clinical breast examinations and mammograms, monthly breast self-examinations, a low-fat diet, regular exercise, quitting smoking, and reduced alcohol consumption. Early detection can dramatically increase a woman's chances of survival. *

Angela LanFranchi is a breast surgeon, cofounder of the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute, and mother of one daughter.

Support for



Parenting Students



"I gave birth to my daughter when I was a sophomore in college ... Were it not for the help and support of my friends and family, I would not have made it through," Ann Raab recalls. "The most important thing to me was

simply the knowledge that my family and friends were there for me, no matter what."

Women who become pregnant while attending school face the pressures of classes and exams as well as the challenges of parenting. While many colleges and universities offer a variety of pregnancy support services, pregnant and parenting students still require a great deal of assistance, and they often need friends and advocates who will help connect them to the resources they need.

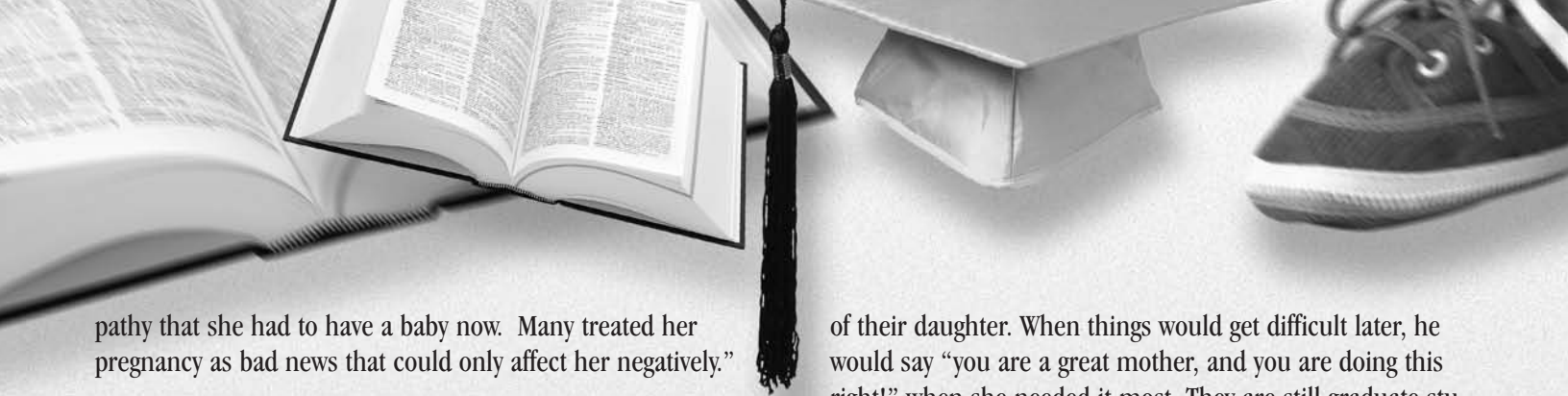
At FFL-moderated Pregnancy Resource Forums around the country, students and administrators have had the opportunity to hear from many student mothers and fathers who point out that it is possible but very difficult to meet the dual challenges of parenthood and student life. Administrations have responded. Many universities now provide for comprehensive maternity care in their student insurance plans. Some schools provide family housing; others have volunteer or professional child care services available. With the aid of grants and scholarships, mothers and fathers are able to complete their education while raising children. But they still face many challenges: inflexible class schedules that force them to spend

too much time away from their child, a lack of telecommuting and distance learning options, expensive day care, costly insurance for their child, stroller-inaccessible walkways and buildings, and no appropriate places to change a diaper or feed an infant.

Once we begin to brainstorm ways that universities can and should be called upon to provide for student parents, we come up with a nearly endless list. But even if a parenting student has all the resources she could desire from her school, we can still ask what friends, family and fellow students can do to help support student parents, who, whether married or single, are confronted with the sometimes overwhelming task of caring for their children and completing their educations.

"Just having someone to talk to about fears and concerns is a great relief—but there are also many practical things that can be done," says Raab, who attended college in Kansas City, Missouri. "Make sure that the mother has proper nutrition and access to healthcare for herself and for the baby. Offer to give her a ride to the doctor if she doesn't have a car, or take her on a shopping trip to make sure she has the right foods to keep herself and her baby healthy. Not having to worry about these things makes it easier for her to focus on schoolwork."

Michelle Dougherty remembers a friend from a Wisconsin graduate school who became pregnant toward the end of her studies, just as she was about to begin her job search in a competitive field: "Although she had a supportive husband, was financially stable, and had no doubt that she would keep the baby, her first reaction was panic. Would anyone hire her when she showed up at an interview visibly pregnant? Could she ask for maternity leave at the time her job was supposed to start? Would needing to spend time with her newborn affect her chances for promotion in the future? As our departmental community became aware that she was expecting, she was stunned by some of the reactions people had. Many expressed sym-



pathy that she had to have a baby now. Many treated her pregnancy as bad news that could only affect her negatively.”

Dougherty learned that new mothers need to know that their friends are not only supportive but excited for them. “My friend needed to hear people say, ‘Congratulations!’ She needed to hear encouragement from other working moms who had successful careers. She needed people to treat her baby as a blessing, not a curse, and then ask how they could help her.”

How can new moms help themselves? What should they expect while pregnant, and how should they take care of themselves? Terri Nelson, who became pregnant while a senior at Southwestern University, instructs, “DO NOT short yourself on sleep. You need so much more than usual throughout your pregnancy, and if you don’t get it, everything else will seem much worse, from morning sickness to backaches to mood swings. Carry around bottles of water and snacks for emergencies...being trapped somewhere without food when the urge strikes can be devastating, and even fast food (besides being unhealthy) can be too slow. Let other people pamper you so you can rest as much as possible!”

Peter Murphy’s wife Melody was pregnant while they were studying in a Washington, D.C., graduate school together, so he tried to help her in every way possible. When Melody developed gestational diabetes, Peter helped her to monitor her nutrition, especially when she was tired or otherwise stressed or distracted, and carried appropriate snacks in his backpack so he could encourage Melody to eat regularly. He helped her avoid strenuous work, and reduced her stress by being more aware of points of contention and avoiding arguments. By doing some of her household chores, especially the ones involving noxious fumes, he gave her more time to rest. In her free time, he encouraged her to do things she enjoyed, such as taking relaxing baths, or taking walks to enjoy the fresh air. Peter also went to every doctor’s appointment with Melody.

Melody recalls that Peter’s encouraging words often kept her going. He expressed lots of pride and praised her at the birth

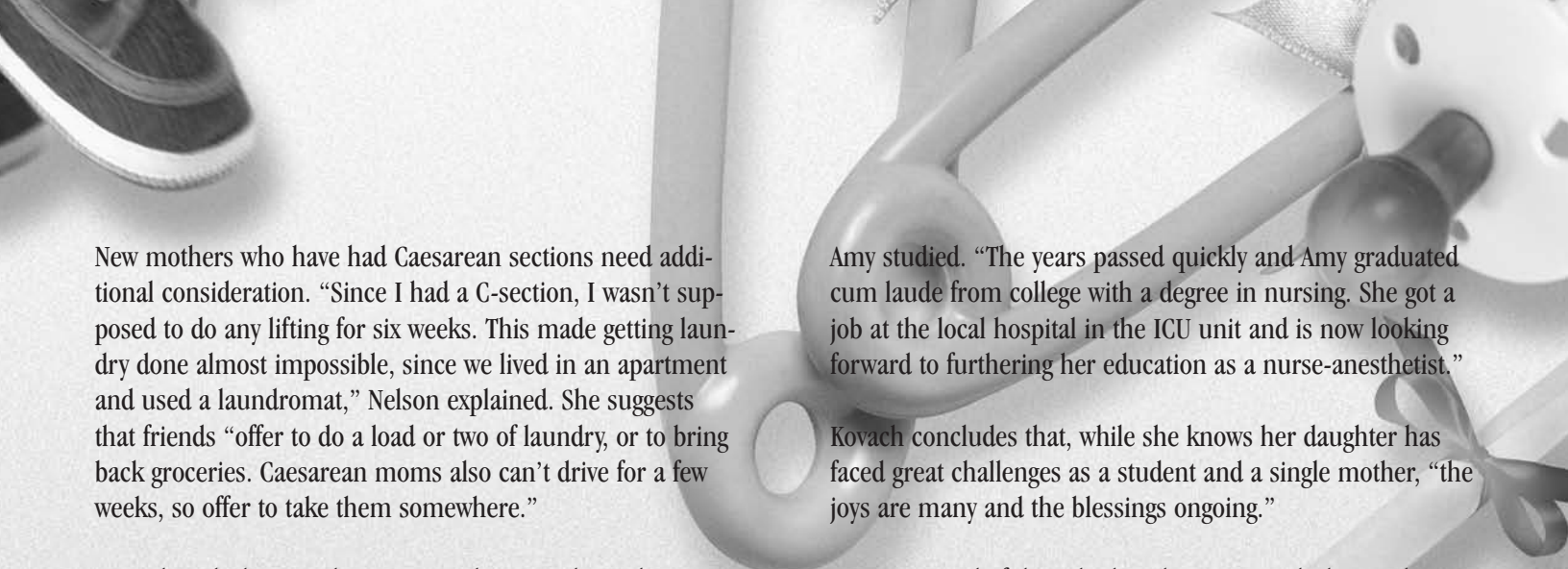
of their daughter. When things would get difficult later, he would say “you are a great mother, and you are doing this right!” when she needed it most. They are still graduate students and help each other keep their priorities in order: family comes first for both of them. When one is disappointed with a grade that is less than excellent, the other says something like, “Don’t let that B daunt you! You got that mark even while shouldering all these other challenges! Just imagine if you’d had all the free time those other students had!”

Student parents need to be reasonable with themselves about grades, Melody says. Her own professors have reported that student parents are often the best students overall, precisely because they don’t have any time to waste on anxiety and perfectionism.

There are many ways friends and family can help after the baby is born. David Six’s entire graduate school lab at the University of California at San Diego used to pitch in to offer support when one of his colleagues had a baby: “The tradition... was to have a baby shower for the co-worker and spouse. We always managed to chip in enough money to get a nice stroller/car seat and dirty diaper storage device... When the baby finally arrived, the lab was all set to lend a hand. We had a sign-up sheet posted and each person took turns delivering a meal (sometimes home-cooked, sometimes take-out). This was greatly appreciated by the new family for the first couple of weeks.”

Raab suggests that friends check in with a new mother once the baby is born to find out what her class schedule involves: “Then see if there is a weekend before a big test where you could babysit for a while to give her some unbroken study time, without making her feel like her child is being neglected. Sometimes that can make all the difference between success and failure in a given class.”

“Free babysitting was a necessity in order for me to finish school!” Nelson agrees. Babysitting not only allows student parents to study but also allows them occasional much needed breaks.



New mothers who have had Caesarean sections need additional consideration. "Since I had a C-section, I wasn't supposed to do any lifting for six weeks. This made getting laundry done almost impossible, since we lived in an apartment and used a laundromat," Nelson explained. She suggests that friends "offer to do a load or two of laundry, or to bring back groceries. Caesarean moms also can't drive for a few weeks, so offer to take them somewhere."

Even though the Murphys are a student couple, and not single parents, Melody says they still need plenty of help with things like babysitting, errands and meals. People should not assume that couples don't have the same needs single student parents have. Kristie Burns, who gave birth to her first child after her freshman year of college, remembers that she and her husband also needed help and support from their friends: "I think *everyone* needs someone during those first weeks to assist with meals and laundry!"

Burns found that pregnancy was "very isolating, especially as a young mom" and she felt lucky to have "a tremendous family and group of friends to make me feel connected." Melody Murphy also highlights the social isolation felt by so many student parents. Other students tend to get together late at night, go to bars or movie theatres, and plan weekend trips. But parents of a newborn or young child cannot do these things easily. Friends of student parents should make regular efforts to plan some events in small groups, in the afternoon or early evening, and in a child-friendly environment. When socializing, Melody says that one of the most important things friends can do is to help engage the baby. When Melody is the only person paying attention to the baby during a social gathering, it is inevitably exhausting and Melody feels ignored. When other people help watch and engage the baby, she feels more comfortable and able to relax and enjoy the company.

When Bonnie Kovach's daughter Amy became pregnant in high school, Kovach made it clear that she and her husband were there to help, but that the baby would belong to Amy and only she could be its mother. Amy and her daughter, Molly, lived with Amy's parents while Amy was in school, and the new grandparents helped to care for Molly while

Amy studied. "The years passed quickly and Amy graduated cum laude from college with a degree in nursing. She got a job at the local hospital in the ICU unit and is now looking forward to furthering her education as a nurse-anesthetist."

Kovach concludes that, while she knows her daughter has faced great challenges as a student and a single mother, "the joys are many and the blessings ongoing."

"I'm so proud of them both," she says. "With that pride comes the knowledge that with enough love and support, there are no obstacles too big in a family."

Renee White is also proud of and thankful for what she has accomplished as a mother, a student and a young professional. She became pregnant while married to an abusive man, then later divorced him and worked her way through the University of Washington while raising her son alone. "Sometimes I look back at those chaotic years and wonder how I did it," she admits. "Some of the time is a blur because I was so tired. But every time that I look into my son's eyes, I know that it was worth it. He is a happy, healthy, well-adjusted little boy who loves his mom and loves life. I now have a successful career and a wonderful five-year-old son who adds joy to my life every day."

Student mothers, both single and married, make great sacrifices and face enormous challenges in order to meet the demands of parenting and student life. They deserve our admiration as well as our support. Raab learned, through her own experience, that "a pregnant or parenting student is doing an amazing thing by working hard to ensure a better future for her child and for herself. Make sure you continuously support and encourage this effort, and wonderful things can happen!" *

To raise awareness and help develop pregnancy resources on your campus, contact Feminists for Life to organize a Pregnancy Resource Forum.

Email info@feministsforlife.org or call 202-737-3352.





A Birthmother's Cherished Memories

I graduated from college in May of 1996 with plans to move to Washington, D.C., that fall. I was living with my parents in Charlotte, North Carolina, in August of that year when I learned I was pregnant. My immediate feeling was that I would place my child for adoption. I had been raised in a Catholic family of lively dinner table discussions, and as long as I could remember talking and thinking about the abortion issue, adoption had always seemed to me to be a natural and positive response to an unplanned pregnancy.

After learning I was pregnant, my first telephone call was to Catholic Charities. I called Catholic Charities to talk about adoption before telling my parents that I was pregnant, because I wanted to have something positive and constructive to tell them—some element of hope to offer them—to soften what I knew was going to be a devastating blow. As much as I dreaded telling my parents, I also needed to tell them. They were angry and hurt, but they made their unconditional love and support for me clear from the beginning and it never wavered.

I moved to the D.C. area later that fall and began meeting with a representative of Catholic Charities Children's Services. She came to my apartment in Alexandria on Saturday mornings, because I didn't have transportation, and we built a strong relationship of trust, friendship, and humor over the ensuing months. She and I talked through a

Objective guidance from someone who can help a birthmother explore all her options is critical at a time like this. The knowledge and assurance that this was my decision to make, and that I was prepared for whatever path I chose, made me feel more at ease and empowered. The guidance I received from Catholic Charities was mirrored in my parents' unconditional support for me whether I chose to place or to parent. I knew that if I chose to parent, I was welcome to move home to Charlotte where my parents would help me raise my child. I knew that they respected my ability to make the best decision for my child; they had enough confidence in how they had raised me to know that whatever decision I made would work out. I have witnessed situations where a birthmother's parents believed that adoption was best for all involved, and through misguided good intentions they pressured her into a placement. The result can be that the birthmother resents the "choice"

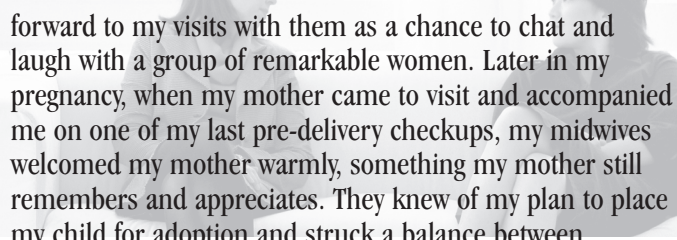


It would have been hard for me to say
goodbye without properly saying hello.

range of topics, from my own upbringing and the qualities that were important to me in adoptive parents, to making plans for parenting in case I changed my mind and wanted to keep my child, to exploring what I envisioned for my own future and what I might experience emotionally over the next several years. She also thoroughly explained the legalities of the adoption process and my legal rights as well as those of the agency and the adoptive parents, so that I was completely informed.

being made for her and ends up either parenting her child out of retaliation or placing her child for adoption but retaining a lifelong bitterness.

I was very fortunate to discover Birthcare & Women's Health, a fantastic group of midwives in Alexandria, Virginia. I felt comfortable instantly with this group of strong, independent, lively women who nurtured me physically and emotionally throughout my pregnancy. I actually looked



forward to my visits with them as a chance to chat and laugh with a group of remarkable women. Later in my pregnancy, when my mother came to visit and accompanied me on one of my last pre-delivery checkups, my midwives welcomed my mother warmly, something my mother still remembers and appreciates. They knew of my plan to place my child for adoption and struck a balance between planning for the birth with the adoption in mind and treating me as they would any mother. They shared and celebrated with me all the revelations of my pregnancy and let me make decisions about those precious moments and hours after the delivery, as did the attending obstetrician, a tender and openly pro-life man. I know some medical professionals find this a challenging balance, perhaps thinking that the more distant they keep the birthmother from the details of the pregnancy and delivery, the easier it will be for her to part with her child, and some birthmothers may prefer to maintain some distance. However, it is vital that the birthmother be allowed to make her own decisions surrounding the delivery: whether she wants to hold and breastfeed her baby, how much time she wants to spend with her baby, and so on. These are very personal, special moments that every birthmother has the right to experience as she wishes.

I worked full time in D.C. throughout my pregnancy, informing all of my colleagues on the same day in my seventh month, via a memo which I handed to each colleague in person, that I was pregnant and planning to place my child for adoption. I remember dreading that day because I was very nervous about how people would react, how it would change their opinions of me, and even what it would mean for my professional future there. I remember feeling completely drained and exhausted after telling everyone, from the sheer relief of getting it over with. I wasn't sure whether I would be entitled to any maternity leave, since I was not going to be parenting, so I was worried about how much unpaid leave I would have to take. However, my employer gave me the standard paid maternity leave that any employee would have received. I worked in a non-profit association with a staff of about 20 people and was very fortunate to receive warm, positive, supportive responses. I particularly appreciated those colleagues who came to me individually to let me know that they admired my decision; gave me infant supplies from their own homes; or asked questions about my pregnancy, my decision, and how I was doing overall. After feeling that I was hiding an enormous secret for so many months, it was a great relief to be able to share some of it with those who

inquired. A pregnancy for a woman planning to place her child for adoption is just like that of any other woman in many respects: there are moments of pride, of frustration, of humor, of discomfort, and it helped me to share them with those around me.

My mother came to D.C. for Brentan's birth on May 15, 1997. After Brentan was born, Catholic Charities worked with us so that we were able to keep Brentan with us for four weeks, giving my family and friends a chance to meet him and giving us all some precious time with him before we parted. My colleagues sent me congratulatory flowers and welcomed me, my mother and Brentan to the office one afternoon so they could all meet him. My closest girlfriend came over to my apartment for dinner one night, and I am so glad that I have photos of her holding Brentan. My mother and I also spent time in Charlotte during those weeks, and Brentan attended my younger sister's confirmation and the celebratory dinner that followed. Like any mother, I was proud to have delivered a healthy baby boy, and I enjoyed showing him off to everyone, so I appreciated being allowed opportunities to do so. It was important to me that my family, friends and colleagues acknowledged the birth and celebrated it.

I know that during those four weeks there were many people who probably doubted that I would be able to go through with the adoption after breastfeeding and becoming emotionally attached. But it was how I wanted to do things—I knew that for me, parting would be more bearable if I knew something about the child. In other words, it would have been hard for me to say goodbye without properly saying hello. I think a part of me felt that if I could start him off well, physically and emotionally, I would be fulfilling an obligation to him. Another part of me knew that my family and I would actually enjoy the time spent with him, and I saw no reason to be deprived of those first few weeks of his life. Every birthmother is different—there is no set approach that will work best for all birthmothers. What helps a birthmother is for those around her to trust her decisions and respect her wishes.

Catholic Charities presented me with a choice of wonderful families. Choosing only one of them, knowing that the others would have to wait a little longer to welcome a child into their loving hearts and homes, was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. But I did have to choose, and I have known ever since Brentan went to be with his family that I made the right choice.

Catholic Charities organized an Entrustment Ceremony for us, in which my parents and Brentan and his new parents all shared a Mass. Brentan slept in our arms through the readings and homily and then went into his new parents' arms at the sign of peace. Entrustment Ceremonies are becoming increasingly popular among foster parents, birthparents and adoptive parents. For me and my family, the Entrustment Ceremony added an element of peace and joy to an otherwise painful day.

After the placement, I attended Catholic Charities' weekly support group for birthmothers. This experience was so valuable that I encourage all birthmothers whom I meet to attend such support groups, for the counseling as well as for the friendship and fellowship with other birthmothers.

For the first couple of years I received photos and cards, and now my family and I are very blessed to be able to see Brentan and his family every few months. In fact, when my sister and I both got married last year, Brentan was a ringbearer in both weddings and his little sister was a flower girl! His parents are dear friends of ours now, and I am constantly amazed by how big and strong their love for all of us is.

I have been very fortunate that our situation and level of openness and communication is one with which everyone is happy. Many birthmothers are not so fortunate. While it is admittedly difficult for both birthparents and adoptive parents to anticipate exactly how their relationship will evolve, it is important to establish some guidelines and expectations in writing (for example, the frequency of correspondence and photos and the frequency and locations of visits, if any) and for all parties to honor these.

I have witnessed situations in which the birthmother had a certain understanding before the placement of what level of openness would exist and the adoptive parents had a different understanding. Unfortunately, the difference may not become apparent until after the placement. Seemingly small deviations from agreements on both sides (such as a reluctance to visit or a delay in communication) can be devastating. A birthmother may feel rejected, insulted or even deceived.

Based on the birthmothers I have come to know, the birthmother who looks forward to promised communications is not questioning the parenting skills of the adoptive parents or trying to interfere in their lives. She

simply relies on a photo or letter to reassure her that her birthchild is happy and healthy. At the same time, birthmothers should receive adequate counseling, before the placement, about the importance of the bonding process between the adoptive family and the child, so that she can understand and respect the wishes of the adoptive family. Ideally, with pre-adoption counseling (emotional and not just legal) for both adoptive and birth parents, clearly communicated expectations, and genuine efforts to adhere to these expectations, all parties can avoid a great deal of pain.

Many birthmothers worry about how they will tell future boyfriends, husbands, or even new friends about their birthchildren, and some never feel comfortable doing so. My family set me a very brave example by demonstrating that they were proud of me and of Brentan, not ashamed.

When I first met my now-husband, I knew that I wanted to tell him sooner rather than later in our relationship, and it felt natural to tell him after a couple of months of dating. As I thought he would, he reacted with admiration and tenderness and now loves Brentan very much, often asking me to recount my latest phone conversation with Brentan, and looking forward to our visits.

Many women who have placed children live with this secret in their hearts. For some, this is the best way to move on with their lives, or to protect those around them from pain or difficulty. I believe that the veils of confidentiality and anonymity, intended to protect the privacy of birthmothers, and indeed welcomed by many birthmothers, can also cast a shadow of secrecy and shame. This is not to say that all birthmothers will want to be public about their experience—it is a personal choice regarding how much each woman wishes to share—but it needs to be her choice, not imposed on her by society.

Every birthmother's experience is unique. Because of the love and support of my family and my husband, my friends and colleagues, and my physical and emotional caregivers, and because of the wonderful people Brentan's adoptive parents are, my experience has been a positive and even empowering one. Because I had real choices, I was able to choose the life I felt would be best for my birthson and feel good about my decision. I believe that Brentan was meant to be where he is today. If I could go back in time, I would not change any aspect of our journey. *

Kim Brooks

PAMPERING



her



Though expecting and giving birth to a new baby is usually exciting and exhilarating, emotional stress, physical fatigue and radical lifestyle changes can also make the same journey difficult for a new mother. To make the transition easier, the new mother, family members and friends can create a stress-relieving plan and a daily routine of enjoyable stress-proofing breaks that will nurture, revitalize and recharge the new mom. Studies show that there is a direct link between psychological and physical areas of both the immune system and the nervous system. When a person allows herself to relax, the physical and mental tension in her body is released.

There are a variety of pleasant ways to incorporate relaxation and stress-relieving steps into everyday life. New mothers may be encouraged to experiment with progressive relaxation, meditation, self-massage, massage, yoga and therapeutic breath work.

Here are some nurturing exercises new mothers can try.

Progressive relaxation

Lie in a comfortable position and allow your body to begin to relax. Focus on the feeling of your breath as it moves throughout your body. Flex and release your feet, breathing in and out of your nose slowly. By bringing your awareness to the contraction of your muscles and then releasing the contraction, you can relax the whole body systematically. Tense and relax both of your legs. Tense and then relax your buttocks. Tense your stomach and relax. Hunch your shoulders by bringing them up to your ears slowly, then slowly relax. Press your chin in towards your neck and relax. Move your jaw side to side, thrust it forward and then relax. Raise your eyebrows and then relax. Clench fists tightly, raise fists to shoulders and then relax. Tighten the whole hand, making “claws” with your fingers, and then relax. Keeping your eyes closed, take a few moments to breathe, focusing on all the sensations in your body.

Belly breath

The belly breath is a wonderful technique that can be practiced anywhere. The new mother can be sitting or lying down. This type of breath exercise is slow and deep and helps to promote deep relaxation, emotional balance and stress relief.

Find a comfortable chair to sit in at a time when there will be few distractions. Sit up straight, not leaning back on the chair. Take both hands and spread them low across the belly. Begin to breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose. Press gently with the exhalation out of the nose. With the next inhalation, let your belly drop down as if it were a balloon filling with air. Slowly exhale, gently pressing on the belly with your hands.

Practice the belly breath for five minutes. Gentle music with nature sounds, or classical music such as Mozart, can be helpful in inducing the nervous system to relax even more deeply. Relax in the chair for a minute after the breathing exercise is finished, allowing yourself time to feel all the sensations in your body.

Simple meditation

Find a quiet place free of distractions and interruptions. Choose a word or phrase to focus on such as “ocean,” “calm,” or “home.” Words that end with “m” or “n” have a comforting drone, and carry a heavy meditative weight in stress reduction. These vibrating sound waves create calm brain waves.

Sit comfortably upright with your hands resting in your lap. Let your eyes gently close, relax your face with your mouth slightly open, relax your muscles and quiet your mind. Begin to breathe normally, becoming more aware of your breath and the slow natural rhythm of your breath, repeating your focus word or sound-ing it out silently as you exhale. Ignore any distractions. Let thoughts, imagery and feelings come and go from your awareness. Do not concentrate on them; just let them pass through.

Try this exercise for ten to fifteen minutes. Don't use a timer. Let your judgment be your guide as to when you've completed the relaxation. When the relaxation is completed, remain quiet, with your eyes closed for a few minutes, to allow yourself time to adjust to being present and awake.

Seated gentle yoga routine

Yoga is the union of breath, stretching, and the awareness of our physical and mental response within the movements. Yoga can

be performed in a chair, on a bed or on the floor. This seated routine takes ten to fifteen minutes depending on the number of repetitions. It leaves the physical body and the nervous system relaxed, alert and refreshed.

Choose slow, gentle, rhythmic music. Find a comfortable straight-back chair and wear loose-fitting clothes. Begin with a warm-up of the muscles from head to toe. Each movement should be performed slowly. Turn your head gently side to side four times. Move your head up and down, touching chin to chest four times. Move your shoulders up and down four times. Roll your shoulders forward in a circle four times. Roll your shoulders backward in a circle four times. Move torso in a circle four times in one direction and then four times in the other direction. Lift both arms up to your shoulders and ease them back down four times. Lift one leg straight up in front and ease it back down four times, then lift the other four times. Lift and stretch one leg out to the side of your body and return it to the center. Do this four times then repeat with the other leg. Turn your ankle in a circle four times, first in one direction and then the other. Repeat with the other ankle. Flex your foot back and forth four times gently. Repeat with the other foot.

Close your eyes and focus on your breath for one minute. Get up slowly from the chair.

Self-massage for the face

The gift of massage is a wonderful benefit to the body, whether someone is giving you a massage or you are giving yourself a massage. A five-to-ten minute (or longer!) massage daily adds great stress-relieving and immune system boosts to the body.

There are many, many benefits to massage. Massage aids in relaxation, relieves stress and anxiety, reduces blood pressure, helps reduce mental stress, reduces muscle spasms, improves circulation of blood and lymph, relieves muscle tension, reduces formation of excessive scar tissue, promotes deeper and easier breathing, strengthens the immune system, promotes a relaxed state of mental alertness, provides greater joint flexibility and range of motion, and satisfies the need for caring—the nurturing touch.

Shiatsu massage originated in Japan. This Shiatsu face massage is great for relieving allergies, headaches and migraines as well as increasing relaxation throughout the whole body. You can perform it on yourself or lie down on the bed or floor and have a family member or friend perform the face massage on you.

Before applying your hands to anyone's face, your fingernails should be trimmed and your hands should be washed. Do not wear makeup while receiving a face massage.

Press finger pads into the top of the head, slowly moving them all over the head, while being mindful of your breath. The movement of your hands should be slow, relaxed and graceful. Smooth finger pads across the forehead, taking care to cover the entire forehead with fingers. Pretend you are tracing imaginary lines. After smoothing fingers across, gently press into each part of the forehead at quarter-inch intervals. Do this slowly over the entire forehead.

Press fingers over eyebrows several times. "Pluck" eyebrows with the fingers. Press into cheek area with fingers. Press, release, and press again, moving slightly, until you have covered the entire area. Use the fingers to rim the cheekbones, pressing gently, moving over the entire area again. Slide the middle fingers down the cheek over the jaw joints. Repeat several times. Press the middle finger gently right between the eyebrows. This is a wonderful relaxation point.

Gently slide a finger up the bridge of the nose. Grip the chin at the center point and smooth out towards the ears. Place fingers under the chin and press gently, sliding from chin out to the ears again. Gently grip and pull the ear lobes down. Repeat several times. Press finger pads into scalp and gently massage fingers all through the scalp. Comb through hair with fingers and then gently pull hair. Relax several moments after massage is complete before rising slowly.

There are a few areas on the body, according to acupressure theory, that should not be pressed. These areas are: the web between the thumb and forefinger, areas around the ankles and the top of the shoulder. Never massage a pregnant woman or new mother who has a fever, abdominal pains, sudden swelling or edema.

The use of scent for healing, as in aromatherapy, is not advised for pregnant women during the first three months of the pregnancy. Consult your doctor and a certified aromatherapist.

Gifts for the new mother

Family members and friends can encourage new mothers to create an enjoyable and revitalizing stress-relieving plan by choosing appropriate gifts.

Soothing and healing music CDs help new mothers to lower their blood pressure. Prenatal and postpartum yoga videos help new mothers formulate a rejuvenating exercise routine. Lavender-, orange- and geranium-scented candles may help the new mother to relax, while grapefruit-, peppermint- and bergamot-scented candles may help energize her.

Ergonomic shoes, supportive back pillows or a cushioning mattress pad can help a new mother feel more comfortable throughout the day. Gift baskets of nutritional snacks can help her eat healthier. You can give items like these a personal touch by making a pillow by hand or creating your own snack basket.


For a really special treat, give a gift certificate for a hand massage, face massage, Shiatsu, Craniosacral therapy, Polarity therapy, Reiki therapy, Lomi Lomi (Hawaiian) massage, or sideline massage with a *certified pregnancy* massage therapist.

By relieving a new mother's stress and fatigue, we care for the whole woman. We can ease her transition

into motherhood by helping her to relax and to savor her excitement, exhilaration and joy. *

Kim Brooks is an Integrated Yoga therapist. She also practices Polarity therapy, Shiatsu, Reiki, and Thai massage. She is a graduate of a 620-hour massage program. She has her own office in Frederick, Maryland, and can be reached at thaicoyote@aol.com.

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Encourage new mothers to incorporate some of these everyday stress-reducing and immune-system-enhancing strategies:

- Breathe slowly and completely.
- Practice the belly breath.
- Stretch, meditate, rest, and renew.
- Listen to relaxing music and perform the progressive relaxation routine.
- Receive a relaxing massage.
- Gently move each muscle group slowly, relaxing and enjoying the sensations of the range of motion of each joint.
- Nurture yourself by allowing the gift of time into your life each day to replenish your body and soul.



Lisa Bellecci-st. romain

The assertion that suffragists do not care for children and prefer notoriety to the joys of maternity is so fully contradicted by the lives of the women who are trying to make the world a safer place for both sons and daughters, that no defense is needed. Having spent my own life from fifteen to fifty, loving and laboring for children, as teacher, nurse, storyteller and guardian, I know whereof I speak.

Louisa May Alcott wrote these words to the editor of the *Boston Daily Journal* on March 6, 1883, in response to a misunderstanding among opponents to the cause of suffrage. Like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mattie Brinkerhoff, Victoria Woodhull, and other suffragists of her day, Alcott believed that true feminism does not pit women against their children but benefits both women and their children. Even as a ten-year-old, Alcott had written, "Father asked us what was God's noblest work. Anna said *men* but I said *babies*. Men are often bad; babies never are."

Alcott's name brings to mind cozy readings of childhood treasures, *Little Women* and *Little Men*. The books' tomboy Jo was the first American juvenile heroine to be portrayed as a believable three-dimensional person rather than a stereotype. The exuberance of the March sisters' interactions and their love of their mother have warmed young hearts for years. But those stories of life by the loving hearth, which brought fame for Alcott, were not written until 1868, when Alcott was 35. Her

earlier life was rooted in poverty, from which grew an incredible determination.

Both of Alcott's parents participated in reform movements of the mid-1800s. Her father, Bronson Alcott, had lofty intellectual dreams and high spiritual ideals, the teacher/preacher Louisa May later described in her satire

Transcendental Wild Oats. Her father's pursuit of the perfect school and communal lifestyle left the Alcott family almost destitute. Her long-suffering mother, Abby May Alcott, held the family together, once working as a city missionary in Boston while advocating that "the opening to women of a great variety of employments" could bring only good. But the imaginative and rambunctious Louisa May, feeling intensely the need to provide for her parents and sisters, vowed at the age of 15: "I will do something by and by. Don't care what: teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I'll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won't!"

Society in the mid-1800s did not offer much employment opportunity for a woman. But Louisa determined

"...I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world." For years, she did whatever she could to provide for her beloved family: taught, sewed, learned nursing during the Civil War, was companion to an invalid traveling in Europe, and, in 1867, became editor of a children's magazine, *Merry's Museum*. But her passion was always writing, and each frustrating life



experience found its way into her stories. From the 1840s to the late 1860s, she authored furious melodramatic stories for New England journals, published anonymously or under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard. The constant theme of these popular stories was men's dominance being challenged and women's power being asserted. In these serials, women were not men's equals but their superiors. They were daring, defiant and indomitable, choosing evil as often as good, having the "nerves of a man and the quick wit of a woman." Alcott recorded in her journal in 1864 that she just "wrote a blood and thunder story or novelette of several hundred pages to relieve my feelings..." The result is described by one commentator as "a feminist fury almost out of control."

Just a few years later, in 1866, she wrote *Taming a Tartar*; in 1868, *Little Women*. The leading women in these stories had matured, being independent and straightforward, with inner strength that makes them able to triumph without manipulation or deceit. Their power was derived from their fearlessness.

While we can guess at Alcott's feelings about feminism from her characters, she has the main character, Christie, in *Work* (1870s), explicitly state: "I'm not going to sit and wait for any man to give me independence, if I can earn it for myself."

In 1873, she wrote to suffragist Lucy Stone, "I am so busy just now proving 'Woman's Right to Labor' that I have no time to help prove 'Woman's Right to Vote.' ...though I shall not be with you in the body I shall be in spirit." Alcott did find time to organize local Concord women to vote in an 1875 school committee election. "Was the first woman to register my name as a voter," she wrote. "Drove about and drummed up women to my suffrage meeting. So hard to move people out of the old ruts."

While her sisters married and began families of their own, Louisa stayed in Concord, New Hampshire, providing for and caring for their parents. Her mother Abby needed the presence of her faithful daughter during her last days: "Stay by, Louy, and help me." Alcott's strength and generous support were a haven for her whole family. When her sister May died shortly after giving birth, Alcott adopted May's daughter Louisa ("Lulu"), who became a joy to Alcott. She later adopted her sister Anna's son John to be her heir and to provide for her remaining family.

Invited again to join the suffragists' cause, Alcott wrote to Lucy Stone on August 31, 1885: "...it is a great cross to

me that ill health and home duties prevent my devoting heart, pen and time to this most vital question of the age. After fifty years acquaintance with the noble men and women of the Anti-slavery cause, and the sight of the glorious end to their faithful work, I should be a traitor to all I most love, honor, and desire to imitate, if I did not covet a place among those who are giving their lives to the emancipation of the white slaves of America [i.e. disenfranchised women]. If I can do no more, let my name stand among those who are willing to bear ridicule and reproach for the truth's sake, and so earn some right to rejoice when the victory is won. Most heartily yours for *Women's Suffrage* and all other reforms." *

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My name is Jessica.

When I became pregnant, I knew I was not ready to be a mother.

Adoption was the best choice for my son—and for me.

It was hard, and I miss him, but I wouldn't change a thing.

I found strength I never knew I had.

Now, my son has the life I would have wanted for him, but wasn't ready to give him. I have pursued my career and life plans. And when I got married recently, my son was our ring bearer.

There is life after adoption.SM

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