

momcafé Summer Writings 2008

It's official! The first ever momcafé Summer Writing Contest was a huge success with entries flying in from as far as New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and eastern Canada. We hope you enjoyed reading the entries as much as we did.

We are delighted to announce that **Emily Perkins** of Delta, BC is the grand prize winner with her entry in the 'If I Ruled the World' category. Emily is a mostly-stay-at-home mom who does some acting work on the side (when she can get it!) She is the adoptive mom of two teenagers, and also has a very active two-year-old who delights and challenges her every day. Emily wins a \$500 gift certificate from Canada's favourite children's clothing retailer, Please Mum.



We also have nine very talented runners up, listed below along with their gifts from our generous sponsors:

- Cathy Crenshaw Doheny, 'Mother of my Daughter's Birth' - Lotuswear leather bag
- Sharon DeVellis, 'The Mom I Admire' - Lotuswear leather bag
- Shelley Khushal, 'If I Ruled the World-Alphabetically' - Lotuswear leather bag
- Vanessa Barron, 'Mom-club' - Webnames.ca gift package
- Caroline Fernandez, 'Ever Learning' - Webnames.ca gift package
- Nikki Skuce, 'Prohibiting Pink' - Robeez gift basket
- Courtney Raines, 'When Your Mum was Young' - Robeez gift basket
- Sarah B. Heinonen, 'A Promise to my Children' - Chapters/Indigo gift certificate
- Jasmine Quaife, 'Gift from Heaven' - momcafé bag

Thank you to everyone who participated - writers and readers alike - especially our generous sponsors who helped make the inaugural contest possible.



Table of Contents

Prize Winners

If I Ruled the World by Emily Perkins	3
The Mom I Admire by Sharon DeVellis.....	4
If I Ruled the World - Alphabetically by Shelly Khushal	5
Mom-club by Vanessa Barron.....	6
Ever Learning by Caroline Fernandez.....	7
Prohibiting Pink by Nikki Skuce.....	8
When Your Mom was Young by Courtney Raines	9
A Promise To My Children by Sarah Heinonen.....	10
Gift From Heaven by Jasmyne Quaife	11

Entries - Life Lessons

A Letter From Mother to a Daughter by Christina Storer.....	12
Creating Motherhood by Taisa Jenne	13
Dating, for Five by Cynthia van Ginkel.....	14
Evolution of a Mom by Susan Matheson	15
From Soft-core to Hard-Core – or, How to Beat Back Pain Once and For All by Tanya Davidson	16
Getting It Together For Halloween: Less Is More Even When It Comes to Candy by Rowena List	17
Getting Your Kids' Schedule Together by Rowena List	18
Getting Your Mail Together by Rowena List	19
Motherhood: The Crucible of Creativity by Linda M. Langwith.....	20
Solace in the Stars by Amanda Wamsteeker.....	21
The Little Lie by Sharon DeVellis.....	22
Unplug – Become Present byDalyce Brandt	23

Entries - The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Child by Judy Forbes.....	24
Friend on a Bench by Susan Matheson.....	25
Have a Coke and a smile! by Kate Shivers	26
Kids? No Way by Christina Stewart	27
Waiting by Judy Forbes	28

Entries - Mom-moments

After Alzheimer's by Cynthia van Ginkel	29
Mum's New Dress by Judy Forbes	30
My Mom by Shelly Khushal	31
My Mom Moment by Danielle Christopher	32
My Safe Place by Sarah B. Heinonen	33
Sea by Judy Forbes	34

Entries - Against All Odds

Bees by Kate Shivers	35
My Mom - Ellen Alban by Dayna Aamodt.....	36

Entries - If I Ruled the World

If I Ruled the World by Francien van Helsdingen	37
The Soft Dictatorship by Nikki Skuce	38



If I Ruled the World

Category: If I Ruled The World

Author: Emily Perkins

Because I rule the world, I will never let a screen take my place in your life because I need to "get things done." Instead, you will learn to help with my daily tasks, and I will wear with pride the wrinkled clothes you folded as best you could with your tiny hands. Truly, finery fit for a queen!

Because I rule the world, I get to decide what pursuits deserve our time, money and energy. I will watch and listen carefully for signs that your passion has been sparked, and I will nurture that passion in order to bring you real, lasting happiness. Understanding the importance of passion in bringing meaning to your life, you will want the same for others, and your interactions will reflect the goals of an expansive spirit.

Because I rule the world, I will exhaust my intelligence and creativity before I even consider using force. I will pretend-paint your teeth the colour of your choice to make you giggle when brushing instead of restraining you. I will point out the humour in any spat, or fashion it myself with a rat-a-tat-tat (wait, am I speaking in rhyme as I'm telling you "No"? It works for now, but what about when you grow?). As a young man, you will expect no less from your leaders, and vote for those who use their wits to strive for peace.

Because I rule the world, you will learn the names of the plants, trees and animals living around us before you can identify the logos of fast food restaurants, or identify cartoon characters and their associated products. Your love of nature will always mediate your material desires, and this will help the planet to heal.

Because I rule the world, I will try to set an example for you in everything I do. I won't speak badly of others, always looking for the good, or at least for how I might respond to others in the most constructive way. I won't use disagreements with Papa as an opportunity to express anger; I will bite my tongue until it agrees to be rational! In this way, you will learn temperance, and I will learn humility.

Because I rule the world, I will give you room to make mistakes. I'll be there to help with all life's spills, literal now, metaphorical later: the carelessness that results in a precious object being lost; the insensitive comment that jeopardizes a friendship; the chemistry class you might decide isn't worth your while. You will know what it means to be a human being in the fullest sense, blessed (and sometimes seemingly cursed) with free will, in a country that grants you the dignity and responsibility of bearing such a gift.

Because though I rule the world today, it will not always be so. One day, with hands a little more wrinkled than they are now, I will pass it over to you, shaped and folded as best I could with my mommy's hands.



The Mom I Admire

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Sharon DeVellis

She's the mother who struggles day in and day out trying to find a balance. Balancing her life, her children's lives, her family's lives. Balancing it all without losing a fundamental part of herself.

She's the mother who has promised herself to make wholesome and nutritious meals for her family each and every day like her mother did before her. And she's the mother who has ordered in pizza on a Friday night and let them eat in front of the t.v. because the kids are fighting, her patience is exhausted, she's emotionally, mentally and physically drained, the house is a mess and sometimes peace is more important than chickpeas.

She's the mother who tries to motivate her children with love and positive reinforcement, hugs and kisses, kind words and smiles. But she's also the mother who has bribed her kids with a treat so that they can get through an outing without uttering the words "so help me god, if you do that again I will send you to your room for the rest of your life."

She's the mother who has read all the parenting books, tried all the theories and wakes up every morning muttering in her sleep-deprived, non-caffeinated voice "Today is the day I'm going to handle everything in a calm and composed fashion no matter what is thrown at me." And by about mid-day, after three fights, seven meltdowns (hers not included) and talking back one too many times, she's the mother who has lost her temper, yelled at her kids, dragged them to their room for a timeout and squeezed their arm in the process.

She's the mother who goes to a party only to be ignored because "She's just a mother. What can she possibly have to say? The simpleton."

She's the mother who felt guilty because she was working outside the home and missed spending time with her children. And now she's the mother who quit her job to stay at home full time and feels guilty because she misses working.

She's the mother who loves spending time with her children....playing, reading, talking. And she's the mother who enjoys spending time without them and doing the things she did before she had children.

She's the mother who loves her kids with her whole heart and soul and would lay down her life for them. But she's also the mother who's sometimes on the verge of killing those same children because they are driving her C.R.A.Z.Y with a capital "C".

She's the mother who used to judge other mothers before she had kids of her own. And now she's a mother, a mother who humbly apologizes to all those she judged because she had no idea, not one iota, about how hard it is to raise kids.

She's not perfect. She's the mother who is just trying to do the best she can each and every day. Balancing precariously on the tightrope of motherhood without a net.

She's every mother.



If I Ruled the World - Alphabetically

Category: If I Ruled The World

Author: Shelly Khushal

There are many things I am passionate about. In order to convey these ideals, I have written this essay in a creative format, using the alphabet to describe what I would do "if I ruled the world".

If I ruled the world:

- I would ensure every child had **A**ccess to the basic necessities in life;
- I would instill in them a sense of pride and **B**elief in oneself because after all, the power for change lies within each of us;
- I would strive to ensure that every child had **C**lothes on their backs;
- That everyone had the ability to **D**evelop their minds by being given resources and tools;
- I would fight to ensure that every child had the access and ability to achieve universal **E**ducation; a place where they could learn in a safe and comfortable environment;
- That children had the **F**reedom to think, act and move freely;
- I would promote **G**ender equality and the empowerment of women;
- I would improve overall **H**ealthcare;
- I would ensure that **I**mmunization & vaccinations were readily available;
- That people had access to **J**obs;
- That people had access to **K**nowledge;
- I would promote **L**ove;
- I would ensure that society had sufficient **M**oney to live a comfortable life;
- That everyone had proper **N**utrition;
- That people had access to **O**pportunities;
- I would help to alleviate **P**overty and hunger;
- I would keep children stimulated by encouraging them to ask **Q**uestions...to engage in critical thinking and open dialogue;
- By making books and libraries available, I would ensure that all children could **R**ead;
- I would promote environmental awareness and the importance of **S**ustainability, in order to promote self-sufficiency;
- I would ensure that everyone had access to **T**raining;
- I would teach children to respect the values of others in order to live in harmony with diverse cultures. Understanding others beliefs, cultures and values is essential to achieving **U**nity;
- I would eradicate **V**iolence and abuse;
- I would ensure that children had clean and running **W**ater;
- By promoting unity and living harmoniously with diverse cultures, I would strive to eradicate **X**enophobia, discrimination and ethnocentrism;
- I would encourage the **Y**outh to find their own voice and become active in politics in order to ensure an equitable system of justice. The only way to influence change is to become part of that change. As Gandhi once said, 'be the change you want to see in the world";
- I would advocate for **Z**ero tolerance of war, destruction, and all forms of conflict.

If I ruled the world, my job would be a demanding one, but *not* an impossible one. With collective efforts to ensure these basic rights, I believe change *can* come. This is my dream. The real power of Martin Luther King was not only that he had a dream, but that he could describe it, that it became public, and therefore, became accessible to millions of people.



Mom-club

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Vanessa Barron

Having moved to a new city in my mid-thirties, I entered a strange social abyss. People in Vancouver were friendly enough, but beyond polite conventions and niceties I wasn't meeting many people in a manner of forming a permanent social circle. In short, friendship dating was slow. When I became pregnant soon after, a work colleague assured me that this would be a gateway to a whole new social world of mothers. This sounded good to me (although previously I had not expected a baby to be a social segue). However, I embraced the possibility by going to prenatal yoga, prenatal group classes, and surfing babyzone chat rooms. I should have clued in when no lasting connections panned out from this. Perhaps my mind was too clouded by the blissful pregnancy hormones coursing through my body to see the signs. I cheerfully kept at it after my daughter was born – at less than two weeks of age she was carted to drop-ins at health units and a little later to playgroups at community places. Yet, after exchanging the basic conversational checklist for newborns (How old? How much does he/she weigh? Does he/she ever sleep?) I was at a standstill. Because the truth is, I am so much more than a 'mother' and although I am happy to share my experiences and hear about others', once the topic of children has been exhausted there are other things I'd like to talk about. And the trap of parent-related conversations is that they sometimes unwittingly lead to judgements (You're letting her/him eat that?, You let your baby cry to sleep?) further separating social groups into mom sub-cultures and sub-categories.

What I didn't foresee was how becoming a mother would cut me off from certain social opportunities. This categorization has catapulted me into a realm where single or married childless people believe they have nothing in common with me. Wait, I was a person in that category for 36 years and I've only been in this one for a year and a half—I still relate! I still drink wine, I still care about what is going on in the world, I'm even back to reading (though admittedly it takes much longer to get through a book). This motherhood thing is starting to seem like a social wasteland! In the end I realize that I have ascribed to these biases myself in the past. Maybe I need to open myself up to the possibility of connecting with others with whom on the surface I may or may not appear to have common ground. And I just have to accept that I can be a social wallflower when it comes to small talk. But I'm still optimistic, I'm moving to a new neighbourhood soon and I'm already dreaming of the social opportunities once again – the Chardonnay is in the fridge!



Ever Learning

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Caroline Fernandez

LOVE being invited to playdates. HATE going empty handed. So, out of sheer pride we started baking - from scratch mind you - brownies - in 30C heat – on a sunny July afternoon - for the playdate. Why not bring fruit?...you ask. Yes, of course we will bring fruit - but silly me thought a treat of brownies would be fun too. Could have gone to the store you say. Yes. Again, there's that pride of mine.

Fast forward to Thing 2 measuring and stirring (well, I measure really) and Thing 1 reading the recipe. See, we make this not only a goodwill gesture but a reading and math lesson too (geez, someone should just take me for a coffee and talk some sense into me). It takes 30 minutes to bake the home-made-from-scratch brownies. Library reading club is in 50 minutes...we'll have...um...20 minutes to clean up and walk over. Not a problem.

Then, Thing 2 spills the whole beautiful bowl of melted butter on the floor. "GEEZ-US!" I bark in not very-not-happy growl. Funny how that was the reaction word that bounced out - I know many more - much richer - adult words. I digress.

Thing 2 shrinks down, shoulders up - absolutely mortified and scared.

Thing 1 glides in (and honestly this is what Thing 1 says); "Look at me. Breath. Look at me". Thing 1 is kneeling; hands cupping Thing 2's face. "When your body does something you don't control it's an accident. If you put the bowl too close to the edge it's on purpose."

Thing 1 spoke - as I speak when the kids have a nightmare. Thing 1 cupped hands to face - like I do when to comfort them when they cry. Thing 1 told Thing 2 to breath - as I do (as Thing 1 always has a nasty projectile vomit habit when upset).

My heart melted like the damned butter.

I am ever learning.

Accidents happen.

Schedules change.

Children are always listening.



Prohibiting Pink

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Nikki Skuce

What a nightmare when “pink” became the new “black”. Men proudly wear pink shirts. Women’s fashion always comes in pink. Other than a t-shirt back in my elementary school wardrobe, I never liked this sickly sweet hue of bubble gum.

While the trend is bad enough, my life recently entered a too rosy reality. With the birth of our beautiful daughter, my partner and I, while tickled pink by her addition to our family, have been inundated by all its various shades. With neither of us liking rose by any other name (pink, fuchsia, salmon, corral, blush), we had to instill a “no pink policy”. Our group of friends who are part of the current Smithers’ baby boom remark how difficult siphoning out the pink from the generous hand-me downs actually is, especially those who had girls. Fortunately they all make an effort.

Apparently our hopes for avoiding pink for our little girl are only going to get harder as she grows into toddler ware. It’s already difficult with friends and relatives “who can’t help themselves” and “had to buy the cute pink” sleeper/onesie/shoes/blanket/toy. I guess prohibition has never been met with total success... We appreciate the gifts, but our tendencies when dressing her are to by-pass the pink and go for other outfits first. “We just can’t help it”.

With the rosy outfits we do have, my partner and I have brainstormed how to accidentally dye them in the wash. Adding new red socks to the load would just make things worse. Would a dark blue t-shirt turn it all purple? We haven’t yet managed to dream up a natural dye solution. Perhaps weeks on end hanging on the clothesline will sun bleach them out.

In the meantime, our no pink policy comes with a cost. If you don’t have your girl child in pink, the general public is stereotyped to think you had a boy. What I want to know is when did every-colour-but-pink generously get dedicated to newborns with a penis?

I don’t get offended when my daughter is mistaken for a son. If I did, the solution would be easy enough. But I am surprised by how little the stereotype is challenged and how much we engender our children from the very beginning.

Those guessing the sex of your unborn child throughout the nine months of your pregnancy are far more entertaining – betting on heart rates, carrying high or low, rings going clockwise or in a pendulum, amount of morning sickness, etc. Now that Lucia is out in the world, the colour-coded biases get tiring and just seem so old school. We’re in a world where same-sex couples are having children; where women are choosing whether to give their last name to their child; where men are taking 6 months paternity leave; where infertility is challenged by technology; and where some employers are providing flexibility for working mothers. When or when will the notion that all newborn girls wear pink be laid to rest?

Apparently some feminists have reclaimed pink. I may need to start a new movement... multi-colourism? It’s a good thing the pink ribbon is already taken.



When Your Mom was Young

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Courtney Raines

Once upon a time your mom was young, and little, just like you are now. And in the summers she would go and visit her grandma on Pender Island. Her grandma and grandpa had a wooden house there that her grandpa built. It was small, and cozy and your mom loved it a lot.

One of the things your mom liked best was to go down to the beach at Trincomali and play. She would wear her blue flowered bikini, the one her grandma had bought in Hawaii. She would wear her blue floaties to keep her safe, and get her mom to put her blonde hair into pigtails. And she would wade in the water.

When your mom was little she was very curious, just like you. She liked to look in the water and discover things. Sometimes there were pinchy crabs, sometimes there were perfect pieces of wood that would float into the bay.

One day there was a jellyfish. It was a day your mom's cousin Drew was visiting. He was younger than your mom by six whole months, which is a lot when you're only two. Your mom was wading in the water and saw a funny bubble floating. She looked some more and saw more funny bubbles floating. They were just below the surface of the ocean, shiny and squiggly.

Your mom was curious. She reached out to touch the funny bubble. It was squishy and slimy. And then, your mom picked up the funny bubble. She held it very carefully in her hand and took it show her grandma.

"What's that?" your mom asked.

Her grandma leaned over from where she was sitting in the sand and looked. "That's a jellyfish," her grandma said. "You caught a jellyfish." And her grandma smiled.

"There's lots more, grandma," your mom said. She took her grandma's hand and pulled her to the ocean where the jellyfish were riding on the waves. "Look!" your mom pointed with her little fingers.

"I see," her grandma nodded.

Your mom took the jellyfish to show her cousin. "Look!" your mom said, and stuck the squiggly, shiny jellyfish under his nose.

"Eew," her cousin Drew whined, and toddled backwards in the sand. The parents chuckled, and his mom came to cuddle him. "It's ok, it's just a jellyfish," she said.

Your mom was confused, but she didn't want her cousin to be scared. She waded into the water and put her hand underneath a wave. The jellyfish floated to ride the waves again.

"Bye, bye jellyfish," your mom said.



A Promise To My Children

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Sarah B. Heinonen

Becoming a mother is an experience that takes one from a life of inward focus to that of greater meaning. Suddenly it doesn't really matter if the windows are spotless and the shelves are dusted. It doesn't matter whether the laundry room is overflowing or dishes are always done. Instead, becoming a mother teaches one that life is full of much more significant definitions. Minutes that will pass by in an instant, children that grow and change so quickly. Motherhood is learning to draw pictures in the dust, run barefoot in the rain. To laugh uncontrollably, and to love unconditionally. Here is my promise to three little children who have taught me so much, and fill each day with love.

Today I will look right away when you say, "Mommy, watch me!"

I will let you splash in the bathtub until your toes are shriveled and you are ready to get out.

Today I will not hurry you when you show your independence by climbing into the van and into your own seat by yourself. I'll cheer you on.

I will let you pick out your own clothes, even if they don't quite match.

I will not scold you for little, unimportant things, like forgetting to pick up your blocks. And I won't tell you to "go play" when you want to help me cook dinner.

Today I will sit down on the floor and we'll play with your toys. You can show me how.

I will let you do projects with paint and glitter and tape - even if it makes a mess.

I will read another story when you ask, instead of rushing off to something else. Today, I will not worry about getting the clothes washed, the dishes done, the floor swept.

Instead, I will spend that time listening to you.

I will take time to really see how your eyes light up when you're excited, the way your smile comes so natural.

Today, I will not let myself be bothered if you spill your cereal all over the table, and not once will I ask you to, "hurry up."

I will let you take your time and I will learn to slow down with you.

I will remember that the lessons I learn from you are just as important as anything I can ever teach you.

I will cherish the little moments that make today so beautiful instead of thinking of tomorrow, or next week, or next month.

And tonight, when I check on you before I go to bed, I will linger awhile and just listen to you breathe.

I will notice how your long eyelashes gently curl against your soft, rounded cheeks. How your little arm curls around your blanket, hugging it securely, protectively to your chest.

I will feel the dreams you are dreaming, and believe in them with you.

And I will know that tomorrow I will try to do the same.

This is my promise to you.



Gift From Heaven

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Jasmyne Quaife

She now was in her 23rd hour of labor with her fifth child the longest yet by a long shot but she could feel something different with this child something unusual, the same feeling she felt with her second child and it turned out he happened to have autism something she wouldn't change for the world. He changed her life around for the best. "Its time" said the doctor.

"Finally" said the women thankfully but it was not until an hour later the baby was born, a beautiful baby girl the doctor smiled looking at the baby but after a moment or two a funny expression came on his face then he whispered something to the nurse. But this did not bother the woman she just wanted to spend time with her new born baby who just opened her eyes for the first time.

About an hour later a woman walked in "Hi" she said "I'm Marion the hospital paediatrician do you mind if I have a look at your baby just to see if everything's up and running well?" The women unwillingly handed over her baby girl. The paediatrician did to what looked like some routine tests when she was done she frowned "I ... I'm sorry to say this" she started but I think your baby has down syndrome the women's heart dropped and she nodded. Hours later the diagnosis was confirmed and a few days later they left back home to the rest of the children.

For months she grew to love her baby more and more she was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen and for months she would tell her story every time getting the answer "oh I'm so sorry" at first she agreed understanding why people would say that but then her heart would fight back "why are they sorry?" so one day while telling her story to a complete stranger and getting the answer "oh I'm sorry" she answered with what she wanted to say "why are you sorry? Can't you see she's surly a gift from heaven? We can't go anywhere without people saying how beautiful or cute she is. She brings light to everyone's day when all we see is darkness so if that's being sorry I don't want to see what's being happy for me." And with that she shifted her baby to her other hip and walked away.



A Letter From Mother to a Daughter

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Christina Storer

To Isabella... It is 11:02pm and I cannot sleep so I want to write a bit since you cant quite understand the things I think about when I say them out loud to you. Where should I begin my darling. This world keeps getting more crazy everyday, I am afraid for you. As I watched the news this morning I couldn't help but think of you when hearing one tragic story after another. I thought about the world I must prepare you for. I am so glad to be your mom, you have given your father and I a kind of love that we could never understand until we looked at what we made. Isabella I want to be a better parent then my parents were. I want to give you all the things I never had and with this I want to show you things that not everybody teaches their children. Ignorance will just grow as we grow as people, color and race are opportunities for you to meet and explore other cultures not be intimidated by people that are different than us.

Men and Women are equal no matter what anybody will tell you. Being a woman you have power, especially in this day in age and I want you to use this power to your full potential. Take pride in yourself and treat yourself with respect no matter what the people around you will be doing. I want to give you confidence no matter how you look, never talk about others who might not look like our everyday super models or celebrities for somebody is always watching you. The decisions you will come to make will define you as a person so be a good one. Take all your experiences and learn from them, watch everything that happens around you and be alert. We are having difficulties with our economy right now and innocent people that worked hard their whole lives are loosing their houses by the dozens. With this said I wish for you to study hard and have goals to achieve so you can become successful and you wont have to struggle. I have made many sacrifices for you and our family as your father has done as well.

My Darling, you are so precious, no matter what path you choose in this life I will be right behind you to live out your joy and catch you if you should fall. Hard times, we all have them and you will have many but I am always here. Not to judge but to listen and be your mom. Never loose faith even for a second. When people tell you that God doesn't care, he lets bad things happen to us turn your cheek because he will be there when nobody else is. I believe we have our guardian angels looking over us, we must because your father and I almost lost you in a deadly car crash when I was 7 months pregnant. The car was crushed and I felt you inside of me. All I could do was pray in the ambulance. You survived, daddy and me survived. Nothing less than a miracle. I want to raise you to be a good person, a great woman and someday a wonderful mother, and when I depart from you know that I will always be with you because you are a little version of me. I love you my angel.

Love Always, Mama



Creating Motherhood

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Taisa Jenne

I was searching hard trying to find a book for my husband's birthday I knew had to exist. First I tried "parents and creativity", then "artists as parents." No go. There were books on raising creative children, and bios of artists who happened also to have kids, but no how-to books on how to be both creative and a parent. My husband, a contemporary artist and dedicated dad, was struggling to find space in his life for art, while juggling a job and the demands of being the world's greatest Papa. But in the world of books it seemed no one thought of these things as compatible. I settled on one about making art with toddlers, and wrote him a card telling him we'd have to write the book together once we'd figured it out.

But I wrote this guiltily, knowing my experience of parenthood and creativity has been quite different from his. Choosing to stay home with my baby meant my days were split between being busier than I'd ever been, and having more time than I could ever remember having. My brain felt soggy from waking uncountable times to breastfeed, and yet, there I was all day long with this tiny little creature who both demanded all of my attention, and also just laid around a lot. There was time in the day where I could imagine doing something- I felt desperate to be doing something- if only it could fit into those unpredictable little gaps in the day.

So I started making things. I began hand-sewing simple projects that could be set down and picked up and didn't take too long to finish. They weren't much to look at, but they were keeping me sane. I made a funny little bear out of an old sweater for my friend's two-year-old, and a wool felt bunny for my teething baby to chew on. I learned new terms like "blanket stitch" and "appliqué" and dug out an old bag of knitting needles to make a hat for my baby- full of mistakes but functional and cute. I started to spend nap times getting to know our old sewing machine, which until then had only been dusted off for quick clothing repairs ending in tangled bobbin threads and plenty of expletives. Now I was actually making things, things that could be used or played with, things that hadn't existed before my mama hands had set to making them. I was creating.

And rather than being incompatible with parenting, I was finding my way through the early days of mothering by filling up our days with creative projects. Together, my baby and I played with yarn, made toys and sewed gifts inspired by his scribbles. As our home filled up with more ribbon blankets, sock animals, bean bags and homemade blocks than we knew what to do with, I felt myself settle into what is ultimately the biggest creative project of them all, being a mama.



Dating, for Five

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Cynthia van Ginkel

Remember dating? Remember trying to find one person with whom you wanted to spend your free time? Now we've got five people in our family. So when we "date" other families, there are five judges on our side, three to five on the other side, and all the permutations of relations that come with that many people trying to want to hang around together.

But we do want to spend time with other people. After all, I can find myself spending my days in the bathroom with two bossy 21-month-old females who keep claiming to need to pee pee in the paw-paw but who don't do anything of note when given the chance to flaunt their paw-paw skill sets. While it's true that people outside my family will probably never kiss me while I'm on the toilet and say "you pee in the potty, Mommy, I so powd of you!" I still yearn for some non-family contact. But having moved frequently, for education and jobs, most of our old friends are scattered across the globe. And people without kids generally like to socialize without the Backyardigans as background music.

My son is three. He is, in general, a lot of fun for me. And funny, at least to other three-year-olds. If I say "can I have some of your ice cream?" his witty repost might be "can I have some of your poo?" And while I find this at least partly amusing – most of the time – I don't always enjoy what being with like-minded similarly-aged people does to him. The descent into uncontrollable giggles and poo-upmanship talk grates after a (short) while.

And then we have the parents. Trying to wade the minefield of talk surrounding child-rearing and discipline practices, what our and their kids excel or don't excel at, and what our latest parenting/career/marital trials might be, is a mammoth task. You run the risk of setting off a dispute between the other parents, or otherwise alienating one or both of the other parents by comments made by you or your dear spouse. Or the fact that your angel just cut their angel's previously beautiful hair.

At the playground I have the urge to distribute compatibility checklists to other families to help determine how our group would survive a family dinner party. I'm starting to seriously think someone needs to set up a family dating service where matchmaking for the entire family can occur.

And, in the meantime, maybe these issues are what makes extended family so important: you can't find a group you all love to hang around with, so you might as well hang with those about whom you have mixed feelings already!



Evolution of a Mom

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Susan Matheson

Friiyeep! I peered over the sloshing bowl of Cheerios at my son. The look on his face was unlike any I'd seen before – a blend of extreme delight, pride, enormous respect, and shocked disbelief. Had his body emitted this glorious, odiferous, combination of disgusting sounds? The planets (and his internal workings) had aligned themselves so as to simultaneously and energetically burp and break wind in divine happenstance. It was quite simply his greatest accomplishment ever and he was savouring the moment. Far be it from me to destroy this reverie with my usual groans of "That's disgusting!" and "Reeeally! Must you?!" His elder brother gazed in admiration. In the end, we both acknowledged his day has started in a most magnificent way.

Later, I escorted my son to his classroom and, after acknowledging zesty greetings from the knee-high set and their probing questions like, "was I an airline pilot 'cuz you'd look good in one of those hats!", I precariously perched on a Lilliputian chair and settled in to a voluntary task: cut 22 face masks as well as assorted pages of accessories (in 22's) for post P.E. craft time. The children rambunctiously rambled gymward and I set to work.

I snip, snip, snipped. One page down. After only two pages, my fingers ached and were cramped from being forced into tiny tyke-friendly safety scissors. Other mommies do this regularly and profess to enjoy the experience. I was beginning to seethe as I noted the minutes marching swiftly by. After a few more minutes, and seriously low yield, I moved on to panic. I wasn't going to finish this measly task! Those rosy-cheeked little faces were all going to be looking to me for craft-time and I had reams to go.

As my own face was beginning to flush and the perspiration was misting, another mom arrived. She sat down to help. I explained the mission. She began to work. And I stopped. And... I stared. She had instinctively stacked several pages together and was carefully cutting out masks in plural. In mere moments she had quintupled my entire output. I was in complete awe.

Do you think back to how you imagined motherhood before you actually were a mother? I seem to recall it was all about sweet milky baby breath and tiny fingers and happily chortling children making pretty crafts. In reality, these little creatures often stink, they have been known to relish showing off weird warts on grimy fingers at the most inopportune times, they brawl with jungle-worthy ferocity and craft times I've witnessed usually involve clean-up intimidating to even the most experienced HazMat team. But love motherhood, and them, I do.

With all the sermonising one does as a Mother, it is surprisingly often that I feel I am in fact the one doing the learning - that there is a greater plan at work and it isn't necessarily my small boys who are being groomed into more evolved beings. It's me.



**From Soft-core to Hard-Core – or,
How to Beat Back Pain Once and For All**

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Tanya Davidson

Since my body type is that of a ruler, for years I blithely assumed that my core muscles were fine. Not so! Once I left my halcyon teenage years behind, back pain became my nemesis.

It didn't help that I've always engaged in a variety of spine-punishing activities – plyometrics for basketball, tree-planting, schlepping steins of beer; learning how to kayak and ski at an advanced age, as well as playing soccer at thirty like I did when I was eighteen – all these activities warranted their own chapter in the annals of chiropractic texts. Yet as far as back pain goes, none of these pursuits held a candle to the hunchfest that is motherhood.

It begins at month six of the pregnancy (or whenever one's toes disappear), and continues for the rest of one's life. Wrestling diapers on to infants in constant motion, nursing in contorted positions, placing babies in cribs; lugging hockey bags, beach gear and/or grocery bags while holding child; doing laundry, cleaning the house while holding child; keeping up with your tweens in the mall, carting all their shopping – this, dear ladies, I call the hunchfest.

I obsessed about back pain when contemplating becoming pregnant. I figured my spine would snap in labour, and I doubted my ability to hoist kids around. The way I saw it, "Mommy muscles" were more likely to segue into a perennial slouch that portended ringing a bell at the top of a church (Quasimodo, anyone?).

Despite the odds, I am still straight and in one piece, thanks to our local gym's core class - one hour of abs. Barf. Ouch! Scared as all get out, I committed upon becoming pregnant – it was then or never. I got the routine down to ten minutes a day, and soon my chronic, low-level back pain vanished. I shoveled heavy loads of gravel while eight months pregnant with no complaints (well, except for the incessant peeing), and walked and biked miles, all ache-free. It was a wonderful sensation to feel my core muscles still "activated" as my baby grew.

The best part is that this "core activation" can be done anywhere – it involves two simple moves: pull in your navel as far as your can, and keep your spine neutral (i.e. allow no pelvic tilt). Rain or shine, that navel stays tucked! At the sink, I suck it in and pulse. Pushing the stroller, I hold it in for intervals. Playing with my baby, I sit him on my tummy and bounce him up and down by contracting and relaxing my core until the burn is too much to bear and he is breathless with giggles. At night, if I have the energy to read for ten minutes, I lay my book on the floor, and do the plank for one page, then two, then three...usually by then I'm skimming! Driving the car – clench it. Biking – squeeze it. And, if you really do it right, you get an added bonus – those pesky Kegels are already half done.



Getting It Together For Halloween: Less Is More Even When It Comes to Candy

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Rowena List

Isn't it interesting how all year long we teach our kids not to talk to strangers and never take candy from someone you do not know, then Halloween comes along all the rules change? No wonder some kids are confused!

Getting It Together has an exciting approach to having a fun, safe and organized Halloween.

Host a Halloween Party on Halloween Night

Creative Halloween Costume Ideas: Ask the children to choose items from around the house to create their own costumes. This will help in clearing the clutter, save you money as you won't be buying a costume will sit in the closet for another year collecting dust. Offer a prize to the child wearing the most recyclable or reused items.

Halloween Food: Think up a theme for the food. For example, all green food. Just think of how great everyone will feel after eating healthy food instead of all that candy (and you won't have to be hiding it from your kids for the next 6 months). Be sure to have some healthy green treats like green frosting on top of a healthy muffin.

Halloween Party Activities: Organize some games and storytelling at your party. Just think of the impact this will have on all the guests as opposed to running around the neighbourhood in the cold and rain.

Halloween Giving: This is the perfect time of year to teach your children about giving. Let them pick an organization or charity and everyone who comes to the party can donate to it. All ages can participate in this with a little help from you.

Less is more even when it comes to candy.



Getting Your Kids' Schedule Together

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Rowena List

Ahhhh, the beginning of the school year.

It's like spring time. Fresh, new, wonderful, bright...and hectic! All over town we see moms and dads pulling their hair out trying to juggle school with kid's activities, work and home.

So how do we manage all this with much less stress? Here are a few Together Tips to keep you on top of it all.

Tip #1 - Kids do best with routine

By now, we should all have settled in to our schedules. Routine is important, however, if a child is not thriving on this schedule it is wise to reconsider. Possibly remove or add an activity that will produce less stress in your child's life.

Tip #2 – Leave time for rest and play

Kids love structured activities, and a certain amount of it every day is important. Each child is different, so gauge how much they need by their behaviour. More than anything, after school and on weekends, kids need and want free time to rest and play. Ensure you allow for that too.

Tip #3 - Sit down as a family

Decide as a family which one or two activities each child wants to do per season. Two activities is most likely the maximum, although every child is different. The demands of school just keep getting greater, so keep an eye out, so that their schoolwork doesn't suffer. Make sure you don't overdo it too as your stress will be absorbed by your children.

Tip #4 – Make a calendar

This may seem like the most obvious of tips, but you'd be surprised when a child gets to be involved in the planning how much more willing and cooperative they can be.

On the calendar, mark down all the regular activities. Ask each of your children to choose a colour marker that then will only be used for their activities. Ensure that your schedule includes which grown-up will be in charge of driving which child to which activity. Look into car pooling especially if you need to be in multiple places at one time.

Tip #5 – Family time

No matter how busy you get with activities, work, school or home improvement, the most important is family time. Schedule one activity per week with the entire family. And, if possible, one activity with each of the parents separately with each child.

On the calendar be sure to schedule in family time in a different colour.

Now this all may seem complicated, but actually it will simplify your life. Keeping life simple and balanced means harmonious, happy kids.



Getting Your Mail Together

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Rowena List

Dedicated to all the people who would like to simplify their lives just a little bit more.

When it comes to our mail you will want to adopt the "Deal with it, delegate it or dump it" philosophy.

Deal With It: Let's start with the first one. Collect your mail from the box when you have 2 minutes to deal with it. Handle each piece of mail once if at all possible. File your bills and invitations etc under the appropriate dates in your 1to31 organizing binder (www.1to31.com). There is no need to pay bills until the day they are due. By being organized with your mail you will avoid the pitfalls of having piles of unopened mail all over your kitchen counter or top of your desk.

Delegate It: Can you delegate any of the mail tasks? Setting up prepaid authorization payments is a great way of delegating your bill payments and takes the stress out of paying them monthly. Is there someone in your household that can fill in the forms that need to be returned to set-up authorized payments? If not set aside some time to do this yourself. The time spent to get it set-up will be worth it!

Dump It: Dump all junk mail in the recycling bin or better yet sign up for the RED DOT program (www.reddotcampaign.ca) and you will never receive junk mail again. Think of the trees you will be saving too.

Next time you go to your mail box try these simple tips and see how much time you will save. What will you do with that extra time?



Motherhood: The Crucible of Creativity

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Linda M. Langwith

Raising a family and being a writer come with their own challenges and rewards. While it would seem that being a mum would make it more difficult to be a writer, I believe that it is through parenthood I really found my voice as an artist. When my children were babies, my writing was confined to notebooks in which I hastily scribbled during nap time (if I were lucky enough to get all three to sleep at the same time). Somehow I managed to write a novel and three sequels using this method. But it was not until our last child entered kindergarten that I was finally able to type up the manuscripts and begin to work on them. Having only a small window in the day to write was great because I knew I had to get right down to it—procrastination was not in the cards. Cooking, cleaning, laundry and gardening took up the rest of whatever available time I had, after having fun with the kids.

I still didn't have the luxury of a room of my own in which to write. That would come much later, once the basement was transformed from a dungeon to habitable space. The computer, when we finally bought one, was positioned in the firing line between the living room and the family room. If I was going to continue writing I had to literally do it in the bosom of my family. By this time the kids were older and now in school. The days of nappies, disrupted sleep, feedings, teething and toilet training were all behind me. But each stage of our children's lives comes with its own set of demands. To cook, gardener and cleaner was added chauffeur and homework helper. My trio was interested in what mum was doing at the computer, so I started reading everyone a chapter each time I finished, to choruses of more and more. The keyboard steamed as the plot sizzled. I was on a roll and churned out chapter after chapter.

Then I arrived at that blissful state of a room of my own. The relative peace and quiet is perfect for revision, but I find I don't write quite with the same sizzling speed as I once did when surrounded by all the distractions of family life. Time has a way of filling a vacuum. Our children are grown up now—one is studying abroad, one is a student in another province, while the third is a soldier. One thing hasn't changed though—they still love to read my creations. So maybe it was just as well that my writing was such a public thing when they were small.

Being a parent demands everything one has to give and more, just as do my artistic endeavors. Motherhood has truly been the crucible for my writing and enabled me to fulfill my dream of becoming a published author of "The Golden Crusader."



Solace in the Stars

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Amanda Wamsteeker

I sat on the couch in the dark, staring at the innocent face of my newborn son, Jacob, while tears of frustration, fear, and exhaustion streamed down my face. This was my third time feeding him since midnight and I knew it was not the last. "Will he ever sleep through the night?" I wondered to myself. "I don't want to do this every night". My body still ached from the rigors of childbirth and my mind was beginning to cloud with uncertainty. "I have been waiting for this moment for years, so why am I so miserable? I can't believe I am a mother? What if I fail? What if he grows up to be a bully or a drug addict? What if he hates me?"

I sat there wallowing in this form of negativity and self-doubt for several minutes when I finally raised my head and looked out the large living room window. Staring down at me and my son was a large, dazzling star. It drew me into its light and I was instantly mesmerized by its beauty. I had watched the stars since I was a child, but never before had I been put under a spell of this magnitude. "Is that the North Star", I asked myself. I tried to jog my memory of the little astronomy I remembered from high school, when I realized it really didn't matter what star it was; this was our star. Its sole purpose was to shine for me and Jacob. I felt myself starting to relax, the tension fading away as I gazed at our star.

I looked down at my son, snuggling up against me as he finished the last few drops in his bottle. He seemed so peaceful and comfortable. Somewhere in that moment, the fear and fatigue that had plagued me the past few days drifted out of my body and mind. I felt the star was the visible bond created between us when he was born. "I wonder if this star will still be around when you graduate, or get married, or even when you are an old man", I silently said to my sleeping baby. Maybe this same star could one day provide him with much needed solace.

That night, I held onto Jacob a few minutes longer than usual and snuggled him extra close. "I will hold onto you for as long as you need me to, whenever you need me to", I promised him. Our star had given me the reassurance that I could be a good mother. Life may not always go the way I want it to, but as long as I do my absolute best and provide Jacob with all the love a mother could possibly give her child, he stands a good chance at becoming a wonderful human being.

As I lay Jacob in his crib, tears once again began streaming down my face, only this time they were tears of peace, understanding, and joy. I walked by the window one last time to gaze at our star, whispering to myself "from now on, I will treasure every moment I have with him, no matter how sleep deprived or frustrated I am because he will grow up before I realize it."



The Little Lie

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Sharon DeVellis

My six year old son lied to me. I'm a realist and know that it won't be the last time. It's a fact of parenting; children will sometimes lie.

This particular lie wasn't even about trying to keep himself out of trouble. It came flying from his mouth without thought to land squarely on my heart and change me in a profound way.

He had gone to a birthday party and played laser tag. He had never played it before so I asked questions. Did you have a good time? Were you on teams? Would you like to go again? Who won?

"I won, Mummy"

A simple three word sentence that changed me.

You did? How do you know you won?

Well, there was a t.v. with a score board and it showed my name and I had 12 points and it said won beside my name.

With each question I asked there was an almost imperceptible hesitation as he tried to answer. The alarm bells in my head started ringing.

"Honey, did you lie when you told me you won?"

"Will I get in trouble if I did?" he asked.

"No, just tell me the truth"

"I didn't win Mummy"

"Why did you lie to me Adam?"

And his answer changed me. *I wanted you to be proud of me.*

How do I explain to him that winning a game or coming in first or even getting good grades isn't what makes me proud. How do I put into words that his just being makes me proud. That even when I'm frustrated because he's not listening to me, even when I yell at him for talking back, even when I send him to his room for a timeout, I'm proud. That if I were to die tomorrow, I would die knowing that he and his brother, these two beautiful boys, the boys I've had the privilege of sharing my life with, are my proudest achievements.

How do I explain to him that every night before I go to bed, I enter his room, sit on the edge of his bed, smooth the hair away from his brow and kiss the soft velvety spot on his temple and whisper *I Love You*.

Where are the words to make him understand that I'm proud of him when he chooses to dress in a shirt and tie every day even when all the other kids his age are wearing jeans and t-shirts. And that if he changed his mind and chose to wear jeans and t-shirts too, I'd be just as proud.

Where do I find the words to explain the unexplainable? Because he will never truly understand until he has children of his own. The simple answer is I can't; not with words. But I can let him know through my actions that he is special in his own right and that my love is not there because of **what** he does..... my love is there **no matter what** he does.



Unplug – Become Present

Category: Life Lessons

Author: Dalyce Brandt

Presence – such a simple act, but not so easy to do. It's a matter of finding peace and space. Often our minds are so active mentally reviewing our last phone call and planning our next meeting, that being present in mind, body, and soul becomes a concentration exercise. Reflecting on my many work experiences, there was only one that supported and practiced a daily routine of being quiet. It was 30 years ago and I was the program director at a children's summer camp. Each morning before breakfast, 15 minutes was scheduled for quiet time, prayer or bible study. There is no way of knowing now whether this daily practice influenced the harmonious activities of the day or not, but even today I marvel at the level of collaboration, creativity and innovation that occurred.

Sometimes a ten-minute break of solitude or silence can have remarkable results. Two news items caught my attention awhile back. The first was an article in the February 21, 2008 issue of MACLEAN'S magazine. The article is titled SSHH: MEN AT WORK and profiles a six-month pilot project by Intel dubbed "Quiet Time". Every Tuesday morning 300 engineers and managers shut out all distractions. No emailing, no phone calls, no appointments, and "do not disturb" sign are displayed on office doors. The point being, Intel believes their workers are so overwhelmed with emails, voice mail, phone calls etc... there's no time to reflect and contemplate. The article uses Sir Isaac Newton as an example of one who discovered the law of gravity because he had time to sit and contemplate (under an apple tree). Several other interesting thoughts are shared such as: creativity is killed when under the gun; information overload is driving people to distraction; and workers show signs of culturally induced attention deficit disorder. The article suggests that other organizations are considering a similar program.

The second news item appeared in the February 1, 2008 issue of the Victoria Times Columnist. The article is titled Burned-out bureaucrats brood over 'BlackBerry blackout' and talks about Richard Fadden, deputy minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada efforts to limit the use of the BlackBerry by his staff. His intent is to reduce employee stress related to the bombardment of emails and to help bureaucrats balance work and family life. Fadden's request to staff was to bar the use of the Blackberry in meetings, between 7:00 pm and 7:00 am, on weekends and holidays.

Although the tide is slow to turn, there appears to be an increasing wave of individuals / organization interested in fostering greater presence through a variety of means. Some may meditate, go for long walks, or pray, while others may sit quietly in reflection, practice yoga, or tai chi.

Learning to balance life for entrepreneurial moms is a battle. I now make an effort to meditate for least 10 minutes every morning. Interestingly enough, I've noted that on the odd morning that I have missed, the events of the day don't run as smoothly.



Child

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Judy Forbes

The woman sat on the corner of the bed in the dark watching the child sleep. She adjusted the angle of the door so that enough light came in from the landing without the beam falling across his face. When her back ached from the angle of her watching she turned and looked out of the window at the moonlight glistening on the roofs but she could still hear his snuffling breath and she could smell his warm, damp skin. A cat knocked over a milk bottle on the street. She held her breath as the clatter died away. The baby slept on.

She thought of the other nights alone in this room, the moonlight and the street lamps throwing strange shadows on to the ceiling. Once she had lain awake on her back staring for hours at the silhouette of a dog that seemed to her more and more real as the night wore on.

The child whimpered and she was immediately alert, tense, watching, back in the present. He turned his head and sucked on an imaginary bottle and then suddenly his eyes were wide open, staring into hers. Their gaze locked for some moments and neither of them breathed. His eyes held hers and he seemed wise and knowing as if he sensed her need for him. Then he let out one long, anguished bawl. He was very hot, sweat gathering in the folds of skin around his neck and wrists. She lifted him from the cot and tried to enfold him but he was stiff with fright and anger and twisted his head, trying to see around the door into the light.

She wrestled with him for an hour. Walked and crooned to him. Her limbs ached from holding him.

Finally she felt his small body relax. His tiny hand had crept through the open neck of her nightdress and rested on her breast. She rocked him gently, humming under her breath so that he could feel the vibration of it in her body but hear no sound. She gave herself up to the moment, to the night, to the feel of his skin on her skin. Warmth spread from the tiny hand, through her whole body, lifting the hair from her scalp, tingling along the nerve ends just beneath the skin of her arms. For one brief moment, that would never leave her, she let herself believe that he was hers. Her thoughts went out to all the other mothers rocking their babies through the night. She became one with them, joined in Motherhood.

Tomorrow she would return him whole, and safe, to his mother's arms. She would take the praise for the quality of her care, her selflessness. She would let them heap thanks on her for her sacrifice of time. They would never know, because she could not explain, what she had stolen from them that night.



Friend on a Bench

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Susan Matheson

She settles on the park bench everyday, sharing her perch with a sundry population of passersby who gravitate toward her - a pinstriped businessman, a drug numbed youth, an adventurous traveller. She grants the same gentle smile to all. The chattering ducks parade before her, so accustomed to her presence as to be oblivious.

She stoops slightly as she sits quietly, a cardigan draped protectively around her shoulders, like a loved one holding her close, warding off the chill of a breeze. Her posture suggests a stiffening of joints. The nearby weeping willow echoes her stance and dapples shadows across her brow.

Her cheek is smooth yet the creases are permanent and etched deep. Her cloudy eyes seem fixed in a dreamy stare while fine wrinkles gently pleat around her lids. Her hair is in a classic chignon – a wayward tendril tucked behind an ear, another sneaking loose at the nape, softening a severe style. A tiny pearl is firmly secured in each earlobe. Something in her manner suggests she could have been a beloved teacher.

Children run up, stop short, and then with polite caution take the last few steps toward her. Inevitably, they stroke the back of her thickly veined hand or caress a button on her sweater. Sitting companionably beside, their small hands inquisitively finger a locket suspended on a chain. Does it open? What precious photo is contained? A grandchild? A long lost love? One wonders.

She is frequently photographed, alone or with companions, her charm clearly crossing cultures and ages.

The calm, trustworthy aura she exudes makes her a confidante - a non judgemental friend. It's tempting to speculate about the stories she has heard, the confessions she promises to keep within.

Lovers stroll by, pausing to share a smile with her, squeezing their entwined fingers in recognition of her special effect. Often they kiss, her presence a strange catalyst for spontaneous expressions of love and affection. They never offend her sensibilities.

In the Spring, a blossom will find its way into her grip, in the Fall, a brilliant leaf. As she endures the winter rains, a bench mate will settle an umbrella over her protectively. She seems grateful for these gestures.

As the sun sinks she is haloed in a warm golden glow. Her silhouette remains still as the soft navy night descends and the streetlights flicker on with a hum. She appears equally happy for those who visit in the evening as for those she meets during the day. The crisp air cools her cheek and exposed fingers.

During a snowstorm this past winter, I approached her special spot and found her nestled on her bench, vulnerably open to the swirling raw currents. I gently brushed the flakes from her hair and her rounded shoulders and cleared away the snowy layer covering the plaque beside her - the one recognising her creator, the sculptor, J. Seward Johnson. I marvelled at how this wonderful work of art succeeds in engaging and comforting so many.



Have a Coke and a smile!

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Kate Shivers

I suffered with very severe morning sickness for my last pregnancy. My current pregnancy began the same way. To make a long story short...I've tried everything from vit B6 shots to diclectin to chiropractor to reflexology to chromium. Then a friend told me of something that she knew of two generations ago...Coke! That's right...good old Coke Classic. So now I still take Dicectin, but when I start to feel the nausea on top of that, I drink a glass of Coke Classic and the feeling soon disappears.



Kids? No Way

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Christina Stewart

I came close to not marrying my husband. It was the classic conflict – He wanted children; always had. I didn't; never had. We found this out very early on in our relationship but without actually saying so we decided to keep dating since we were having so much fun together and in most ways felt connected. So, we didn't talk about kids. I thought he would just change his mind and I'm certain that he thought the same of me. None of our friends had babies back then. It really wasn't an issue. We carried on with our dating lives. We went to movies and bars and white water rafting and continued to fall further in love. We didn't give babies another thought.

Fast forward five years to the proposal. One Sunday night, my then boyfriend got down on one knee and asked me to marry him. He had a long speech that I honestly can't remember but the gist of it was that times were hard but it didn't matter because we had each other and me by his side for the rest of his life meant that he could get through any obstacle. I said yes. We began planning a wedding. Life was good. There was, however, this niggle of doubt in the back of my mind. I knew he wanted kids. He knew I didn't. Why were we planning a forever together if that meant that one of us wouldn't get the life they wanted? We had to talk about it. We had to bring it to the surface and dissect it. "On the weekend" I told myself, "we'll talk on the weekend."

Friday night we found ourselves at the mall with a couple of quick errands to run before heading off to meet up with some friends for beer at a sunny patio in the city. Who knew that one of the most pivotal moments of my life would come between a Radio Shack and the dollar store? We ran into a friend's older brother, his wife and their newborn baby. "Here" she said "Hold the baby." And with just that simple warning she shoved the child into my arms. I'd never held a baby that small – I'd never even seen one that small before. He was tiny, and helpless and beautiful. Somewhere, deep in my unconscious a crazy feeling ripped through and popped into my intellect. It felt right to be standing there holding this child. His parents were practically strangers to me – distant acquaintances at most – and I felt a connection to their infant son. How powerful must that connection be if this child in my arms were mine?

Through the noise of food court, through the background chatter with this couple, through the hustle and bustle going on around us I looked up at my future husband. It only took a second for the agreement to pass through us. One day this would be us. One day soon I hoped.



Waiting

Category: The Great Canadian (Very) Short Story

Author: Judy Forbes

"I hate you. I wish that you were dead".
The words grow huge, stretch away from her
Like the credits on a Hollywood film
They distort, make pathways until they make no sense
Disappear, leaving a clanging, jarring echo

She watches him as he rages
The scalding tears, the balled fists
He careers around the room kicking out his impotent anger
Wanting, really, to kick her, hurt her, make her suffer

He makes her suffer

She holds tightly to the newel post
In her head she feels anger, resentment, pain
She fights the bitter words, swallows them sourly down
She wants to scream at him, hold his face in her hands and spit the words into his eyes
Don't you know, she wants to say. Don't you know

He doesn't know

So she watches him, this fiend, this fury, her son
While love pours out through her skin
Rolls in sweat down her spine
Lifts her hair from her scalp
Presses in a band around her heart
Till she gasps for breath

She holds tightly to the newel post
She watches him and she waits.



After Alzheimer's

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Cynthia van Ginkel

When my daughter was 18 months old, my mother turned to me and asked what her name was.

I was taken aback, somehow most by the idea that a grandmother would ever ask such a question. It was one of many such incidents as Alzheimer's slowly stole the mother I knew. As I saw the confidante I'd known so well slipping away, I was continually more surprised and upset by the loss of my relationship with my mother than her losing memories and facts. As my mother, how could she ask me these things, even if she couldn't remember?

There were bad days and better days. Some days my mother was in a wonderful mood, remembering the recent past fairly clearly, accepting the gaps in her memory with humour and grace. Other days, when she could still use the phone, she'd call repeatedly, not remembering that she'd already called or what we'd discussed. Before her driver's license was revoked, she'd say she was coming over to play with her grandchildren and then not show up. And she was angry, understandably, and frustrated by miscommunications that she was eager to blame on anyone but herself. She claimed the right to forget anything that "wasn't important" to her. She said, as a retiree, it didn't matter what day or week or month it was.

When I was growing up, my mother would recount the best day of her life: the day I was born. She claimed it was a day she would never forget. Yet now it is forgotten. While she continues to usually feel familiar towards me, she sometimes believes I am her sister.

In recent years, I've seen less and less of the person my mother was. Not only have facts and memories evaded her, she's also lost much of her personality, or what seems to make a person apart from memory: temperament, judgment, hobbies, interests. My once hardy and active mother now can't bear to wear a wet sock for a few minutes. She panics and yells if she has trouble opening a door. At one time she would have been furious with my writing this down. But now she no longer reads.

As I seek to make some sense of how to lose someone who isn't actually lost, I realize that the phenomenon of my mother does still exist in many ways: she touched thousands of students in a thirty-year career teaching English, social studies, and debating. She's also woven into the myriad of social causes that used to demand her attention.

Ultimately, her greatest achievement for me is the woman I have become. There were so many ways in which she molded me over the many years before her illness, in all the years of travels, parties, and experiences. Her hardiness and passion still exists in me, and is something I will try to pass on to my children – for now and whenever I am taken from them.



Mum's New Dress

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Judy Forbes

You stood so proudly for the photograph
Your bearing testament to a dancer's grace,
Head up you looked not at the camera, but beyond it,
Beyond us
Imagining, perhaps, the effect
On the larger crowd
Your adoring public

I can see you now
The turquoise blue, exotic as a sultan's turban,
Shimmered over you
A wide sash brought it together at the waist
Flowed down the back to form a train
The long skirt tapered to the ankles,
Revealing the glamorous, glittery shoes

It is a film star dress
An elegant, look at me dress
A hand in a long glove held to receive a gallant kiss
A turn of the head
The flashing of bulbs
Here, click, and here
Look up, look down, click

You accept it calmly
Your eyes are wide, your lips, carefully painted,
Hold the faintest of smiles

You made it yourself
Modelled it on your tailor's dummy
That held your shape but not your essence
We are your public now
We clap our hands and cheer
What beauty!
Your eyes shine
Dad holds out one hand as if to present you
So proudly.



My Mom

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Shelly Khushal

My mother grew up in the 1950's during a difficult time. Her mother had passed away at a young age, and being the 5th of 12 children, raised by her father and grandmother in Africa, my mother had to work twice as hard to get the bare necessities. Being of East Indian decent, my mother was not allowed the same freedoms as we have today, living in Canada. She had to fight for the right to education. She had to ask for things which we take for granted.

I remember the amazing story my mother told me about asking my grandfather if she could become educated. In those days, women did not ask for such things. With her father's permission, she was able to get an education. Growing up, this message of **never** taking education for granted was imbedded in me. My mother was very adamant that living in a society where access and opportunities were readily available to us, it was an injustice to not take advantage of those opportunities.

We came to Canada when I was 2 years old, and my sister was 5. My mother took four buses to get to work. The first thing she did after coming to Canada was register for free English classes. She not only wanted to assimilate into this society, she wanted to *contribute* to it.

She took advantage of all the opportunities that Canada had to offer. She enrolled in courses and seminars, and even encouraged my sister and I to take part in social activities, school plays, music classes etc. She taught us how to be well-rounded people. She really exposed us to the educational, social, and spiritual aspects of life.

In a time and place where it was difficult for women to be independent and strong, my mother not only survived, she thrived. Her strength and determination makes me believe that all mothers should be like her.

I owe many things to my mother. She has taught me discipline, strength, respect and above all, love. I am indebted to her for being able to think, speak and act freely, for being the independent woman I am today.

I am also indebted to her for my freedom. I have the freedom to be whoever I want to be, to move freely from place to place with no fear. Traveling to all the countries that I have, I have come to realize and appreciate how much she sacrificed for my betterment. She moved to Canada to give our family a better life. She not only understood the importance of education, she set the example herself by becoming educated. At the age of 50, my mother decided to do her Masters. It was yet another eye-opening moment for me. Now, at the age of 58, her message continues to be consistent - that you can do *anything* that you put your mind to!



My Mom Moment

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Danielle Christopher

As an unexpected mom of a twenty two month old and another on the way, the mom I would love to meet today is my mom.

After a long second round of cancer my mom passed away. She was thirty seven and I was ten years old. Sure I skipped the teenage hell a mother and daughter can go through but I sure could use some advice these days.

After a lot of medical tests and numerous bouts of endometriosis I was told, at thirty one, that I could not have kids. My husband and I were not too upset by this as we had been together a long time and loved being on our own. We kept moving forward in life. Then four months after the news that we could not have kids, we conceived our daughter Alexa.

When the pregnancy shock wore off then the panic set in. What do I do? I had not been around a baby in a long time. We had no clue. I had many heavy, bad dreams that I did things wrong for the baby. The mom void that I had for the past twenty two years overwhelmed me especially during the third trimester till right about now as I write this essay.

The best I can hope for is that my children will know that they were the surprises I did not know I wanted until they arrived. Sometimes not having advisers to dilute your gut instincts is the best way to live and parent.



My Safe Place

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Sarah B. Heinonen

In my second semester of nursing school, I gave birth to my third child. Holding her, admiring her simple perfection, I was mesmerized, completely consumed with her. On my second day in the hospital, I was hit with a choking thought: how could I continue with school? It seemed too soon to be thinking about that, but it was a realization I had to face.

At home, I wanted nothing more than to hold her. She was so tiny, arriving into this world three weeks early, and I kept her bundled tight warding off the chill of early February. I didn't want to put her down, not for a moment. Even at night, when I knew she should be learning to sleep in her own crib, I kept her close to me, watching her breathe, feeling her tiny fingers curl around mine. She became my safe place. When my mind was racing, she calmed me.

When I had to return to school the following week, I cried. I didn't want to leave her so soon as if she might sense that I was somehow betraying her. But it was only for one hour and I was back before she barely had a chance to wake from her nap. When clinical began two weeks later, I wanted to quit school altogether. To leave her for a full eight hours seemed impossible- even if it were only one day a week.

In the darkened moments of early morning, I held her and kissed her, and felt the softness of her cheek pressed against my own. She buried her head into the hollow of my shoulder and held on to my shirt with her clenched fist as she slept, oblivious that I would be leaving her for the day. My heart was aching, my mind was battling an internal fight. Am I doing the right thing? I questioned again.

Later that afternoon when I returned home, I picked her up and whispered how I had missed her. My husband sat smiling, pleased that he had managed her and the older two children with such ease. After I changed, I sank down with her onto the chair and put my feet up- knowing this was the only place I wanted to be.

After those initial days of class after her birth, I made it through the rest of the semester and the next one as well. Seven months after her birth, I am into the first semester of my last year of school, and she continues to be my safe, quiet place. Whatever else happens at school, I take her in my arms and know that I am holding all that matters in this life. She is my comfort, my joy, my light. She was given to me at a very busy time in my life to remind me to slow down and hold on to what is important. I now know that it is she who makes possible what at first seemed impossible.



Sea

Category: Mom-moments

Author: Judy Forbes

I remember...

I remember running down the long length of sands at Ogmores-by-Sea, the wind whipping my hair into my eyes and the blown sand already sticking to my skin. I ran badly; my sisters, though younger, ran well. To avoid being last in any race I stopped to observe the grey horizon and the patch of brightness behind the rolling clouds that showed somewhere the sun was shining.

The sea came in flatly over the sand. It looked sluggish and oily and the foam was more like scum. Here and there semi-solid masses bobbed in the water, sewage disgorged through the pipe that extended out into the sea but never quite far enough from the shore and sometimes, when the tide was particularly low, was completely exposed.

My sisters were already ploughing out into the water, splashing and shrieking in competition with the wheeling gulls. The water reached the backs of my knees and I shuddered. I would have tried to turn back but they were holding hands and dancing round in circles and then ducking down to catch the grey waves and shrieking again. I wanted to go and I wanted to stay.

I looked back up the beach where a very long way away my mother was sitting on a rock, a headscarf around her hair and a basket by her side. I knew what was in that basket. I could already feel the rough, dry towel on my skin and her hands rubbing my arms and back to stop my teeth chattering. And best of all, beyond any sensation before or since, the solid chunk of Cadbury's Milk chocolate broken off a big family bar and so hard it had to be sucked not chewed. The rich warmth of it would seep into me and the towel would warm my skin and my sense of well-being and of being loved was wrapped up in that moment.

I knew everything was shared though and I wouldn't get any before my sisters and I wanted to be part of the game, not left out on the edge, so I ran towards them tripping and splashing until I was as wet as they were.



Bees

Category: Against All Odds

Author: Kate Shivers

Overwhelming pain of being burned and crushed simultaneously, chest heavy with what seemed like water filling up my lungs, "I can't make it down the stairs", I said..."Don't worry...we are two very strong..."...everything went silent...then I see it...a sky sunburst, light rays radiating...I'm approaching a field, it was so bright I was squinting but not uncomfortable or hot...figures were in the field, lit from behind...I wonder who they are, I am curious and squint harder to see their faces...as my hand reached out to open the gate to the field a thought flashed through my mind...I can't die...I have a baby...I can't die...in a heartbeat I was back, in an ambulance...I could hear now...one medic asking the other to get ready with the defib, injecting me with epi, starting my IV...my body went berserk...at 34 years old and 5 1/2 weeks pregnant with my third, I suffered my first anaphylactic shock twenty minutes after one, or possibly two honeybees stung me...when we get to the hospital and they have stabilized me, the medic suggests for me to find a new hobby...

I've heard people say that when you need to learn life lessons, first the universe (or God) speaks in a whisper, then a talking voice, then yells, then bangs you over the head until you get it. My anaphylactic shock was my wake up call. I was a hobby beekeeper and had been stung probably 20 times or more, with never more than a skin reaction. I am still reliving the event and adjusting my lens to bring lessons into focus. Some lessons are clear, others are still blurry. One thing I know for sure is the power of the life force within all of us is strong. That is the first lesson. We are gifts from God and we are here to help the ones we love. Nobody is too small to work miracles. My little embryo saved my life that day. Imagine what we are all capable of being and doing! The life force within a being the size of a lentil called me back from a peaceful, loving death, to face my pain, to grow and to learn. Our challenge is to be that gift from God, to be strong and valuable, and to work our own miracles each day.

Another lesson is to find and to love your power. I used to let people steal my power and with it went much joy. I was angry and I hid my true self. Now I know that I am not going to hide anymore. I have begun to cut ties to relationships that made me feel insignificant. I know that I am significant because my husband, my children, firemen, medics, nurses and others saw me that way and saved my life, when I wanted to die. For the health of my kids I will live significantly and fully. I am empowered. I am worthy of happiness and I have the power to create my own joy. I've been to death and back and I have a message. Keep your power and share your joy, peace and true self.

The sting of a honeybee has forever changed me. The humble honeybee, overlooked by many and taken for granted by many more, changed my life in powerful ways. Many of us live humble and overlooked. Yet we are all capable of greatness and through experiences like these, are given the second chance to love ourselves and truly live our only life. I know now that my soul is part of an interwoven tapestry of life. Big changes start small, on the wings of a butterfly, or the sting of a bee.



My Mom - Ellen Alban

Category: Against All Odds

Author: Dayna Aamodt

My mother is my hero. She is the most courageous person I know. I hope that this piece about her provides you with the inspiration to see the silver lining behind each cloud. I hope that when you experience disappointment or like the world is against you you can revert back to my mother's story and know that there is always hope.

People can achieve incredible things despite the odds against them. My mother is one of those people. Her life is full of friends and a self awareness and compassion that comes from a deep well of suffering. She was always giving giving giving. Not taking time for herself and putting everybody's needs ahead of her own.

As a teenager I went through a rough time. She could have given up on me and kicked me out of the house but she always stood by me. One day a friend looked at my mother and said "Ellen I notice that your pinky finger is shaking". My mother noticed it too. She went to the doctor and it was dismissed. Within months the shaking became worse. She was then diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

She had to give up teaching. My brother and I were teenagers. Her mother, step mother and grandmother had passed away. So all she had was herself and this horrific disease. I call it horrific but my mother never called it that. She referred to her fluttering right arm as her "angel wing". When life gives you lemons, she would tell me when I was feeling sorry for myself, make lemonade!

She went on a creative journey. One of the first things she did was begin composing poetry. Later her vast collection of poems would become a book that people would buy. She also took up making bracelets and necklaces-also something that was remarkable considering her trembling hand. She would sell the bracelets and necklaces at craft shows and to friends. She took up pilates and loved it so much that she started teaching it! She volunteered at the gym and was given an coveted award for her dedication in front of 200 people (only 3 people received the award). She never told me about the award-I found out about it through my father. Her picture is on a wall at the YMCA.

She loves clothing and putting together outfits that turn heads and often make her appear the most elegant woman in the room. She was even in a fashion show!

My mother is incredibly involved in the Parkinson's community. She insists on seeing the light at the end of the tunnel without realizing that she is that light to so many of the people around her.

Thank you mom for giving me life. Thank you mom for being who you are. Thank you for never giving up on me. You have touched so many people's lives. I know I'm not the only one who calls you their hero.



If I Ruled the World

Category: If I Ruled The World

Author: Francien (Frankie) van Helsdingen

If I ruled the world;

I would make sure that everyone would be happy
never grow tired and never give up their dreams
where no one had problems and everyone could see the good things in life

If I ruled the world;

I would make sure that there was a happy sex life for everybody
no more beatings and killings because you did not like someone

If I ruled the world;

I would make sure that there was only love and good feelings no more war and no more hate

it would be nice if life could be like that

let it be to each his/her own... live your life the way you like and just be happy

Note: Hi, my name is Nick. This is a bit weird and hard for me. Just heard on CBC about your contest and site. Coincidentally I have been going through my wife's things lately and found her poetry and writings. We were together for 41 years but last year she suddenly died of lung cancer. I knew she kept a diary and wrote other things but only on a few occasions did she let me see what she wrote. So I was very surprised when I heard one of your categories was: 'If I Ruled the World...' exactly as she had written it twenty years ago! So here is her entry, not by or for me and not to gain anything by it but just to give her a recognition she really would have enjoyed as shy as she was.



The Soft Dictatorship

Category: If I Ruled The World

Author: Nikki Skuce

If I ruled the world... It would be quite a mess! There would be toys scattered on the floor, laundry hung to dry for days and dishes piled high. Although it wouldn't be as big a disaster as the one we live in. I'd start the clean up by putting an end to the tar sands, stopping the wars in Sudan and Iraq, eliminating nuclear and all small arms, dismantling conglomerates with too much power such as Royal Dutch Shell and Haliburton, banning GMO crops and petroleum products sold as 'food', halting mining and gas exploration in environmentally sensitive areas, and ousting a number of corrupt and negative leaders. The next day we'd start developing solutions that would include plans for global access to renewable energy, support for small-scale farming, a more equitable distribution of land and resources, restorative justice programs, and universal access to health care.

I'd address the public with a half written speech read with a baby on my hip and milk stains on my chest. My mushy, sleep deprived, breastfeeding brain would stumble on words such as "social equity", "environmental sustainability" and "peaceful future".

It would become obvious to everyone early on that it was really my daughter that ruled me. She can command my attention, get me on the floor making goofy sounds to hear her laugh, and call for my breast at all hours.

We would rule as soft dictators. Sometimes coming out with a hardline "NO". Some things are just not okay. At times we'd force folks to rally behind us as we moved forward trying to get everything done on our to-do list for the day.

Mostly we would smile and listen and try to bring out the best in everyone. We'd teach everyone how to be gentle with one another. We'd all learn and re-learn the difficult lesson of sharing. We'd kiss owies better. We'd stop and take deep breaths when we were angry or frustrated. We'd fill the world with song.

Everyone would have a two-hour nap every day which would not only make people more pleasant, but do wonders to decrease energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

Most towns or cities would be left to create their own sense of community and well-being. While diversity would be respected and celebrated, there would be more villages raising children together. All decisions would take into account the future for these children and generations beyond.

At the end of each day, stories would be read or told and sweet dreams would fill the air. And like it or not, there would still be laundry to fold, dishes to do and toys to put away...

While I'm glad there isn't just one person who rules the world, there is definitely one who rules mine. I'll not only do whatever it takes to nurture her, but will work to make the world a better place. There is hope for the future.

