

Musings on Motherhood

A soon-to-be empty nester looks back on the tiring but terrific toddler days.

289 days. That's the countdown to when I will be an "empty nester," that trite reference to a mother who finds herself without children living at home. My beautiful, 6-foot-tall high school senior (Baby Erin, as I still like to refer to her,) will be going off to college in August. She constantly reminds me she will soon be gone and that I should wait on her hand and foot, fetch things at her whim and forgive any slight because (this is her favorite phrase and battle cry), "This time next year I won't be here!"

I've been down this road before. My first "baby," KJ, has been gone since 2005, having since graduated from NCSU. She is now ensconced in the brutal first year of law school. But this is my "baby-baby" leaving. KJ was my first and had me to herself for over four years. I feel like these last four years alone with Baby Erin are a consolation prize of sorts and I need to make the most of every minute. Yet anyone who remembers being a teenager will agree that spending time with your mother is not high on your list of pursuits.

So, sweet readers, I encourage you to enjoy and engrave every moment of motherhood. Yes, I know most of it is task-oriented, fatiguing and frustrating, but the golden moments of their fleeting childhoods (and it does fleet!) are to be savored. Every cliché of motherhood becomes oh-so-true.

Long Days, Short Years

As a lactation consultant at a pediatric office, I have the privilege of shepherding new mothers through the early days of motherhood. It is an exhilarating but overwhelming time for them. The best observation regarding this roller-coaster of emotions was made by Dr. Rhonda Patt, one of our pediatricians and a mother of two children under age 4: "The days are long, but the years are short." Your new baby will sprout before your eyes and you can never reclaim those early days with a newborn. Relax and enjoy! Some day you will sleep again.

Teething and Toddling

Just as you get the hang of this mothering thing and maybe even log more than three hours of sleep at one time, your stationary baby is mobile and menacing! Everything in your house seems to scream "911 potential." Your days are an endless stream of wiping (kitchen counters, bottoms and drool from his chin), baby-proofing and assorted chaos. Or so it seems. Your baby is a person now, developing her own unique personality and floor-level opinion of the world. Avoid letting this new tiring time drag you down; you have the awesome ability to watch your baby bloom. Trust me, it flies by!

Preschool Years

I think this was my favorite time. Preschoolers are easily amused, laugh at your dumb jokes or faces and can be bought off with a trip to the park, a makeshift picnic in the yard or just reading books. Many toddlers take naps! Their sunny approach to life primes you to forgive the episodic tantrums they can unleash. Think preparation for the teen-age years. "No" remains a favorite word.

Off To School

Be careful what you wish for! This is truly a time of mixed emotions. Your baby is off to kindergarten with a backpack, lunchbox and an attitude. You can go easy on the lunchbox contents; I made PB & J sandwiches shaped from seasonal cookie cutters, and both my girls claim they do not remember this. The competition that has already been a part of socialization (among the mothers, not the kids!) ramps up. There are costumes to make, committees to join, grades to compare. "Just say 'no' to the sign-up sheet" will help you enjoy this time. Save all those amateurish art projects. You will cry when you look at them years later. Take time off work to go on those field trips.

Middle-School Madness

This time is your dress rehearsal for dealing with the rapid changes in body and mind of your child. Sometimes you think you need an exorcist to reclaim your sweet baby. Every injustice or insecurity you felt during your own puberty resurfaces and makes it doubly daunting to observe. Stay cool and remember: We all survived puberty. As my Daddy says, this too shall pass.

High School Muse-ical

You will never see four years fly by so fast! Your emotions and your child's are as erratic as the Dow Jones. Oh, and you experience the joys of teaching a hormonal time bomb to drive in Charlotte traffic! On one hand, the newfound independence of your high-schooler is a welcome departure from time-intensive helicopter mothering; on the other, this is the time they need you most to monitor their activities and choices. I can truthfully say I am glad to be on the tail end of this, although thankfully Baby Erin did not give me the "peak experience" of teen-age mothering that KJ did. The hypothesis is that these years help you get ready to let them go. Hmmmm ...

De-latching and Letting Go!

In the world of breastfeeding, the baby is reputed to take his fill and quietly and peacefully de-latch. And when the baby weans it is poignant and bittersweet, a milestone in the mothering experience. I feel sending Baby Erin off to college will be similar, with the exception of the quiet and peaceful part. This year I am trying to be home to eat dinner, to have meaningful conversations to impart all that I have learned in over 50 years, and to share my early memories of her life so she can pass these on to her own family one day.

In the real world, babies do not always de-latch on their own or wean without issue, and I expect the same will hold true for us. But Baby Erin will soon be College Girl Erin (read: "Mom, could you be any more embarrassing?") and I now know every cliché truly has merit. My hope for you new mothers is that you can enjoy the ride. You've heard them all: pick your battles, smell the roses, don't sweat the small stuff, teach by example, stand your ground, know when to retreat, hold your tongue, know that things have a way of working out, find time for yourself, be a parent not a friend, listen more than you talk, and savor every mothering moment. I can promise you'll be glad you did!

Jan Ellen Brown is a lactation consultant at Charlotte Pediatric Clinic. She is co-author of "25 Things Every Nursing Mother Needs to Know" and a frequent conference speaker. She is the mother of KJ and Erin, who may be surprised to come home from college and find her "empty nest" is a new condo.



Womb
maternity consignment

Upscale Designer Maternity Clothes

Now accepting brands:

- Michael Stars
- Olian
- Japanese Weekend
- Ripe
- Notice
- A Pea in the Pod & others


To consign, contact store for appointment

Located in Consign by Design
739 Providence Rd (Myers Park)
704.344.0797
Hours: Tuesday - Friday 10:00-6:00
Saturday 10:00 - 5:00
Closed Sundays & Mondays




At the corner of Altondale and Providence Roads
White building next to Bank of America
Shop entrance faces Providence Road - Parking in rear.

PERSONAL, QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR KIDS AND THE NURSING MOTHER



Arnold I. Snitz, MD, FAAP
Board Certified Pediatrician
Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine

Ginger R. Snitz, RN, IBCLC
Certified Lactation Consultant
Breastfeeding Equipment & Rentals



SNITZ PEDIATRICS, PA

Eastover Medical Park, 2620 E. Seventh St.
Charlotte, NC 28204-4375
704.332.7141