

Mothering: Meaningless or Meaningful? by Raelee Peirce



I knew that I had stretched my time too long from my 3 and 6 year old when I heard my little one screaming about being hurt and my older one's voice was scolding and punitive. As I took the long journey up the stairs to face the scuffle, I could feel my blood boiling with frustration and anger, not at them, really, but at myself.

I've gotten so spoiled in having a few hours each morning to myself to write, read, and work with clients; the summer days have snatched these quiet hours from me. I took a deep breath in and devised my game plan of approach.

This would not be a time for me to explain rules or expectations. They needed me to take action, to help redirect them. I felt myself on every level digging deep for patience and self-control as I stood

before them - one screaming with tears streaking his face in pain, "It hurts!" and the other with a look of rage on her face from being pushed too far.

I calmly removed the offending object of their desires which only inspired my oldest to try and get it back. (Whew! Hot button for mama being pushed over and over again). I remained calm and quickly detached myself from engaging her. I gently put my hands on her shoulders, knelt down at her eye level, and spoke softly, "It's time for us to do something together; I am feeling frustrated too and really need your help and cooperation so we can move on with our day."

Without yelling or anger from me, her resistance surprisingly fell away. I scooped up the hurt one, kissed him - he was as good as new. My anxiety began to diminish and I was feeling victorious in talking myself through a very hard moment that I approached with the clarity and confidence I so often talk about with my clients and workshop participants. It always shocks me how much easier parenting becomes when I do it well. The anticipation and the work itself is incredibly difficult for me to muster, but the outcome and side-effects always blow me away.

It's parenting in these hard moments that I remember how wonderful it was to just get up each morning, shower, put make-up on and dress clothes, eat a quiet breakfast and drive, listening to my CDs of Ani DiFranco or Dar Williams, arrive at work to colleagues who respected me. Wow! Those were days when I heard often how much I was appreciated, how my work mattered and was done with excellence. How loud those acknowledgements sound to me in the silence that exists now in my role as mom.

Interestingly, when I became pregnant I couldn't wait to give that all up. I counted the days until I could be home full-time with my baby, focus on homemaking, and create the family life I always wanted. But shifting from the world of womanhood to motherhood wasn't the easy transition I thought it would be. I recall bringing my first baby home and sobbing, feeling

overwhelmed with the task of being her mom and the expectations I had of myself to know what she would need.

After healing from a surprise C-Section, both physically and emotionally, I began to calm my fears, take each day as it came, embrace my new role. It surprised me and felt more amazing than anything I'd ever achieved when I learned what she needed and when. It felt so right to be with her, to be the one who gave her nourishment and comfort. I believe it was my strong value of mothering that held me to the task.

My own mother helped to shape my view of full-time mothering. As a child I felt so secure, so loved, and complete in the presence of my mother. My mom didn't receive accolades and daily praise for her duties and I know that she often felt overwhelmed with five children. Had she had the opportunity to go to college and pursue her personal goals, she may have been more restless at home.

I can only say that as one of her children she nurtured and cared for, how grateful I am, how centered and balanced I feel, because of her devotion and everyday joy that she shared with me as my mom.

Mothering isn't work that will ever provide for us the same pleasure as an outside career once did. Being home isn't something that we have to see as a life-long sentence. It doesn't even have to mean that we give up our drive and ambition for a career. Thinking outside the box can be the creative solution so many mothers crave.

Women today have achieved educational and professional heights that our mothers and grandmothers might not have even dreamed of. As the first educators of our children, what a bounty it is for us to bring our knowledge and insights to the spiritual task of parenting! How sad it is that our society has led us to believe that our education should take us further from our children and our families.

Today, careers do not have to be pursued outside the home. More and more women are discovering the unique joy of starting their own business, or working creatively with their employers to work from home, job sharing, and working with other mothers to channel their mental energy and abilities productively while still being the primary caregiver of their young children.

Children need their mothers most for the first 5 years. The role of the mother is to nurture the character of their child. Children are naturally oriented to their mother. My youngest child often asks me, "How did God make your skin so soft and your voice so kind, mommy?" The qualities of the feminine are not exclusive to women, but they are more readily strengthened, despite the low value our culture has placed on them.

Had the feminist movement really advocated for women and our unique character qualities, we would be honoring our virtues of caring, compassion, creativity, gentleness, kindness, love, peacefulness, service, and wisdom. We wouldn't have decided that the best woman to be meant becoming a man. We would revere breastfeeding, nurturing, and guiding

our young children and it would be obvious and certain that the personal care of a mother is irreplaceable. We would pursue our educational goals with the thought of being our child's first teacher in the early years. We would have systems that financially allow women to be able to be home with their little ones, not pull them away from them.

Unfortunately, women themselves no longer value the role of caregiving. Caregiving is not a material task, thus many women have decided it to be worthless, even demeaning. It doesn't receive monetary compensation, unless you work in a day care or preschool and we are all aware of society's poor view of that profession and the low expectations we have placed on the qualification for doing such "easy, mindless work."

Mothering is a task of the spirit. It isn't something you master over night. It begins at conception and ends when you take your last breath. It is a life long journey of personal transformation. There is great meaning and purpose in it for the mother who embraces it, finds ways to express herself within it, and essentially, believes that true happiness is achieved through spiritual behavior it demands.

Look upon these years with your young children as a gift to you. A gift to have the time to slow down, to focus on the relationship with these most precious beings in your life, to find the beauty in homemaking - the idea of creating a home that you enjoy with your family. Fill your home with rhythm, baking smells, and laughter. Protect yourself from allowing society's judgment and expectations to taint and jade you from the allure of focusing on your career while you have babies, toddlers, and preschoolers at home.

If the culture succeeds, they rob you of the experience of your little ones through the day, to be the one who cheers their heart, the one who comforts, and the one who instills in them their virtues. It isn't forever. Babies, toddlers, preschoolers - they grow up, way too quickly. There are ways to keep your career, to nurture your skills, to keep your mental capacities energized during these early years; be creative!

There's no other work in the world more noble than mothering, there just isn't.