

How Motherhood Might Be Like a Volcano

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Life before baby. I remember what that was like: leaving the house at will; running errands whenever the timing seemed right; taking long showers; casually perusing the internet and answering emails; making dinner and having the time to eat with my husband while we discussed the day's events; reading an entire journal article while taking notes and having time for contemplation; going to work and whimsically deciding to stop for a shopping trip on the way home. Ah the freedom!

Life after baby? I'm completely in love with her. I watch her when she sleeps—her eyes closed, lips full and relaxed, cheeks soft and round, and her little nose taking silent effortless breaths. We swaddle her in a blanket for naps. She looks like a cocoon with a delicate head balanced at the top. Every day brings new beginnings—smiles, waves, kicks, and giggles—and every day brings new challenges—crying for mysterious reasons and bodily functions that can blow your mind! I never would have guessed that it takes such little time to fill a diaper; nor that a sneeze on the changing table could result in such a mess (imagine a volcanic eruption). The first time we experienced the “eruption” on the changing table I had to stand in awe. If there were a competition for the farthest pooper, our little one would definitely be a contender. How can something so gross come out of something so cute? She usually smiles or giggles afterwards, which skews the experience more towards lovable than loathsome.

The balance between yearning for freedom and the unconditional love for your child is delicate. There is a push-pull sentiment. On one hand I can't imagine my life without her and I long for the closeness that she and I have. On the other hand, I have a need for my own autonomy. Every time I do leave her with the nanny, my husband, or my mother, I want to be with her more than I want to be away. Perhaps those feelings are just the beginning of the perils and joys of motherhood. Having been a mother for only two months, it is difficult to tell.

The most challenging aspect of motherhood thus far has been finding time to do things for myself—not just the work that I need to complete, but also getting sleep. There are moments in the day when exhaustion takes over; and it is easier to turn on the television and simultaneously turn off my brain. Sometimes, watching the Home and Garden channel is just much more appealing than reading a chapter on the zone of proximal development. I enjoy seeing John and Jane Homeowner receive a brand new kitchen, designed and constructed by experts who make it look so simple. It takes no effort on my part and yet I still get the benefit of watching a project go from start (the ugly old kitchen) to completion (the shiny new kitchen). At the same time I know that I have to carve out time for my own projects, specifically, teaching and schoolwork. Finding the time to keep up with current literature as well as write the paper that I so desperately want to finish is difficult. Finding the time to rejuvenate myself sometimes seems impossible.

I hope that as time goes on, the ambiguities of motherhood will become less mysterious and more manageable. Other mothers tell me that it gets easier. In the meantime, I take one day at a time. I enjoy every moment that I have with my daughter—giggles and eruptions alike.

Maybe motherhood is like a volcano. Most of the time it's peaceful and dormant, but occasionally, it is interrupted by extreme excitement and torment.

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