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and Grayson Lawrence (10 months)

Letter from the Editor: Make Yourself at Home

By Kirsten Pflieger



Kirsten lives in the Castro and is spending the beginning of 2016 contemplating kindergarten, bunk beds, and how to create a sense of adventure around household chores.

When I think of my childhood home, laughter and time with family are what come to mind. Because we moved often (eight homes in six towns in five states by the time I graduated from high school), the actual structure was less important than what went on in the home. Regular family dinners and frequent card and board game nights were standard through high school, and continue whenever we get together. And whether it is the history of shared experiences or just our level of comfort with each other, I rarely laugh as much as when I am with my family. Maybe they are just exceptionally funny people.

During five years of motherhood, I have spent a fair amount of time considering how to create the home that I want to raise my children in. I often get hung up on domestic details—how to decrease clutter, what pictures should hang on the wall, how to maximize minimal outdoor space, whether rearranging the furniture will make our living room feel more spacious—when how we live together is what’s really important. As in my childhood, my husband and I have created a tradition of family meals, we are introducing the girls to board and card games, and we laugh often.

One aspect of our homelife I want to strengthen is how often we have people over. I fall into the rut of feeling like we are too busy, or that inviting someone over needs to be a production. Catherine Symon talks about letting go of your hangups and bringing your life into your home on page 24. On page 20, Sallie Hess considers where we lay our heads at night. How we spend time at home has changed dramatically in the past generation. Shannon Brennen looks at that evolution on page 16. Whether you rent or own, creating a safe and healthy home is important to all of us. On page 28, Stephanie AuWerter looks at environmental dangers that can exist at home and how to address them.

I often get hung up on domestic details... when how we live together is what’s really important.

Like my husband and me, many of you are not from here. Shaheen Bilgrami and Daniel Brennen share their journeys of making San Francisco home in I heart Mom on page 39 and Dadlands on page 10.

Like Daniel, my path to this home in San Francisco was quite circuitous. I don’t know if it will be the final stop, but I will continue to endeavor to make my house the home that I want for my children.

KPflieger

Housekeeping

Opinions expressed in this issue are those of the contributors. Acceptance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by GGMG of any products or services. The editors reserve the right to accept, edit, or reject any content submitted to the magazine.

ADVERTISING: Advertisements are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. For submission information, email advertising@ggmg.org.

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: Kindergarten interviews, holiday houseguests, a return to the gym, norovirus for all, Ziggy Stardust on full blast, an endless train of Argentine Ants, Legoland, glorious rain, the only slightly stale Christmas cookies that were hid from the rest of the family, crockpot chili, urine-soaked sheets, an adenoidectomy.

COMING NEXT: March—Humor; April—20 Years of GGMG

CONTEST: Congratulations to Emilie Lynch who won our December Peek-a-Boo Factory contest.

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggmg.org.

Letter from the Board: Making Mom Friends

By Laurel Kellam

Most women join GGMG to form connections with other moms. Whether they’re pregnant for the first time and have lots of questions, just had a baby and need to get out of the house, or are headed back to work and need support, mothers utilize GGMG. Ideally, they are able to find and connect offline with someone going through the same experience.

I am always amazed at the way that these connections often lead to true friendships for the whole family. A dear friend of mine with a 4-year-old is in a playgroup that was formed through GGMG. There are eight members and they’ve been meeting for three and a half years! They do a moms’ getaway every year and have even celebrated Thanksgiving together.

If you’re looking to find a cohort like this, the next GGMG playgroup formation event takes place on Monday, March 21, at Recess. This is a great opportunity to find other moms in similar stages or with children of similar ages and form new connections. RSVP here: www.tinyurl.com/z5unan8.com.

It’s never too late to make new friends! If you’re out of the newborn phase but still want to make connections, join one of our 11 Neighborhood Meetup subgroups who organize weekly playdates, monthly wine nights, and quarterly book clubs. To find your group and RSVP, join the Neighborhood Meetup subgroup on BigTent for the neighborhood(s) you are interested in at www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup. You are not restricted to joining only one subgroup, and you are not required to live in the neighborhood in order to join. We are still in need of volunteers to organize playdates in the Haight, Mission, Richmond, Potrero, and Nob Hill neighborhoods. If you are interested in helping, please email volunteer@ggmg.org.

GGMG also has private groups that help our members form connections with moms with similar situations. Our thriving single moms group has close to 80 members and aside from their monthly meetings, they often get together socially. A friend of mine who is a member of the group says, “A lot of times someone will just say, ‘Let’s have a spaghetti dinner at my house,’ and we’ll all meet up, bring food, and drink some wine while the kids play.” They also help each other with meals, childcare, clothes, etc. She says, “One time someone said that her sitter canceled last minute and another mom immediately replied, ‘I’ll babysit!’ and stepped in for the other mom.” Amazing!

I am always amazed at the way that these [mom] connections often lead to true friendships for the whole family.

In addition to our single moms group, we also have a group for moms with postpartum depression and infertility challenges. If you are interested in joining either of these, contact membersupport@ggmg.org.

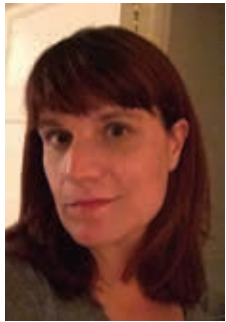
Please let us know how we can help you make new connections! Email us at feedback@ggmg.org.

Laurel Kellam



Laurel is a mom to three kids, wife to an amazing husband, and sales rep for a financial software company. When not managing all that (plus volunteering with GGMG), she enjoys wine, running, reading, and sunshine.

Volunteer of the Month



Congratulations to **Rachel Watson**, February volunteer of the month! Rachel began volunteering with GGMG in August 2011 as the founder and co-coordinator of the PPD/Anxiety/Depression Support Group, and since 2013 has served as a Member Support volunteer. She and her husband are parents to Ida (18) and Iris (6).

Most-admired heroine: My mum! You don’t appreciate just how much your parents have done for you until you have kids of your own; my mum is the best! **First choice for new career or venture:** I just applied to a Master of Social Work program commencing this fall, fingers crossed! My dream is to be a CLSW (Clinical Licensed Social Worker) one day. **What you most miss about your hometown:** My extended family; everyone else lives back in England. **Piece of baby/kid gear you could not live without:** Wipes. Even though my daughter is 6 now, I curse when I go out without them. They are so versatile!

Rachel will enjoy a 60-minute massage at International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at www.internationalorange.com.

Ask the Expert

Establishing Family Rituals

By Nancy Gnass



What are rituals and how do they benefit children?

When adults are asked to share positive memories of their childhood, they often recall a family ritual they practiced. A family ritual is an activity or practice that has meaning or purpose. It is done on a regular basis, whether that be daily,

weekly, monthly, seasonally, or annually, and it becomes a part of one's permanent memory and identity. It can be as simple as a bedtime routine, setting the table together, family pizza nights, or the family camping trip to the Sierras in July. Or, it can be more complex and involve community service (maybe a volunteer day at the Food Bank every quarter), a holiday dinner with the extended family—the one where there was always the dish that Grandma used to make—or a spiritual gathering with community members. Because these activities are an outgrowth of a family's values and beliefs, they help form the identity of children when they partake in the ritual. This is a shared collective (family) experience, which helps form a shared collective identity that children take on as part of their own identity. These expected activities bring predictability and build stability in the family, especially for children.

People have been researching family rituals for over 50 years. One of the main researchers in this field, Barbara Fiese, has found that family rituals are positively linked with social, emotional, language, academic, and social skill development in children. Fiese's research also points to a connection between family rituals and marital satisfaction, positive personal identity, and closer family bonds for the entire family. In addition, research has shown that rituals help in transition periods, whether there is family trauma, divorce, recovering alcoholism, or an international move. Continual practice of rituals has helped children settle into a new situation fluidly and with less stress than kids without many or any family rituals.

How are rituals different from routines?

Researchers Steven Wolin and Linda Bennett (1984) have categorized three types of family rituals. Family celebrations are holiday celebrations and rites of passages, such as weddings. Family traditions are associated with birthday customs, annual vacations, and first day of school customs (e.g., a picture of the new student walking out the door with backpack, followed later in the day with post-school visit to the ice cream shop). The third

type of ritual, family routines, occurs most regularly of all the rituals. These can include a morning hug and kiss, bedtime story, and sharing the day's peak and valley at dinner. All of these activities have meaning for you and your children, whether it's a reminder that you love them, or an emphasis to value and care for the natural world, academics, spirituality, or whatever is most important to you.

At what age do family rituals start to take on meaning for children?

Children who are preschool age begin to understand more abstract ideas, and therefore begin to understand the meanings of rituals, but they enjoy being a part of family rituals at a much younger age, even if they can't comprehend the purpose of the ritual. If you want to practice a certain ritual in your family, you can start before you have children, or when your children are infants. The more you, the parent, practice a family ritual, the more it becomes a part of who you are, and the easier it is to communicate why you practice the ritual to your children when they begin to understand.

Can you give one or two examples of rituals you've adopted in your family?

Our family loves to pick strawberries in the spring around Memorial Day and apples on Columbus Day. Not only does it mean that we have a good stock of delicious fruit in the house for a bit, but it also helps us appreciate the passage of seasons and time, and the hard work it takes to produce food. Another favorite family ritual is to pop popcorn when it rains. My two kids always looked forward to rainy days because they loved gathering around the stove with our big cast iron pan, clapping along with

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the first popped kernels, and watching the rain come down through the windows. I have walked through the door on a rainy afternoon with the smell of popcorn already popped by my now teenage and tween children. I'm pretty sure that this family ritual will stick with them when they go off to college and beyond, and the thought of that makes me smile. ❖

Nancy Gnass is an educator of 20+ years. She is a speaker, consultant, and a parent education instructor in the Child Development Department at City College SF, guiding parents through the different stages of childhood. Nancy and her husband live in San Francisco with their two adolescent kids. Learn more at parentingwithteachernancy.blogspot.com.

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Community Support

Drives

We are excited to partner with the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco to support **Dress for Success** (sanfrancisco.dressforsuccess.org).

We will be collecting donations of professional attire including suits, separates, handbags, shoes, and jewelry from February 9 to 23.

Options for dropping off a donation include:

- The Dress for Success office (500 Sutter St, Ste 218)
- The JCCSF (3200 California St)
- Email communitysupport@ggm.org to arrange a convenient drop-off/pick-up

Dress for Success provides each client with professional attire to help secure employment, but it is about much more than simply providing a new outfit. Its programs furnish a client with a confidence that she can carry forever and the knowledge that she can actively define her life, the direction she takes, and what success means to her.



Contest

InteriorCrowd's Stylin' Space Giveaway

This month, one lucky winner will have the opportunity to redesign a room in her home with InteriorCrowd's Stylin' Space Giveaway.

InteriorCrowd is a San Francisco-based company started by GGMG's own Heather Natsch that connects people with home design/decor needs to a network of interior designers. InteriorCrowd makes the process of sourcing and working with a talented designer much easier, more fun, and more efficient than ever before.

How are clients using InteriorCrowd?

- Expectant moms use it to turn the home office into a nursery.
- Experienced moms are leaning on it to reclaim the living room they lost to toys during the toddler phase.
- Everyday clients who are simply uninspired by their space are using it to give life to the Pinterest board they've been curating over time.

Join the Stylin' Space Giveaway to receive InteriorCrowd's online design services for free (valued at \$299), so you can create the room of your dreams!

1. Receive multiple concept boards from interior designers interested in your project so that you can decide who you want to work with based on their ideas for your room.
2. Your designer will source the right furniture items and accessories for your space based on your feedback, style, and budget.
3. Your designer will finalize your shopping plan and give you a spatial plan and instructions on how to pull your new look together.

TO ENTER THE CONTEST, SEND AN EMAIL WITH "INTERIOR CROWD" IN THE SUBJECT LINE TO CONTEST@GGMG.ORG BY FEBRUARY 29.

For more information about InteriorCrowd, go to www.interiorcrowd.com.

* Certificate is one-time only, non-refundable, and may not be combined with other offers.



DADLANDS

Creating Roots

by Damon Brennen

I've lived in a lot of places. If we meet and you very casually ask me where I grew up, I could decide to give you either the short answer (Colorado, the place I identify with most even though it's not where I spent the most time) or the long, winding answer.

You seem like nice people, so I'll give you the long one: I was born in Michigan and stayed there until 5th grade. Then it was on to Denver through middle school, and then we moved to suburban Atlanta when I started high school. After that, I moved to Boulder, Colorado, for college. Then things took a more dramatic turn and I ended up moving to Asia for 9 years—Taipei, Beijing, Manila, and Singapore.

No, I was not on the run for a crime I didn't commit. It just sort of happened. One of my college roommates was a Chinese major and went off to a graduate program in Taipei. We kept in touch over email, and he was like, "Dude, you should come out here. You can totally get a job teaching English, and I know someone looking for a roommate." I was like, "I don't know. I'm living with my parents and have this pretty sweet inside sales job working for a company that makes housings for security cameras, but OK, sure. Let me just figure out how to get a passport and a visa and I'll be right over." That's how we talked—like people in our early 20s. I got the passport. I got the visa. I said goodbye to a terrible job and the shame of being a college graduate living with his parents, and I moved abroad.

I taught English, then I studied Mandarin for a bit. I got a "real" job, and then I got another, and another. Pretty soon, I wasn't just taking an extended post-collegiate vacation. I was a person who lived in Asia. It had accidentally become home. And, eventually, I had to stop and ask myself: do I want this to be my home? Living in all these different cultures was certainly fun and interesting and educational, but did I see myself living there the rest of my life?

I eventually decided that the answer was no. I'd loved my time in Asia, and had even settled into Singapore—a comfy, modern place where it is easy to settle in long term—but, ultimately, I decided that I hadn't really found my place yet.

This is when I turned to San Francisco; to try it and see if maybe it would be my home. When I arrived, my "home" consisted of as

much luggage as I could possibly get on an international flight and a couple of shipped boxes. It took some time to settle in. I found a job, an apartment, and a few friends. I was all set to hunker down and try this city on for size.

That was 10 years ago, and it has been a decade of settling in deep. I've made some fantastic friends, started a business, married a lovely woman (Hi, Shannon!), and now we have a 14-month-old son. I've never felt more at home.

Moving around all those years, I kind of reveled in being an outsider. That was my identity. The guy who was from someplace else. But ever since I moved to San Francisco, I've relished being an insider. Perhaps it's the fact that I'm older and all those years as an outsider taught me what I really value in people and experiences. Whatever it is, I've just been able to find more of my people in San Francisco.

I often wonder if my son will have the same sort of quasi-nomadic existence as his old man. I'd love for him to have some stability through his school years. That was the hardest part for me, at least. I already have an inkling that sitting still might not be in the cards for him, though. Our one-bedroom apartment is feeling hella cramped (see, I'm totes a local) and the economics of having enough bedrooms for the number of people in our family doesn't add up to us living in the city right now.

We might have to leave. I think we're going to have to leave. Hopefully we won't have to go far, but even if we do—and even if

It had accidentally become home. And, eventually, I had to stop and ask myself: do I want this to be my home?

we move again and again—I'm sure everything will be fine. I can teach my son what I know about adjusting, about finding the awesome in places, and about figuring out what is important, and what isn't, when you're starting out somewhere new.

Maybe his response to "where did you grow up?" will be even more confusing than mine was by the time we're through. I just hope to give him enough time in this home that his short answer is "San Francisco." ♦

Damon Brennen is a former International Man of Mystery who now produces awesome commercials with his company, Paper Dog Video. He, his wife, and son live in San Francisco—for now.



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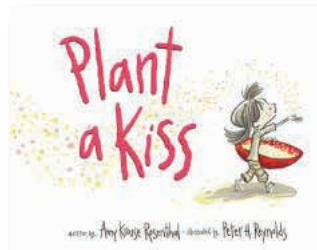
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Whether celebrated with roses, chocolates, paper hearts, or candy, Valentine's Day is the perfect excuse to show somebody how much they mean to you. For children, Valentine's Day is about family and friends and telling them how much they are loved. Enjoy these books and spread the love!



Plant a Kiss

Written by Amy Krouse Rosenthal,
illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

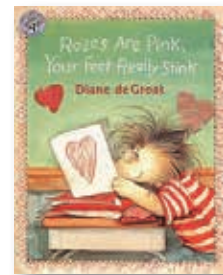
Little Miss plants a kiss in the ground. She watches the ground with patience until one day, a sparkling thing emerges. A sprout! It seems like a small thing but it turns out to be a wonderful thing that she shares with those she loves. Rosenthal reminds us that making people happy

doesn't need to be complicated or expensive. Sometimes, the smallest acts of love can lead to wonderful results. *Ages: 0 to 2 years*

Roses Are Pink, Your Feet Really Stink

Written and illustrated by Diane de Groat

Valentine's Day is a big deal. Gilbert needs to write cards for his classmates, but he doesn't want to write anything nice to Lewis and Margaret. They've been mean to him, so he writes not-so-nice poems to each, signing their names instead of his. After his prank turns sour, Gilbert learns his lesson and soon gets a second chance. Kids will like the message on friendship and forgiveness. *Ages: 3 to 6 years*



Stick and Stone

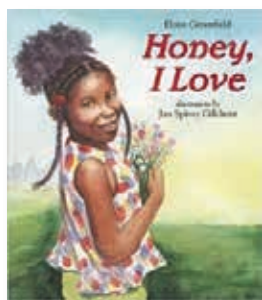
Written by Beth Terry, illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld

Stick and Stone both feel very alone and alone is no fun. When Pinecone comes along and makes fun of Stone, Stick protects Stone and they become friends. With very few words and lovely illustrations, the book shows what friends do for each other and how friendship can change someone's life for the better. *Ages: 3 to 7 years*

Honey, I Love

Written by Eloise Greenfield,
illustrated by Spivey Gilchrist

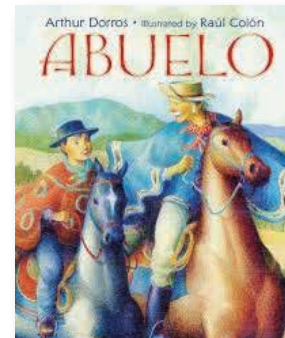
A young girl explains how she loves the way her cousin talks because every word he says just kind of slides out of his mouth. She also loves the laughing sound of her friends when she makes a dress with paper that looks a mess. This 1978 poem still resonates as wonderfully as ever with its joyful and happy words. *Ages: 5 to 8 years*



Nate the Great and the Mushy Valentine

Written by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat

A double puzzle to solve for kid detective Nate the Great! First case: Who put a valentine on Sludge's doghouse? Second case: Who swiped the valentine Annie was making for her little brother? Intrigued and tickled, the reader is as eager to find the answers as Nate the really Great detective. *Ages: 6 to 9 years*



Abuelo

Written by Arthur Dorros,
illustrated by Raul Colon

When he was little, a boy and his grandfather would ride anywhere. And if it rained, Abuelo showed his grandson how to use his poncho to make his own house. "Tu propia casa," he would say. Peppercorn with Spanish expressions, Abuelo's words gain significance as the boy grows, when he moves to the city and away from his abuelo. From the plains of South America to a big city, this story is a touching reminder of that special bond between grandparents and grandchildren. *Ages: 4 to 8 years*

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Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (www.frogmom.com), as well as the book Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops.

From Womb to World

Close, but So Far Away

By Alona Joynt

We all know raising a child takes a village. Presumably, the village is your family, biological or chosen. Unfortunately for many Bay Area transplants, these helpful villagers live in a completely different village...across the country. While idealistically daydreaming about relocating my villagers nearby, I imagine on-call childcare, large Sunday night dinners, and of course, my baby constantly surrounded by unequivocal and irreplaceable love. Maintaining a sense of closeness with distant family is a top priority among my mom friends, and each family has its own special traditions, ranging from high- to no-tech, to keep the bonds strong across the distance.

Video chatting: A modern marvel

When you can't be there in person (and until teleportation is invented), video chatting via FaceTime or Skype offers the next best thing. Group video chats are possible in Google Hangouts, but the cross-talk can be confusing for younger babies (and older grandparents!). Some families have daily or weekly appointments, if only for a few minutes after dinner. Recent San Francisco transplant, fellow mom Korie Mabray says, "FaceTime has been invaluable. When my daughter hears that special ring, she stops what she's doing and comes to the phone to talk to Grandma." My friend Rebecca jokes that the nickname for her mother in Canada is "Flat Granny" because she is "always hiding in the iPad."

Photo sharing

Think your baby is especially cute but don't want to overshare with your whole network? Free services, like Apple's iCloud Photo Sharing, allow you to create a list of people who can view and comment on any photos saved to a shared folder, provided they have an Apple device. Some moms create Instagram, Tumblr, or Google Plus accounts, and only allow access to a discerning few. Heather Westcott has a similar strategy: "My husband has established what he calls 'the distribution list,' which is just an email list of close relatives that he sends photos and milestones to. He started from our daughter's first day in the hospital, and he considers it his duty to keep our families up to date."

Face books

Albums displaying faces of important family members can range from fancy to makeshift, but the sentiment of creating familiarity through repetition is the same. Pinhole Press makes beautiful customized board books, but any customizable photo book will be similarly appreciated. Alternatively, Sassy makes a soft album

that holds 8 printed 4-inch-by-6-inch photos that your baby will love to chew on. Photographer Whitney Cooley Miller says, "Since my son was 6 months old, we have thumbed through a photo album of our families' faces every day. Now that he's a year old, he's able to point out various people when prompted." Having photos scattered around the home is also a helpful way to keep family at the forefront of conversation with your little ones. Replace fancy frames with bent acrylic or beat-up wooden ones, and watch as your baby gets up close and personal with the subjects. Prime locations include the refrigerator, changing table, and on low, accessible shelving.

Texting (non-stop)

Group texting apps, such as WhatsApp, allow you to be in a running chat with your whole family at once, even if they are on different carriers. Psychologist Dr. Maureen Lindmeier says, "Since we don't live close by, there's a near-constant messaging chain amongst my family. It's a simple yet personal way to stay in touch with one another's daily lives from afar through pictures, videos, and funny anecdotes." When the conversation gets particularly heated or bustling, you can silence notifications and peruse the thread again at your leisure.

Hearing voices

For my niece's first birthday, my husband and I collected audio from my husband's whole extended family and burned it to a CD. Some relatives sang songs, read poems, told jokes, or wished her well. Inspired by our gift, for our son's first birthday, my sister-in-

What distant family lacks in proximity, they make up for with enthusiasm at receiving incoming calls, texts, and photos.

law gave us a board book and an mp3 file of family members reading each page. We are just as amused as the baby at hearing the different intonations and accents.

What distant family lacks in proximity, they make up for with enthusiasm at receiving incoming calls, texts, and photos. I was blessed to grow up with grandparents who lived down the block and watched my every move, and their presence shaped my childhood. Though my son will have a different relationship with his grandparents, we are teaching him that love knows no geographical boundaries. ♦

Alona Joynt is a proud Texan living in Cow Hollow with her husband and their eerily tech-savvy son, Dean (1). She relies on her amazing village of mom friends to navigate parenthood.

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Untethering Household Management

Modern parents find themselves spending more time working outside of the home and playing with their children than on chores compared to previous generations.

By Shannon Brennen

Photographs by Carmen Dunham Photography



Last winter, my son was a newborn (or, more accurately, an “adjusted age” newborn, since he was a preemie playing catch up) when my in-laws came to visit. My husband and I were in that bleary, sleep-deprived, half-crazed early phase of new parenthood, and my mother-in-law in particular was mystified that I was sitting on the couch holding the dozing baby between feedings instead of swaddling him up, putting him down, and trying to get some sleep. “With ours, we’d wrap them up and put them down as soon as their bellies were full,” she said, chuckling at me and my unwise waste of time. I laughed along with her, agreeing out loud that I was, indeed, a ridiculous, over-eager new mom, all the while thinking to myself, “But I’m just getting to know him. Why in the world would I put him down unless I absolutely have to? HOLDING HIM IS MY FAVORITE THING IN THE WORLD!”

Like I said, we were exhausted and delirious. I eventually released my vise grip on

my progeny, put my baby down, and slept.

This early incident was only the first of the many differences we discovered between our parenting style and that of our parents and even our grandparents. As the instances of deviation began piling up, a common thread that we found stitched through them was time.

The fact is, we are spending our time doing things differently than our parents’ generation and previous ones did. These shifts in how we’re spending our time are

labeled in many different ways, but at their core, they are real, traceable deviations, and when you dig beneath the surface, they become very fascinating quickly.

Talkin’ ‘bout mom’s generation

In a recent thread on this topic in the GGMG forum, members commented on the anecdotal differences they’ve noticed between how they spend their time and how they recall their mothers spending their time. A majority of the commenters said they spend less time on housework and cooking than their mothers. In fact, many were awed by how much their mothers seemed to do.

“[My mother] did everything around the house, cook, clean, drive us everywhere,” said member Jennifer Franklin, who also noted that she didn’t recall a lot of time left over for one-on-one time with her mother. Victoria Carradero also chimed in that her full-time working mom was “A crazy superwoman because she also did the majority of housework and cooking.” Another member commented privately that “[My mother] had the burden of handling all household tasks herself, without the luxury of a cleaning service, food delivery, or my dad’s help (as most dads didn’t really participate in household chores at that time).”

These observations are well-supported by research. According to the 2013 Modern Parenthood study from the Pew Research Center, American parents, on the whole, are spending significantly less time today (about 8 hours per week per household) on chores than they did in 1965. When you look at just moms, the number of hours recouped from unpaid household chores climbs even higher, to 14 hours per week. That is a lot of time tucked back into our collective parenting pockets.

Chores—huh? What are they good for?

There are a lot of factors contributing to the drop in time spent on household chores. One significant factor is that modern parents can outsource their kitchens more affordably and often without a significant drop in food quality. Along with that, both Generation X

[I]nstead of funneling this newfound bounty of time-savings into leisure activities, American parents seem to be splitting the difference between more time at work and more time spent focused on their children.

and Millennials are more likely than their generational predecessors to let someone else do the cooking entirely. A Technomic Consumer Trend report from 2012 shows that younger generations are eating out at restaurants significantly more than previous generations. Along with that, we are ordering in, eating on the go, and taking advantage of the plethora of ready-made and heat-and-serve food delivery options that have become available in recent years.

Another contributor to the reduction in chore time can be attributed to technology and innovation. This includes simple appliances and house goods innovation—think dishwashers, microwaves, and wrinkle-free textiles—as well as time-saving innovations courtesy of the internet and mobile apps. We can let our smart phones run many of our errands: from having our groceries and basic household items delivered with one click, to doing our banking and booking babysitters via our mobile devices.

These factors and others, such as lower

birth rates per household and sharp and steady climbs in the services industry, have combined to loosen the previously unavoidable shackles of unpaid household chores, freeing us up to do more of what we want to do with the time left over. Of course, we’re not exactly cashing this windfall of time in and running wild with outrageously crazy fun. The Pew Modern Parenthood research shows that, instead of funneling this newfound bounty of time-savings into leisure activities, American parents seem to be splitting the difference between more time at work and more time spent focused on their children.

Spending all my time with you

The shift we see towards more household hours spent working is not at all surprising, given that the average number of hours mothers spend doing paid work rose from 8 hours per week in 1965 to 21 hours in 2011. Why we’re also adding more hours to time spent caring for our children is a little more



challenging to explain and attribute; it is also an even more sizable shift in time utilization. According to the March 2015 *Wall Street Journal* article “Making Time for Kids? Study Says Quality Trumps Quantity,” working mothers today are spending more time with their kids than stay-at-home moms did in the 1970s.

The urbanization of the modern family might account for at least some of the shift in hours. We’re less likely to live near our families than previous generations were, and as a result, are missing that powerful network to help us with some of the responsibilities of child rearing. Another often-cited contributor to more hours on the mom clock is the intensification of modern parenting, including a cultural expectation on today’s parents that if they’re not hovering directly above their children at all times, they’re probably doing it wrong. This expectation seems to exist in spite of the fact that American parents spend more time with our children than our global counterparts do, or than parents in previous decades did.

Time after time (after time after time)

Perhaps more important than why contemporary parents are spending more time with their kids is the question of whether or not this is time well spent. If it is, then of course chiseling out a few more hours a week for it is worthwhile. But the research doesn’t necessarily bear that out. In the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Milkie, Nomaguchi, and Denny (2015) share results from a longitudinal study which reported that the amount of time mothers spend with children between the ages of 3 to 11 has virtually no impact on key success indicators, including academic achievement, behavior, or emotional well-being. Quantity of time had a higher impact for kids aged 12 to 18, who showed less delinquent behavior when they spent more time with their parents, but the positive impacts were realized with just six total weekly hours in the presence of their parents. On average, parents today are spending more than three times that amount of time with their kids.

Another finding from the study? If you’re one of those guilt-riddled parents stressing

out about how much time you should be spending with your kids, that added stress might actually have the detrimental effect you’re trying to stymie. Kids exposed to parental stress have shown poorer outcomes, including emotional and behavioral problems and even lowered math scores. (So relax. Sociologist’s orders.)

Do it for love

Just for fun, let’s say the research is 100 percent irrefutable and indisputable in its accuracy, and we can say with certainty that more time with our children doesn’t really matter to them at all in terms of outcomes. Would that have any impact on how we spend our time?

Probably not. My guess is that we’re not spending all of this extra time with our children because we have to. I suspect that it’s exactly how we want to spend our time. Which changes the conversation slightly.

If we’re not doing it for measurable outcomes—because the research says we’re not getting those—maybe the shift in how we’re spending our time really is simpler than that. Maybe it’s because housework got easier, we suddenly found ourselves with a surplus of time on our hands, and we decided that we wanted to spend it with our children.

This is exciting news! If this research is true, then we’re not all at the mercy of this new-fangled cultural mandate that we **MUST** spend every waking moment with our children. We’re not legitimately afraid that our children will turn into soulless monsters if we don’t spend every Sunday afternoon pushing them on swings. We’re not so crippled by the weight of our guilt that we really have no other choice. We are making a choice. Even if that choice has the same ultimate outcome as the guilt that we think is driving some of our parental decisions, the fact that it is a choice is...different.

Franklin said it well in a recent GGMG thread on the topic: “Every free minute I have when my daughter is not in preschool or asleep, I spend with her and I adore it.” We’re spending more time with our children because we have more time to spend, and, darn it, that’s how we want to spend it. And maybe—just maybe—if our parents had had the same resources and time-saving tools and services at their disposal to cut away at the massive amount of time they were spending on unpaid household chores, they would have reallocated their newfound hours in much the same way. ♦

Shannon Brennen lives in Noe Valley with her husband, 1-year-old son, and a French Bulldog named Fergus. She spends her time avoiding housework, playing with her son, and cracking jokes with her husband. When she’s not doing that, she spends her days working in marketing in the wine industry.





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Creative Sleeping Arrangements for the Urban Family

By Sallie Hess

Photographs by Albena Ilieva Photography

There is a truism that people always wish they had just one more bedroom. You have a baby, you leave your one-bedroom for a two-bedroom, and all of a sudden you need a guest room where your mom might stay to help out (should you have that sort of mom). You have a three-bedroom and then you have another kid and then what? You still have no guest room.

However big your family might be, life in the city means that you often must look within your existing walls to find that space. You might love your location, whether for a short commute, great neighbors, or a wonderful bakery next door. You might have a stunning view or a special cozy nook that you wouldn't trade for the world. Often, you are simply not able to afford to move into a bigger place. Whatever the reason, life demands more often than not that we get creative with our space rather than trade up or move out of the city altogether.

One bedroom

There are plenty of reasons to keep a one-bedroom apartment in the city—especially if it is on a good MUNI line or if you have been there for ages and have a tiny mortgage or rent payment. This minimum of space requires a maximum of creativity, though.

When you have a new baby, a one-bedroom seems really doable. As my mom will often say, a baby can sleep in a dresser drawer. The bassinet hardly takes up any space, and you want to be close to your new baby.

As the baby gets older, the cozy closeness might start feeling intrusive. Maybe you keep forgetting to get your pajamas out of a squeaky drawer before bedtime. Or your baby might be a really light sleeper and someone's snoring is keeping her up. Start looking around the apartment for another option. Do you have a good-sized breakfast nook or a small office space? Any little corner can be separated off with a screen or a curtain. You can buy tracking to attach to the ceiling much like they have at hospitals. A large closet is also an option. Bonus: no blackout shades required in the bright nights of daylight saving time.

Think twice before using any sort of service porch, though. First, they are terribly cold and what you save on moving expenses and increased rent you will spend on heating it. Second, you don't want to have to walk through the baby's room to take out the trash at night.

If you don't have an extra space to use as a crib room, you might have to sacrifice your sleeping space. Some parents sleep on a pull-out couch or futon in the living room and save their one bedroom for the kids. If there is room in the nursery for your clothes, you can just sleep in the living room and leave everything else as-is. Be diligent about

Before you consign grandma to a hotel, though, think about bed options that will give you the most flexibility.

closing it up in the morning, though; you don't want your kids jumping on your bed in their school shoes with a bowl of cereal in hand.

If you don't mind sharing long term and your bedroom is big enough to accommodate a big bed for you and a little bed for your little one, you can go this route for a while, though you may want to set an expiration date. Is there enough space in there for a bed big enough for your child? Is your sweet little boy morphing into a giant who really should be in something bigger than a twin bed? And are you going to have sex in the bathroom until your kid goes to college?

Two bedrooms

A friend of mine lives with her husband and two girls in a two-bedroom apartment. This should work out: the girls share a bedroom and the parents share a bedroom. But when the older girl went through an extended phase of not staying in bed, they were lucky to have one other room with a door—their dining room—so they could let the little one get her 11 hours of sleep.

Bunk beds can be a great option to save space, but they usually work better for older kids. If you get bunk beds, consider opting for the kind that can be pulled apart and be used

as two single beds until both kids are mature and self-sufficient enough to handle it. There are a lot of kids who won't want to sleep up top, or who will want you to lie down with them, or who might wet the bed. Think long and hard before you commit to climbing up and down at 3 a.m., or explaining why you can't carry them while your head is touching the ceiling, or wrestling with urine-soaked sheets eight feet up in the air. I don't know about you, but I would end up with a broken collarbone.

If you have no playroom, of course you want the space for toys, and bunk beds make sense. However, you need an intact

collarbone more than you need floor space. This is doable. Think back to college: were you in a palatial spread or were you in a cell? At my college, the dorm rooms were about 10 feet by 12 feet and somehow we managed to cram in two dressers, two desks, two twin beds, two closets, a mini fridge, and a couple of those ubiquitous halogen floor lamps.

There are many families, though, with more than two children and who live in a two-bedroom place. As the number of kids increase, the threat to your collarbone becomes real as the need to elevate at least one child becomes paramount. Four kids in a two-bedroom leads you down the path of camp dormitories and multiple bunk beds, a popular look in the catalogs these days and a great way to rest all of those weary heads.

Three bedrooms

When you hit the jackpot of having a third bedroom, you think, "Hey! Now I have it all!" If you have two kids, each kid has her own bedroom, no babies in your bed (ha!), and no worries, right? Or are you thinking you can now have that elusive guest room? Not so fast.

The guest room decision is a tough one. Do you want to take one of your precious bedrooms—a whole room with a door and a

closet—out of circulation for the majority of the year? Those pesky guests!

There are real downsides to kids sharing rooms. They can wake each other up. The I-need-to-pee-just-kidding false alarms magnify. There are also great upsides to sharing. Siblings can reassure each other when bad dreams come and help each other stay in bed at bedtime.

Knowing your family is key. Some of us have parents who don't visit, or don't have parents, or would just as soon never have their parents visit. Some of us have parents who are relentless visitors, and dear friends who live abroad and faithfully visit every year. My mom lives on the East Coast, so when she stays with us, she stays. It's hard to ask a woman who lives alone in

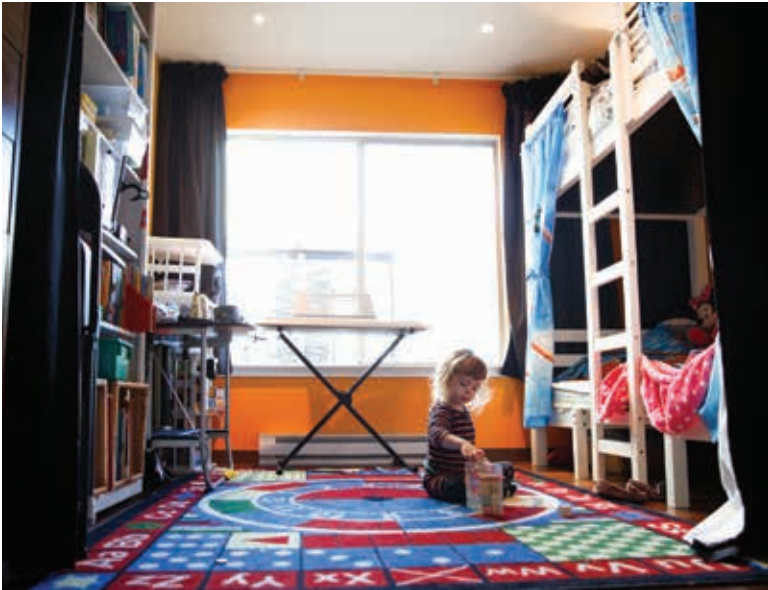
3,000 square feet to be okay with sleeping on the couch in the living room. Before you consign grandma to a hotel, though, think about bed options that will give you the most flexibility.

If you don't have one bedroom set up as a guest room, it can be helpful if one of the kid's rooms has two twin beds and one has a queen. That way, the kids can bunk when guests come to town, and your college roommate and her husband don't have to sleep in separate beds like a 1950s sitcom couple.

Your musical beds also need to take into account the available bathrooms. Our house is on three floors. There is no bathroom in the basement, a powder room on the main floor, and two full baths on the second floor. So if we have people stay in the basement, they have to go up two flights of stairs to take a shower. Raise your hand if your 90-year-old grandma or 70-year-old mom has trouble with stairs.

Our kids are in separate bedrooms. My daughter recently graduated to a toddler bed, which still fits in the same room with a queen-sized bed whose fate is yet undecided. When we have guests staying with us, our daughter gets kicked out and sleeps on a

small air mattress in her brother's room. She used to be in our room in a pack-and-play. The giggly slumber party atmosphere with the newer arrangement tells me that we could easily put the kids together on a more



permanent basis.

Another option is to put the kids in the same room and use the third as a play and homework room. This is especially great if you don't have a separate family room, or if your family room is attached to the kitchen and you are tired of stepping on Hot Wheels while making dinner. You could put some sort of pull-out couch in that room if you want to keep the option of guests open.

Four bedrooms and up

Here we enter a realm that for urban families is bedroom Shangri-La—space for everyone! But maybe individual sleeping quarters isn't what you want. I know a family who has a four-bedroom house, but their two kids still share a room. One of the other bedrooms is used as an upstairs art and homework room while the fourth is a guest room.

But how do you know what to do?

There are so many ways to configure your space. It can be hard to know what direction to take. Something has to give; what is it going to be?

One easy way to get a feel for how to make everything fit is to get out little scraps of

colored paper, cut them to scale (one-half inch to one foot is a good ratio to keep it from being too tiny), and make a little floor plan. Move things around. Maybe use one color for pieces you have and another color for things

that you think you might need in your new arrangement. Allow for 18 inches of walking space around furniture. This is not rocket science or being able to have a "vision"; it is simple geometry.

You can also go to Ikea and take a look at their new campaign for small spaces. They have a number of single-room arrangements that are really very clever and don't feel sad or cramped at all. Not surprisingly, they are set up right next to the kids' department. Also not surprisingly, you will have to

get rid of a lot of stuff to live this minimalist dream.

Knowing the personalities of your kids and yourself makes a huge difference. I had some friends growing up who had an unusual sharing arrangement: the second (a girl) and fourth (a boy) shared, and the first (a boy) and third (a girl) shared. It worked because they had similar sleep patterns and personalities, though there were times it seemed a bit awkward to my friend and me, two little 8-year-old girls hanging out in the room of a teenaged boy.

When all else fails, a big change may be in order. If you or one of your kids is not a good space sharer, or if you have loud and high-energy kids who are driving you and your neighbors bonkers during this El Niño year, you might start considering a move to the 'burbs—giving in isn't always giving up. But if that suggestion makes your skin crawl, it is time purge more stuff and get out the scraps of colored paper again. You can make it work! ❖

Sallie Hess is a veteran furniture rearranger both personally (living in her 22nd home!) and professionally. She recently banished all toys to the basement and her feet are much happier. Check out her website at www.salliehess.com.

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Open Your Home to Open Your Heart

Creating lasting memories in your home begins with inviting friends over, whether you have recently vacuumed or not.

By Catherine Symon
Photographs by Whitney Cooley Photography

When I was a kid, my family moved frequently for my dad's job. The running joke was that whenever my mother bought curtains, my father would announce our next move. By the time I was 12 years old I had lived in eight homes in five countries. My nomadic lifestyle continued, and by my 30th birthday my lifetime average for living in any given house or apartment was just 20 months. (Crazy, right?)

Around that time, I moved into a one-bedroom walk-up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. It wasn't beautiful, but the location was convenient and the rent was reasonable. It was a good time in my life: I had my own place, a flexible work schedule, and I was back in school chasing my dream career. I managed to stay put in that apartment for 10 years—more than twice as long as I had lived anywhere before or since. How strange, then, that I have almost no memories of it. I have Proustian flashbacks of every other place I've ever lived in, but not this one. Only recently did it occur to me why: I never invited anyone over.

As in many urban areas, living your social life outside your apartment isn't unusual in New York. With thousands of venues around the city there isn't much need to host, especially if space is tight. But space wasn't really an issue for me. I had an actual living room. And sure, I spent a lot of time at work and school, but there were plenty of opportunities to have a friend over for movie nights or drinks and a long chat.

The truth is, I had a serious case of house shame.

While my gainfully employed friends were ushered to their well-appointed apartments by doormen in smart uniforms, I was living the student life and making do with some serious quirks in apartment 2A. The wall that divided the bedroom from the living room took a 30-degree turn on its way to the windows. Sickly mustard-yellow tiles in the bathroom gave my reflection in the mirror a perpetual case of jaundice. The exposed brick walls constantly plunked tiny boulders of mortar onto the floor. The oven in the 6x6 ft kitchen was so small that my roasting pan pushed the oven door ajar. There's more, but

you get the point.

Two years and three homes later, I found myself in our current house in San Francisco. It was certainly a step up from apartment 2A, but there were enough quirks to make me cry for an hour after my husband and I submitted our application to the landlord. My mental list of things I hated grew quickly. Drafty windows

[W]hen it comes to building memories and relationships, there's no place like home.

that rattled and leaked. Sloping tiled countertops with grout that hadn't been white since the 1970s. Popcorn ceilings that would be better described as oceans of upside down cottage cheese. Ungrounded outlets. Stubborn wooden drawers. Again, I could go on. And again, I felt that house shame creeping in. But that isolation that strikes many of us new parents made me long for company. Could I overcome it?

House shame limits happiness

Surprisingly, research on house shame exists. In two separate studies commissioned by the London-based company Sugru, roughly 60 percent of the 3,000 subjects admitted to exhibiting some level of embarrassment about their home, ranging from closing off certain rooms when visitors were present to pretending not to be home when the doorbell rang. The most common sources of embarrassment were general mess, clutter, and having a house that looks outdated or needs repairs.

Sound familiar? If so, it may be comforting to know there are many other people experiencing the same thing. But it's more important to see that house shame can limit your ability to both forge new friendships and deepen existing ones. And meaningful personal relationships are vital for happiness, regardless of where you fall on the introversion-extroversion spectrum.

Here's what prominent psychologist Daniel Gilbert, the bestselling author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, had to say during a 2012 interview

with the *Harvard Business Review*: "If I had to summarize all the scientific literature on the causes of human happiness in one word, that word would be 'social.' We are by far the most social species on Earth. Even ants have nothing on us. If I wanted to predict your happiness, and I could know only one thing about you, I wouldn't want to know your

gender, religion, health, or income. I'd want to know about your social network—about your friends and family and the strength of your bonds with them."

Relationships are also known to impact long-term health. When researchers from Brigham Young University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill jointly analyzed 148 studies on social relationships (with a combined total of more than 300,000 study subjects) they found that people with stronger relationships lived longer than those with weaker networks.

While our immediate family provides a solid foundation, social connections shouldn't end there. For me, bonding with other moms helps me stay sane while maintaining older friendships keeps me in touch with my pre-kid self. For my 3-year-old, a quiet afternoon at home playing with a friend goes a long way toward helping her navigate a bustling classroom.

Home is where you are you

Of course, you can forge relationships in all kinds of places. I can think of several people I consider to be friends whom I've only ever seen at the playground or at school functions. But there is something different about inviting someone into your personal space—an implicit trust that allows you to let your guard down in a way that can't really happen in public. I find that you can often tell when families have spent time at each other's homes: their conversations are easier, there are more hugs, and they seek each other out in a crowd.

Having people over to your house does not have to be complicated or fancy. A play date can be a great starting point, as can simply inviting someone over to talk. Dennis Chien, a fellow parent at my daughter’s preschool, is working to resurrect a family board game group that used to meet once a month. While parents bonded over the board games, the kids played in a separate room. (The parents took turns supervising the kids.) Even though the kids already attended the same co-op and the parents worked together running it, Dennis says that the get-togethers fostered a deeper level of friendship than was possible at school and the playground.

My friends Jean and Palmer Truelson host family sleepovers. As busy working parents, they found they could never finish a conversation during play dates, and meals at restaurants didn’t offer enough bonding time. They also wanted their only child, Julianna (Juju), to be able to interact with friends in the home. Jean says, “The great part about family sleepovers is that once the kids go to bed, we parents get to stay up. We all get to finally talk and get to know each other, have a glass a wine, watch a movie—and nobody has to pay for a babysitter or run home to one. We love it! We finally get to know our parent friends better and Juju gets to spend time with friends she doesn’t always see as often.” If you’re lucky enough to have a guest room, don’t let it sit empty waiting for someone to visit from out of town.

As for us, we first invited friends over for brunch at our current house about a year ago. My house shame was still running high and I consequently spent too many days planning the menu and detailing the house. I also sent a rambling email essentially apologizing in advance for our ugly house. Needless to say, our friends either didn’t notice or didn’t care about the things that annoy me on a daily basis and, most importantly, we had lots of fun.

Over time I let go of the intensive cleaning and menu planning. Life can be messy, especially if you have kids. So what. Let everyone see your dust bunnies and your unread magazines. I know I feel much more relaxed when I’m visiting a friend and I see a few dishes in the sink and unfolded laundry on the bed. You may be doing your guests a

Home, through a child’s eyes

From interviews with five preschoolers, including my own daughter.

What do you like about our house?

- I like YOU in our house, Mommy.
- My stuff and my house.
- Having my friends over.
- The flowers that we get. I love that we get magazines. I love that you let me draw. I love that we have lots of toys for me to play with.

What’s your favorite place in the house/apartment? Why is it your favorite?

- The bed. Just because.
- My bedroom and mommy and daddy’s room. My bedroom because I sleep there. Mommy and daddy’s room because I can talk to you and snuggle and cuddle with you there.
- My room. Because I like my bed. No. Because I like my slide.

If you could invite friends over right now, what’s the first thing you’d like to show them or do with them?

- I would show them EVERY toy in my room.
- Show them blankie so they know not to play with her. And then I’d show them my parking garage.

What do you wish we could change about our house?

- Turn it orange.
- Make everything purple.
- Make it pink!
- A cow.

Thanks to: Lucy Mekkelson, Agnes Messina, Ixchel Reyes, Natalie Shapiro, Aila Tajima and their parents



favor by leaving a little mess!

Still hesitant? Try looking through your kids’ eyes. Ask them what they think about your house. Chances are they aren’t going to say, “Let’s upgrade the appliances” or “it’s time to declutter.” I almost fell out of my chair when my daughter said how much she loves our house. I hadn’t even considered how she felt about it. Of course, this is the only home she remembers and it is filled with the people, books, and toys she loves the most.

My game plan to avoid passing my house



shame on to her is to fill the house with friends too. Looking back at my forgettable 10 years in apartment 2A, I’ve vowed not to miss out on making memories this time around. Not because it’s important to remember this house specifically, but because this is home (for now). And when it comes to building memories and relationships, there’s no place like home. ❖

Catherine is a medical writer. She has friends over for playdates and brunch at least once a month at her unrenovated, crazy messy 1940s Miraloma Park rental.

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The Healthy Home

Environmental hazards such as lead paint and asbestos can put your family’s health at risk. You can take steps to protect them.

By Stephanie AuWerter

In late 2015, Sarah Brandstetter discovered that her 1-year-old son, Sam, had low-grade lead levels in his blood. “I freaked out,” says the 34-year-old mother of two, who had moved into a 1930s home in San Francisco’s Parkside neighborhood earlier that year. “You don’t know what kind of problems it’s causing.”

Brandstetter and her husband immediately hired a professional lead inspector, who found significant lead exposure in several locations, including their bathroom window sills. Since then, the couple has worked to fix the problems. Sam, who has shown no signs of being affected by lead exposure, will be retested at his upcoming 15-month appointment. “I have a lot of anxiety,” Brandstetter admits. “I really hope we have fixed it.”

It’s a worry no mother wants to experience. And unfortunately, lead isn’t the only environmental hazard to consider. Asbestos, flame retardants, formaldehyde, and contaminated soil can also raise concerns. The good news? A little bit of knowledge, preventive steps, and, if needed, fixes, can cut risks considerably. Here’s what you need to know to protect your family.

Lead

Lead can be present in many places in your home (such as an old bathtub, or the metal used in a stained-glass window), but the most common concern is lead paint. In 1978, lead paint was federally banned from use in homes. If your home predates that—as 85 percent of San Francisco homes do, according to the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH)—assume until proven otherwise that your home contains lead paint, says Bay Area homebuilder Glenn Goodman, principal at GGD, Inc. “It’s not the end of the world,” he says, “but you need to deal with it properly.”

The dangers of lead are scary indeed. When ingested by children it can cause a range of serious and permanent learning and developmental problems, particularly in those under age six or still in the womb. These problems include lower IQ, attention deficit disorder, and decreased muscle growth, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Current science states that no blood levels of lead are safe. In San Francisco, an average of 449 children had documented lead exposure annually from 2007 to 2012, according to the most recent data from the SFPDH. Many exposed kids show no immediate symptoms. Before you panic, know this: paint that’s in good condition is generally not a hazard, particularly if it’s in an area not frequently used (lead paint is often buried under coats of newer, non-toxic paint). But chipped, bubbling or peeling paint should be tested. Areas appealing for a toddler to gnaw on—window sills being a classic culprit—are also a concern.

But the way most children get exposed is through lead dust, according to the EPA. Tiny particles can be released via everyday activities in high-friction areas, such as doors or windows, that then get picked up by gooey little hands that are shoved into mouths. Dust can also be generated via a renovation project when proper procedures aren’t followed, warns Tamara Rubin, who founded the advocacy group Lead Safe America Foundation (LSAF) after two of her children were poisoned during a 2005 home renovation.

If concerned, get your home and child tested, says Karen Cohn, program manager for San Francisco’s Children’s Environmental Health Program (CEHP). For home testing, LSAF offers free 3M LeadCheck swabs, which you can also purchase at a local hardware store or online. But, for a more thorough test, find a certified inspector. Check out www.epa.gov/lead for a preliminary list of local pros. Be sure to also talk to your pediatrician about a blood test. In the Bay Area, it’s not standard protocol for all kids to be tested. Here’s what else you can do to minimize risks:

- Do not remove lead-based paint yourself.
- Keep painted surfaces in good condition.

- Talk to your landlord about fixing surfaces with damaged paint.
- Regularly clean floors, window sills, and other surfaces.
- Wash children’s hands, bottles, pacifiers, and toys often.
- Help your kids avoid high-fat foods, which

A little bit of knowledge, preventive steps, and, if needed, fixes can cut risks considerably.

- may enhance lead absorption, and make sure they get sufficient iron and calcium, which can hinder lead absorption.
- If purchasing a new home, know that homebuyers typically have up to 10 days to test for lead. Sellers and landlords are also required to disclose known hazards.
- To protect yourself when renovating, repairing, or painting, use only EPA Lead-Safe Certified workers.

Sources: EPA, LSAF, SFPDH

Contaminated soil

For most Bay Area families, the biggest potential soil hazard is once again lead paint, says Jim Marxen, spokesperson for the California Department of Toxic Substances Control. Damaged exterior paint can fall to the ground, causing a hazard for those walking by or making mud pies. Other pollutants could also be found (including arsenic, pesticides, or remnants of leaded gasoline), depending on the location and history of the home. A house located in an



area with an industrial background could have hazards specific to that environment. Knowing the history of your home and neighborhood can help you identify possible concerns, says Marxen.

To get the dirt on your dirt, get your soil tested at an EPA-approved laboratory (you can find contacts for local labs at the EPA’s National Lead Laboratory Accreditation Program List). Soil found to be significantly contaminated

should be replaced, says Jonathan Wilson, director of research at the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH). Barring that, everyone can follow these simple practices to stay safe:

- Planting grass or other vegetation helps keeps dirt in place, making it less likely to wind up in little mouths.
- In play areas, add several inches of mulch.
- If gardening, use a raised box with clean soil.
- Always wash hands after a child has played outside.
- Remove shoes when entering your house.

Sources: EPA, SFPDH, NCHH

Asbestos

In 2014, an HVAC contractor mentioned to Lauren Rolfe and her husband Alex that the heating ducts of the 1910 San Mateo home they recently moved into were sealed with asbestos tape. “You hear the word ‘asbestos’ and alarm bells go off,” says the 36-year-old mom of two. An asbestos abatement company discovered that the ducts leading into her daughter’s room and the master bedroom were particularly problematic. “With an old house, we knew that these types of problems can arise,” she says. But discovering that her daughter’s room in particular was affected made her want the problem fixed “like yesterday,” Rolfe says. Now corrected, Rolfe says it’s a relief to have it off her worry list.

Asbestos is a mineral fiber found in many older homes, mostly because of its flame retardant properties, durability, and ability to provide heat insulation. Homes can have it in many locations, including textured ceilings (often known as “popcorn ceilings”), walls, and vinyl floor tiles. The concern is that high

levels can increase the risk of diseases such lung cancer and mesothelioma (another type of cancer), often decades after exposure.

Discovering that your home contains asbestos is concerning, but if it’s in good condition, it’s often best to leave it alone, according to the San Francisco Department of Public Health. (In fact, asbestos use is still permitted in certain products at limited levels.) Asbestos that’s not “friable” (translation: easily crumbled by a human hand) is unlikely to release the fibers that cause health problems. Asbestos that is friable, however, must be dealt with, often by removing it or sealing it, says GGD, Inc.’s Goodman. A few other tips:

- Take care not to damage asbestos-containing material. Don’t saw, sand, scrape, or drill holes in areas with asbestos.
- If doing a remodel, hire a contractor qualified to work with asbestos.
- If you find damaged asbestos, don’t deal with it on your own.

Source: EPA

Flame retardants

Alarms have been sounding for years over flame retardants, a range of chemicals that can be found in everything from your couch to your baby’s changing pad. Basically, if it has polyurethane foam, you may have flame-retardant chemicals.

But, you may wonder, aren’t flame retardants a good means of preventing fire? No, many experts say. The risk of flame retardants—some of which are believed to raise cancer risks in children as well as lower IQs and create developmental delays, among other things—has trumped their use as an effective fire deterrent, says Michael Green, executive director of the Center for Environmental Health (CEH).

In 1975, California stoked the controversy when it passed a state standard called “Technical Bulletin (TB) 117” requiring upholstered furniture to withstand up to 12 seconds of a small flame. To meet that standard, flame retardants were added,

which then became standard practice nationwide. But in recent years, many have questioned their effectiveness. And in 2013, TB117 was modified (now known as TB117-2013) establishing a new standard that no longer needs flame retardants in order to



be met. “It’s a great step forward,” says Green. Already, companies such as Ikea, La-Z-Boy, and Crate & Barrel offer flame-retardant free products, according to CEH. Some advice on how to navigate the new rules:

- When purchasing upholstered furniture, read the label, which should detail whether it has flame retardants.
- When TB117-2013 passed, it exempted some children’s products, including changing pads and play mats. New products may not have flame retardants, but also may not have a label stating that. Ask before you buy.
- Think twice about hand-me-down upholstered furniture or baby products with foam cushions, as these older products are likely to have flame retardants in them.

Source: CEH

Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde may make you think of eighth-grade frog dissections, but the chemical can also be found in many household items, most notably furniture or flooring made with pressed wood or particleboard. The formaldehyde is located in the glue that holds it together. The problem with formaldehyde is

off-gassing (when it’s released into the air), which can cause several health issues, including scratchy eyes, irritated skin, and a runny nose. Chronic or repeated exposure to high levels of formaldehyde (more likely to be caused by a job that carries exposure) is linked to more serious problems like an increased risk of cancer.

In 2008, California led the way in reducing risks by passing a law that limited formaldehyde levels in composite wood products. In 2010, President Obama signed a federal law of similar scope, although with ongoing controversy, the EPA has not yet finalized the details. Clarification is expected in 2016.

The good news? While slightly more expensive, formaldehyde-free wood and wood-products are readily available, says GGD, Inc.’s Goodman. Most other available products have limited amounts of

formaldehyde.

And keep in mind, new products are of the highest concern, as minimal gas is released from older products, says NCHH’s Wilson.

When shopping, pay attention to labels, looking for compliance with California standards. Unfortunately, the news program “60 Minutes” recently reported that some wood coming in from China via the popular company Lumber Liquidators significantly exceeded California’s formaldehyde standards, even though it was labeled as compliant. If this will keep you up at night, you can purchase a test kit or hire a pro to investigate. Here are some additional tips:

- Opening up your windows can help significantly with off-gassing of many chemicals, including formaldehyde.
- If moving out during a renovation, give your house time to air out before you move back in.

Source: Glenn Goodman, GGD, Inc. ❖

Stephanie is a San Francisco freelancer who has written for The Wall Street Journal, Real Simple, Parents, Money Magazine and many other publications. She is a married mother of one feisty toddler, stepmom of two, and owner of two very tolerant fur-babies.



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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS



The Heights, comprising Pacific, Presidio, and Laurel Heights, is an active group of moms and kids of all ages. We meet during the week at different parks in the neighborhood, including Lafayette, Presidio, and Alta Plaza. We also have quarterly weekend playdates where the whole family is invited to participate. Lastly, we host regular wine nights at local establishments that always draw a big crowd!

Kelly Dwinells (mom to Henry and Oliver) is the neighborhood director and Alta Plaza host and has volunteered for over two years. We have a number of fabulous ambassadors, including Amy Kronberg (mom to Lea and another on the way) who has served as the Lafayette Park host for over a year. Relatively new are Crystal Hough (mom to Derek) and Jamie Johnson (mom to Will) who co-host at Presidio Playground. And perhaps most importantly, our moms night out hosts, Anna Morozovsky (mom to Nate and Beau) and Molly Agarwal (mom to Jaidin and Sonia) have been volunteering for two years.

Some of our recent events included hosting monkeys and trains at a weekend Halloween playdate, decorating cookies and enjoying cider at our holiday extravaganza, and celebrating a moms night out at Internos Wine Cafe. In the New Year, we are planning a number of events, starting with a Valentine’s Day play date in February. If you live in the area, make joining the Heights group one of your New Year’s resolutions!

Get connected

Connect with other moms in your neighborhood by joining your Neighborhood Meetup subgroup on BigTent. From wine nights to playgroups, there are 11 neighborhoods hosting events every week! Contact Tracy at andreassen.tracy@gmail.com for more information on what’s happening in your neighborhood. Here are a few events going on this month:

The Heights Valentine’s Day Playdate at the Presidio Heights Playground

Create Valentine’s Day cards and decorate heart cookies. Hope to see you and your little cupids there!

- DATE:** Saturday, February 6
- TIME:** 9:30 to 11 a.m.
- PLACE:** Clay and Walnut streets
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: See the Heights subgroup on BigTent for more details.

Nob Hill/North Beach Movie Night at AMC Van Ness 14

We’re going to the movies! It’s moms’ night out and we’re leaving the kids at home. Movie and time TBD.

- DATE:** Thursday, February 18
- TIME:** Evening
- PLACE:** 1000 Van Ness Ave.
- COST:** TBD

REGISTRATION: For more details, see the Nob Hill/ North Beach subgroup on BigTent or email andreassen.tracy@gmail.com.



MEMBERSHIP

First 2016 Member Mixer at Recess

Have you ever wanted to meet other moms in person instead of online? Join us and take a night off from the family to make some new mom friends. There will be an event raffle plus appetizers, wine, mocktails, and, of course, cupcakes. We hope to see you there!

- DATE:** Thursday, February 18
- TIME:** 7 to 9 p.m.
- PLACE:** 470 Carolina St.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/95611930

Bagels & Coffee Play Date at Koret Children’s Playground

Looking to meet other GGMG families with similarly aged kids? Or just looking for a break from your usual Saturday morning routine? Join us for breakfast at the red barn near the Golden Gate Park Carousel where we will have fun activities to entertain the kids and plenty of coffee, bagels, and other snacks to start your weekend off right.

- DATE:** Saturday, February 20
- TIME:** 10 a.m. to noon
- PLACE:** 198 John F. Kennedy Dr.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/95663158

PARENT EDUCATION

Parent Education Presents: Infant Sleep Solutions with Lauren Scout at the Presidio Sports Basement

Sleep expert Lauren Scout (CPD, CLEC) will help parents begin to understand how to establish good sleep habits and a healthy schedule for their babies and for themselves.

- DATE:** Tuesday, February 2
- TIME:** 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
- PLACE:** 610 Old Mason St.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/95590858

Infant, Child, and Adult CPR at Recess

If CPR is needed, knowing what to do in an instant can save your child’s life. Your instructor will be a registered nurse with hospital experience in an emergency or critical care setting. Two year certification is offered through the American Safety & Health Institute, and a certification card will be emailed to you for free after the workshop.

- DATE:** Tuesday, February 9
- TIME:** 7:30 to 9 p.m.
- PLACE:** 470 Carolina St.
- COST:** \$75 per person (\$5 off with code GGMG16 at checkout)

REGISTRATION: Advance sign-up required. Register at www.recess-sf.com/workshops



Committee Spotlight: *Member Support*

Describe the personality of your committee.
Kind-hearted moms who love to help people. We have all been through hard times of our own and know how important it is to have a village.

Why do you do what you do?
Volunteering and helping others makes us feel better. When we have a rough day, nothing cheers us up like playing fairy godmother!

What types of activities or projects to you undertake?
Member Support volunteers scan every forum post, watching for moms having a tough time. Our team runs support groups (Single Moms, Mood Disorders including Postpartum Depression, and Infertility) to create a safe space for our members to help each other. For postpartum and pregnancy loss, one of our volunteers runs support groups through Helping After Neonatal Death (www.handonline.org).

How do you know when you are making a difference?
When you send us an email to say thank you or send us a photo, we are

so happy! We remember you and love to hear how you are doing.

Who are your current volunteers?
Vicky Keston (Chair), Kristin Leung, Amy Bradac, Briony Doyle, Rachel Watson, Page Abramson Hirsch, Victoria Carradero, Cecilia Poggi, and Jennifer Barnhart.

What’s next for Member Support?
We would like to add support for GGMG members facing serious illnesses in their family. We would also like to further expand support for single moms, moms with mood disorders, and those dealing with infertility.

How can GGMG members get involved?
Member Support needs additional volunteers to help watch the forums and reach out to moms in need. You can also volunteer to deliver a meal at tinyurl.com/GGMG-Meal-Delivery. Even simply posting to offer a kind word to your fellow moms can make a big difference.

GGMG Forum Etiquette: *When Mom’s Gotta Be Mum*

Every once in a while, with the outpouring of feelings and information, we end up sharing a little more than intended on the public forums. To avoid embarrassment and hurt feelings, please consider:

- Reviewing your message before posting.
- Posting anonymously by choosing the “Conceal my profile identity” checkbox.
- Responding privately to comments. Public responses to an anonymous thread you started will show your identity.
- Being courteous and not exposing a member’s identity if you recognize the author. She must have a good reason to post anonymously.
- Alerting the webmasters if you feel the situation requires intervention.

As always, feel free to contact webmaster@ggmg.org directly for help or questions about online forums or the GGMG website. GGMG Forum Guidelines can be found at www.ggmg.org/Forum_Etiquette.html.

Recruiting *New Year, New Resolutions!*

Happy New Year, GGMG members! If your New Year’s resolutions include giving back to the community, keep in mind that volunteering with GGMG is a great way to do that! Volunteers with GGMG also receive so much in return—it is a great way to make new friends, build your resume, and earn valuable discounts from local businesses. Send an email to volunteer@ggmg.org for more information.

- OPEN POSITIONS:**
- Kids Activities**—Co-chair
 - Magazine**—Photographer, Graphic Designer
 - Neighborhood Meetups**—Committee Co-chair; Ambassadors for Haight, Mission/Castro, NOPA, Richmond
 - PR/Marketing**—Social Media Volunteers
 - Recruiting**—Volunteer
 - Social Events**—Volunteer

Community Support

Community Support was hard at work in 2015! We have been busy supporting both the GGMG community and our greater San Francisco community, and we couldn’t have done it without you, our fabulous members.

EVENTS
Last year, the Events team held three CPR classes, an earthquake preparedness class, and a Kidpower class, held in conjunction with Parent Education, all of which provided valuable resources to our members. We also offered opportunities to volunteer with the San Francisco Food Bank, at the Botanical Garden in partnership with the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, and at Ocean Beach with the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. We had a great showing at the Light the Night Walk in November, where we honored our late member Caitlin Mullinix and raised more than \$7,000 to support the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society!

DRIVES
GGMG members raised \$1,500 and collected in-kind donations for Raising a Reader and La Casa de Las Madres. We supported St. Anthony’s through a successful back-to-school drive in April, filling almost seven donation barrels. In May, we worked with Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP) and Help a Mother Out to collect 5,000 wipes and 7,500 diapers. After a summer break, we came back to support Project Night Night in September and collected 82 books, 88 stuffed animals, 21 blankets, and 13 lovies. The drives team capped the year off with our annual HPP funds drive and raised over \$15,000. Amazing!

MEMBER SUPPORT
Our Member Support team reached out to more than 1,200 members in 2015—double 2014’s amount. It arranged 183 meal deliveries, coordinated 11 meal calendars, and arranged babysitting coverage and additional support such as lactation and sleep consultations for our members in need. Member Support also continues to facilitate three support groups: Mood Disorders (including PPD), Infertility, and Single Moms. For more information on any of our resources, please contact member.support@ggmg.org.

Thank you all for your enthusiastic support. We look forward to an even more successful 2016! Please contact us at communitysupport@ggmg.org if there are any organizations you would like GGMG to support in 2016, and look for a full calendar of our upcoming drives in next month’s GGMG Magazine.



Operations

On November 6, 2015, GGMG honored its hard-working volunteers at the annual Fall Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. We are incredibly grateful for the donors who helped us give back to those who give so much of themselves to support this organization and our members. Without their generosity, these wonderful gifts of appreciation would not have been possible!

BABIES & KIDS

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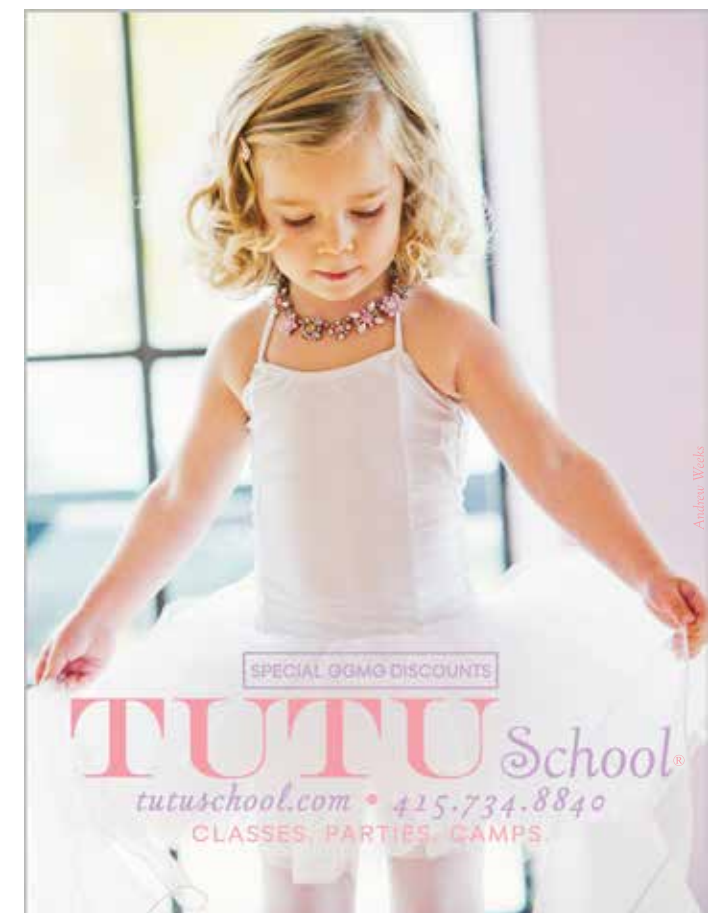
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I ♥ Mom

Is Home Where the Heart Is?

By Shaheen Bilgrami

My family moved from India to England when I was very young. My childhood, university years, and more than a decade of my professional life was spent in or around London.

Then I met and fell in love with an Indian Frenchman...who lived in San Francisco! We married and I moved to San Francisco to be with him. I had never lived more than a couple of hours away from my family and closest friends, and my daily Skype and FaceTime sessions didn't ease my homesickness. I cried every week the first year after my move.

During that first year, I often compared San Francisco to London, and it fell short. The art galleries were better in London, the restaurants more varied, the people more cosmopolitan and well-traveled. And I missed my friends who understood and accepted me.

In San Francisco, I was reminded of my foreignness pretty much every time I spoke. Every single day, random people I met would wax lyrical about my accent and make assumptions about me from the way I spoke, which made me feel very one-dimensional.

To help me adjust, or just to distract me, my husband and I took day trips out of the city on weekends. We also explored different neighborhoods and parks within the city itself. I started to fall in love the city.

A few months after my move, I started tutoring elementary school children at 826 Valencia. The kids were so accepting of my differences. My interactions with them taught me a lot about American culture and more specifically, San Francisco culture. The kids also taught me to "talk American." For instance, I should say "sidewalk" instead of "pavement," "faucet" instead of "tap," and a host of other phrases.

After that first year, I started appreciating the uniqueness of San Francisco. I loved that I saw the sun pretty much every day. I loved the close proximity to the ocean, and the breathtaking views across the city and from the top of the hills. I loved the delicious farmers market produce. I developed quick and friendly responses to questions about my accent, so conversations about it stopped being grating. San Francisco started to feel more like home.

I started making friends. My new friendships weren't yet on the same level as my friendships back home, but I met interesting people with whom I could socialize. However, I struggled with the transience of San Francisco. It seemed that every time I made a

good friend, he or she would move to another city.

I learned of my pregnancy on one of my annual pilgrimages to England, and chose to stay in England for my first trimester, mainly because of my incapacitating nausea. I dreaded returning to San Francisco.

Then I joined GGMG and spent my few not-so-nauseous moments poring over the forums. I quickly realized that I had an affinity with a large number of moms and moms-to-be in the group, in that many of us were transplants, trying to create our "village" away from our natural support systems of friends and family. Returning to San Francisco was not so hard after all.

I expected motherhood to be easy. I was always good with children. I babysat neighborhood children from an early age. I spent hours every week with my nieces and nephews and was well-versed in baby care.

It was not. But after the initial shell-shock of the first few sleep-deprived months, I located a cohort via GGMG. The bonds I forged with these

moms were deep. We shared our excitement over milestones, and our frustrations over confusing baby behavior. We exchanged tips for breastfeeding, starting solids, weaning, sleep, applying to preschool, and finding a good babysitter, amongst other things. We explored different playgrounds and play spaces, decompressing whilst our little ones played. We survived the terrible twos and despaired over our tantrum-throwing "threenagers." I was finally putting down roots.

Many of us were transplants, trying to create our "village" away from our natural support systems of friends and family.

I continue to lean on my amazing mom friends and am constantly making new ones. I still struggle with friends moving away, but have been excited to find that some are now returning! I am encouraged by the fact that my now 4-year-old daughter embraces her multiple countries, cultures, and languages. Being her mom has taught me to live in the present, and to embrace the fact that I have multiple homes. ♦

Shaheen Bilgrami is a freelance writer and editor and is a contributor to <http://blog.littlelane.com>. She is also the mom of an energetic preschooler. Contact her through her website, www.shaheenbilgrami.com or her blog, www.girlinfofcity.com.





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