

## A New Vision of Motherhood

by Ellen Blum Barish

I expected certain things to change when I had my daughter. I was prepared for a Caesarean, a long labor, postpartum depression, angst about returning to work, family squabbles. I figured on sleepless nights, a house full of yellow-green-blue-and-red plastic, and never seeing a first-run movie at the theater again.

It was 10 months after Emily's birth that I went to my mother's in Philadelphia to seek a little 'mothering' myself. That's when I realized that nothing could have prepared me for one of the biggest changes I'd experience in my new role as a mother: The one between my mother and myself.

Our 30-year-old relationship had been the oldest, most dependable friend I had—in spite of its ups and downs. My mother had been my life advisor, dress critic and the never-changing embodiment of wisdom and experience.

She had created and maintained a stable family life. She had the husband, the children, the house in the suburbs, the advice on boys and careers, the four-door family car.

Then I got married, and three and a-half years later gave birth to Emily. I made my own stable family life with my husband, the baby, the home in the suburbs—even a four-door family car that replaced our "sporty" one.

On one of my wedding anniversaries, my mother and father divorced. Mom started dating and began to live with a man—in a townhouse in the city. She became focused on her career. She started jogging. She took yoga classes. She bought a sporty car. Now, she dresses hip. She travels.

The pendulum had swung. I was the mother now. I was the expert on disposable diapers, new-fangled buggies, play groups and child-raising. My mother was a long way from these things. She wanted to know about dining, money management, AIDS.

I've thought a lot about that weekend. I realize now that it changed forever the way I thought about my mother, myself, my daughter—and what being a mother really means. I discovered that being a mother isn't

all that women are meant to do. I saw that my mother was no longer just "mom." She was a lot of people: an independent, single career woman; a partner to her boyfriend; a friend to her friends; a woman. I discovered that being a mother is only one of the vital roles that women play in their lives.

I also realized that it was time for me to find what my mother had given me in the past—nurturing, wisdom, protection, attention—inside myself. Letting go of my childhood image of my mother freed me to think about my role as a mother. I, too, am many different people. And during my life and my daughter's life, I expect the pendulum will continue to swing back and forth. However, now, for Emily, I am only "mother."

My mother calls me these days and we exchange news. She talks about her own mother, my grandmother, who has been living these last years in a nursing home. She is preparing herself, and my brother and I, for the inevitable.

She is thinking about how it will feel to be in the world without her own mother. I don't have much to say. It forces me to think about my own mother's death. I sense that when my grandmother dies, my mother and I will need one another much more.

I guess that's the thing about a pendulum. It always swings back.

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