

parent to parent

We'll Always Have Paris

Memories of sweet, surprising times I shared with my baby

AS I FLOATED ON AIR WITH THE joy of my first pregnancy, I remember picking up disturbing signals from friends below, warnings about the perils that awaited me during my baby's first year of life. Be prepared, they said, to feel scared some of the time, lonely a lot of the time, and tired practically all of the time. Look out, they warned, for scheduling hassles that would tax the ingenuity of Mary Poppins. And expect some marital discord—like when your husband implies he is no more capable of diapering a baby than he is of nursing one.

Well, yes. After my son was born, life did become infinitely more complicated, what with juggling a job, a baby, a marriage, and enough bottles and diapers to start my own landfill. During the next few months, I also discovered that for every hour of lost sleep, every scheduling problem, every disagreement about parental responsibilities, there existed countless moments of sweetness and heart-stopping joy. In fact, that first year was the most intimate my child and I would ever spend together.

My son was more mine during those 12 months than he has been at any time since. I didn't have to share him with teachers, with playmates, or even, a lot of the time, with his father. Daddy would usually be fast asleep in the next room when, in the dark, quiet hours of the night, I studied our nursing infant's noble brow and grew to know his tiny features better than I knew my own. Sometimes the two of us simply communed silently together. Sometimes we enjoyed late-night cultural events, like midnight showings of *Casablanca*, when my son would guzzle contentedly while I tearfully watched Bogart tell Bergman, as they were



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about to be separated forever, that they'd always have Paris. Oh, the wonders I could see in my child during those first incredible days, miracles no one else could yet discern. Before he dazzled the world with his wide radiant smile, I could read the tiny arching at the corner of his lips that signaled a pleasure the less initiated might take for gas. Before he ever giggled at a finger poke in the middle of his tummy, I could hear the lyrical quality of his gurgles. Before he was old enough to relish a game of peekaboo, I could see how keenly his eyes followed me wherever I went. I knew before anybody else what an extraordinary fellow he was. Those first few months, it was a secret between the two of us.

What I couldn't keep to myself was my excitement at the sight of his developmental

milestones. The night I discovered he had learned to raise his torso half off the mattress and support himself on his straightened arms, I called my mother immediately, forgetting that not everyone is on a feeding schedule that makes midnight the shank of the evening. And the morning I first saw him roll over on our bed, I shouted the news to my husband, 12 stories below and in the act of hailing a cab to his office.

Not that Daddy was forever an outsider looking in. Some of the sweetest moments of those infant days were the ones all of us shared together: The morning snuggles in

bed; the springtime walks when baby made three; the diaper changes done family-style, with my husband making funny faces for our son's delight. These were the times when we absorbed the central fact of our lives: that we had been transformed. We were a family.

Then one morning, right around his first birthday, my son picked his rear end up off the floor and took several determined, if unsteady, strides across the living room. Suddenly he could go where he wanted to—on his own two legs, without any help from me. I sighed as I realized that his new mobility signaled a beginning of the step-by-step separation that would define our future.

But if our year-long symbiotic idyll was over, the memory of it would last forever. It was our Paris. ■

Bette-Jane Raphael is a writer and editor, and the mother of two children.