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Reflections on motherhood

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University of Iowa

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REFLECTIONS ON MOTHERHOOD

by

Heidi McKay Casto

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Fine Arts degree in Art
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Mathew Rude

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Heidi McKay Casto

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine
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To Amari

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Andy, you are an amazing husband. Words can not describe how grateful I am to have you as my partner in this life. You have not only put up with my stress and craziness, but you have held me together. You have encouraged me and pushed me forward to become a better artist and mother, even when I thought all hope was gone. Thank you for folding laundry, washing dishes, making dinner and watching our daughter. You made this possible for me... thank you for believing in me that much! I'm looking forward to our next adventure together, I love you babe.

Amari, thank you for having so much grace, and allowing your mamma to continue to grow as an artist while balancing the complexities and joys of motherhood. Everyday you teach me more than I teach you about navigating this world. I love you.

Family, friends, studio mates, graduate students (especially those other mamas), and professors: you have all played a special role in encouraging and inspiring me as an artist and a mother. I would not be where I am today without the wonderful community structure you have built around me, thank you.

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PREFACE

Raising a child was nourishing in every way, and the child that I raised is nourishing to me still. The richness of that experience is so much a part of myself that it cannot be separated from the self that is an artist.

-Hermine Ford

An overwhelming amount of information is thrown at new mothers. Countless books tell us what we should and shouldn't do when raising our babies, let alone the advice you receive from opinionated moms/parents who enjoy sharing their way of doing it. A partial list of examples: the proper way to give birth, how much to let your baby cry, what to wrap around your baby's butt, what to feed her, how to discipline, what vaccinations to give her, what sunscreen to use and how much time you should be spending with her vs. your partner, or on yourself or at work, etc..

All of this advice can produce a lot of anxiety and guilt!.

I will admit that I'm an opinionated mom who is obviously sharing my way of raising Amari... but it took me a while to realize that I couldn't follow what every books said (for one, a lot of them contradict each other) and what works for other moms and their babies, might not be the perfect answer for our family. So I came up with a rule for myself... as soon as motherhood began to feel more like a job and a responsibility, and less joyful and inspiring, I would reassess and make sure I was doing what was right for us. This rule actually began when I was pregnant. I was reading What to Expect When Your Expecting (a pregnancy advice classic) and I realized that I was getting all worked up about bizarre things that could go wrong with me or my baby. Andy started calling it "the scary book" and I stopped reading it. I had midwives that I trusted watching my pregnancy progress, and I was very in-tune to what was going on inside of me. I trusted myself and the relationship Amari and I had already. That book was taking all of the joy out of my wonderful journey of pregnancy. I still read bits and pieces of pregnancy, baby,

and parenting books. I am also eager to soak up as much as I can of what other parents have to share. But I'm getting much better at filtering through what works, and leaving what doesn't. What works for Amari, Andy, and I might not work for our next little one, and it might not work for Amari in a month, and it certainly might not work for you.

I do, however, think there is great value in sharing our stories. I would be a very discouraged mother if it wasn't for other moms, especially the other moms in grad school who have pushed me along and encouraged me with their stories. The key to this parenting (or a lot of things in life) is learning from other people's stories and experiences... all of those ideas, and experiences get mashed together in your internal self, and I believe that what you trust, and what works for you, comes out in the end, as long as you are in tune with who you are and who your family is. Become your own advice book, and whether you share your opinions or not, make sure you share your stories... your story may help someone else heal from their story or grow as a parent. I'm writing our story, because it would have been great to be handed a manual for how to get through grad school while balancing being a new mother. So I'm passing on what I know now. Maybe this will find you at the right time and place to be encouraging and helpful in some way.

*A note to readers:

Some of the entries in this text are written to potential mothers. Others are written directly to my daughter Amari. It's my hope that both of these sections will be worthwhile reading for both parties.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION (EXPLANATION)

To Amari:

This, Amari, is the story of your beginning... the day you were born (from my perspective).

It was Wednesday. Monday had been our 6th wedding anniversary and your dad gave me a beautiful necklace that has a colorful flower pendent on it (you enjoy playing with this when I wear it). That was also the Monday we moved out of our friends' basement apartment into a huge old house that we were planning to rent (we were planning for your first year to be in this house, but after two months of many problems, including bats, we moved out, and we all really enjoy the simple duplex apartment we are in now). So Monday we were moving with the help of your Grandpa Mike and Grandma Sally... They left on Wednesday morning and your Dad and I got started on various projects of cleaning and unpacking. I scrubbed the kitchen floor very hard that day. That evening as we sat down to eat dinner, you just weren't yourself. Up until then you loved to dance in my belly after dinner, kicking so much we would just sit and watch you move sometimes. But you were so still that night. I was hopeful that I had just worn the both of us out and that all we needed was rest. Your dad could hear your fast heart beat through my tummy and assured me that you were still in there. We made a deal to get some rest and see if you kicked in the morning. The morning came and there were still no kicks. At this point it was really easy for me to be both scared and nonchalant... I thought, maybe I just haven't been paying close enough attention, or maybe you were resting. Having had a miscarriage two years before, I felt so scared I was going to loose you, I didn't even want to breath. I tried so hard to not let myself think, about the "what if this is bad" scenario...I had come this far, it just wasn't fair to lose you now. And yet I still had a sense of embarrassment when I called the midwife, like I was making a big

deal out of nothing and I didn't want to bother them... To this day I still get lightheaded when I think about the outcome had I not called the midwife that morning.

So there we were, late morning on June 18th, I was gathering my hospital bags that I had just packed a few days before with your dad laughing at me thinking I was crazy for putting them in the car. I didn't really think you were coming out of me on this particular day. But all I could control at that point was to do exactly as I had read... "Take the hospital bag with you."

I was sitting in a huge recliner, hooked up to a monitoring machine. Your dad was sitting next to me. This was the first of a handful of tests we would try to get you to pass. This was the non-stress test. At first the nurses kept saying, "oh well, we'll hook you up to this, and we will monitor your baby's heart and movement and you'll probably get to go home in an hour or so... I already knew you weren't moving, so I didn't believe them... but I was glad to hear your strong heart beat when they hooked me up. That was a really painful hour and a half... sipping sprite and watching Anthony Bourdain on the cable... Dad and I were afraid to say a word to each other.... We even gave you music to listen to, to try to get you to move... and all that we heard was that little heart of yours. I knew we weren't going to pass the test, but I was still hooked up to the machine. This is when I texted my parents because I knew it was serious.

The midwife came and looked at the chart of your movement (or lack there of) and your heartbeat. She ordered up an ultrasound and said that we would probably see you move in biophysical test on the screen and most likely we would be sent home in the next half hour, we could stop and see her on the way out if we wanted to. Well about 15 minutes into the 30-minute test I new we weren't going to pass this one either. You looked so fragile and beautiful inside me. It was like the whole world was still with you; we all froze, just to take a moment to breath you in. I was squeezing your dad's hand with so much worry and yet I was also trying to calm him down. The technician turned to

us and said, “Have they told you what is going to happen next?” “No,” we both said eagerly. I felt like people were keeping things from us the whole morning and now this lady was going to fill in all the blanks for us. “Well you will go up to labor and delivery and they will monitor you for awhile, but you will either be induced or have a C-section. “You mean we are having this baby today, like this is her birthday!?!?” “Yep”. I don’t know why it didn’t cross our minds until she said it, but neither of us thought we would have you that day. In my mind we were either being sent back home or we had lost you... there was no other road. I was so relieved to know that you could still have a good ending. I then turned to her and said, “She has a good heart beat... that’s a good sign, right?” With out a moment to think she said, “hell yeah!” I laughed, very relieved. We then passed the remaining time that we had to sit through to make the test official by getting a tour of your little sweet body on the ultrasound screen... I was smiling through my worry; she said you had lots of hair.

Strange doctors began to show up saying lots of scary things, I was trying to stay strong and not freak out. I just kept repeating “hell yeah” in my head holding on to the sound of your heart. We were quickly directed to labor and delivery. I was quickly introduced to an entire new staff of people, none of whom we had planned to give birth with. I was strapped into another machine to be monitored while they discussed what to do. The door closed, your heartbeat kept resounding in the silence of the room. I put my head back and looked at the grey ceiling tiles. “Well,” I said out loud to your dad, “at least she had a strong heartbeat.” And as if you heard me, your heartbeat immediately dropped from 160 to 80 BPM and it was still dropping as Dad ran into the hall yelling “heartbeat, heartbeat!”

Instantly there were nurses surrounding me, prepping me for surgery. Later I would find out that your dad almost fainted in the hall, and as he was trying to recover the suave looking middle eastern doctor was telling him, “it’s ugly man.” Your grandma

and grandpa Casto didn't believe dad the first time he told them what was happening. All of the grandparents were on the way; I was going into the OR to get you out.

I was leaning over a tray hugging a pillow as the two anesthesiologists were complimenting my "anatomy" and trying to figure out where to put the block. There were two nurses counting off the tools they would use to get you out, there was another nurse holding my torso, her name was also Heidi. Within seconds my torso was numb, they didn't waste a moment, they cut into me right away. "Scalpel" I heard one of them say, "where's my husband? Andy?" Dad was by my head a minute later. The anesthesiologists were making jokes and trying to figure out what astrological sign you were going to be now that you were three weeks early... I was sort of annoyed and sort of pleasingly distracted by them. I was trying so hard to focus on what was happening to my body and you. They were shaking me so hard, rocking my body back and forth. I felt no pain, I didn't hear the doctors talking, I was scared that that meant it was bad. I was waiting for the cry; all I wanted to do was hear your cry. If you would cry I knew you were there... finally I heard a little tiny yelp. That little sound was enough for me... I could breathe again. "Andy is she okay?" "Well there are a lot of doctors surrounding her, but I think they are ogling over her hair" Dad brought you over to me after a few minutes... you were all bundled up and all I could see was one large dark eye blinking back at me, I kissed your forehead. Andy went with you and the OR emptied out quickly. The show was over; their jobs were done. One of the surgeons told me I did a good job. "Good job?" I thought... I didn't do anything. They took the curtain down, the nurses were counting the tools again, and that was my blood on everyone's gowns.

We never got a simple answer for what happened. My placenta stopped working, a few doctors said. You had also swallowed some meconium and had the umbilical cord around your neck.

I didn't get to see you for a long time, you went to the ICU because you were having trouble breathing and keeping your temperature. I went to the recovery room so that the spinal block could wear off. I was then transferred to my room. All I wanted to do was hold you and feed you... but I was trapped. Hours later I would finally convince the nurses that I was well enough to go see you. You were so tiny and beautiful. I held you... and time stood still again, for a moment until I had to throw up. I handed you back to your dad (whom you were good buddies with by this point) and was handed a cup to return my cranberry juice in.

It was a terrifyingly magical day. Later we would slowly realize how blessed we were to have you. How close we were to losing you. The midwife told me that I was lucky... that most moms who don't feel their babies move notice too late. Most women like me, don't have a baby at the end of the day. If we had gone in any earlier they may have detected your weak movements and approved me to be released and come back for a check up in 7 days... that would have been too late. Amari, we went at the perfect time. I look at you today and I get lightheaded and overwhelmed by your amazing story. How you and I were connected that deeply. I love you so much. You were meant to be here. You have brought joy to everyone you meet from day one... your joyful character is abundant. Never forget your story... our story.

CHATER 2

PREPARATION

To Amari:

“She downed it like a college freshman at her first keg party”- that was the text I received from your dad the second week of the fall semester when you were just shy of three months old. As if you knew our schedule was going to change and I wasn't going to be by your side 24 hours a day, you went on protest the week before school. Refusing to drink any pumped milk. Your dad and I were both fearful that we weren't going to be able to swing being parents and being in school. So when I received that text complete with a picture of an empty bottle, I breathed a deep sense of relief, and then laughed out loud... this was really going to work.

To Readers:

Although lactation rooms are provided throughout the University, I found it very hard to find enough time to gather my equipment, take it to another part of the university and pump in between classes. This was especially difficult when in the beginning when I needed to be pumping every two hours and my three hour classes were back to back. My solution was to create a private hut in my own studio constructed of two by fours and sheet plastic. The hut was equipped with an electrical outlet, a comfortable chair and a mini fridge for storing the milk. Since my studio space was a shared room, this private hut was essential. Also if you have UI grad care, the insurance will pay for a breast pump (as of 2009). All you have to do is get a prescription for a breast pump from your OB, or midwife and take it to a pharmacy that sells breast pumps.

In the first couple of months I also had an extra playpen in my studio space for when I had an unexpected meeting or needed to do something in my studio for a few minutes and had no one to watch my daughter. We didn't use it much, but it was a real life saver when we did use it!

Also make sure you keep your studio clean and keep a basket of fun toys and books ready for entertainment. You never know when those unexpected visits will happen.

CHAPTER 3

EXERCISE

To Amari:

Two things you love to do these days are running fast – where you swing your arms very aggressively, and laugh as you run through the house or down the sidewalk, and your four favorite yoga positions: reach to the sky, touch your toes, and downward dog into cobra. Watching your little body fold as you try to hard to copy what dad and I are doing is so adorable... I hope this is a family practice we will keep for a long time.

To Readers:

Ok, honestly, I've never been much of an exercise person, but I do believe in staying healthy and fit so I'm able to play with my daughter for years and years to come. Juggling school, teaching, marriage and motherhood makes it nearly impossible to get to the gym. When Amari was little, and would lay contently on a blanket, I would set her beside me in the living room and work my way through a peaceful yoga video. She loved watching me, especially when I added special faces and sound effects. As she got more mobile, yoga became more difficult. I still sit in a stretch position when we are playing or reading in one place, but I have also developed a few tricks for pushing my muscles a bit more when interacting with her wonderfully active personality. It's really simple to make play into exercise... you really just have to be committed to getting into the play. Bend your knees a bit more, chase her a little faster around the house, get a bit crazier when having a dance party. Trust me, your kid will love it and so will your body!

CHAPTER 4

NOURISHMENT

To Amari:

From conception to 6 months, I was solely responsible for your nutrition. I was very careful with everything I ate while pregnant and breastfeeding. I ate as much organic fresh produce as I could, and tried my best not to stay away from things like caffeine and medicine. A few weeks into breastfeeding, you developed this horrible projectile vomiting after most of your feedings. The doctors said this was fine, as long as it wasn't a weird color and as long as you still had wet diapers... but I knew, after witnessing you throw up into your father's mouth (it's hard to explain how this happened) that what I was seeing couldn't possibly be normal. So for weeks your dad and I experimented eliminating food from my diet that could possibly be making you so upset. Finally, it dawned on me that you might not be sharing my love for cereal with milk, pizza with loads of cheese, and healthy servings of ice cream. As soon as I eliminated dairy from my diet, you were a happy vomit-less little girl! I consider that to be one of the hugest nine-month long sacrifices I will ever do for you. I was able to reintroduce dairy into my diet when you could handle it, and now you have a fairly serious love affair with cheese.

The last day you breastfed was the week of Thanksgiving when you were 17 months old. I think the weaning process was much harder on me than you. You and I had the first and last moments of the day together, and now that was being replaced by (and thankfully shared by) dad. It wasn't easy lying in bed listening to dad try to comfort you while you cried and asked for me. It only took a week of this for you to learn to sleep through the night. I miss the way you looked up at me while you were eating in my arms... what a magical moment. Those moments just don't come at the dinner table now, where you will often spit unwanted food back into your hands and hand it back to

me, or how many meals Dad and I have to convince you to take just a few bites by pretending your clay penguins are feeding you. I think to myself how the distance between us keeps growing... you are on a journey of detaching from me. Will I ever be able to let go? I believe there is something magical beyond words that will always bind us together.

To Readers:

When Amari first began to eat solids we fed her what we ate, organic vegetables, fruit, a little grass feed beef, whole grains, beans etc.. pureeing our own food was not only cheaper, but it was also the best way to know the exact ingredients of what she was eating. It's weird that I would feed my baby something that could stay sealed in my pantry for years and still be edible. It may seem like this is just something you don't have time for, but trust me... it doesn't take much time at all. Just save an hour or so on the weekend, steam and puree your foods, and get some ice cube trays with lids and fill them up. Then you can just pop a few out, and thaw them on the stove or in the microwave for a quick meal. You can also keep a hand blender handy and just blend a small portion of whatever you are having for dinner that night. Having the right equipment in the kitchen has been a lifesaver. In the early stages of eating we used the food processor, hand blender or a little baby mill/grinder (a small hand cranked grind/puree machine – very inexpensive). Now that she's getting older and eating just about everything, we still make great use of the food processor. It not only dices or purees things finely enough to hide good things like spinach, kale, or carrots in just about anything; it also makes very quick work of shredding and slicing vegetables. This is very helpful on those teething days when she really just wants to be held. The other kitchen item that is a must have is the crockpot. I have just tapped into the wonderful world of crockpot food. For someone who likes to cook so much, it is really hard to give up the dinner cooking duties. So my solution this year was to throw a bunch of veggies, meat

and some seasoning in there at the beginning of the day, and when I pull in the garage exhausted from my day's work in the studio and smell dinner waiting for us, it's a great feeling! Another way that we've conquered the stress of cooking and cleaning up from a meal is to make three or four meals together on one day and then enjoy just pulling things out of the fridge ready made. No prepping dishes to clean up and stress free for the next part of the week.

As Amari is navigating this world of tastes, and making choices about what she does and doesn't like, it's hard as a parent to not feel totally discouraged when all she wants is bread. So in an effort to try to get her to eat some nutritious things, I've become very creative about finding ways to chop up, puree, and change the look of healthy foods. For the most part it's been a success! Also having some healthy bread, muffins, or granola on hand has really helped cut down on the nutritionally pointless snacks. Although I'm far from successful, we try our best to make sure that the calories Amari is eating count for something - fiber, protein, vitamins etc...

Here are a few of our favorite recipes - but don't stop here, there are no rules in the kitchen. Go ahead and create your secret meals!

Heidi's Banana Bread

2 large bananas, smashed

1/3 C unsweetened applesauce

3/4 C sugar (I think you could still use a little less if you wanted to)

1 egg

1 teaspoon Vanilla

1 teaspoon baking soda

dash of cinnamon

pinch of salt

1/2 C of whole-wheat flour

1 C of all-purpose flour

Feel free to add a handful of walnuts and or chocolate chips - I did!

Preheat the oven to 350

Mix applesauce into the mashed bananas in a large mixing bowl. Mix in the sugar, egg, and vanilla. Sprinkle in the baking soda, salt and cinnamon. Add both flours and mix.

Pour into a greased loaf pan. Bake 45 to 60 min. Cool on a rack then remove from pan and enjoy!

The Bomb Blueberry Muffins

1 ½ C white flour

1 ½ C minus 2 tablespoons whole-wheat flour

Handful of wheat germ

1 tsp baking soda

2 tsp baking powder

big pinch of salt

big dash of nutmeg

¾ C sugar (if you want them extra sweet add an extra ¼ C)

½ C applesauce

1 ½ tablespoons of vegetable oil

1 egg

1 heaping C of plain yogurt

2 C fresh blueberries

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

butter

turbinado (raw) sugar

Preheat oven to 385 degrees.

In a large bowl mix flour, wheat germ, baking soda, baking powder, salt and nutmeg. Set aside.

In another medium bowl mix together sugar, applesauce, oil, egg and yogurt. Mix wet ingredient into dry until just blended - do not over mix. Mix in Blueberries. Plop dough into well-buttered muffins tins and sprinkle lightly with turbinado sugar.

Bake 20 to 25 minutes.

Good Morning Oatmeal

Process any or all of the following in the food processor (or make up your own favorites):

Fresh fruit: bananas, apples, and/or strawberries are a few that we use.

About a ¼ C of your favorite kind of milk

A handful of dried fruit (raisins and prunes are our favorites)

A spoonful or two of peanut butter or almond butter

1 or 2 Kale leaves – remove stem first (great source of nutrients and really adds a nice hint of green flavor- don't be afraid!)

a dash of cinnamon

Once you have your additions nice and blended, add in your cooked oatmeal and process it all together. The change in the oatmeal texture is so nice, and the whole family loves it! And since it is hot when you make it, it has forced us all to sit down at the rarely used dinning room table to enjoy breakfast together before we all depart and do our own things for the day!

Gotta Have it Granola

6 C of dry ingredients - any combo of the following:

Rolled oats (the main ingredient)

Wheat germ

Oat bran

Shredded coconut

Nuts

Protein powder (add after toasting the other dry ingredients)

Mix together and toast above ingredients at 400 degrees in a 9 X 13 pan for about 12 minutes. Stir every once and awhile to keep the top from burning. Pull out of the oven and add in a handful or two of your favorite dried fruit. Set aside for a moment.

In a saucepan (if it is large, you can use it for the mixing later - one less dish to wash) on medium heat melt and stir together any combo of the following:

4 Tbs. natural peanut butter and/or Butter

1 C honey, agave, brown sugar, and/or maple syrup

2ish tsp. of vanilla

½ tsp. salt

Obviously if you want more protein add more peanut butter than butter... and feel free to experiment with using less of the sugar additives! You could also experiment with sweetening with apple juice or something natural (I've never done it). If you use the peanut butter option you might want to add some milk or yogurt to allow the liquid mixture to mix into the dry ingredients more easily. Once your liquid ingredients are well blended, mix in the dry ingredients then spread back into the greased 9X13 pan. Compact the granola by pressing it flat; use a piece of waxed paper on top of the granola and press down with your hands. When cooled, break apart for yummy granola cereal or cut into bars for on-the-go breakfast bars (if you choose to do the bars, having enough liquid so they will stick together is essential).

Zucchini Crusted Pizza

Crust:

Olive oil and flour for the pan

2 cups (packed) grated zucchini (about 2 7-inchers)

2 eggs, beaten

¼ cup flour

½ cup grated mozzarella

½ cup grated Parmesan

1-2 Tbs. olive oil

Optional: pinches of basil, marjoram and/or rosemary

Topping Suggestions:

1 large tomato, sliced

Extra mozzarella, sliced or grated

2 to 3 large cloves garlic, thinly sliced

Sautéed mushrooms

Sautéed red onions

Thinly sliced bell peppers

Sliced olives

Preheat oven to 400 F. Generously oil a 10-inch pie pan and coat lightly with flour.

(or for a thinner crust- use a cookie sheet). Combine zucchini, eggs, flour, mozzarella, Parmesan, herbs, and 1ish Tbs. olive oil in a bowl and mix well. Spread into the prepared pan and bake for 35-40 min (less if you are using a cookie sheet), or until golden brown. Remove from oven. When it has cooled for about 10 minutes, use a spatula to loosen the crust from the pan so it won't break later. (broil the crust a tad if you feel like it needs to be a bit more crispy). Top with your favorite pizza items and broil until heated through.

CHAPTER 5

DIAPERS/POTTY TRAINING

To Amari:

Dad and I decided to do cloth diapers because it seemed like the right thing to do for the environment, and for our budget. It is not a time saver, but now I can say when you are sixteen that “you better be nice to me because I wiped your poopy butt and then I dumped your poop in the toilet and scrubbed your diaper so you could wear it again and not contribute to a landfill.” I truly hope you will love me for that one day. This is an instance where your grandparents did have it way easier than your parents. They paid for a diaper service to wash their diapers. Diaper services scarcely exist now because so few people are using cloth diapers. Cloth diapers are such a rarity now - when we were at a gallery opening sometime in your first year, I was mortified because an art professor thought your cloth diaper was just a disposable diaper full of pee. I wish I had had the guts to tell her, “No my daughter’s ass is not bigger than her head because I’m a bad mom and I forgot to change her diaper... it’s because we are rock star parents and we use cloth diapers.” I didn’t say that, but I tell her that all the time in my head.

I also think you are way ahead of the rest of your friends when it comes to potty training... this might be because you recognize all the hard work we’ve done and you’re smart enough to start showing us love for this in return, but it probably has something to do with a wet cloth diaper against your butt instead of a disposable. You really got into potty training in your 19th month. You watched a few videos and read a few books about using the big girl potty, but what really did it for you was the sticker chart. You get a star every time you go pee, and two if you go poop. You are still afraid of pooping in the potty... I would be too. I have no idea how you fit that much poop inside of you by the way... it’s amazing. Anyways, you always ask for two stickers no matter what, holding both of your index fingers up to your chin and asking for “twooooo.” If I was giving out

stickers for how cute you were or for how proud I was, I would give you all the stickers you asked for... but you only went pee, so you only get one this time. You have mastered the art of relaxing for pee and trying to push for poop. The only thing left is to get you to not be afraid of poop, and to be more interested in taking a trip to the bathroom instead of continuing to play with your toys when you need to go. I recently was inspired to make you seven different potties out of clay to make this trip more exciting. These potties are the lower half of different animals that you love. I hope you will see them as a continued sign of my love for you. Maybe someday soon you will learn to wipe your own butt too.

To Readers:

Cloth Diapers: how to do the not so impossible:

- We use “prefold” cloth diapers fastened with “Snappies” (a rubber claw type fastening alternative to pins) with either plastic covers or wool covers as the outer layer. We use disposables at night to keep her drier longer and encourage sleeping through the night. Also, now that she is potty training, we use either disposables or “big girl underwear” (Gerber cotton training pants) with an extra insert. This way we can get her to down to her bare butt faster than with the extra layers and complications of a cloth diaper.

My thoughts on what we use and how to clean cloth diapers:

- First of all, prefolds are awesome. If you are ordering them new, they will come large and flat. To strip them of their chemicals and quilt them properly, wash on hot with cold rinse four times, drying in-between each cycle. You are then ready to use your prefolds.
- There are many videos on youtube, and my favorite cloth diaper website is listed below on how to pin/fold cloth diapers on your baby correctly... it took us a day or two to build up our confidence in this! Stick with it.

- **Washing Prefolds:** The easiest season for using cloth diapers is when your baby is just drinking breast milk (or formula). In the beginning months we used a washable pail liner and put the entire diaper, poop and all in the pail liner when we took it off of her. Because the breast milk poop isn't solid, there is no need to pre-rinse in the toilet etc... Once she began to eat solids we would always rinse the diapers in the toilet. We're lucky to have a bathroom with a tub right next to the toilet, so we just use the shower hose, turn the nozzle to the roughest spray, hold the diaper in the toilet, and power wash it. If you don't have the convenience of a shower hose next to your toilet, you can buy a hose hook up for your toilet water line (I believe they sell them on the diaper website as well). On washday (every two or three days) we put everything; liner, diapers, plastic covers, cloth wipes (if you are using them) into the wash (don't put wool covers in the wash). We first wash on cold with a scoop of Charlie's soap (<http://www.charliesoap.com/>). This cycle acts as a rinse wash. We then run the machine again (don't dry in between) on hot with a scoop of Charlie's and a scoop of powder oxyclean or borox. We then run one final hot rinse. After the washing is done, you can dry the diapers in the drier or, if you can, hang on a clothesline (the sun has wonderful bleaching power).
- **Fasteners for the prefold diapers:** We use "Snappies" instead of diapers pins and think they're fantastic. They took a few tries to get used to, and when you first get a pack you have to stretch them out a little... but they're great. They are faster and safer than pins. There are videos on this too.
- **Plastic covers**
New and improved from the old days... They are actually a laminate polyester mix. We've used these the most. They are quick and cute. They do carry the smell of the pee though, so you need to have enough to rotate through the wash.

- Although they don't have to be washed after every changing and in a lot of cases you can rinse or hand wash in the sink pretty quickly.
- * Wool Covers: Ok stick with me on this one, I rolled my eyes when I first heard of this too. I think this a great way to go! You can buy or knit yourself. Two great places to buy: <http://www.greenmountaindiapers.com>, or <http://www.etsy.com>. Etsy is a place where artists sell their work... click on "children," then "baby," then "diaper cover," then type in "wool" to the search line... very cute (and some not so cute) choices. Or if you knit, or know someone who knits, there are great patterns out there. Check out <http://www.ravelry.com>. You do have to create a user name, but it's well worth it for any knitter out there!
 - So Wool covers: Once you buy them/make them... you have to wash and "lanolize" them. Lanolizing is a process that seals the wool, and makes it waterproof. The process is easy but lengthy, so here is a great website with video explaining it all: <http://www.greenmountaindiapers.com/lanolize.htm>
 - Why I think wool is great: Well, first of all you can make your own. If you don't knit, but you do sew, you can also make them out of old felted sweaters. We had three wool covers, which seemed to be perfect. Since it's made from animal wool and sealed with lanolin (the same stuff you use for sore nipples) the pee really doesn't soak in. You can use the wool covers over and over without washing, and they don't pick up the pee smell either. Every once and a while some poop will leak out on one, but just spot clean it and let it dry and it's ready to use again! Wool isn't just for the winter either... it's quite breathable. They can be very cute too! You have to rewash/lanolize the wool covers about once a month. I don't really know how else to describe the wool greatness, but it's worth giving it a try... it's making our cloth diaper experience way better!
 - Traveling with cloth: It's rough to travel with a bag of smelly diapers... it can be

done, but I'll have to admit, we weren't that much of rock stars.

- Encouragement for going with cloth: You will save an enormous amount of money... more if you are going to use this method for more than one child too... you can reuse everything! Cloth diapers also don't have a gross smell to them after they've been "filled." I feel like the disposable diapers have a gross chemical pee smell to them. If you are home and can do the laundry, it's worth it! Doing the laundry doesn't take any longer than running to the store in the middle of the night when you are out of disposable diapers.
- Drawbacks, or things to get used to with cloth: You do need to be patient with the learning process... it will take a week or two, and it helps if your husband/partner/other caregivers are on the same page. I had a few low days where if Andy had said, "let's just do disposable," I probably would have (so glad we didn't).
- Your baby also looks like it has a big booty. Some people love that, and some don't.
- Baby clothes are made for disposable diapers... although I haven't really run into that many wardrobe issues yet. We usually just bought her pants a size or two bigger than her age.
- Advice for new moms: Cut your self some slack and use some disposable when you first bring home your newborn and slowly transition into cloth when you're ready. Don't buy everything at once. Buy what you need when your baby is at the stage you're buying for... that way you know what works for you, and you haven't wasted money guessing what's going to work for you when she's 6 months old, or before she's even born.
- Everything I have learned has either come from my mom, or this website: <http://www.greenmountaindiapers.com>. Seriously, this lady is passionate about

cloth diapers! We have ordered multiple times from her website and really had great service. And in case you thought this was a manifesto on cloth diapers... our first order came with a 16-page booklet that she typed herself, answering every possible question about cloth diapering! You can find videos, questions and answers, and everything you would possibly want to order all on this site!

- Oh and if you read this and decide it's not for you here's my two cents on disposable...Go with Pampers or Target brand! Huggies are awful, not even band-aid quality (at least for girls).

CHAPTER 6

LOVE

To Amari:

“No” is one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to say to you. We tried to avoid using that word with you for so long... but eventually you needed some boundaries. “No, you can’t play with the electrical outlet.” “No, you can’t eat raisins until you get sick.” And now that you know how to have a tantrum (where did you learn that?) it is even harder to stand my ground with you and remember what’s best for you. I do however always say yes to things that don’t really matter, even if they mean making a mess. We had the best afternoon last week when we spend an hour splashing in puddles from the melting snow. It was a wonderful memory I wouldn’t have if I had been afraid of you getting dirty. So even when it seems like I must not love you because I’m not giving you everything you want, know that I am truly thinking about what matters and what is honestly the best thing for you. Because I do love you, even though I won’t let you pick up dog poop off of the sidewalk.

To Readers:

From the beginning, for the most part, we have not let Amari “cry it out”... this is one of those things that just didn’t feel right in our hearts... the moment that feeling set in, it was a red flag that this method was not for our family. Every once and awhile she needs to make a small cry to get herself to sleep, but that’s a different cry. I don’t believe our little sweet girl is out to play mind tricks with her parents. If she cries (which rarely happens, and I think it’s because we respond to her emotions instead of ignoring them) we gladly embrace her and comfort her... to me, it’s one of the greatest joys of parenthood that won’t always be there... so I will take the opportunity every time I can get it, even in the middle of the night, to shhh, sway, swaddle, or snuggle her - whatever it takes. Some may call it spoiling her, but we call it loving her.

CHAPTER 7

TIME

To Amari:

Amari, this semester has been the hardest so far. Yes, even harder than going to school when you were ten weeks old. This is my last semester in grad school. I do not have the ability to minimize my vision for what I create in the studio or even in this thesis. It has been three months of struggling to find a balance. I wake up early and get ready while you are still sleeping. Luckily most mornings I catch a sleepy hug from you before I head off to the studio to teach, go to class or work on my artwork. Somehow your dad and I have managed to have this wonderful balance with you for the past two years. We've staggered our classes so that one of us can be with you while the other is at the studio. Although I see less of your dad, it has been worth it to enjoy almost every moment of your life with you between the two of us! Lately he's been taking on more of the at home duties and getting to spend more time with you while I prepare for my MFA show. I rarely get to be with you in the mornings, and I look forward to my time with you, in between your nap and bedtime, although you are usually cranky at this time of day, which makes it hard to feel like I'm connecting with you. The nights you ask for Dada while we are playing break my heart. I know you love us both and we both love him so much. Your dad builds you forts in the living room and takes you to the pool; I would want that too. Maybe this is his moment with you, just as we had so many moments in the beginning... oh, and nine months before that. I want you to know that I love you so very much and that the balance will return in a few weeks when my show is over. I can't wait. I think this is a big part of why I make the work I do. Because I miss you so much when I'm away from you that I have to make work for you, or about you, or about my experience with you; otherwise I would be so unhappy. And isn't that what creating is about? Doing what makes you happy? We created you too by the way. You make me

very happy, always.

To Readers:

I spend as much time with her as I can. And if I was planning to do something else, but she is really acting like she needs some mommy time, I put off what I was planning. Our main priority is Amari. Everything else can wait. I do believe that time doing the other things I love, and spending time with other people that I love is truly valuable... that's why I work when she's napping. My kitchen table is covered with my current art projects, and my craft table is also set up in the dining room, my kitchen has a play area for Amari, and when I need to run errands, Amari is a pro at helping. I may only get to attach one piece as I walk by my current sculpture, but it's one piece that wasn't there before, and I'm actually managing to get a lot done this way. When she began sleeping through the night, I greatly benefited from the full night's sleep, but I cashed in on a little extra evening time by staying up later working on projects that needed my full, uninterrupted attention. I believe having a studio at home as well as at school has been essential to getting things done. Some days I just didn't feel like wasting 40 minutes of my time in the car, when I could have been with her, or in the studio for that time! It has also been really fabulous to have great support from my husband and friends who love spending time with her when I need to get some solid time in the studio. I think overall finding a balance that works for you and your family is key... and by balance, I don't mean 50/50. I mean you spend all time with your child that you need to cultivate that relationship and remind you what is truly important at the end of the day. Then have someone who pushes you out of the house to be with the other "thing" you love. Have them remind you that your artwork, or whatever you are working on outside of the house is also a key to who you are as a person, and that person is important for your child to see as they grow up. Although I still struggle with this, do not feel guilty when you are away from your child. They will love being with you even more after

you've had a break from each other! And by all means, never feel guilty for spending more time with your child... your work can wait... at least until she goes to sleep. When it comes to spending time with other people... well most of my other people love her too.

CHAPTER 8

FILTERING

To Amari:

Not letting things bother me is not a skill I currently possess. It is so hard to have a rough day with you and not feel totally destroyed: You fell when I wasn't looking, you cried when I didn't pick you up right away, I did two more things before getting you when you called my name from your crib, I caved and let you watch an video instead of sitting down to read to you. I must be an awful mother. Yet, in the morning, when you smile and hug me and laugh with me, I will know this is not true. And the experience from the day before will only help me be a better mom to you today. It is hard to have a rough critique about my work, which is so personal and tells the story of you and I. I think, "I must not be a good artist." But in the morning when you smile and hug me and laugh with me, I know this too isn't true. The critique from the day before will only help me be a better artist today.

To Readers:

I had a great professor that always said, "Your personal story is your best story." This comment alone gave me the confidence to do work that is intensely personal. Work about motherhood doesn't make a lot of sense to a room full of mostly single unmarried Twenty-something grad students. Critiques were honestly hard. A battle of peers trying to push my work to a place that made sense to them, so they could walk away with something as well. I would love it if everyone could walk away from my artwork feeling like there was something in it for them, but it took me a long time to realize that it is impossible to make work that relates to everyone and that what I'm doing is truly valuable, because it's valuable to me. Plain and simple. It is my story; it is what I know best, and therefore it is the strongest artwork I can possibly make. I recently had a conversation with a friend of mine who is also an MFA candidate. She thanked me for

the boldness I had in creating work that came from what I was passionate about. She too is doing artwork about what she is passionate about (for her at this point in her life it is the environment, and specifically what we are doing to our water systems). We both have been challenged that our artwork isn't really artwork... But I want to put a little reminder out there that I think the reason we were all attracted to the idea of being artists is because there are no rules, and there are no boundaries. It is my opinion that passion creates strength in artwork, and no matter what your end product is, if you embrace your story, it will influence what you make and why you make it, and that's something to applaud.

CHAPTER 9

INSPIRATION AND ARTWORK

To Amari:

Amari, I made artwork before you were even thought of, but as if you were my muse, you have filled a hole in me, and in my work. You have inspired me to be bold in what I do and you are a source that keeps on giving. The way you walk around with your blanket on your head giggling, the way you insist on the three of us kissing each other at the same time, or even the way you pretend to be different animals inspires me to reflect on what it means to be a mother; your mother. I often find myself daydreaming of the animals in your books. Those animals make it so easy to teach you how to go to the bathroom or go to sleep. How do actual animal mothers handle motherhood? They follow an instinct that is powerful beyond comprehension. Yet for me, there is the challenge of balancing advice from the world with instinct. Sometimes the fear of doing something wrong or losing you is so paralyzing. I don't believe the mother ape feels this way; she just does her job of doing what it takes to care for her young. Basic instinct. Basic extraordinary love. Dad and I hold such a huge responsibility in who you become. The choices we make determine your path. I am searching for that simplicity in instinct. My artwork is a way for me to digest these things and hopefully in turn be a better mother for you. And when I get lost or frustrated in the studio, I know that it is time to come home and be reminded why I make the work I do.

To Readers:

I hope to document my journey in motherhood through the creation of artwork.

I had dreamed of being a mother for quite some time. These dreams were complete with expectations of how and when I would give birth and what motherhood would look and feel like. Now that I am a mother, I realize that my projected expectations in light of my true experience provide a conflicting story. While adjusting

to reality has not always been easy, the experiences in unknown territory have brought beauty, joy, sadness, pride, and love in ways I never imagined.

I believe that the only way to fully grasp the intensity of the experience of motherhood is to actually live through it. In this sense, the significance of documenting the motherhood experience is to capture the emotions and the reality of being a mother. I hope to put images to the continual conversation, conflict, and emotional battle that wages inside of me.

I feel driven to document this experience not only to preserve these feelings for my own sake, but also to shed light on what I see as a misperception of motherhood. My experience with motherhood as subject matter for my artwork has led me to feel a sense of judgment; that to talk about motherhood in a fine art context is almost by nature taboo. I find this strange and disconcerting, especially since motherhood is one of the most common relationships in the universe: certainly we all have, or have had mothers. I hope to question why the discussion of the beauty of this relationship is often looked down upon. I also want to communicate the significance of my experience to those who would otherwise not know what this experience is like. I also hope to give those who share my feelings regarding motherhood a voice to be confident in their experience, and their love for their children, and to celebrate the common, yet extraordinary role of being a mother.

CHAPTER 10

EMBRACING MOTHERHOOD

To Amari:

I am so proud that you are mine. You bring so much joy to those around you, I want to share you with everyone. You are evidence of who I am. You are a part of me and I am a part of you. I love being your mother and I hope for nothing else but to hold that joy for the rest of my life.

To Readers:

Most people who don't have kids don't fully understand what you are attempting to do. I took a lot of comfort over the past few years knowing that someday these people will look back and say to themselves, "wow, she was a badass for doing all of this at the same time. It all makes sense now." I also took comfort in the fact that there were (even if it was just a few) people who knew how hard it was to balance grad school and motherhood. You are a badass. Embrace motherhood. It is a part of you. Remind other people of the journey you are on, trying to do everything without recognizing that journey will be completely painful. And remind yourself that someday, they will understand.

CHAPTER 11

THE STORY OF THE PENGUINS

To Readers:

The first movie we let Amari see is a documentary called, The March of the Penguins. It is a story of the journey of one species of penguin that all migrate to one place in the arctic during the mating season. They all arrive on the same day at almost the same exact time. The penguins then choose their mate. Once the egg has been laid by the female penguin, she passes the responsibility of caring for the egg off to her male partner while she makes the long journey back to the ocean to feed herself and get food for her little one when it is born. The father is left to face the brittle winter and the responsibility of caring for the egg. If the egg is dropped, it will freeze. The males huddle together to try to stay warm, taking turns being the one getting hit by the cold wind on the outside of the huddle. Once winter breaks, if the dad has been successful, the baby hatches from the egg. Soon the mother returns, and regurgitates for the baby. It is then time for the father to make its way back to the ocean to feed himself. Some do not complete this journey, having gone too long without food. It's really a beautiful story.

To Amari:

Amari, I feel like these past few months have been our winter season. I have been away working on my MFA show, while dad has taken on the main responsibilities of caring for you. But I often think of the community of penguins that huddle together. There are countless people that have huddled around us, supporting and encouraging us through every season. It's a beautiful story when you realize it's not just us in this world. We have help. And I don't have to be apart from you for endless amounts of time, I can come home and eat dinner with you at the end of the day. I am thankful for our beautiful story.