

In Honor of Mothers

By Gail Kauranen Jones/*Transitions: The gifts of change*

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“The role of mother is a high-stress job itself. The assumption has been that because mothering is supposed to come naturally to women, it’s somehow easier than their other roles. That’s not necessarily so.”

– Rosalind Barnett, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.

Whether you’re married to one or were raised by one, mothers who do their job well are sacred. Treat them so.

For women, the transition to motherhood can be the most encompassing role of their lives, when often their own needs get thwarted in the nurturing of another. Our society fails terribly at acknowledging the critical role women play in raising the next generation, giving them no perks like paid time off or a salary that validates their true worth.

In the process, many women, particularly at-home mothers, often lose self-esteem. Constantly giving to others without replenishing oneself along the way leads to burn-out. Many women soon learn that scheduling in “me time” is essential to maintaining a better balance of giving to others while also caring for themselves.

And for women like me, who grew up unmothered, learning to mother ourselves has been an additional responsibility—in some cases, a lifetime journey of healing the initial loss of not receiving basic nurturing needs. “Parenting often doubles as self-parenting when a mother still longs to be mothered,” says Hope Edelman, author of *Motherless Daughters*, an excellent book that teaches women how to nurture themselves.

The changing nature of the role is demanding as well. “Of all the things I’ve learned to do in life, mothering is among the most difficult,” says Susan Bernard, author of *The Mommy Guide*. “Just when you think you’ve got it all figured out, your child enters a new stage or backslides into an old one.”

When I first moved to Topsfield fourteen years ago, I extended my coaching expertise to new mothers—guiding them through the emotional changes of embracing their new identity. Now, I teach seminars helping women recreate an identity “beyond

motherhood.” Many of these mothers, like me, are dealing with our “babies” preparing to leave home. A whole new set of challenges in “letting go” is upon us.

Can the daughter I left off at Trinity Pre-School thirteen years ago really now have her driver’s license and take herself anywhere she wants to go? Can the son who used to crawl behind me dragging one leg on the floor really be entering Masco this year?

Once needed and valued for my nurturing skills, I am now anguishing over the fine line between being a mother and being a friend to my young adults, who have opinions and perspectives of their own that I increasingly value. Always choosing to be the parent first, I still admire their sense of self and passions for life and want to create an environment that allows them to thrive in the continued expression of their individuality.

My teenage daughter has helped me laugh more and stay fit because going to the gym with her is one of the ways we bond. My son has unknowingly taught me more about some gender differences, and assisted me in my incompetence with technology (which I will overcome).

One way I aid my in my children’s continued assertion of their uniqueness is by claiming my own. I increasingly build a life that extends beyond the intimacy of our home, freeing myself to more engage in the world in new ways. In expanding my own sense of self as my children are also spreading their wings, I trust in the earlier foundation of security I laid for my children. I have tried to live by this anonymous quote framed next to my fireplace: “There are two things you give your children: one is roots, the other is wings.”

As a coach, I find that many mothers, conditioned as women to put others first, also have to give themselves permission to have wings of their own.

In the process of cutting the strings with their children, they often have to find a new identity for themselves beyond being a family caregiver. That search entails a lot of vulnerable moments of asking questions like, “Who I am when I’m not a mother?” “What’s my life purpose beyond nurturing children?” and “How do I find the courage and skills to re-enter the workforce?”

Claiming or reclaiming those other parts of herself beyond family responsibilities can be a lonely, challenging and sometimes scary-- although rewarding-- journey for a woman. This Mother’s Day give all the mothers you know a special nod or hug of appreciation, not only for their nurturing skills, but for their strength in trying to live and love as fully as possible.

Gail Kauranen Jones is an author, life coach and workshop leader who has been guiding adults in transition for 18 years. A frequent radio guest on Common Ground (a public affairs program of WZLX, Boston, 100.7 FM), she lives in Topsfield with her two children. Her Web site is: [www. SupportMatters.com](http://www.SupportMatters.com). She can be reached at gail.kjones@verizon.net.