



# I am Mom

The real changes parenthood inspires happen within

By Cullen Curtiss

The day after my OB told me I could do some light driving, I eagerly awaited my husband's arrival home, then dashed out the front door, exhilarated by the notion of completing two simple errands *without* the cute cling of my 2-week-old Augustus. My milky bosom and I had a mere hour to transact with the world we had abandoned for motherhood.

I found myself floating along in rush-hour traffic, amazed that my driving skills had not suffered from my maternal hermitage. But once I hit the video store, the place from which my husband had been plucking my two-hour chunks of sanity, I felt strangely alone. I hadn't been without Augustus since the minute he was born.

His presence would have explained the huge circles under my eyes, the crusted white stuff on my oversized shirt, my mealy paunch, slumped shoulders and unwashed hair. What scenario must I have been projecting? Fifteen minutes into my freedom and already I wished Augustus were with me.

I returned my husband's discriminating movie choices. Pre-Augustus, I would have chosen a *Dogtown* or a



Photo by Jo Ann Garcia

"Through my last trimester, I had come to feel I was Queen Mother of the Earth," new mom Cullen Curtiss recalls. After the birth of Augustus, "I was as invisible as everyone else."

*Chinatown*, but that day I embraced two mindless romantic comedies. I could swear a smirk lurked in the face of the hip celluloid clerk.

"I have a son," I wanted to say. "Aside from giving me mommy-mush-brain, he breastfeeds every two hours, and I cannot always be entertained by the delicate design of his ear, the fattening curve of his glowing cheek or the playful twitching of his toes! Yes, the movies I've chosen are trash, but I am *not* frivolous and dull!"

I left with two videos that had never seen the theaters and drove across town to the grocery store. Through the doors I was humming a tune I couldn't immediately place, inhabiting that soundtrack-space

previously reserved for Alison Kraus, Coldplay or a flashy pop hit I'd heard at the convenience store:

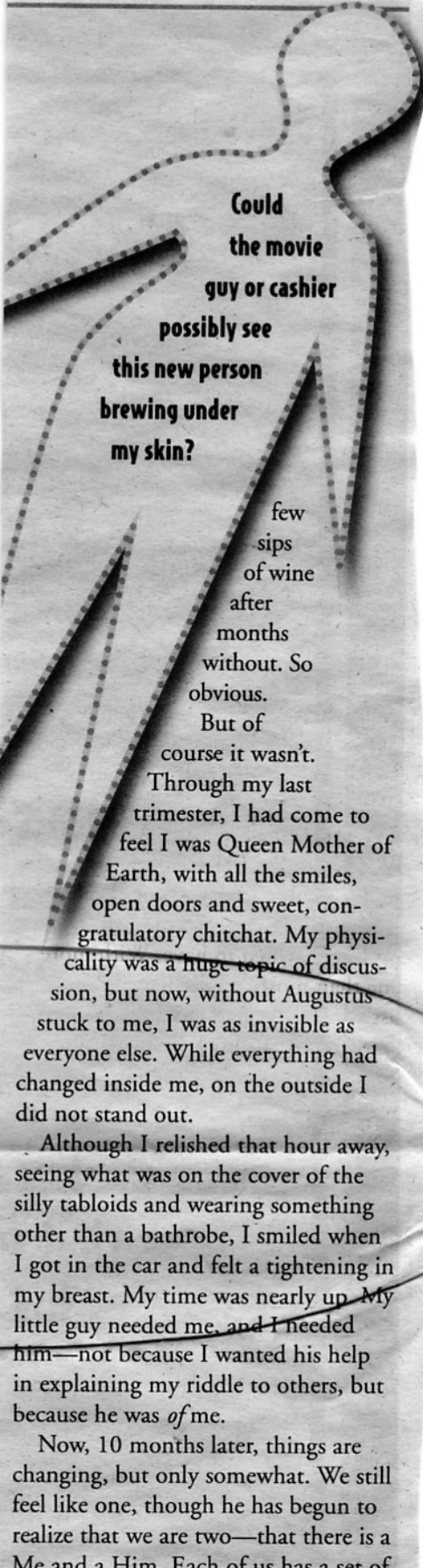
*"Rubber Duckie—you're the one—you make bath-time so much fun."*

I wondered whether, if I had raised my pitch just a little, I might have initiated a chorus

among the other lone moms and dads, pulling them out of their anonymity.

Losing my nerve, I picked up some size-one chlorine-free diapers and a bottle of red wine. Conspicuous? Controversial? I looked around and nodded, "Yes, I am a new mom whose nine months of prohibition are over."

At the register, I thought for sure the cashier would ask about my little one. The wine and diapers rode the belt, along with open bags of Chinese seaweed crackers, carob-covered raisins and reduced-fat cheddar cheese puffs. Add to the equation the spit-up-spoiled clothes and the pendulous bosom and there was only one possible explanation: I'm a new mom with an appetite only breastfeeding can arouse, who enjoys a



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brewing under  
my skin?**

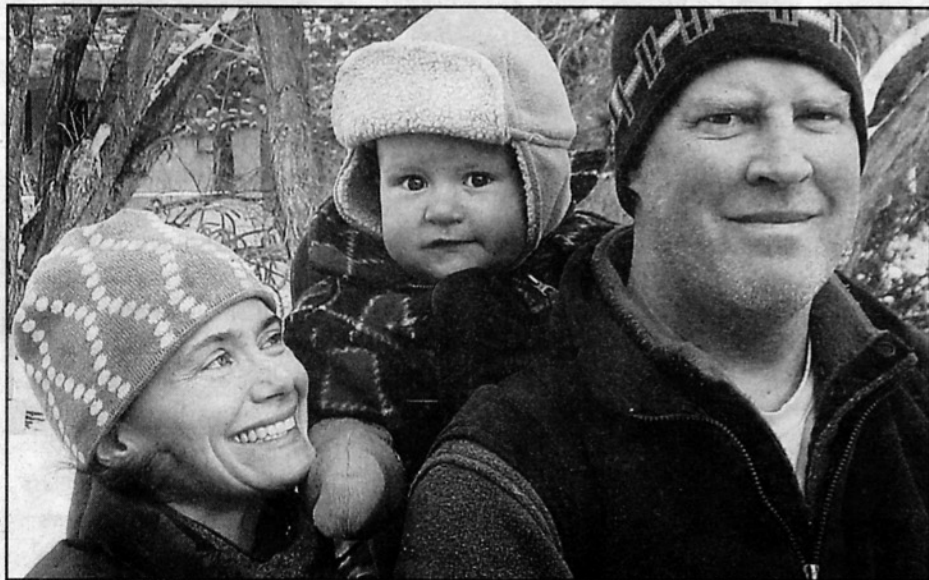
few  
sips  
of wine  
after  
months  
without. So  
obvious.

But of  
course it wasn't.  
Through my last  
trimester, I had come to  
feel I was Queen Mother of  
Earth, with all the smiles,  
open doors and sweet, con-  
gratulatory chitchat. My physi-  
cality was a huge topic of discus-  
sion, but now, without Augustus  
stuck to me, I was as invisible as  
everyone else. While everything had  
changed inside me, on the outside I  
did not stand out.

Although I relished that hour away,  
seeing what was on the cover of the  
silly tabloids and wearing something  
other than a bathrobe, I smiled when  
I got in the car and felt a tightening in  
my breast. My time was nearly up. My  
little guy needed me, and I needed  
him—not because I wanted his help  
in explaining my riddle to others, but  
because he was *of* me.

Now, 10 months later, things are  
changing, but only somewhat. We still  
feel like one, though he has begun to  
realize that we are two—that there is a  
Me and a Him. Each of us has a set of  
knees and hands, one can walk and  
the other is trying, but still, we feel

## Infants & Toddlers



Cullen Curtis, Augustus Joe Curtiss-Mitchell and Toner Mitchell

better when we are close. When I walk into the house, he raises his head from an engaging toy. I swear no one else has or ever will greet me that way—with an all-face smile and an all-body giddy-up. I grab him before I remove my hat, coat or shoes.

Augustus is someone my husband and I endeavored to have. With more time than most couples have to discuss why we wanted children, we explored our curiosity about what a

child might teach us, how a child might help us grow and evolve. Already we are changing.

We're letting go of the independence we enjoyed before becoming parents, trying instead to be fair and clear, checking in with one another about what we need and when we need it. This isn't always easy, and I have to remember the advice I'll soon give Augustus: Use your words.

Our previous occasional malcon-

tedness might foster an unhappy child, so we try to breathe optimism. We want Augustus to experience and feel hope. The world may be better when he is older than at the present, or at least occupied by more forward-thinking, caring people. And he'll be one of them.

I used to try to do several things at one time, but now I stop, sit, watch and play. Previously fascinated by existential wonderlands, we try now to savor the present, where moments—his joy at knocking over toy towers, love of peek-a-boo, keep-away and chase—are perfect.

"You seem to love more easily now," my mother told me. This change has been effortless.

Where things have really changed is on the inside. The outside stuff is peanuts. I'm getting my body back, we're all getting more sleep and I'm enjoying more stimulating media. I have become my former self to some degree, but if I wanted my life to remain the same, what would have been the point of having Augustus?

But could the movie guy or cashier possibly see this new person brewing under my skin? Could they see that I am more patient, whereas before patience seemed like an excuse for too much deference? That I am more aware of why my parents struggled with one another and worried so much, where I perceived them as ill-equipped and reactionary? That I demand more kindness of the world, whereas before I might have looked the other way?

No, the casual observer cannot see this stuff, but it's mommy-making material of the finest quality. And I can expect more because for the rest of my life, thank goodness, I'll be Augustus' mom wherever I go, as if I've always got my finger lodged in his mighty grip.

*Cullen Curtiss is a freelance writer living in Santa Fe. She spends her free time outside or working on a novel, The Garden of Eva. Visit [cullencurtiss.com](http://cullencurtiss.com) for more information.*