


I Wanted to Prove Motherhood Wouldn't Change Me

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A dinner party thrown while I was pregnant was meant to convince my friends I was “still me” — but I learned something more.

Before I'd gotten married, I'd lived in New York City, where my foodie friends and I had loved dining out together and having deep conversations late into the evening. Naturally, when I settled in the suburbs, I socialized less with my city friends, but they didn't complain until I announced that I was having a baby.

Instead of showering me with congratulations, my core group warned me not to become a full-blown suburban stereotype. One actually said: “Please don't become one of those moms who talks about her kids and nothing else.” *Ouch.*

So when motherhood seemed to be closing in fast, I decided to prove to my skeptical friends (and okay, myself) that I was the same old me. How? By throwing an elaborate dinner party for my three closest pals and their significant others. No baby on the way could keep me from cooking six dishes from scratch, hosting dinner for eight and showing everyone how much fun I still was!

The dinner party — and what I missed

I was 7 months pregnant, all belly, squatting to check on the salmon in the broiler and reaching on tiptoe for serving platters above the refrigerator. My friends kept asking to help, but I kept shooing them away. The end result was a delicious meal that I haven't replicated since, several years and two

children later — but I was too busy to enjoy myself.

I often think about that night when I'm spending quality time with my children but my mind is elsewhere. They want me to play dress-up or read them a favorite book again. I'm thinking about starting dinner or writing an article that's due tomorrow. But instead of rushing off and spoiling the fun, I remind myself to slow down and savor the moment.

The night of my dinner party was the last time that all eight friends got together for an entire year. I was sleep deprived, adjusting to life with a newborn. Others were preoccupied with the novelty of being engaged, planning weddings.

I've often regretted not taking time to enjoy their company the night of the dinner, instead focusing my energy on the meal. Fortunately, that experience changed my perspective about spending quality time with important people. And no one is more important than my children.

I've realized that there's no finish line for motherhood like there is for a dinner party, and if I'm always running around to get things done efficiently when my kids are underfoot, I'll miss out on the whimsical moments that make motherhood worthwhile.

During my dinner party, I heard chuckles coming from the living room while I juggled dishes in the kitchen, but I chose to skip the fun. I've made a conscious effort not to do that with my children. I get on the floor with them. I giggle and tickle. I do silly voices when I read them stories. I dance, play tag, and imagine that I'm a fairy with gusto. Dinner can wait. My kids will only be little for a short while.

In the moment, I do my best to focus my attention on my son and daughter. But motherhood hasn't turned me into a single-minded drone who only wants to talk about baby milestones, pottytraining troubles, and parenting techniques, as my not-too-tactful friend predicted years ago. Being a mom hasn't changed my desire to meet my oldest, dearest friends for dinner and meaningful conversation. Rather, it's inspired me to connect my children to my past.

The connections I want to keep

Even though it's sometimes tricky to lug two youngsters into the city — especially when there were diaper bags and nursing cover-ups to contend with — I've made a point to see my old friends often enough for my children to love them as much as some of their relatives. Everybody wins: I don't miss out on established friendships, my children bask in the attention of special adults, and my friends get to know them as individuals instead of just some abstract idea of "children."

In a few years, my kids will want to know what I was like before I became a mom, and my old friends are exactly the ones whom I want answering those prying questions. If I'd fully succumbed to suburban life and lost touch with my pals, none of this would be possible.

But I do surrender, unapologetically, to certain aspects of my friend's skeptical view of motherhood. I've found myself naturally gravitating toward my children's changing interests, which means that I've gushed over finger painting, Disney princesses, Taylor Swift songs, and more.

But my relationship with my son and daughter shouldn't all be about their interests, so we read classic picture books that were my favorites in the 1970s. We play games that have fallen out of favor, now that Candy Crush has outpaced Red Rover. And we've cooked together since my children were babies, because it's one of my passions... and because I want them to be able to prepare elaborate dinner parties for their own friends one day, should the mood strike.

When I've had a particularly trying day — with tears and time-outs and toys strewn everywhere — and I finally get everyone to bed, I feel drained yet satisfied, knowing that I'm giving my children everything that I've got without compromising my own identity, and they're thriving. It's a little reminiscent of the way that I felt at the end of my long-ago dinner party.

After my friends had left and I was stuffed from the meal and had a kitchen full of dirty dishes, I sat for a long time, letting it sink in that I was very pregnant and very tired. But I couldn't stop grinning, because I'd realized that over the course of the evening, I'd managed to convince the most important skeptic of all that motherhood wouldn't be able to change who I was on the inside: Me.

Lisa Fields is a full-time freelance writer who specializes in health, nutrition, fitness, psychology, and parenting topics. Her work has been published in Reader's Digest, WebMD, Good Housekeeping, Today's Parent, Pregnancy, and many other publications. You can read more of her work here.