

Motherhood.. It will change your life!

Time is running out for my friend. We are sitting at lunch when she casually mentions that she and her husband are thinking of "starting a family". What she means is that her biological clock has begun its countdown and she is being forced to consider the prospect of motherhood.

"We are taking a survey," she says, half joking. "Do you think I should have a baby?" "I think it will change your life." I say carefully, keeping my tone neutral. "I know" she says. "No more sleeping in on Saturdays, no more spontaneous vacations..." But that is not what I meant at all. I look at my friend trying to decide what to tell her.

I want her to know what she will never learn in childbirth classes. I want to tell her that the physical wounds of childbearing will heal, but becoming a mother will leave her with wounds so raw that she will be forever vulnerable.

I consider warning her that she will never read a newspaper again without asking "what if that had been my child?". That every plane crash, every fire will haunt her. That when she sees pictures of starving children, she will wonder if anything could be worse than watching your child die.

I look at her carefully manicured nails and stylish suit and think she should know that no matter how sophisticated she is, that becoming a mother will immediately reduce her to the primitive level of a she-bear protecting her cub. That a slightly urgent call of "Mom!" will cause her to drop a soufflé or her best crystal without a moment's hesitation, only to find that the anger she feels, will become a joy she has never experienced when she discovers that the call came only over a lost toy.

I feel I should warn her that no matter how many years she has invested in her career, she will be professionally derailed by motherhood. She might successfully arrange for child care, but one day she will be waiting to go into an important business meeting, and she will think about her baby's sweet smell. She will have to use every ounce of discipline to keep her from running home, just to make sure he is all right.

I want my friend to know that everyday routine decisions will no longer be routine. That a visit to McDonalds and a five year old boy's understandable desire to

go to the men's room rather than the women's, will become a major dilemma. That right there, in the midst of clattering trays and screaming children, issues of independence and gender identity will be weighed

against the prospect of that a child molester may be lurking in the restroom. I want her to know that no matter how decisive she may be at the office, she will second-guess herself constantly as a mother.

Looking at my attractive friend, I want to assure her that eventually she will shed the pounds of pregnancy, but she will never feel the same way about herself. That her life, now so important, will be of less value to her once she has a child. That she would give it up in a moment to save her offspring, but will also begin to hope for more years. Not so much to accomplish her own dreams, but to watch her child accomplish his. I want her to know that a cesarean scar, or shiny stretch marks, will become badges of honor.

I want her to know that her relationship with her husband will change. Not in the way that she thinks. I wish she could understand how much more you can love a man who is always careful when diapering the baby, or who never hesitates to play "bad guy" with his son. I think she should know that she will fall in love with him for reasons that she would now find unromantic.

I wish my modern friend could sense the bond she will with women throughout history who have tried desperately to stop war and prejudice and drunk driving. I hope she will understand why I can think rationally about somethings, but become temporarily insane when I discuss the threat of nuclear war to my childrens future.

I want to describe to my friend, the exhilaration of seeing you kid learn to hit a baseball. I want to capture for her the belly laugh of a baby who is touching the soft fur of a dog for the first time. I want her to taste the joy that is so real that it hurts.

My friends quizzical look makes me realize that tears have formed in my eyes. "You'll never regret it." I say finally. Then I reach across the table, and squeezing my friend's hand, I offer a prayer for her and me and all of the mere mortal women who stumble their way into this holiest of callings.