

# The momentum of momhood

People have always been obsessed with preserving memories, moments, feelings.

It's why cave paintings once acted as mounted eight point bucks for our ancestors. It's why the Bible exists as our guide. It's why my mom is our family paparazzi. She's behind her camera, snapping away at every moment, no matter mundane. (We tease her for it, but the truth is we're grateful.) It's why I wish I had hired someone to film my wedding. It's why I write.

Even now, as I watch Collin run, speak in complete sentences, and play, it's hard for me to remember him being as cuddly, quiet, and small as Frank.

Parents, in particular, wish to document every little moment of their children's lives and make keepsakes of things others would view as garbage. (If you are a mom and you are reading this you know you've stashed away a hat from the hospital and/or a snippet of hair.) We want our children to grow up happy and healthy, but we want to keep them little forever. It's a paradox as old as time.

As Frank rests beside me, I want to etch this moment in my memory forever. His tiny body sinks into a pillow that would disappear if I lay beside him. His belly rises and falls with every breath, a tiny smile and sigh periodically interrupting that rhythm. (He's talking to angels, as my mother says). The soft, white sleeper dotted with blue and green elephants and butterflies that belonged to his brother not so long ago. That sweet, sweet newborn baby smell that could propel Yankee Candle past McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Apple if only it could be contained.

"Enjoy it while it lasts." "It flies by pretty quick." These are just a few of the comments new parents hear the most. I used to get annoyed when strangers would approach me and baby Collin with that advice. But now, when I compare my two sons (don't judge - it's inevitable and in no way leads to a diminished love for either child), I see exactly what they meant. I can only hold Collin when he's fast asleep, and even then, just for a few minutes.

Frank rolled over at five weeks. I told him to slow down. Collin will be three tomorrow. It's official; he's no longer a baby, but a little boy.

At every stage of my sons' lives, I've told them, "I wish I could just freeze you and keep you like this forever." But, that's not God's plan. We are designed to grow and change into adults and establish ourselves as independent beings.

This is particularly difficult for mothers. We carry our babies within us for the better part of a year, then in our arms for as long as we can thereafter. But, eventually, we have to put our babies down. They aren't meant to be ours forever, no matter how hard we try to prolong it.

Think about the progression of our sacraments: we bring our baby to the Church in our arms; half-way through elementary school, we invite them to join us at the table alongside us; in high school we ask them to accept our faith for themselves; and as adults, they can choose to start a family of their own by marrying into the Church or can choose a vocation. We celebrate as our children grow in faith, even if it means they are drifting further from us.

God eases the pain of child development by offering something new to enjoy for every joy we must relinquish. Frank is just discovering his world, which is exciting to watch. I hold him up to the mirror and he stares at the baby looking back at him. Right now, he doesn't recognize his face, but the moment he does will be an important step in the formation of his identity. Lacking the power of speech, as Frank gazes into the mirror, he can't entertain me with comments Collin makes, like, "My face is growing," or "Can you make my hair happy?"

We also gain and lose parenting frustrations at every stage. Collin helps himself to the healthy snacks I keep at his level in the refrigerator and pantry, while Frank wails until I feed him. But, Frank can't disappear in a store or run out into the street the way his big brother can. As our children gain independence, we are selfishly relieved that we can gain back some of our own time and space, only to find ourselves worrying more.

I know the teenage years can be especially rough (I'm a high school teacher, after all), but even this trying time has gifts to offer. Watching your child performing on

the sports field or the stage, creating paintings or poetry, building engines – all of those hours you spent playing catch or dress-up, finger-painting and reading stories, and stacking blocks have come to this. Summer jobs. College acceptance letters. Prom. Graduation. These are all enormous steps toward adulthood that should reassure you that you've raised your child well.

If you're a parent of a teen, you may be dismayed by your child's utter lack of respect for you and everything you stand for, but have faith. I can't tell you how many of my students' parents are amazed when I describe the teen they see as rude, defiant, and lazy at home as being polite, compliant and hardworking.

It's a teenager's job to drive his or her parents crazy. It makes going away to college and moving out on their own far less painful.

When you wonder what happened to that sweet little person you so loved, pull out that baby album and remind yourself of the times you thought it was easier. Back when your child's universe revolved around you. It's hard to let go, but think of what you've gained. A few pounds, maybe. Sleep (except when they're out late on the weekend). Confidence. Independence – yours and theirs. Warm memories. And – I hope – faith.

"Write down everything they say and do that makes you smile," my aunt told me awhile ago. "You forget," she said. I didn't and I have. I must change. I will.

I try to document as much of the boys' lives as I can. Being a writer helps, but also gets in the way. The best thing to do is be present in that moment, truly experiencing it from every angle, rather than trying to replicate it in the future.

This time around, I'm enjoying the little things, especially the ones I found frustrating when I first adapted to parenthood. Skimping on a few hours sleep every night for several months isn't worth getting cranky over. Rather than thinking of feeding time as an interruption to my schedule, I see it as a chance to be truly present in bonding with my baby... because sippy cups, water bottles, and pint glasses aren't too far away.