

Motherhood. "We know what causes that."
by Kathleen Smith

If I had a dollar for every time someone has said those words to me, I would be a very rich woman! Holy cow! How come everyone who sees that I have a bunch of children has to say that? I suppose they are putting their fears on me. They think that if they were saddled with that many children, they would be wondering what the heck caused it, right?

Just for the record, I know what caused it, and I'm actually happy about it. Sure, I'm not saying that any of it was easy. I mean, just imagine me with three children in diapers, three pre-teens and a baby on the way! It sounds dreadful! Am I crazy or did I just forget to take my pill? Sure I have a dozen children, but does it necessarily follow that I am crazy? Well, yes, but... Let me explain.

My mother had twelve children, and no, I did not inherit it from my mother. Mom was a good egg. Literally! She could get pregnant like nobody's business. Along with the twelve children, she had some miscarriages too but the thing is, since she had been a small child, it had been her urgent and burning desire to have a dozen children. Some women do actually WANT children. That does not mean that they are crazy. I suppose, however, that I am really trying to convince myself. You see, I was there when mom was having her seventh through twelfth children and at the time it meant nothing to me. However, when I got married and suddenly Motherhood was staring me in the face, I had to take a long, hard look at myself and wonder what in the WORLD I was thinking!

Now, don't get me wrong. I love my children and I'm glad I have them. BUT, getting pregnant and having a child are two very, very different things, if you know what I mean. Excuse me for talking bluntly, but I assumed that everyone reading this book already knows the facts of life. If that is not the case, I recommend you either stop reading and brush up on the subject, or just grin and bear it. It's really not that scary. So, as I was saying: Getting pregnant. Right. A great thing. Pretty easy too. And at the time, it sounds like an OK idea. I mean, you feel great, the bills are paid, you are happy, you love your husband, etc. etc. It just all sounds peachy. Then, twenty minutes later, when you start to feel sick for the first time, you can't button your jeans because it just doesn't feel good and people start asking you if you think you need to sit down, you begin to wonder if you weren't crazy after all.

I remember thinking, many times, after I got pregnant: What could I possibly have been thinking!/? I'm so sick I can't stand up, the thought of food makes me gag, the room spins around me like a top, everyone, including and maybe especially my husband, seems like they are mocking me with the glib way they just sit to a table and eat food, or wantonly buckle their belts around their non-bulbous waists and my life is passing before my eyes every moment as I feel like I am walking down a dead-end corridor where, at the end of the endless nine month sentence I have the happy prospect of labor and delivery waiting for me with their own set of horrors, including but not limited to: long and painful contractions through long and pain-filled heartburn infested nights, doctors who smile and say: "Go home and we will check you tomorrow.", and you smile and say, "Thank you doctor.", but you are really wishing you could strangle him because you cannot imagine going one more minute in labor and now he's asking you to wait another whole day! (As if it's his fault, which of course it isn't, but you don't care because you will blame anyone for anything so long as you can just get it over with!)

I ask you: Does that sound crazy? Yes. It does. I can completely understand why people think I'm crazy. But the thing is, they are thinking it for all the wrong reasons. So, let me set the record straight. I'm not crazy because I'm willing to go through the nightmare of pregnancy, labor and delivery. No, that, my dear, is not the reason you should think I am crazy. Compared with the rest of what motherhood is about, THAT seems like a picnic. Yes, a picnic. Sure, the picnic has ants and grasshoppers and moldy bread, but it is a picnic nonetheless when compared with the REAL challenges of motherhood.

The drama of what people see about motherhood is the labor and delivery. The drama is real and the pain is real, but it has an end. The most difficult thing about motherhood, I think, is that it has

no end! Don't get me wrong. I love being a mother. But, in the beginning, the worst demon I faced was the demon of eternity. He loomed before me like a giant, chanting over and over: This is going to go on forever! It is worse than the Chinese water torture, I'm sure. I mean, just look around you and see the heaps of dirty laundry, piles of dirty dishes, mounds of strewn toys, and hear cries for food, shouts for help, and noises that would frighten even the bravest soldier, and then hear that interminable voice saying: Forever. Forever. Forever! Wow. Whose idea was this, anyway? That's what I had to ask myself. I did not even wonder about the mother who jumped off the bridge because she said she couldn't take it anymore. I only wondered when my turn would come.

I'm sorry if this sounds a little fatalistic. I just did not want to make light of the predicament that many women find themselves facing. It is very real, very scary, and insanely funny in a weird, mixed-up sort of way. It often makes me think of Daniel in the Lion's den. He is one of my heroes. He is told not to pray to anyone but the King, and instead of doing the sensible thing, ie. praying to the King, he just goes ahead and prays to God, right in front of his open window. I mean, he doesn't even have the good sense to close the curtain or something, or just pray in his heart. No, he has to make it his usual thing, out loud, in front of the window, and, surprise-surprise, there are the King's men just waiting for him. Then Daniel, rather than argue about it or try to change the law, or get a reprieve or something, he just goes quietly to the lion's den. Now these are no ordinary lions! These lions have been starved to make them ravenous. Have you ever tried to feed a ravenous animal? It's not pretty. My daughter, sandwich in hand, picked up a hungry kitten once, and to her utter dismay, the kitten made a giant lunge for her mouth and tried to grab the food and instead caught my daughter, square on the lip. No, Daniel would not have been sitting pretty. But, calmly, quietly, he goes to the Den. At this point, like with a mother, we wonder if Daniel is a little loony. Here he is going quietly to his anything-but-quiet death and he is asking not for a reprieve, but actually has pity on the King! "Don't worry about me, O King, I'll be alright. Buck up now!" No, he didn't actually say that, but you get the idea. Daniel is not worried. He's calm, he's cool and he goes down smiling.

I had to ask myself: What did Daniel know that I didn't? What did he have that I could get? Where did he get the appalling nerve to sink into a lion's den without cringing? We will get into that, later. But for now, suffice it to say that Daniel HAD something. That something allowed him to go down smiling and come up alive. Daniel DID come up alive. I read it. I believe it. And now, I have lived it, because I AM A MOTHER.