

NEIGHBORHOOD PARENTS NETWORK

FEBRUARY 2002 NEWSLETTER

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Vote for your favorite kid-friendly businesses! See ballot on page 7.

Neighborhood Parents Network (NPN) provides neighborhood and community forums to support and educate children and their parents with regard to issues of parenting and early childhood emotional, physical, and social welfare and development.

NPN has a membership of approximately 1000 families who live in the East Bay Area of California. New members and ideas are always welcome.

Memberships are \$35 for one year and \$20 for six months. Members receive a monthly newsletter and are welcome to participate in any NPN event or activity. Prospective members are invited to attend an event before joining.

NPN is a nonprofit (501c4) organization. Dues and donations are not tax-deductible. Please call 527-6667 or visit www.parentsnet.org for more information or a membership application.



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Fast Forward

by Sarah Lavender Smith

What's this fish? What's this fish?"

My daughter Colly, who just turned three, is lobbing questions from her car seat while I merge into freeway traffic. I reach back with my right hand and grab her coral reef sticker book while looking over my left shoulder to ease into the lane. "That's not a fish, sweetie. That's coral. You saw these when we were in Hawaii, remember?"

"Yeah—I had swimmies like big muscles!" She means the inflatable swim floaters that slide onto a kid's arms like sleeves.

The sticker book will distract her for a good twenty minutes while the two of us cruise down Highway 101 toward Southern California. We're visiting my family while my husband stays behind to work. I'm seven months pregnant, so this is my last chance to travel before the baby comes.

Colly and I took this same trip nine months ago, back when her favorite phrase was "my do dat." Complete sentences were a stretch; attention span, five minutes max. I'd reach back to hand her a baggie of goldfish crackers, and she'd eat two before shaking the rest out. She'd cry, "Baby bloogah!" and wouldn't stop until I forwarded the Raffi CD to *Baby Beluga*. My right hand became a little whale pretending to swim in a wave while my left hand gripped the steering wheel. But midway through the song, she'd wail, "No! Day-whoa!" and I'd skip to Raffi's *Day O*.

"No! Bloo-gha!"

When that trip reached its exhausting conclusion, toys, books, naked dolls, doll clothes, food wrappers, crackers, wipes, empty tippy cups, two socks, two shoes, and one slightly sticky baby blanket coated the car floor between the front and back seats.

Fast forward to this trip, and she has her own backpack in which she organizes her dolls and toys. She deliberately puts her sticker book away before unpacking her Madeline doll, and when I point out the agricultural fields that we're driving past, we spend several minutes discussing farming methods and vegetables.

My little buddy. When did she become my companion as much as my charge?

It hits me that the next time I drive this route, I'll hear a newborn cry; I'll have heavy, leaky breasts; and we'll stop even more often for changing and feeding. I'll concentrate on the baby's needs, and in doing so push my big girl to act more independently. If she demands my help less frequently, it'll be a relief, won't it?

In playgroup, the other moms and I celebrate the little things our kids accomplish by themselves, but on this last road trip before the baby comes and everything changes, I don't feel like celebrating my daughter's development. Her blossoming conversational skills, her newfound sense of responsibility, and her tender awareness of her growing body instead fill me with a sense of loss and longing. At this moment, I can honestly say we are each other's everything. I secretly fear that the intensity of our love and our dependence on one another will be diluted when my arms envelope my new baby and Colly grows into her big-sister role. As much as I want this baby, I don't want to shift my focus from my firstborn. Yet I will, and that inevitability fills me with nostalgia for something that hasn't yet passed.

When we pull up to my sister's house six hours later, my daughter packs her toys, fastens the Velcro flaps on her sneakers, and jumps out to play. A few crumpled tissues and an empty juice box are all that litter the back seat.

Sarah Lavender Smith, a freelance writer who edits this newsletter, is the mom of Colly, now almost four, and Kyle, seven months. Since she wrote this essay last year, she has survived the same road trip with both kids and still has the Raffi tape loop in her head.

We are interested in publishing your personal essays about your parenting experiences. Take us off the beaten path. Please submit essays (600 words max) to kbricetti@attbi.com or call Kathy at 524-8276.