

Becoming a Grandmother

from Susan Richman

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This must be every longterm homeschooler's ultimate dream-- to be present during the birth of your own child's first child. Such a gift and blessing-- words escape me, and still a sense of deep gratefulness floods me when I remember the night of December 14, 2000, when little Sarah Catherine Richman came into the world. Some of you may remember that this was the very worst weather and most dangerous night for driving this whole winter-- it was the night of the severe ice storm. Someone was watching over this baby and these new parents though, and all went so well, and everyone driving to the hospital to share in this birthing was kept safe from any harm. She was welcomed in so lovingly by her parents, Jesse and Patricia, and by both grandmothers and 'Aunt Molly' and everyone else who waited eagerly out in the hospital hallway, eager to come in to greet this new wonder. And if you'd like to see some really cute baby photos of Sarah during her first week, just check out www.pahomeschoolers.com/baby.

I feel like I've really come full circle-- a child of mine has now had a child, and life continues and goes on and moves forward into the next generation. It's giving me new perspective and making me remember and cherish those years when my now grown kids were babies, and to see the value in the type of parenting that fosters close family ties. It's also made me see how similar having a new baby is in many ways to starting out on the very scary adventure of homeschooling-- both make mothers feel uncertain, unsure, anxious, and worried..... often! The need for support is really crucial-- and support can come through reading books, newsletters, online websites, and probably most importantly through meeting others who are just a bit beyond where you are in parenting-- or homeschooling.

One of the real delights for me in this past month of grandparenthood has been going with Patricia and baby Sarah to their first two La Leche League meetings, offered through the international organization that gives help and support to nursing mothers. I'm a retired LLL leader, and almost all of my first homeschooling friends were people I'd met through League, so this felt like 'coming home' to me. I can't tell you how special it was to see women still getting together to share, support, empathize and gently guide new moms-- and certainly more through example than lecture. Here were moms actively soothing babies and toddlers, responding warmly, sharing personal stories of how they'd grown and changed as mothers and women, sharing meaningful books that had helped them see mothering in a new way.



And it made me realize again just how important this chance to really *meet* others who have really done what you are setting out to do can be-- be it mothering a newborn or homeschooling older ones. You finally have a sense that *real people* do this-- they make mistakes, learn something from these, try new options and ideas, gain patience and skill over time, grow gradually in love and appreciation of their children, and learn to gain confidence by being with others who are like-minded rather than dwelling on the negative comments some might make about their choices. This direct mother-to-mother type of helping can never be replaced, and although all of the other ways of supporting mothers are so important, without that link to real people, something would be lost.

Made me see again the importance of getting together however informally with other homeschooling parents-- even at events organized mainly for kids, such as volleyball matches, or debate, or writing clubs, or Geography Bees. That chance to also talk and connect with other moms and dads is so key. We have the 15 minutes before the event as late stragglers arrive, the informal play time for the kids afterwards, the shared potluck lunch or supper or snack time, to just talk with other parents. We feel again that we're not alone in this, not crazy, that there are others to help us out, help us recharge our low batteries and move onward and upward. I keep a quote by Albert Schweitzer close by my desk area that says, "Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light." I see this `rekindling' going on all of the time at both LLL meetings and at almost all homeschooling events. I feel very grateful for these opportunities-- and in some difficult times I've had this past fall

related to homeschool politics, this support has been so crucial to me personally as I needed to be the one reaching out for guidance and perspective.

Hannah, as the thirteen-year-old `baby' in our family, never had the experience of helping with a younger sibling, something that was so key in her older sister Molly's young life, and also for her older brothers. But she's now a very involved aunt, loving to hold this new little baby, dance with her to wild Klezmer music while Patricia helps out in our office with the daily mail, and coax those first smiles from this bright little light. Hannah's also learning how portable a young baby can be, especially when a mother is nursing-- just pop the baby in a sling, and head off to the Shakespeare play with the rest of the family! Sarah actually slept through a marvelous free production of *A Comedy of Errors* with us recently, not minding at all that the play was full of shouts and racing about in the aisles right by her-- she was safe and secure in her mother's arms and cradled in the babysling Patricia had made for her with love. Hannah's getting a real view of what it's like to be a new mother.

Patricia is also already finding that she herself is being a model and help to others, just as every homeschooling mom becomes a help to others just starting out. She was recently in a local grocery store when a young mother of a ten-week old premie came up to her in great excitement. "Where did you ever find that babysling! I've been looking everywhere for one just like that!" The doctors and nurses at the hospital had urged her to hold her premie daughter as much as possible, as she'd missed out on those last few weeks of being carried inside. Patricia is already contemplating the idea of starting to make these carriers for others as a little sideline business-- and realizing too how her example of using it is already reaching out to other mothers. Some of you who have just been homeschooling a very short time will find this happening to you-- you'll suddenly find that to a brandnew mom starting out on homeschooling, *you* are an expert, someone with experience who can really give assurance and guidance.

I'm learning again about the delights of watching a baby change and grow and become more aware of the outside world and of all the loving people's faces that keep popping into view to smile at. I'm learning about stretching to offer help to my kids in any way I can to support them through this new change in their lives-- and often this takes on the delightful mode of carrying sleeping Sarah in her sling for an hour while Patricia and Jesse have some needed time together, and just as often may take the form of just matter-of-factly doing their dishes if I can see things are getting pretty piled up. Or it may mean that I think to invite Patricia and baby for an outing into the city with me to visit Molly and other friends-- as I remember how cooped up a new mother can feel and how wonderful the chance to get out and see others can be. And, of course, many times support means just tacitly encouraging them to head off on their own-- to be pleased when Patricia's had her first solo outing in the car with the baby all day, and to hear how well it's all gone, to encourage her that she'll learn from her baby what will work best, to notice when Patricia's presence has a very special calming effect on Sarah that no one else can match. I'm really enjoying all these types of serving. I just feel really grateful for being nearby and for being a part of this baby's life-- and I'll gladly take the diapering along with the cooing (and sometimes baby Sarah actually coos during the times when I'm doing the diapering!).

New homeschooling moms may need similar types of support-- someone friendly to invite them out to an informal park play day or the next homeschooling event or meeting, someone to help them in making decisions about curriculum or approaches to working with their kids day to day. Encouragement that they'll gradually figure out some unique ways that will work best for them, that they don't need to be in a rush or worry overmuch about finding the 'perfect' approach. Time will be on their side. Being a new homeschooling mom-- and just being a new *mom*-- are lonely endeavors if we're not careful. We are literally in our homes *a lot*, and at times with seemingly non-cooperative children or babies and no other adults to talk to for long stretches. It can be depressing-- and then that cycle of worry or irritation starts in. Those times for getting out and being with others can be a real lifeline.

I hope you can be that boost for someone this year-- you'll feel enriched even as you see someone else grow in confidence in learning the art of homeschooling.... and mothering.