



| a photo essay by Ali Smith

CAUGHT IN THE ACT OF *mothering*



There are so many words and phrases you can use to express the challenges [of motherhood]—*exhaustion, loss of control, time management, lack of support, career compromises*—but no words that adequately express the joys. I just know that since Lizzie’s birth I’ve had more laughs—more genuine, joyful belly laughs—than I had in the previous 36 years of my life.

—HANNAH BRIGHT

To check out the writing of some of the powerful women featured here, go to www.mothering.com/links and see “Caught in the Act of Mothering.”

The fierce, the tender, the just-holding-it-together—portraits of women who triumph in the face of the everyday challenges of parenting



When I had my child, lots of people told me that I'd never be able to pursue my personal dreams. Even my mentor . . . told me it was the end for me and my career goals. That depressed me so much. But I'm not afraid of hard work, and I feel I can still pursue my dreams. I decided to start home-schooling my daughter individually. Next year, I'm going back to school to get my MFA.

—OLA AKINMOWO (above)

Between the time I found out I was pregnant with my first child and when she was seven months old, my husband and I didn't have sex more than twice. At the end of my second pregnancy, my husband and I had some really good 'heavy, deep, and reals' about our sex issues. For the first time, we really got honest. Ever since those conversations, Marco has been extraordinarily romantic and affectionate. I'm taking the time to take care of myself more, and I look good and feel good about myself.

—SHANNON RIVERO



Ali Smith is a photographer whose personal work centers on issues that affect the lives of women. Her first book of photography, *Laws of the Bandit Queens*, has been called "this generation's quintessential homage to strong, smart, groundbreaking women." She is working on her next book, *Momma Love: How the Mother Half Lives*. Smith lives with her husband and son in New York City. See more of her work at www.alismith.com.





Choosing a father for your baby is one of the most important decisions a woman can make. So what started as a funny 'What if?' conversation with Darren, [a gay man and] my best friend of 20 years, became a 'Should we?' conversation. I didn't choose Darren and Sam [his partner] because they were my only choice to father my child. I chose them because they were my best choice!

—KITTY STILLUFSON



The contracts my band, Betty, uses have a rider that says 'experienced, reliable babysitters with references' where once we had listed a dozen different kinds of cocktails. Having been the star of my own life for so many years, how absolutely challenging it was to become a bit player in my own movie, and at times only an extra! What I am compelled to put into the

world is richer now that these two new lives have intertwined with mine and Tony's. My voice is less strident, more mellow. I am more confident about the sum of my ability, even though I never dreamed my ass would be so big. My compassion is vast for all women.

—ALYSON PALMER