

## Viewpoints

# Just wait till you have kids!

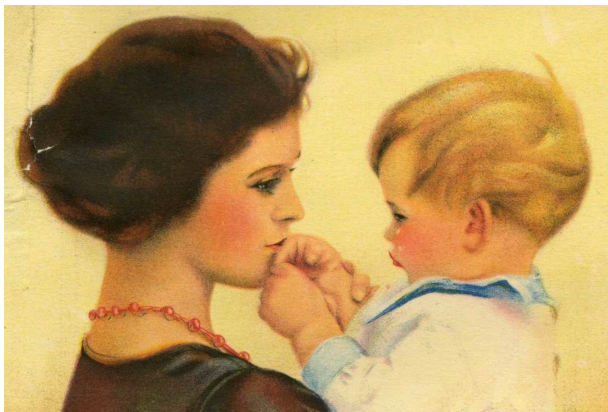
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by Joyce Eisenberg & Ellen Scolnic

As we watch our young next-door neighbor chase her two little boys around the backyard, we can't help but notice she's clutching her always-present phone, poised to take pictures. Her candid photos will be posted on Facebook by the end of the day.

Twenty years ago, we took pictures of our kids at play, too, if we remembered to bring the camera with us. Now those old 4-by-6 prints are tucked into albums that we pull out only when we want to cry.

In the faded photos from our own childhoods we are posed — dressed up and smiling on cue. Cameras were bulky, film was expensive, and parents would take pictures only on special occasions — birthdays, trips, and holidays.



When we recall our childhood dinners, we remember salmon croquettes, Creamettes, and frozen green beans. In those days, there was only one option for dinner. No one was allowed to be vegan, lactose intolerant, or allergic to peanuts. Moms fell into different camps:

“If you don't like it, don't eat it.”

“I'm not cooking three different dinners tonight.”

“You can't leave the table until you clean your plate.”

When we became moms, we vowed never to make our kids stay at the table until they cleaned their plates. That was such wrong, old-fashioned parenting! We'd even serve extra sides so each child had *something* they liked: a bowl of plain mashed potatoes — no chives, no pepper, no strange flecks on top — and a separate bowl of Tater Tots for the child who hated mushy things.

But like our moms, we would forget which kid liked what. When Michael came home from college, we'd proudly serve up a heaping bowl of creamed spinach only to be reminded: “I hate creamed spinach. Andy's the one who likes it!”

When we went back-to-school shopping, our mothers insisted that we buy a blouse to match the skirt we wanted. Our socks had to match, too. “You need to have a whole outfit,” they’d say. We read *Seventeen* magazine and longed for blond hair but weren’t allowed to dye it, so when summer came we tried to lighten our hair with lemon juice. A missing lemon we could get away with.

When we took *our* girls clothes shopping, we didn’t even pause at the matching outfits. We let them pick leggings and comfy shirts. We didn’t care if they wore mismatched socks just for fun. And when the girls wanted to dye their hair purple, we decided it wasn’t worth a huge fight. After all, it’s only hair.

Now when we see a 7-year-old in a tie-dyed shirt, striped pants, and a tiara at the supermarket, we don’t even blink. We smile at the young mom and know that she gave up the fight over what to wear, too.

Back in the day, our moms read books and baked cookies with us, but mostly they sent us outside to play. “Go amuse yourself,” they’d tell us. “Play with your sisters.” They’d holler our names when it was time for dinner. We rode our bikes to the drugstore to buy bubble gum. We wandered into the neighbor’s yard to play. We were free range and we didn’t even know it.

When our kids were little, we would get down on the floor to build a Lego castle and dress Barbies with them. As they got older, we tried our best to remember their friends’ names. We made them tell us what they had for math homework and where they were going after school. We weren’t helicopter parents, but we did keep track of their arrivals and departures.

Our moms cooked dinner for us most every night; restaurants were for special occasions. We cooked a little less. We’d eat at the local Thai restaurant on a weeknight and take the kids along. If they misbehaved, we would pick them up and march toward the front door as fast as we could. Now in restaurants we watch parents pull out an iPad, turn on a cartoon video, and hope the child stops crying.

More than once, when they were exasperated, our mothers told us: “Just you wait until you have kids!”

And then we did. We’ve had kids for years, and we get it: Our mothers were doing their best and loving us when they helped us put on a puppet show or made us wear hand-me-downs and finish our green beans. We get it because that’s what we were doing, too, when we whipped up the kale smoothie our teenagers liked, drove across town for Little League practice, and made them finish their Latin homework even though it was a “dead language.”

It’s a revelation to young mothers when they discover that there are many different ways to parent. Sometimes we do things the way our moms did; sometimes we do the opposite. We do what feels right.

But on Mother’s Day and every day, we’re grateful to receive — and give — a mother’s love.

*Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic, The Word Mavens, are the authors of a new book, “The Whole Spiel: Funny essays about digital nudniks, seder selfies and chicken soup memories.” Connect with them at [www.thewordmavens.com](http://www.thewordmavens.com)*