

Alone



There was a burned-out light bulb high up in the garage and an outdoor spotlight that I had tried to change only to have the bulb break off in the socket. There was the door from the kitchen to the laundry room whose handle fell off—months ago—and let's not forget the miniblinds in the basement, which fell from the window whenever I adjusted or dusted them. My neighbor told me that when it rained water cascaded from the gutter by my kitchen window. He explained that the gutter needed cleaning, promised to clean it, but never did. And finally, there was a large piece of plywood up on my roof that blew there in last year's tornado.

Fortunately for me, my garage had two bulbs in its ceiling and one of them still burned, and the same was true for the outdoor spotlight. Additionally, I had learned to deal with the laundry-room door, which is to say I stopped closing it, and as for those miserable miniblinds, I cursed them with some regularity. I felt

sorry for the neighbors who had to look at that plywood on my roof, and I worried about the clogged gutter, not to mention the fact that some day the remaining bulb in the garage would burn out. And then one day, the unthinkable happened. The door to my shower stall broke, leaving me and it unhinged. I had two choices—start taking baths or find a man, a handy man, a man with tools.

Welcome to my world. I am a *gerushah*, a divorced woman, and while it is true that I run my own business and I am a Superwoman in many ways—I am faster than a speeding bullet in creating *matzah*-ball soup for a sick child and able to be at my parents' side in a single bound when they are ill—it is also true that I am a complete failure with tools and a frightened *klutz* on ladders. When my toilet gets stopped up I know to call a plumber. When my house is overrun with bugs I know to call an exterminator. But whom do I call with my honey-do list?

There was that one plumber who told me over a clogged drain that he was always available to do odd jobs for single women. But when he mentioned as his only “for instance” the need to turn my mattress, I felt a little uncomfortable with his thought process. And so in my time of need I turned to the handyman section of the Yellow Pages, where I spotted several such businesses, including the name of a house painter who had done some work for me in the past. Knowing that he was reliable and not involved in rape, pillage, and plunder, I called him. He came that very day with two helpers in tow, and within fifteen minutes those three men and a ladder had my house in order. I was thrilled, even after I

got the bill—and I won't tell you what it cost because you'd *plotz* and tell me that there was indeed some plunder involved—but the bottom line is that my to-do's are done and showering is once again an option.

Shortly after my experience, I received a long-distance call from my folks. They told of their tortured sleep the night before. Their smoke alarm had begun to beep repeatedly in the middle of the night, informing them of the need to replace the battery. Not as surefooted as they were in decades past, they decided to just listen to it and deal with finding and climbing a ladder the next day. And so with a steady beep . . . beep . . . beep . . . they passed the night. I laughed at their story and took solace from it too. For I had thought that my own story was not just one of minor inconveniences but instead the story of the sometimes-aching aloneness of divorce. It was nice to be reminded that more than fifty years of togetherness could not save my folks from similar feelings of helplessness, nor could it assuage their desire to be rescued from their predicament. I will try to remember that the next time I stand wet and naked in the shower embracing a cold and unhinged shower door and when it is my turn to hear things that go beep in the night.

I Need a Man's Pants to Wash



Let me give you a little background so that you will understand. Though I am definitely a Jew, my strongest allegiance to my faith is probably gastrointestinal. I hanker after *kugel*, *kasha*, and *knishes*. I also have a propensity to cry when movies portray Jewish weddings and funerals. And though I bless candles, wine, and *challah* during my *Shabbos* dinners, my spirituality is more in line with New Age thinking. I meditate each morning to a special mantra and put out positive messages to the universe in hopes of manifesting my dreams. I do this in spite of the “Psycho Dairy Farm” cartoon I read that showed a pig in meditation saying, “I can be kosher. I will be kosher. I am kosher.” Additionally, I am forever in search of signs from the heavens that I am on the right track in life and thus I am pleased by all the lucky pennies I find along the way. I was thrilled, therefore, when I wrote my last book and found 165 coins in the process, and I was tickled by seventeen feathers that came my way,

making my writing “fly.” We New Agers don’t believe in coincidence. Everything is *besht*.

Another thing you need to know is that I adored my *bubbie*, and though she has been dead since 1993, I am still learning her lessons. One day, when I was newly married and she was eight years into widowhood, I asked why she never remarried. Her response was incomprehensible at the time, though I understand it after twenty-one years of marriage and a divorce. She said, “I need a man’s pants to wash?” Over the years I have toyed with the idea of using her words in my creative endeavors. In the aftermath of divorce I have become a motivational speaker, fiber artist, and author. The lectures I give and the books I write are illustrated with my artwork, contemporary quilts with words and symbols pieced into the design. At the edge of my consciousness, I can visualize a quilt with rows of plaid boxer shorts, captioned with her comment.

The reason that I have not yet made the “Bubbie quilt” is that I don’t know how to punctuate it. Do I use a question mark as Bubbie did to show disdain for marriage, or do I use a period to say I’m ready to sign on for another go? I have pondered these questions since my divorce and still have no answer. When I talk to audiences about getting in touch with their inner truth, I suggest that they try writing about their issues. Isn’t it “coincidental,” then, that the publisher of a Jewish newspaper invited me to begin writing a column about being single and Jewish?

OK, now try to understand. And while you do, remember that I don’t believe in coincidence, because

here's the second one and it's a little odd or perhaps totally strange. Today I was out for my daily walk and I found a dime in the street, and then I found a second something too. I found a pair of men's boxer shorts. At first I walked past them, but then I heard Bubbie's cryptic comment in my head and decided that I could not let them lie there. So I went back, picked them up, and carried them home, holding them at arm's length like a dead rat by the tail. They are now washing for the fifth time in scalding water and bleach, and I have likewise washed my hands with a fetish.

I can hear you wondering, "Is she *meshugeh*?" But what if it's a sign, a heavenly prod toward punctuating Bubbie's sentence? And so I will hold on to those shorts as I commence writing about being an "Attractive DJPF, 48, 5'7", 122 lb., mother of 3" and I will see where all of it takes me. I hope you will come along on the journey as I explore whether those boxer shorts are a symbol of what I no longer want (give me a break, they had brown streaks!) or if they are waiting here for some man to fill them (they're a size large—any takers?).

So now you understand and now I have begun and soon we will see what we see.

Cappuccino



Some women go to bars to meet men, but not me. I do most of my flirting over the cappuccino machine at my local gas station. I just love the stuff, and I am literally a card-carrying member of the gas-station coffee club, having my card punched after every purchase, getting every seventh cup free. There are a surprising number of men who drink this sweet stuff and I strike up a conversation with each one I meet. How often do they drink it? What's their favorite flavor? And do they promote it like an evangelist to their friends?

As for me, I drink one cup every Saturday and Sunday morning, and when I wrote my last book, the completion of each chapter was celebrated with a visit to the gas station. (All right, so there were twelve chapters and I got a "cuppa" two days in a row at the quarter, half, and three-quarter points, not to mention at the finish line.) My flavor of choice is hazelnut, but English toffee and French vanilla will do. And, yes, the manufacturer should pay me for all the promotion I give their product.

I have tried cappuccino in coffee shops but do not like it at all. It's too strong and costs a fortune, while the gas station only charges sixty-nine, seventy-nine, and eighty-nine cents for the twelve-, sixteen-, and twenty-ounce servings. Every now and again they have a special where any size cup costs sixty-nine cents and, ever conscious of getting my money's worth, I got addicted to twenty-ounce servings in this manner.

I figure I can learn a good deal about a man from his cappuccino habit. Right off the bat I know that since he's at the gas station and not the coffee shop he likes sweets and he's frugal. I also know that he probably lives in the area. If he tells his friends about his drinking habit he's a good sport, because he must surely take a ribbing. And I know about his addictive propensity by how much of it he drinks. Would I want to link my financial future to a man who is so out of control as to drink three of them a day—what if he gets introduced to casinos next?

Today is Sunday and so I stopped by my friendly neighborhood gas station to get my fill. No men were lingering but I met a wonderful woman there. She told me that if I make a one-time purchase of a special sixteen-ounce mug, I can fill it at each visit for only forty-nine cents. (And they will still punch my card!) We discussed that economically and calorically it's probably wise for me to do this. She also told me that every January the gas station picks a name out of a hat and that person gets free coffee for a year, and she's this year's winner. As if she's reading a Torah passage at the High Holidays, she tells me that this has been a

blessing and a curse because now she drinks two cups a day!

As I walk from the gas station laughing, my thoughts get all mixed up—men, cappuccino, blessings, and curses—and when I rearrange the words in my mind I come up with this thought on my single status. It is a blessing to be single because I can drink as much of this stuff as I want without some man peering at me over the top of his glasses as he mutters, “You’re going out for another cappuccino?” And of course, it’s a curse to be alone, as there is no one with whom to toast my various successes over a cuppa brew. In my mind I hear the words of Deuteronomy—“I set before you today a blessing and a curse”—and I know the admonition is to “choose life and live it.” I realize that I have chosen divorce and thus my current life, and now I must live it fully and happily, and I realize that in fact I do. And so I pat myself on the back for being able to find so much pleasure in such a small thing as cappuccino and over the fact that I remember to buy myself treats and celebrate my successes. I am so pleased to be having such wise thoughts that I consider going back to the gas station for more coffee. Life is wonderful. So is hazelnut cappuccino.

My Sin



I've always been a good girl in life—neat, sweet, and in my seat. Well, all right, there was that one time in high school when I had a party and we spilled lemonade on the carpet and scratched one of my brother's Temptations records, but I apologized, was forgiven, and never acted up again. It was shocking to everyone, therefore, when at the age of forty-two I took an enormous step off the expected path and got divorced. This really felt like quite a crime at the time, and in reality still does, as there is a pervasive myth in my family that divorce does not happen. Now, on my mom's side of the family this is fairly true, but my dad's side is another story altogether. Of nine first cousins, two have never married, one is in a long-term marriage, and the rest of us have been divorced at least once, not to mention my dad's brother who divorced a generation earlier. But in spite of all this history, the end of my marriage felt like an anomaly, a crime, a *shandeh*.

In the years since my divorce, these feelings have

enveloped me like cologne, and as I contemplate “my sin,” I come to realize that those who wish to call me a sinner are looking at the wrong offense. My divorce is not what I did wrong in life, as there is a larger and perhaps even precipitating sin to consider. It is this—after two years of marriage, my then husband and I decided to leave our hometown of St. Louis and move to California. This move had all the sanctions of society as we were pursuing a new career for him and our share of the American Dream. But in reality we were breaking up a family—our extended family—as surely as would “the other woman.” We were also putting a heavy and perhaps unbearable burden on our relationship, as we each became everything to the other in the absence of that most important thing, our *mish-poche*.

As I wax poetic over the concept of family, I will also confess that at the time I needed to leave St. Louis, as I was meshugeh from those very same people, who had a tendency to make demands upon my time, have great expectations of our relationship, and, in general, *hak mir a chainik*. After running away from my family, I learned a funny thing, however—friends do the same things. The only difference is that friends tend to come and go, whereas family is always “there” for you. Thus if a person must learn to deal with others, it seems a better investment of time, energy, and love to learn to deal with family.

Feeling as I do, it was odd for me when a friend boasted recently that her son was in Spain, loved it there, and might never return home. I was appalled at her news. Spain?! I know that they can be in constant

touch via e-mail and the phone, but what comfort will that be when one of them is ill, when one of them has a car in the shop and needs a ride, or when one of them has a *simcha* to celebrate? My own personal Diaspora is not much better. My son has left home for graduate school in New York, my older daughter will follow in my footsteps and move to California upon college graduation, and my younger daughter aspires to either coast for college in a year. And what can I say to these beloved children as my heart screams on many levels—for my sake and for theirs—“Don’t go!”? How do I have the *chutzpah* to tell them to do as I say not as I did? How do I explain that there’s nothing out there in the great beyond that is more important than family? How do I do anything except let them move and learn their own lessons?

I was in St. Louis recently and had lunch with my aunt, who is ninety-one years old. She told me of her wonderful life while also making clear the fact that her life would be entirely different and better still if one of her two children—or even if I—lived in town. And I know she’s right. And I know we have all missed out on a lot. And I know that this is my sin in life.

Code Word: Cookie



I found myself in the company of an amazing group of women. It was at a dinner party given by my friend, a stellar salesperson in a male-dominated industry, a woman who could always close the sale. Also present was our mutual friend, a highly successful stockbroker and financial columnist. And rounding out our high-powered half-dozen were an entrepreneur and two Ph.D.s. Of these three, one was a college professor and the other two worked in community development. Though I'm not sure what I expected that evening, I am quite sure it was not what I got, for what we women served up over dinner was a long conversation about men. Oh yes, for *forshpeiz* over wine, we got to know each other by briefly discussing our careers, and for dessert over a *glezel tai*, we debated the validity of astrology, but for the main course, we moaned and *kvetched* about men—how to find them, how to keep them, and what on earth it is that they want.

I don't wish to imply that I did not enjoy and participate fully in this conversation. It was informative to hear how these women juggled the polarities of being sexual but single adults, and it was a gas to giggle over the various escapades—make that sexcapades—of our sextet. My creativity was even sparked that evening as I suggested a garage sale of sorts where the six of us would recycle the “used” men of our lives, allowing one woman's castoff to be another woman's find. This plan fizzled, however, after I showcased the first man and it appeared that he was the ex-husband of the professor. Things were a bit tense—territorially speaking—until we determined that he was not, though he turned out to be the ex-husband of her friend!

But I guess having my creativity sparked was exactly what I had hoped for that evening; I just thought it would be on a professional level. I wanted each woman to tell me about her career and *kvell* about her accomplishments, so that I could glean bits of wisdom from her experience and be encouraged by her successes to aspire to more of my own. I wanted to hear of the glamorous aspects of her job as well as its ugly underbelly, so that I could return to my office ready to face the challenges of my own profession. In short, I wanted to be empowered by the lives of these women and feel full to overflowing with mine. Instead, I ached and felt empty, as we seemed to narrowly define a woman's success in life by the presence or absence of a man. As a sad case in point, one of the women had recently taken a year's sabbatical to write a first novel. The resultant manuscript was picked up by an agent, who then sold it to a major New York publishing company. Even with a sizeable

advance firmly in hand, this woman only casually mentioned the experience, gave herself little credit for it, and instead found herself somehow lacking because she was alone.

In the early days of my divorce, I guess I agreed with this assessment. I was dating a man who was not very accessible, as he was frequently—all right, perpetually—out of town. As I ached over our relationship, I described it this way: “I was the round of dough and he the cookie cut from it. When we were together, he fit back perfectly into my empty space. I was complete and he was encircled by my love.” It was a beautiful and romantic notion at the time, though it makes me quite nauseous, now as I refuse to see myself as incomplete and empty without a man. Sure I still want a relationship with a perfect fit, but that means a guy cut from the same dough, not from my hunk of it—a Gingerbread Joe to my Gingerbread Jane.

I am sure that I will spend many more evenings in the company of single women and that we will spend some of our time moaning about men. But as we do, I hope “Code Word: Cookie” will pop to mind and I will think of myself as Gingerbread Jane, whole, fully formed, and enhanced with lots of icing and candies, my many accomplishments. In that manner I will feel full to overflowing and empowered by my life.

A Tale of Two Professors



Last summer I dated a college professor who was a world-renowned authority in his field. I was completely turned on by his mind, not to mention—*gotenyu*—his hands. Ours was a torrid relationship that burned out in two months' time, and what I learned from the experience was that a fire that burns hot burns fast and then, poof, it goes out.

I had a little chat with God at the time and told Him I really needed to try that experience again, but I asked Him if the next man and I could take things a little more slowly, recognizing that perhaps it is wise to wait beyond the second date to get so physical. God must have laughed as He answered my prayer, and He must have muttered under his breath as well, "Be careful what you pray for."

It's months later and college professor number two has entered my life. He is a brilliant man whose many areas of intelligence do not overlap with my own, a man with whom I may have nothing in common but to

whom I am attracted nonetheless. Go figure. He looks like Robert Downey, Jr., from the front and like Neil Diamond from the side, and I think both of these men are darling—well, all right, so all three of them are. It's very odd, but I am intrigued by the professor's clean-shaven face and the promise of a beard that is there, and I have a burning desire to watch him shave. I should also mention that he has a scar on his forehead, another by his eye, and a third on his chin, and they call out to me across restaurant tables—I want to touch them or kiss them or more.

Lest you worry about my *tsatske* status, let me mention that the man is a classic and cautious Capricorn, and as such he needs to be very certain before he gets involved in a relationship. The translation of this is that we have had four dates and he has yet to kiss me good-night. God laughs at His little game of *gantz* or *gornisht* while I am live wired with sexual *shpilkes*.

Our next date is Sunday night and I have visions of walking into his apartment, dropping to my knees, and begging him for a kiss. Another option I explore is appealing to his engineer's mind with my own funky math, explaining to him that with a combined age of ninety-six we may not have a lot of time to waste. The final alternative is to take a deep breath and wait for him to shock and excite me with a kiss in his own good time. I'll probably take that last option because of a little fantasy that plays in my head: I see Mr. Capricorn and myself in one of our gentle hugs and then I see him pull back from it a bit as he gazes into my eyes. His gaze is long and deep like the one he surprised me with over dessert the last time we were

together. In the fantasy he informs me with great seriousness that he wants to kiss me, and I tell him that I would like it if he did. We hold each other's eyes until he lowers his face to kiss my forehead. I feel some consternation, but I just keep looking into his eyes until finally he tries it again, this time landing a kiss on my lips, the kiss of a brother. I don't know what to do, so I just look into his eyes until he bends a little farther than before and kisses me ever so gently on the side of my neck, at which time we continue our gaze and our eyes say more than lips ever could.

I find the fantasy to be ever so beautiful. So maybe I'll take that deep breath, remain calm as I recognize the steps we've taken—a hug here, an arm to hold there, that unexpected gaze over dessert—and try to be appreciative of the care he is giving our friendship and the respect he is giving me as a woman. And as I wait for our big moment, I know one thing for sure. There is definitely a lesson to be learned from this professor and from my ever-present and often comical God.

Thelma and Louise



It occurs to me that house hunting and shopping for a man are similar activities and that in both cases it is helpful to remember the wisdom of the famous movie characters, Thelma and Louise, who taught us that you get what you settle for.

I remember shopping for a home and thinking how much I loved the yard at house number one and how exquisite the master bedroom was in house number two and how workable the kitchen was in house number three and how much I always wanted a walkout basement like house number four. I also remember feeling discouraged when no one house possessed all of those elements—not to mention the fact that house number one was in the wrong school district and house number two was too expensive and house number three was on a busy street while house number four's walkout basement leaked.

In the case of homeownership, there is the possibility of building the dream house, but that's not possible

in the search for a man. Therefore, though I have a list of all the male amenities I desire, I don't know how to proceed. All I know is that I want a man I can laugh with like boyfriend number one, a man so friendly and easy to *shmooze* with that I can imagine him belly laughing and backslapping with my kids as they discuss topics of every kind. I also want a man who loves to read like boyfriend number two, a man with a vast library of books that he has actually read, a man whose library overlaps with mine. My dream man must be spiritual like the guy who was behind my personal door number three, and if he could have the exact same amount of body hair, that would be sensuous indeed. And while we're on the topic, I want a man like boyfriend number four, a man so sexy that he removed the starch from my spine if he so much as looked at me, touched me, or got close enough to smell. And oddly, I also want a man like that guy I was married to, a solid citizen, a *mensch*, a man with some *gelt* in hand.

These are the cornerstones of the man I would build if male mortar and brick were available to me. But they are not, so I feel discouraged that thus far no one man has possessed all of these elements—not to mention the fact that boyfriend number one was a womanizer and boyfriend number two was not pleased that I had children and boyfriend number three was jealous and possessive and boyfriend number four was too fond of *shnaps* and a womanizer to boot.

The odd thing about the men I have dated is that I have often known from the start that they were not right for me, that something major was missing, and still I entered into the relationship, extending the benefit of

the doubt. On the one hand, there is some wisdom to this approach, as it allows me to get to know men who are different from me and who may have entirely new things to teach me. On the other hand, however, I know this can be folly. I am reminded of a comment my daughter made about single adults in my age group. She said that we are all “some degree of desperate.” I know that this often describes me. There are times when the only real requirement I have of a man is that he has the defining male amenity and is still breathing.

I am thinking back to my first house-hunting experience. I remember telling the realtor that the only mandatory feature for my starter home was a fireplace, and the first house she took me to did not have one. As she stood in the living room telling me that I could easily add a potbellied stove, my mind shouted, “But that’s not what I want!” And so I replaced that realtor with one named Thelma, or was it Louise, and proceeded to hunt until I found a home that suited me and that I loved. As I continue my search for a man, I hope to remember the experience. For in both of these shopping expeditions, a person does indeed get what they settle for, and in both cases the matter is far too significant to just settle.

From Car Wrecks to Car Washes



I was in the fast lane of the interstate, traveling at my standard four miles over the speed limit, when, *mit'n derinnen*, a deer crossed my path. I had no choice but to hit it. Except for the fact that the collision caused my hood to pop all the way open, it may not have occurred to me to stop. But traveling at 69 miles per hour with zero visibility seemed unwise, so I pulled onto the median. At that time I noticed a lot of smoke coming from my car, feared an explosion, and ran from the vehicle. That's how I came to find myself standing in the dark, in the middle of the divided highway, with hundreds of cars whizzing by. To make matters worse, I was 200 miles from home.

Almost immediately, a man pulled his truck onto the shoulder of the slow lane, ran across three lanes of traffic, and asked me if there was anything I needed. I answered quite honestly, "I need a hug." And so he hugged me, ran back across those lanes of traffic, got into his truck—right beside his wife or girlfriend—and

drove away. Luckily for me, a second man stopped to offer *rachmones* and, exhibiting a bit more *saichel*, I asked him to call AAA.

Some may fault me for getting off to such a slow start in handling this situation, but I don't. Perhaps I was in shock or just *tsemisht* as usual; it matters not. All that counts is that I eventually got my act together and did all that needed to be done. In this case, I dealt with the police, AAA, a tow truck, my insurance company, and, for weeks after, the body shop. In the old days, my husband would have dealt with all of these matters. But this incident took place soon after I became single and there was no husband to lean on, so I did it all myself. The payoff was increased self-esteem for being able to manage alone.

I like to believe that with each incident of this type, I earn a feather in my cap as a self-sufficient human being. In my years as a singleton, I have had the opportunity to earn a lot of them, doing a vast number of things that in the past would have been left to that husband. My list of successes includes items from the sublime to the ridiculous, and with pride I list a few. I have learned to pump gas and drive my car through the car wash. I have learned to make my own airline, hotel, and car-rental reservations. I have learned to find the airport's long-term parking lot, the shuttle bus, and my parked car a week later. I have learned to carry a suitcase that weighs half of what I do. I have learned how to negotiate major purchases and have bought a house, a new roof for that house, and not one but two water heaters (don't ask). I not only bought a new car but I ran an ad in the newspaper and sold an old one

as well. I have so many feathers in my cap at this point that it is beginning to look like a full-plumed Indian headdress, and I am proud of my capabilities, my accomplishments, and myself.

I don't wish to imply that all of these successes came off without a hitch, but I do wish to say that the glitches don't count, only the ultimate achievements. When I purchased my home, for instance, the realtor asked casually after the closing if I had switched the utilities to my name and if I had let my insurance agent know when to begin coverage. He was shocked to learn that I had not and I was shocked to realize that I should have. But instead of wasting time calling myself a *dumkop*, I just made those calls and handled the situation.

If you ask me if I want to do all these things unassisted, I'd have to say no. And if you ask me if I prefer to be alone, I'd have to say no again. But if you ask me if I can handle doing these things alone, I'd have no choice but to proudly shout, "You bet!" From car wrecks to car washes, I can manage alone.

A Modern-Day Verse for Ecclesiastes



My daughter Shana graduated from college last Sunday and I don't know what to wish for her. Oh yes, I wish her happiness and peace and all those good things, but I'm talking about the foundation upon which that will be built, the role she chooses to play in life. A very large part of me wishes her the traditional female role. I want her to have a husband and a home and children and I want her to be able to focus on them exclusively. Another part of me wishes her a feminist version of life, with a meaningful career and the personal empowerment and high self-esteem that it can bring. And then the sum total of me *shreis gevalt* over the fact that a whole generation of women has been unable to figure out a hybrid of these two roles that can work.

This issue has plagued me since Shana's childhood, when I lived my life as a full-time wife and mother. During those years, my friend Lucy used to yell at me with some regularity, "What kind of example are you

setting for your daughters?!” I know that as a flag bearer for feminism I was a huge failure, but then, that wasn’t the example I was trying to set. I was trying to be a world-class *baleboosteh*. And I must state emphatically that I think this is a vitally important role to play. I hate to run on a platform of family values, but really, is there anything more important? Beyond the fact that children need a parent at home to offer time of a qualitative and quantitative nature, a family is a small business and needs someone to run it. But as good as it is for the household and the children for the mother to be home, this role can definitely be limiting for the mother. So how do I espouse it for my beloved child?

I have learned a lot in my midlife stint as a single woman in pursuit of a career, and it’s knowledge that I want Shana to have. I have learned that there is a lot of self-esteem to be earned along with a wage. I have learned that when I am paid for my work I realize that it has value. And most important I have learned that I am capable of taking care of myself and all of my needs. In my old life as a homemaker, I was like the Little Engine of kiddie-literature fame. I walked around saying, “I think I can, I think I can,” without ever proving to myself that I could. My career has allowed me to prove the fact. It has shown me that there are areas in which I can be a *maxin* and a *macher* and this knowledge has empowered me. Additionally, while the world pays lip service to the importance of motherhood, the business world pays in cash, and like it or not, cash is empowering too. I want all of these perks for my daughter.

Perhaps my problems with the baleboosteh business were brought on by the fact that I never really explored other options before entering into it. For the first twenty-one years of my life I was a child in my father's home, and for the next twenty-one years I was a wife in my husband's. I was always dependent on a man. I never took time off between being a daughter and a wife to become that very important thing—a self-sufficient person. So maybe the traditional female role was not the problem, only my timing, and maybe I just need to wish Shana a period of self-discovery in the feminist world before she makes further decisions.

In Ecclesiastes, we learn that there is a season for everything and a time for every experience under heaven. And so this is what I wish for my daughter as she graduates from college: a modern-day verse for Ecclesiastes. I wish her a time for personal growth and then a time for nurturing the growth of others. I wish her a time to be single and self-sufficient and then a time to be part of a pair. In this manner I hope she will find personal empowerment, a strong foundation for happiness and peace in whatever role she chooses to play in life. And to this I say amen.