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Keeping Abreast

By Abigail Dotson

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When I found out I was going to become a mom, there were a lot of things to consider. I had to think about whether or not I wanted to immunize, who would be at my birth and what to name the baby. I thought about whether I would quit working all together or try to work from home, who to invite to the birth and whether or not to give my newborn vitamin k. But there were some things that were a given from the moment I stood in my obgyn's office and heard her tell me I was pregnant. I would have a home birth, I would sleep with my baby and I would breastfeed. Forever, if I could. So from the moment that sweet little pea slid out of my body and latched on, I was as hooked as she. I couldn't really imagine that there would be folks who would be offended by my tendency to whip `em out at any given moment, sort of like how when I was growing up I couldn't imagine that there were really republicans and that I would ever meet one. And so I approached public breastfeeding with an almost "I dare you" sort of philosophy. I was a firm believer in feeding on demand from the very beginning, and if my daughter wanted to nurse right at the moment I happened to be standing in the checkout line at the supermarket, then the formula feeding mother of four behind me and the Harley Davidson rider in front of me were just going to have to be privy to our not-so-private moment. I could often be seen wheeling her stroller with one hand as I walked down the beach cradling my suckling daughter at my bosom. It doesn't take long to learn how to use your two hands as if they are four when you're a breastfeeding mother.

There were certainly stares, and the occasional nudge to a friend as strangers passed me and my breasts in public venues. I let the obscene comment of a teenager or two roll off my shoulders (only because they were teenagers), feeling sad that seeing a breastfeeding woman as nature intended her was cause enough to incite such nasty comments in the new millennium's generation of kids. I wondered what that said about our society. If nothing else, it said that not enough women are either breastfeeding at all, or comfortable enough doing it publicly to normalize the experience for those around us. And sadly, this directly affects our children. When we are uncomfortable breastfeeding, we will turn more quickly to alternate forms of nourishment, forsaking the ultimate nutritional and bonding value of breast milk for bottles (even those who choose to pump are robbing themselves and their children of the many other benefits of breastfeeding).

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As those of you who've breastfed children yourselves already know, it takes a little time to really get the knack of it. So in beginning, I must admit, my grace was suffering and often I stumbled through the experience, unable to successfully lift one side of my shirt without lifting the other, accidentally untying the bow on my postpartum drawstring pants, not to mention needing to expose the entire breast just to get my daughter to the nipple. But these things happen, and with a little practice we soon became an expert team. I could push the stroller, browse the new releases at our local bookstore, carry on a cell phone conversation and nurse the baby all at the same time. Most mothers can.

With time, nursing became second nature to me, and I suppose like every nursing mother these days I was confronted with a certain facet of society who was "not-so-supportive" of public breastfeeding. Like a true Sagittarian, I was ready to rumble. I confess there was a part of me that almost couldn't wait for the man the in bank to call me a "f---ing rodent" as I sat on a sofa quietly nursing my baby girl. I knew

what to say to him, I had it all rehearsed in my head. I almost wanted to get kicked out of a restaurant, just so I could give the manager a piece of my mind. I would defend my right to breastfeed with a patriotic gusto, vehement in my pro-breastfeeding stand. When confronted with such blatant disapproval, I knew exactly what to say and stood on strong ground.

The problem came from a less likely place. I had anticipated the angry passersby and disgusted store owners; what I had not prepared for was the onslaught of subtle disapproval cleverly disguised as support. I did not question my motives, my exposed breast or my timing when openly harassed. It wasn't until a kindly woman asked me if I would like her to show me to a more private corner that I began to feel ill-at-ease. Until then, it hadn't occurred to me that many rational people— people who believed whole-heartedly in breastfeeding— expected that I would prefer privacy. Her well-wishing concern gave me my first dose of self-consciousness around the issue, as if someone had suddenly pointed out that there was something to feel awkward about where before there had been nothing. While it is words like hers that led me to examine this very issue, I am hopeful that one day our society as a whole can return to the place of my previous naiveté.

When I was approached by an angry man one day who shouted obscenities at me and my nursing daughter, onlookers were quick to intercede on my behalf. I was not afraid, nor was I tempted to give his accusations a second thought. When, however, an employee later asked me how come I didn't tell her I was going to do "that" so she could have let me use a back office, I quickly wondered if I should have. It was the well-wisher who made me question my actions, and it is exactly this kind of statement that reflects a society largely uncomfortable with the idea that breasts are multi-functional. Most importantly they are an instrument of sustenance and a means of nourishing our young, although in the wake of their own revolution we seem to have forsaken this foremost purpose for one purely sexual. We witness breasts bared in nearly imagined bikini tops; we walk around malls and are confronted with posters advertising women's lingerie, bathing suits, and blouses cut to accentuate the cleavage. And hidden among these blatantly sexual depictions is the lone maternity store, proudly displaying an enlarged photograph of a sensibly dressed woman in a nursing shirt cleverly designed to hide her breasts. As though now that they are suddenly useful for something more than a wet t-shirt contest we should forget we have them. Now don't get me wrong; I am a big fan of the breast. But I am a fan of the breast in all its glory. There are many faces to each woman's own, and I am as proud of the ones I have now as I was of those I had ten years prior. Please, don't make me feel ashamed to put them to

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their rightful use. As a mother I am expected to care for my child as I best as I can, and yet I am bombarded with criticism for doing exactly that.

It is seldom the ignorant and angry public who intimidate this breastfeeding mom, but the kindly folk who think they are doing a good thing by propagating the idea that breastfeeding should be a private experience. Our breasts, in the end, have been so sexualized that even those with the best intent cannot separate their sexuality from their functionality. Even those of us who choose to integrate ourselves into communities which embrace our choice to breastfeed are hammered with advertisements for clothing offering "discreet" access. The world around us is telling us over and over again that they don't want to see our breasts (at least not until we are finished breastfeeding and then only if they are still adequately perky), that we should hide them, that breastfeeding is a public issue when in reality it has as much to do with those who happen to be around you as what you ate for breakfast. The only people who should be concerned about how you breastfeed are your child and yourself, and whether the concern of others' manifests itself in an angry or a "helpful" way, as breastfeeding women we should learn to ignore it all. I'm tired of slings that allow you to breastfeed with minimum breast exposure; I'm tired of being offered a blanket or a jacket to "cover up" with; I'm tired of being asked to pay an arm and a leg for clothing with slits on the chest permitting one to

breastfeed while their breasts remain covered. I'm proud of my breasts and their ability to nourish my daughter; I love the way she fondles and molds them as she nurses, the way she stops every so often to say "hi, mama" and smile or coo (thereby, god forbid, letting my entire breast hang free for all who pass to see!). I don't expect her to eat under a blanket or slurp continuously until she is done, never pausing for conversation. My daughter eats the same way I do (or at least did, before I had a baby to care for!): slowly, socially and savoring each bite. What she has for lunch is as much your business and what you have for lunch is hers. Let us nurse in peace, however and wherever we choose to do it.

Abigail is a trained childbirth educator and doula, whose writing has appeared in various parenting and childbirth publications. This essay has also appeared in the compilation *Loving Mama: Essays on Natural Childbirth and Parenting* edited by Tiffany Palisi.

Keeping Abreast Of Your Domain ...Updates and Keeping Up With It All

By Sue and Chuck DeFiore

Another major complaint that most business owners have is all the reading they need to do to keep abreast of what is happening in their business area. Again time management and organization can be a tremendous help.

Be sure to put your reading times in your daily schedule. Schedule a half hour in the morning to read at least one article in a magazine.

While having lunch, read updates or small bulletins.

Make a folder in your e-mail program and organize the articles and newsletters you wish to read and

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then schedule time specifically to peruse these articles and newsletters in the evening and on the weekend. You don't need large blocks of time, half hour, forty–five minutes will do.

However, if you schedule your reading on a daily and/or weekly basis you will be better able to manage it all, and in the long run have more time to yourself.

I know you are saying, how do I find the time. Well remember to read our organizing and time management articles. And for those of you that are real lazy, take a gander at Jim and Dallas Edwards', The Lazy Man's Guide To Online Business at:

Remember, "the day you stop learning is your first day towards going out of business."

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