

CHAPTER SIX



G R O W T H H A P P E N S
N A T U R A L L Y

The Power of Progress

by Shawna Woodworth



Shawna Woodworth was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, the last of six children of a university professor and an elementary school teacher. She is now the mother of three children, ages seven, five, and two, with one more on the way. She and her husband, Jed, spent the first nine years of their marriage growing their family in Madison, Wisconsin, before recently transplanting to the Mountain West.

Shawna met Jed in Chicago, where she was teaching high school math and Spanish in an inner-city public school. As difficult as that experience was, she has found mothering to be the great challenge of her life. Writing for *The Power of Moms* has helped her to process experiences in a meaningful way, thereby developing her skills and understanding of motherhood.

Meanwhile, mothering also allows Shawna the flexibility to do a little bit of everything else. She has taught group aquatics exercises for the Arthritis Foundation, tutored high school math students, taught music at a Spanish-immersion preschool, and competed in several racquetball tournaments. Shawna loves to wow her kids with original cake art, talk domestic politics with her husband, and is an avid reader of the *New Yorker* and *The Week* magazines.

A deep yearning for progress comes with being human. Our babies start out utterly helpless and then learn to roll over, crawl, walk, laugh and interact, all in the space of one year. Our children want so much to read and ride bikes and become “big.” Ambition and accomplishment are part of human nature. Mothers feel this as much as anyone.

Far from wanting to merely “coast” through life, repeating mindless routines for twenty-plus years; moms feel deeply the urge to progress—to grow stronger, wiser, and deeper—as individuals and as mothers. We hold on to our individual dreams and abilities and merge them with our desires to progress through motherhood.

The progress we make as mothers and as individuals often seems imperceptible from day to day. And that makes sense. Our babies grow without anyone perceiving the countless changes happening inside them on any given day. Yet the *accumulation* of days reveals the dramatic outcome of all of those tiny changes!

The same is true for mothers. We can be certain we will progress through motherhood because all living beings grow, given time and the proper nutrients.

Here I’ll focus first on the progress we make as mothers, and then talk about more proactive ways we can progress as individuals.

Part I: Our Progress as Mothers

What more important realm could we strive to progress in than motherhood? We want to improve as mothers because so many are counting on us. Our work will influence not only our children, but many of their friends, and even other parents, families, and societies going forward—no pressure!

Moreover, our own experience in mothering improves as our mothering abilities do. The more confident and able we feel as mothers, the better we will enjoy the role.

A Rough Start is Normal

I spent my youth idealizing motherhood as I watched my sisters and other hip moms work with their kids. I practiced what I saw them do and became a favorite baby-sitter to children of all ages. I could not imagine loving anything more than being a mom.

But my initial entry into motherhood was not what I expected. The baby-sitting and my subsequent training as a high school math teacher did nothing to soothe my crying baby or get him to sleep. There were no other parents to come home and relieve me of my baby-sitting duties (except my equally-baffled husband). And my college education and previous work experience were futile. My son didn’t care that I could graph a quadratic equation three different ways!

Sure, I’d read plenty of parenting books, but I had zero experience caring for another human being so small and entirely dependent on me for everything. When my son was

ten days old, I actually scheduled an extra doctor's appointment, just so that for those thirty minutes, my baby could be in the hands of someone who knew what

she was doing! Those early days and months as a new mom were awkward and overwhelming.

As shocking as my initial feelings were, I can now reflectively say, they were normal. I know dozens of moms whose experiences were similar to mine.

Motherhood, like other professions, follows a growth-curve much like the chart at the pediatrician's office. Naturally, the most growth occurs at the outset. A new mom, like a new teacher or a new doctor, has to study and think carefully through every detail of her role that comes easily to seasoned mothers. Previous experience may help some new moms learn faster, but true competence and confidence requires many hours of on-the-job training.

The very concept of growth implies starting smaller and weaker than where we end, so it makes sense that we might feel inept at first. And with each additional child or "new beginning" in motherhood, I've found some of those feelings return. While the awkwardness does not feel comfortable at all, I have learned to endure and accept that those feelings won't last forever.

We CAN Be Taught!

One of the gnawing worries of my early mothering years was that I might just be a bad mom. I would look around at other moms who seemed to thoroughly understand and enjoy their mothering work, and think, "Uh-oh, I'm not that good."

What I didn't realize was that I was just a quality-mom-in-training – and that I will be training for the rest of my life! I had everything to learn, and motherhood had everything to teach me. When a woman becomes a mother, it's like she's enrolling in a special brand of higher learning—Mom University. Mothering surrounds her with unique opportunities to learn that she couldn't have any other way.

In her book, *Mindset*, psychologist Carol Dweck argues that we all have a choice to live with either a "growth" or a "fixed" mindset. By adopting a *growth* mindset, we can overcome limitations, develop essential talents and even see failure as an opportunity to learn something new. The promise that we *can* learn and progress offers hope to any discouraged mom. Here are just some of the ways that we learn through motherhood.

Learning through Reflection

Much of what we learn as mothers comes through personal epiphanies as we puzzle about our mothering challenges. Some of my best insights come to me when I just sit down to think—usually with a notebook in hand.

I've found that, deep down inside, I *am* tuned in to the deepest needs of my children, and it is in meeting those needs that I develop myself as a mother.

It was in a reflective moment recently that I realized my three-year-old daughter was being under-served by the regular neighborhood play-dates she clamored for. What she needed was a mommy who could focus on helping her to develop her mind. So instead of just sending her next door whenever she asked, which was my habit, we started a little “mommy” preschool, just the two of us. The curriculum was simple but focused: sing the ABCs, say one nursery rhyme, read two books. My daughter absolutely blossomed during that small daily exercise.

Nobody told me to do that, and it's not something I did with my other kids. I just sensed *she* needed it. Our time together in that setting has already become one of my most treasured mothering memories. We are closer, her mind is turned on to learning, and I developed skills as a mommy-teacher in the process.

Looking within and finding answers builds confidence in our ability to meet the challenges of motherhood.

Learning from Other Mothers

We can help each other to progress as moms. At Mom-U, all mothers are teachers, students, professors, and colleagues. Our first, most influential professor is often our own mother, and we learn from countless other examples as well. Mothers further along the experiential curve share their seasoned knowledge, and younger moms, their noses in the parenting books, also offer spot-on ideas.

We share “what works” at play-dates and soccer games, in book groups and learning circles. The Power of Moms website, as well as personal blogs, offer forums for sharing mothering insights. Often just considering how to report an experience to someone else leads to fruitful reflection.

Virtually every parenting challenge we experience has been experienced before. Parents everywhere have found solutions, even if they haven't written a book about them. As we find solutions to our own parenting challenges, we are positioned to share our insights with others.

As a “newer” mom, I always appreciate when other mothers teach me from their experience, as this mother does:

When a five-year-old has chapped lips and her mother is fighting with her to stop licking them, I calmly say, “Let's try some of this fancy cherry Chapstick—it smells really good and it will make your lips feel smooth. Just don't lick it or it won't work anymore!”

I now easily handle the same argument I had with my daughter when she was younger. A positive spin takes little effort and can make all the difference in the world.

- Karin Schelling

Learning through Trial and Error

At Mom-U, we each have our own laboratory—our home—where we can test out various parenting theories and ideas. Starting from the parenting philosophies of our own parents, we explore other ideas in books or from moms at the park and test them on our kids.

Sometimes this experimentation is painful because we often make mistakes—even if we start out with a sound theory! But for the most part, if an experiment fails, we needn't worry that the laboratory will shut down. We can just log the failure as useful data and try something different the next time.

Jim Fay and Foster Cline, creators of *Love and Logic*, advocate allowing kids to learn through experiencing the “natural consequences” of their actions. As mothers, we get to do this too.

I will never forget the day I let my two-year-old son dump all the pieces to ten wooden puzzles at the public library. “He’ll learn not to dump out puzzle pieces,” I reasoned, using my best parenting-book understanding, “when he sees how hard it is to put them all back together.” But of course, on that day, it was *mommy* who learned that toddlers are not capable of putting so many puzzles together by themselves. (Duh.) And after they quickly tire of the chore, it becomes all yours.

Lesson: When your baby starts to dump puzzles, INTERVENE!

The beauty of mothering is that we *can* learn from our mistakes and avoid them the next time. The very repetitive nature of mothering affords us multiple chances to improve and do better until we get it just right, kind of like Bill Murray’s character in *Groundhog Day*.

Success teaches as much as failure. Once, while trying to get sluggish kids to pick up toys strewn about every end of our small apartment, I said on a whim, “Let’s see how much you can get done in five minutes—I’ll set the timer.” Wham-O! Instant results. Only later when observing a more experienced mom use the same technique did I realize what a motivational gem I’d discovered. Her independent experience led to the same conclusions mine had.

Our daily practice as moms helps us create a mental catalog of strategies that either work or don’t. Serendipitous strokes of inspiration add up, creating a pool of effective mothering techniques to draw from.

Learning through BEST Practice

As any musician or athlete can attest, the best way to acquire a new skill is to practice it. But merely “putting in hours” day after day doesn’t lead to progress. We need *Best Practice*: personal *exertion* in which we actually perform the skills that we are trying to master, to the best of our ability.

We cannot hope to become even-tempered mothers, for example, if we never practice the discipline of holding ourselves together when we feel like exploding. Sure, there may be instances when we let loose and breathe fire, but there must also be times, hopefully an increasing number of times, when we *will* ourselves to be calm, at all costs.

It is when we succeed in performing well in the most difficult circumstances, and then string together a number of such successes, that we acquire real mothering strength. Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is therefore not an act but a habit.” And habits, at first, are formed one decision at a time.

Along those lines, I appreciate this mother’s epiphany:

If I want to change results in my family, then I have to do something different. That may sound funny, but doing the same thing over and over and expecting things to be different does not produce the improvements I want in my family. - Penny Tapp

We likely already know what changes we want to practice, though we face resistance at first because our children are often used to our old ways and respond accordingly. Persistence is really the key to developing any good habit, as was so famously stated by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

“That which we persist in doing becomes easier to do—not that the nature of the thing has changed, but that our power to do has increased.”

The journalist Malcolm Gladwell found research to support Emerson’s claim, suggesting that ten thousand hours is “the magic number for true expertise” (Gladwell 2008, 40). Citing examples of international phenoms, such as the Beatles and Bill Gates, Gladwell argues that the common denominator in their enormous success was approximately ten thousand hours of rigorous practice in their respective fields.

While our work may not receive worldwide acclaim, mothers have a similar opportunity to develop our own mothering genius. If we devote our time with children (which is certainly more than ten thousand hours!) to practicing our best parenting skills, we will develop into the mothers we hope to be.

Be Assured . . .

You've Come a Long Way, Baby!

Much of our progress as mothers will be discovered only in retrospect. We can see our own evolution when we look at a mental snapshot from a blog or journal page three months or three years ago.

Consider all the skills a mother of a newborn quickly masters, beginning with learning to wash that floppy, slippery little body. We learn how to nourish a baby, and how to help her rest; how to comfort her and express love with songs and coos.

Improvement comes with experience. We get better at one-sided conversations and playing the little baby games that elicit the sweetest giggles. We learn to do almost anything one-handed while baby rests on the other hip. We get faster at cleaning up nesting cups (and all the other baby accoutrements that seem to take over the house!), and we become more skilled at finding acceptable “trades” when baby has something she shouldn't.

Before long, mothering an infant begins to feel natural. And then our baby becomes a toddler, so we hit the books again! As we gain competence at each stage of parenting, we can remember those initial awkward feelings as a measure of growth.

Along with the skills directly involved in childcare, we also improve our skills as homemakers. We may never learn to *like* scrubbing floors or washing dishes, and that bottomless pile of laundry with all its mystery stains could defeat even the most determined chemist. Still, as time passes, we find new and better solutions for keeping up. We work on training and motivating our families, hire help, or just get better at doing it all ourselves.

Your Weaknesses Can Become Strengths

Perhaps like no other experience in life, mothering helps us grow strong in the places we are weak. For one thing, we have a new motivation to be our best selves: our children are depending on us *and imitating us!* Kids ingeniously unearth our weaknesses and bring them to the forefront.

My friends and I sometimes joke about how “patient” and “compassionate” we were before we had children. When those qualities were challenged, we realized we weren't nearly as polished as we'd thought! Mothering experiences lend themselves to gradual refinement and useful attributes that stand the test of life. A friend of mine put it this way:

What skills have I significantly improved over the years through mothering?

- **Empathy:** *I have sat in the middle of a sidewalk on a busy street holding my two-year-old motionless while she screamed and tried to hit, kick, bite and head butt me. It's a bit harder to judge other parents now that I have been there.*
- **Mind reading:** *It is a skill, really it is, and I can do it with my kids. Based on their behavior, I can tell if they are hungry, tired, cutting a tooth, worried, happy, need an extra story, want a piece of candy or have to go to the bathroom. I can tell if it is time to leave a play date, take away a toy or have some special mama time.*
- **Civil political discourse** (or discourse of any kind): *I do not want my daughter saying things like, "He has stupid ideas," so I don't say those things about political candidates with whom I disagree . . . even if they get elected. I talked to my daughter about saying things like, "Congratulations. That was an impressive win," and "I disagree," and "I think you are wrong," without shouting or adding little personal attacks. I am getting better at keeping my mouth shut until I figure out how to remain civil without belittling my strongly held opinions.*

Jesse Boyett Anderson

Probably any mom could create a similar list of advancements. An important item on my list is compassion. I have learned how to care for my kids when they're suffering, even when their pain is self-inflicted, and even when I could say, "I told you so." This brand of compassion did not come naturally to me at first, but practicing consoling words and comforting actions has made me more nurturing.

Mothers of children with special needs model in a unique way how experience makes a mother grow strong. Perhaps nobody expects their child to have special needs, and few feel prepared at first. But I have watched one friend after another rise to the challenge.

When my first son was born, a good friend of mine had a baby with Cerebral Palsy. Everything from feeding and resting to movement and exercise required special handling and medications. At first, I'm sure, it felt overwhelming, but I watched her quickly adapt. While caring for her son has required many sacrifices on her part, those very sacrifices and his place in her life have helped her to grow strong and focused as a mother.

Your Imperfections Make You Perfect

It is easy to underestimate the value of learning on-the-job. After all, I think, wouldn't my kids be better off if my Fairy Godmother would just wave her magic wand and make me a perfect mom? Wouldn't it be nice to just *be* a perfect mother instead of going through the grueling process of *becoming* one?

The truth is: imperfections perfectly qualify us to be life-coaches to our kids! We must help them deal with living in an imperfect world, surrounded by imperfect people, including *themselves*.

When they see us struggle to learn something or overcome our own mistakes and even failures, we teach them how to do that too. Our own bewilderment with motherhood allows us to empathize with our kids' struggles to figure out life.

As we work through the process of becoming better mothers, we become the models our children look to for learning how to manage missteps. We will grow and improve, and we can shower them with assurances that they'll acquire life skills too, one new understanding at a time.

Measure Your Progress Carefully

Sometimes the most difficult part about progressing as a mom is finding a way to measure our growth. How do we measure progress according to those things we can control, and not the things we can't?

Should we feel dejected about our mothering efforts if our family members don't shower us with praise? Can we measure our progress against the practices of the mother next door? Do our children have to perform academically, socially, religiously, athletically, musically, and so on, in order for us, as mothers, to feel a sense of accomplishment?

If we judge ourselves by looking at the behavior of others, we may resent family members for not living up to our expectations—or attempt to control their choices. We may try to find validation by pursuing other activities where success is more easily measured, and consequently limit our ability to serve our families. Or, we may decide that mothering is a wasted effort and simply give up.

Thankfully, there is no single, agreed-upon goal of parenting against which we “pass” or “fail.” Our real progress as mothers is not measured by the actions of our children or our neighbors.

I learned this from a friend who describes her mothering experience in this way:

When we had our first child, and we started to feel confident with our parenting skills, we thought we could see what the “successful” outcome of our parenting effort would look like. We had our own dreams and aspirations for each child.

But the years taught us that our kids get to choose their own path, and that path, for various reasons, may not match the path that we initially defined as our, or their, success. So we have to shift our paradigm. This process doesn't mean we have been negligent or unsuccessful parents—it just means we were a bit naïve and didn't fully understand our kids' individuality.

- Shelley Hoffmire

If our objective is to establish effective, loving relationships with each of our children, then we can work toward that no matter what kind of life choices they make. We may

become more attuned to the needs and moods of individual family members and respond in more gentle ways.

We can gauge our progress according to how focused we are on each child's unique needs and how effectively we are mentoring them through their current challenges. We may find more pleasure in the seemingly thankless service we render to our children, even in everyday tasks.

We may not be praised for the work that we do, but our conscientious efforts will yield a more satisfying fruit: the peace of mind that we are doing all in our power to fulfill our roles as mothers. That is success indeed.

Part II: Our Progress as Individuals

OK, now I'll admit: it's really impossible to set our progress as mothers against our progress as individuals—they are so thoroughly intertwined. So much of what we do to develop ourselves as mothers helps us to become better rounded individuals, and vice versa.

In many ways, motherhood is *ideally* suited to personal development—contrary to popular belief.

For example, the moms I know who are actively pursuing a college degree report that they are more focused students because they are mothers and more focused mothers because they are students. They manage to squeeze more learning into shorter blocks of time because they must.

In her book, *The Mommy Brain*, journalist Katherine Ellison shows how pregnancy and early motherhood actually remap parts of a woman's brain by boosting our perception, efficiency, resilience, motivation and emotional intelligence. We become more capable leaders as we plot our family organization and manage the many competing claims to our time and attention.

So when I speak of progressing as individuals in this section, I'm really talking about the things we can do to be *proactive* about our progress as individuals and as mothers. Managing pursuits outside of our mothering realm won't happen without our determined effort. And while it's true that we will naturally get better at mothering, even those abilities can be systematically enhanced with concentrated effort.

Measuring progress in personal life can be difficult for anyone. Even mothers who have periodic evaluations and external benchmarks in another career are left to their own devices when it comes to measuring personal progress. Programs like the "Bloom" game on The Power of Moms website can help, but ultimately, personal styles will dictate how we go about it.

Lovers of grand plans might measure progress with charts and figures. Those who live in the moment may let feelings of contentment be the reward. Women who prefer to spend all their time doing the “mom thing” might focus on advancements there, while others might reserve set blocks of time for other ambitions.

However you approach personal fulfillment, here are some things to consider.

Think Big Picture

Sometimes we are strangers to our own deepest desires. It’s easy to let the rush of living, and the near-constant demands of our children, quash our inner lives. By setting aside some time to focus on the larger view of our lives, we can discover how we truly want to invest our time.

Some people find a “vision” useful to guide in decision-making. A vision can take many different forms, but its purpose is to remind us at critical junctures what we most want in life. With a vision, we can measure our own progress against the potential that we see within ourselves. This can be mapped out in advance or created as we go along.

Here is how one mother made her vision tangible:

After visualizing different scenarios in my mind, I created a vision board with a collage of different things I wanted in life. My vision board hangs in my bedroom directly across from my bed so it is the first thing I see when I wake up, and the last thing I see when I drift off to dreamland. Just this morning I was looking at my vision board, and I noticed that there were at least ten different things I had accomplished without realizing it, all because of those positive, subliminal messages I had been sending to my brain every day.

- Megan Stewart

Creating a vision is like choosing a college major. Both provide a framework for moving toward larger goals and competencies. In life, as in college, sometimes people know their major from the start, while others figure it out after taking lots of classes. Still others change their major many, many times, as their experiences change them. These are all understandable scenarios. By affording ourselves time to think, our deepest desires will rise to the surface.

Establish Goals of Varying Shapes and Sizes

If creating a vision is like choosing a major, then setting goals is like creating a class schedule. Goals help us choose between competing goods. Accomplishing a goal can be the most easily-measured form of progress. Some moms like to set written formal goals; others just have a general sense of what they are trying to accomplish. Even a hastily-scribbled checklist can be validating at the end of a day’s accomplishment.

I like the variety of potential triumphs on this mom's list:

I look for my own personal growth when I celebrate my little moments of achievement. Most of these moments are simple:

- *Cooking a new recipe*
- *Making time for exercise*
- *Finishing a book*
- *Staying calm in difficult situations*
- *Finishing a reasonable to-do list*
- *Catching up on paperwork*
- *Spending quality time with a child who needs it*
- *Keeping up with the bills*
- *Getting everyone to an event on time—or at all*
- *Getting everyone home from an event!*

- Naomi Ellis

And when you're ready to set some larger goals, perhaps focused on a vision you have for your life, you might try some of these ideas:

To help me set goals every year, I choose a one-word theme, such as Simplify, Choose, Embrace, etc. Then I consider several categories – physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, financial, interpersonal, etc.—and set some specific goals in each area in line with that year's theme.

I try to limit the number of big goals, and I cross them off as I either accomplish them or decide that a particular goal is no longer in line with my vision. I hang my goal board next to my bed (yes, my room is full of foam core décor) where I can refer to it often. It keeps me motivated and also helps me see what I've already accomplished.

Another fun and effective way to set goals is to break them up into years. What do I want to accomplish ten years from now? (Then five years, two years, one year, etc.) Recently I found some goals I had set five years ago. Everything in line with my vision had been accomplished.

The best part is your children watching you do this! This past summer, my boys wanted kittens from the neighbor so bad, they finally convinced me by deciding to do a goal chart to earn them. I have never seen a three-year-old quit sucking his thumb cold turkey like that! I was so proud to watch them stick to their goals and see them grow.

- Megan Stewart

One friend of mine sets goals motivated by subject area. She selects a topic she wants to learn more about and then applies her free time to mastering the subject. As soon as she feels she has sufficiently mastered one area, she chooses another subject to pursue. In ten

years she has become well versed in finance, gardening, music teaching, food storage, swimming, small business, ethnic cuisine, racquetball, and more. She is never at a loss for new goals to pursue and her passion for learning is contagious.

Whenever I see a mom who is learning and doing so many impressive things, I am always tempted to just adopt all of her plans as my own. But I try to remember that I'll get more satisfaction out of meeting goals that match *my* talents, interests and circumstances. We can be inspired by other moms without pressuring ourselves to do all the same things they are.

Get Started

Starting a new goal can be the hardest part because it's easy to feel pulled back by our responsibilities at home or other circumstances—just when we're on the brink of doing something grand.

If you're not sure *where* to start, try this:

Create a Bucket List. Write down everything you have ever dreamed of doing. The first bucket list I ever made included riding in a hot air balloon and seeing a Broadway production of Les Miserables. Within months of creating my list, both of those opportunities presented themselves through conversations where I mentioned my desire to do those things. Inspiration and opportunities that might have been previously overlooked are brought to our consciousness when we write things down.

Invite Others to Participate. When I decided to take guitar lessons, I discovered that my son's second grade teacher shared that goal. We were able to take lessons together, splitting the \$80 per month tuition. Another time, some friends and I were discussing how we wanted more opportunities for our children to serve. After that conversation, one mom put together a day for us all to gather and bag lunches for the homeless. When we talk about our goals, we are likely to find others with the same dreams.

Do SOMETHING Today. We might be tempted to put off living our dreams until the time and circumstances are just right. While there is definitely a time for every season, you can still approach your goals by breaking off bite-sized pieces. For example, earning a college degree might not be a viable option right now, but perhaps you could interview professionals in the field, learn about local programs offered, or read a book on the subject.

- Rebecca Kohler

I aspire to improve my mind and further my education, but registering for formal classes won't work for me right now. So I've tried to find ways to develop my mind on my own.

I've joined book and discussion groups with other moms, and I try to read as much as possible. A mom-friend and I try to stay conversant in current events by challenging each other to read news periodicals, with the promise to talk about what we read during our weekly conversations. I know other moms who read professional journals to keep current with other careers and listen to audio books (especially in mp3 format) when they're too busy to sit.

My favorite tool in personal development has been a three-subject spiral notebook. I use the first section to record academic or world-related learning. The second section holds spiritual insights gained from church or worshipful study. And the third section is devoted to professional development in mothering and homemaking. I take notes from parenting books, plan out schedules and routines for my family and record epiphanies there.

Whether I choose to study a single topic extensively or just read and think about whatever comes along, I make a record of the things that I'm learning so that years down the road, I can remember the learning acquired during these busy years!

Dare to Soar!

Once we lay out our vision, set some goals, and begin, we might be surprised where life takes us. Sometimes we only have to take a few steps before the really rewarding opportunities open up.

Any goal worth pursuing will involve some amount of sacrifice from self and family. We may find that our goal causes more strain than it's worth to us and decide to cut back (which is itself a worthwhile form of progress). On the other hand, we may find that our ambition takes on a life of its own and propels us toward success!

I love this mother's experience:

When I first dared to write a book, I had a new baby and two little boys. I wrote late at night and early in the morning. Eventually, I found a way to reproduce a few copies of the book myself. While picking up the newly-bound books at the copy shop, I bumped into the owner of a gift shop who invited me to do a book signing at her shop. So I started making lots of books! A local copy shop would print and cut them. I hand-made all the covers.

At one point, my handmade book ended up in four different shops around town. I found myself doing more book signings and enjoyed radio and TV interviews. I then tried to find a publishing house to pick up the manuscript. While that didn't pan out, by doing that search, I was hired by one of the publishing houses to be their Literary Publicist.

When we choose to dream and take the steps necessary to make the dream REAL, our lives change, and before we know it, we are no longer the person we used to be.

- Wendy Christensen, Author of "It's the Little Moments that Matter"

While some life goals may have to be postponed or even cast aside to make family life manageable, women can and do experience and achieve more than they might anticipate with kids in tow. Maybe we can't do *everything* we always dreamed of doing, but we can always do *something* to make those dreams real.

The Magic of Mother Nature

Our progress, like that of our babies, comes in fits and starts. There may be long stretches where we see no noticeable progress, but those will likely be balanced with periods of intense growth. As we develop the skills and habits that enrich our lives, we gradually become the person we have always wanted to be.

I'm only six years into this mothering life, so I think I'll have more to report about my own progress after a couple of decades. But so far, I am convinced that motherhood makes the *world* a better place, not only because of the nurturing we offer to the future adults of the world (our children), but because of the people *we* become in the process.

I love the classic image of that saintly grandmother—the woman with silvery gray hair pulled up in a bun. She is *so* wise, knowing the right answer to any question, seemingly able to accomplish any task. She knows how to respond to human suffering in any form, how to balance discipline with love. And how did she become that all-knowing grandmother?

By being a mother first.