



**MELANIE
HATTER**

A new mother's meditations

*Editor's note: While Ed Sha-
my takes a break from writing
columns, other members of our
staff are taking turns in his spot.*

Ah, the joys of new mother-
hood.

The tingling feeling inside
when a brand new face yawns,
turns and falls back to sleep.

His tiny body squirms in my
arms when I hold him for the first
time. A bundle of smooth, deli-
cate skin and soft black hair.

I'm afraid to hold him too
tightly for fear I'll squeeze the air
out of him — yet afraid his fragile
body will fall apart like a set of Le-
go blocks if I don't hold his head
and limbs together.

The pride that swells to over-
flowing when family and friends
gush over him.

That's my son.

The anxiety of caring for this
tiny person who is completely de-
pendent on me.

The exasperation at his hun-
gry cry at 1 a.m., and 3 a.m., and 5
a.m. . . . And the daily naps inter-
rupted by seemingly endless feed-
ings and diaper changes. Watch-
ing him grow. And grow. And
grow.

The countless hours spent
gazing at the changes in his fea-
tures and facial expressions.

His uncoordinated move-
ments gradually losing their awk-
wardness.

The middle-of-the-night trips
to baby's cradle to check his
breathing. I had once said that on-
ly neurotic mothers make sure
their children still are breathing
while they sleep. That was before
I became one. By the time I real-
ized what I was doing, there I was,
listening for his snore.

The extra time needed to go
anywhere. What used to be a
quick trip to the store becomes an
all-day event.

Loading up the car with baby
and his diaper bag-cum-suitcase
filled with everything but his
changing table.

Once arrived at the destina-
tion, the silent prayers begin that
baby will remain asleep as I
speed-walk up and down the
aisles. But the inevitable happens.

He awakens hungry and — in
the only way he knows — de-
mands food. He emits a scream as
if he's auditioning for a horror
movie. Rummaging through his
things for his pacifier, I remem-
ber it's sitting on the coffee table.

I grab him out of the stroller
and, hiding between the picture
frames and wall paintings,
bounce him in my arms. It takes a
while, but he finally calms down.

The frustration and embar-
rassment is overwhelming when
people's faces say "get that baby
outta here."

But the sympathetic smiles
and nods from fellow mothers
who have endured similar experi-
ences tell me I'll survive.

The paralyzing scare watch-
ing my little boy stop breathing
for a few seconds. His body be-
comes rigid, followed by that hor-
rific scream. Rushing to the emer-
gency room to discover he has
colic.

The fear that I won't be able
to protect him from something
bigger than I.

Oh, the exhaustion of moth-
erhood.

The little voice inside my
head that says I'm not ready to
cope with this responsibility.

Then he smiles at me. A
toothless grin with dimples and
sparkling brown eyes.

Oh yes, the joys of mother-
hood.

*Melanie Hatter writes for the
Extra section.*