

Steady as a rock



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PHOTO BY JODY RUSSELL

I don't recall why I needed a rocking chair 23 years ago. Maybe it was being eight months pregnant. I simply had to have a rocking chair for this baby. We bought a beech wood chair, made for someone a bit larger than I was. But of course, sporting those 40 extra pounds, I probably was that larger person and, in any case, it was comfortable. We chose a powder-blue cushion for it. I think my husband was hoping for a boy, though I don't think I ever would have chosen a pink cushion anyway.

The chair had great rock. Its rockers — the curved bands of wood — were long and solid and I could move quite a bit in it. The chair was well used during my daughter's first year, mostly during those early months of nursing. I can remember the exact feel of that little bedroom with the blue carpet, one wall papered in an old fashioned wallpaper of toys and dolls, the kind children don't really play with anymore. It was hung by the previous owners and just quaint enough to keep. It was a room where I cried when my daughter was days old — cried just from not knowing how to be a mother. Do I read to this

baby? Pick her up when she cries at bedtime? What do I do when her little nose is stuffed? How many dolls can safely be in the crib? When can she eat Cheerios? Ice cream? How does anyone know how to do any of this?

I'd sit in that wooden rocking chair and nurse my daughter. And read to her. And talk to her. And smile. And marvel at her dark eyes. And sometimes I'd cry. The chair sat in her room and welcomed me in the middle of the night or in the middle of the afternoon; it settled me down, and was a part of motherhood for me.

Nearly three years later, the chair was again part of being a mother, when it was moved from my

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daughter's room to my infant son's room. He and I rocked. I nursed, I read, I talked, I smiled, I marveled at his red hair, and did a whole lot less crying.

Only a few years later, divorce brought a division of property. I let most of the furniture go, but not the rocking chair. I tend to hold onto objects with emotional rather than monetary value.

The years haven't been easy on this rocking chair. My son rolled a metal toy on it once and scratched the wood in deep gouges. It's been part of blanket forts. It's been the home of many a teenager playing Nintendo, Playstation and Xbox. It's moved into the grungy part of the basement to collect dust — it's come back out — and gone back in again.

Not long ago, I bought a more beautiful rocking chair at a local art fair. Made by an artisan. The wood is oak, stained a rich brown, more suited to my taste. It's a work of art. Its lines gentle. It rocks smoother. Fits me better. I love looking at it. Sitting in it.

It's "my" rocking chair. I read in it. I talk on the phone in it. I sit in it with my feet up and look out the window, watching the mourning doves fluff out in the northern spruce.

Love struck again and the chair went to his home, where I could start anew with it. Together, we picked out a new cushion. Black and white, thick and cozy. The chair still has great rock. Sturdy as can be. Its childhood scars hidden by the new plump cushion. I read in the chair, rocked in it, played word games in it, listened in it, was honest in it, and watched the world go by outside his window.

And love, being the most capricious and whimsical aspect of my life for so long, slipped away. The chair came home again, with its beautiful cushion and its substantial rock. It sits in my living room, though it's not where I sit. I look across the room at it. It's a reminder of whom I've loved over the years and the changes that life inevitably and unpredictably offers.

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