

## En Tandem

By Rebecca Fountain

This evening I strolled into my local medical centre with my bare breasts sauntering beside me. My son had been cutting mushrooms atop an unsteady accessory to our formica dining suite when he slipped and fell into the arms of my partner who happened to be wielding a frypan full of bolognaise. After several attempts to douse him under the shower and apply a cold pack to his welting face, our two year old showed no signs of belief in our knowledge of burn therapy. A healing 'maju' and a brief stint of tele tranquilizer later, father, mother, bewildered eight month old sister and burned brother leave the house.

Maju you say? Could that be a relative of the shiatsu family? Possibly a transcendental meditative state that noone but our well-to-do two year old can afford to practise? Or perhaps a Weleda cigarette for the young and homeopathically inclined? Neither a religion nor a politic for my kids, but undoubtedly an ethical choice for myself, maju is the whole and hearty experience that is nursing at my breasts. Somewhere between hearing the words 'mama's milk', getting to know his life source, and experimenting

with his vocal chords 'maju' (mahj-oo) landed at the center of my son's emerging vocabulary.

Maju is the embodiment of every lazy Sunday afternoon curled up in a hammock under the sun with a nice book. Maju is the calm before, during and after any storm, sleep or scare you can think of. Maju is the icing and the cake, the midnight snack, the morning wake. Maju is the feeling you need when you need when you're little and the feeling you miss when you're old and alone. Maju is under my shirt, come rain, sun or grime. Out in public, at home, anywhere, and anytime.

A solid fact: Breast is best. But wait I have two - two little kids who nurse when we like: in the car, with a fox and definitely not with ham, the mama's milk girl and the maju man. And yet it is such a beautiful thing to nurse your children. The closest possible close you can get to fulfilling two or three people all at once. The easiest way to love, feed, nurture and let go in a breath. And when your sleep is so broken that you ache and you're sore and their tandem feeding makes you want to start a maju revolt you can depend on the eternal paradox of nursing - the breastfeeding babes who keep you awake will eventually help you get a few more winks. When you'd

rather be carousing some high society gala hosted by the leader of the debt-free arts degree society or getting down and dirty in a nightclub full of baby-free-boppers chalking up a grand idea. When you are stuck at home reading Patrick and Ted go to the Seaside for the gazillionth time. You can still be there, nursing yourself and your kids, while you dream yourself far far away.

Sometimes though, when I'm feeding two at once, and he is standing up (while I am sitting down) and she is coming on and off and I'm in the middle of an incredibly public place, with my breasts leaking and exposed to unnatural weather conditions, well, I can't help but feel a little self conscious. When I get a look that says 'my god there's two of them on them there hills' its hard. The obligatory 'that's indecent exposure' comment from a pimply pimple or the awkwardness of two grown men formula fed on silicone sexiness makes it hard. When I feel inside that I am embarrassed to be nurturing my children in public I know that it's really hard. Yes, its hard to be a woman giving love to little ones, giving life to little ones, giving lessons to little ones. It's hard to bare it all because you believe that your nakedness warms the nakedness in others. It's hard to hold your head up

when your breasts are way too low. Its hard to stick to something that sometimes society would rather we didn't stick out.

Like tonight, when I head out of my car into a medical centre at nighttime and my son is sucking away a little bit scared, a little bit sleepy and a little bit burnt. And he is nursing and looking for extra comfort and has his hand upon my other breast (my bra upon the shower floor went down with the burn and bath routine). And it tickles like always and they're my breasts like always and this is normal like always. This evening I walk; a mother, a woman and a breastfeeder into a well lit, hygienically inspired auditorium full of keen spectators and it makes me stop. And I do. And I hide my right breast. And that makes me stop again. There is my son looking up at me for all the answers to his world of questions. "Have some maju" I say. And he does. And that's just right.

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