

Time Out of Mind  
by Andria K. Brown

In an era of ever-dwindling relevance, Time sure figured out how to get its name out there. (I mean, quick, what's the last Time cover you remember prior to last week's?) Turns out, putting a photograph of a woman with a breast exposed to feed a nursing toddler is pretty much ignored on a Whole Foods magazine rack, but when placed on the cover of a mainstream news weekly, sparks one the most fundamental and potentially emotional debates in our culture. No, not "what is the right/best way to parent." The true question stemming from that cover was, "How self-absorbed do they think mothers are?"

That Time cover and accompanying story were publicity bait, seemingly intended solely to get shared thousands of times on Facebook among the technologically-active attachment parenting community, as well as those equally opposed to it. The first time I saw the cover, I mentally braced myself for the comment threads to follow. I was pleasantly surprised when the most frequent reaction I saw instead was, "Oh, come on." The cover was so over-the-top, its aggressive "Are you mom enough?" headline so obvious, that it didn't warrant a response. If there's anything we've learned from the recent so-called "mommy wars," it's that no one wins. There is someone on the other side of every parenting issue, and neither side can claim victory. The sentiment I saw over and over was, mothering is hard enough without us judging each other. In short: we're not taking the bait.

In case the pointlessness of Time's story wasn't clear enough, there was another magazine story, coming out of Memphis, that spelled it out in no uncertain terms. If you want a hard-hitting story about the true hazards of mothering, skip over Time and pick up a copy of Glamour. Yes, Glamour. The May issue features four women who are dedicated to lowering the infant mortality rate in Memphis, which is currently the worst in the United States. Local mothers Brittany Spence and Kenyatta Collins-Bolden, nurse Tonya Taylor, and social worker Netasha Bowers, among a growing legion of others, have taken an active role in increasing the number of babies born in Memphis who see their first birthdays. They have had measurable, significant success, but the fight is nowhere near over. The fact that this is a battle still needing to be fought in a major city in the U.S. reveals a "mommy war" that can't be summed up by a staged (yes, women nurse 3-year-olds, but not one of them does it like that), intentionally provocative photograph of a middle-class woman with every parenting choice at her disposal.

And I say that, I admit, as a middle-class woman with every parenting choice at my disposal. Yes, I can attest that I received unsolicited advice about every major child-related decision I've made, from giving birth at home to co-sleeping to nursing my babies past their first year. And I also know that a woman who makes diametrical decisions still gets guilt and pressure for her own path. There seems to be some inherent need to question how children eat and sleep, when these are the elements of parenting that least affect anyone but the family involved. And yeah, it sucks either way. But the mere fact that we have these choices means we and our children have advantages that aren't even imagined by a mother who cannot access pre-natal health services or afford licensed daycare.

Every Mother Counts, a global initiative to reduce maternal mortality (with one of its most vocal supporters in former Memphian Heather Armstrong of dooce.com), spent this last Mother's Day publicizing the alarmingly precarious state of many mothers. According to World Health Organization studies cited on EMC's website, "approximately 358,000 women die each year due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth." That's 1000 a day. In case that seems like a far-distant problem, keep in mind that in 2010, the United States ranked 39<sup>th</sup> globally in maternal mortality. Thirty. Ninth.

In our city and beyond, pregnant women, new mothers, and infants are dying preventable deaths. And Time wants to stir us up about how long some people choose to breastfeed?

My mother taught me better than that.