

privacy

# Rooms *of* our own

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Women didn't even have the right to vote when Virginia Woolf first voiced our need to have our own piece of space in *A Room of One's Own*. A hundred years later and feminism has taken us beyond Virginia's wildest dreams, I imagine. Back then as a single woman, she was refused entry into a library without the escort of a male gentleman. Today there are few, if any, buildings we cannot stride into, and even have the chance of running should we so desire or work hard enough. However, one thing remains the same. How many women – and us mothers in particular – have a room to call our own? A space that is ours? A refuge from the hurly-burly tumble of motherhood?

I for one don't have a room of my own. Not any more. Not one room. Not even a cupboard that locks or has room enough for me to hide inside (believe me, I've tried!). I have two daughters under two and a half years of age, and by two my eldest had discovered the delights of trying on my new red suede high heels (scored before I'd even worn them), could reach into the drawer and unzip my make-up bag, (I won't go into the implications of liquid blusher on a cream carpet) and

stand on the windowsill to reach across my dressing table to pull my necklaces and beads off the rack. But it's not just the physical assault on my belongings, the loss of sacred things that are mine (as every mother knows – a two-year-old lives by the motto, what's mine is mine, and what's everybody else's is mine too). It's that little pocket of solitude, that tiny oasis of space, that miniscule crevice of peace, a place to run screaming to and slam the door shut should the desire

overwhelm us. My daughters have it. My husband has it – an office at work, a shed, the study. Even the damn cats have it. But somehow between being a child and having a child, I lost the right to privacy.

When I was young, I had my own bedroom. Poster laden walls and heart-patterned curtains with secret hiding places for furtive writings and diaries stuffed with longing. As I grew up and chased life in a tirade of exciting adventures I had many rooms, in





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together in a sorry house that whispered of many stories untold. Now I own several rooms, but none of them are mine; no part my husband doesn't share (and clutter), no area my daughters don't ransack. I don't even close the toilet door anymore – that intimate moment of privacy too has been stripped away by an insecure toddler. And since giving up my full-time desk-job to look after the family and pursue a freelance career, I no longer own an office where people would knock to enter and I could choose to welcome them, or not.

Now don't get me wrong. I wouldn't change one minute of motherhood (well, ok there are about 30 seconds I might exchange) but here I am. Thirty seven. A mother and a writer. And for the first time in my life, I have no room to call my own. I write at the dinner table amid dollops of baby food and smidgens of egg yoke and between piles of ironing. I was deliriously happy recently when my husband grudgingly allowed me to store some old crockery in the shed so that I could have a whole half cupboard of the dresser to store my laptop and writing. A whole shelf! Who needs diamond rings when you can have a whole shelf, I ask you? When I surveyed a bunch of mums recently about their thoughts on motherhood, one of the strongest moans was lack of privacy and personal space. And I don't think we even dream of anything grand. All I want is a little corner of the house that belongs to me; a place where all my piles of 'stuff' and notes and 'things' can congregate together in harmony. I'd like to feel I belong rather than have bits of me scattered around the house in every available recess like a hobo in my own home.

But for now I suppose I must create my own 'room', my thinking and writing place. My solitude must take place amid the hectic squealings of motherhood. My creativity must fight its way through the mundane acts of domesticity. I must claim my room where I can; in my head; in the car as I wait for the lights to change; in between the nappies and the boiled eggs and soldiers; in bed as the moon recedes and little voices have yet to break the silence of the morning. And maybe one day I will have a room again; one that's just mine. With a door. A soft door that's knock is mild and not intimidating. A gentle knock that I will gladly say 'come in' to. Because I can. \*

many houses, in many towns, in many countries; rooms that, when all was said and done were mine to close the door on, and say goodbye to the world. And then, when I had wilted, recouped, rested, regathered, I could throw open the door again to say hello to the world, myself intact and recovered.

I only ever actually owned one of those rooms – well, three to be precise if you included a bathroom and kitchen/lounge area – and that was the best room of all.

Mine, all mine. Well, mine and the cats. I can still just grasp that glorious feeling of how good it was to wake up on a Saturday morning, the blinds still down and hiding me from the outside, the door still bolted to keep me safe inside, as I languished indulgently in my space, alone to decide how the day would proceed, with space to just be. But no sooner had I secured my room(s) of my own, than I invited someone in to share it. Our love took over and we moved on to own multiple rooms