



INVISIBLE mums



Sinead Moriarty bemoans the loss of identity that goes with becoming a mother

The loss of identity begins when you first announce your pregnancy. People no longer look at your face, they stare at your stomach to see how big it is and some men just blatantly stare at your boobs to see how they are 'blossoming'.

People suddenly feel free to comment on your shape. Whereas before no one would ever have dared call you huge, massive or enormous, they now feel free to use such words when describing your expanding midriff.

Not only is your body out of control, so are people's mouths.

Then the questions start – breast or bottle? Natural birth or C-section? Crèche or nanny? Stay at home or go back to work? Boy or girl? What are your baby names?

It goes on forever. I even had one person ask me what senior school I was going to send my unborn child (sex unknown) to. I started at her blankly. "You'd want to get their name down soon or you won't get them in anywhere," she assured me.

"But I don't know if it's a boy or girl!" I reminded her.

"It doesn't matter, put them down anyway!"

Then the baby is born and, from the moment that little person comes out into the world, your name disappears into the abyss. You go from being a person in your own right to being Johnny or Mary's Mum. And that is the name that you will have for the rest of your life. People won't even bother to remember your name. It's easier to call you Johnny's Mum.

Even your husband will call you mum – a personal bugbear of mine. When my husband refers to me as mum, I want to shout, "I have a name, remember!"

Besides, he usually uses it to extricate himself from being the bad cop, ie, "Mum thinks it's a bad idea for you to have that sixth chocolate biscuit".

You're damn right I do, because I know

they'll probably vomit it over me later.

Obviously, your children never use your name. To them you are Mummy, Mum or, usually, MUUUUUUM, which they roar from another room to get you to come in so they can then ask you to go and fetch them something.

I have a friend who used to be a management consultant. "Now, I'm a scrubber," she sighed over coffee the other day. "My life is like groundhog day. I wake up, clean, cook, wash, drive them around and then do it all over again. And they don't even notice I exist. I'm completely invisible."

She's right. Mothers are invisible in their own homes. If I ask my sons to put their shoes on in a normal tone of voice, they completely ignore me. They don't see me or hear me. It's only when, after 15 requests, I roar like a banshee that they actually look up, surprised to see me there. As if I have just appeared from under my invisibility cloak.

They don't notice my presence until my head starts to boil and I shout at them. Then they tell me not to shout, which makes me so furious I sometimes think steam does come out my ears.

My five-year-old son said the other day: "How come you get a Mother's Day and we get no kids' day?" I stared at him in genuine shock. "Every day is a kids' day," I said. He snorted. "No it isn't".

So I decided to explain it to him. In very simple terms, I enlightened him with a long list of the 'minor' chores that I perform on a daily basis to make his days seamless, safe, happy, comfortable and fulfilling.

I described the overwhelming joy that I would feel every morning if I woke up to a day like his. I could think of nothing more wonderful than to have someone in my life who cooked all my meals for me, laundered all my clothes, drove me everywhere, praised me for every achievement, however small or menial, hugged me, kissed me and regularly patted me on the back.

I would adore to be allowed to watch TV, uninterrupted by wailing, fighting or wrestling bodies, have my teeth brushed for me, be tucked up in bed at night and have stories read to me.

"It's heaven! Every day of your life is a party!" I exclaimed.

He looked decidedly unimpressed. "Well, why don't you just get a mum?" he suggested. I willed myself not to shout. "Because she's on a well-deserved sabbatical on the golf course, having raised three children of her own," I retorted.

He shrugged. "I don't know what 'abbatical' means, but there's no need to get cross about it. And actually, Mummy, my days really aren't that great," he assured me.

Even husbands, who formerly rushed to you if you cried, listened intently as you described your day, beamed at you across candlelit dinners, don't notice you any more.

They come in from work, throw their coat on whatever piece of furniture isn't covered in laundry and sigh about being tired.

Having been deprived of adult conversation and even a screech of attention for almost 11 hours, you crave their company. You are desperate to tell someone how you managed to coax your three-year-old down from a tree, made your four-year-old taste broccoli, ironed a full basket of laundry and made a robot costume out of a cornflakes box and a roll of tinfoil.

In fact, you're expecting 'Blue Peter' to call any minute now.

But they just aren't interested. They've been surrounded by adults, drinking coffee, talking about grown-up things all day and they want to 'chill out' for a bit. Their eyes glaze over as you witter on about your day.

They wander off mid-story to 'check emails' or 'take a call' or sometimes for no apparent reason at all. They used to find you so interesting. They now find you... well, frankly, dull.

And let's be honest here, when they talk to you about corporate mergers and conference calls with Mumbai, don't you switch off a little too?

You sit in your food-stained fleece and wonder where you went. What if you disappeared for a few days? Would they notice you then? Would it be your absence that shook them all out of their complacent, unappreciative reverie?

Probably not. A friend of mine tried this and when she got back after 48 hours of liberation, her husband smugly announced that he couldn't believe how easy it was. They almost got divorced.

Not long ago, I was waiting to cross the road with my two sons. The friendly lollipop lady winked at me and asked the boys: "Who's this nice lady with you?" They were puzzled, "Who?" asked my five-year-old. "What nice lady?" asked my six-year-old, looking around.

"This lady right here," the lollipop lady pointed at me.

"Oh her," they shrugged, "She's just our Mum."

I knew then that it was official – I had become invisible. ☹

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