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### **What in the World is “The One-Armed Cook?”**

“There I sat in the middle of the kitchen floor at 6:00 p.m. still in my bathrobe, sobbing, cradling my 3-week-old son in my arms wondering if he was ever going to stop crying and if I was ever going to take a shower or cook a meal again in his lifetime, “ writes Cynthia Stevens Graubart. Meanwhile, in a parallel universe only a few miles away lives Catherine Fliegel, who confesses without remorse that she was so in love with new motherhood that she never put her babies down.

Before the births of their children, both Moms were accomplished cooks who knew their way around a kitchen with confidence and a degree of finesse. But both had babies who loved to be held. When faced with the previously simple task of getting dinner on the table, they found themselves diminished to tears with an overwhelming sense of inadequacy and completely at the mercy of a person just under 2-feet tall. Because their very survival depended on it, they each found their way back into their kitchens, but suddenly in unfamiliar territory.

Being a very organized and practical person, Cynthia quickly adapted to life in the kitchen with baby, but was struck that no one was talking about just how hard this phase of parenting really is. She knew that people weren’t eating takeout every night, but how can you make dinner with so little time and only one hand free?

After the birth of her second child, she coined the phrase “a one-armed life” and began taking notes to help her remember how difficult it is to prepare dinner when a fussy baby needs to be held, or other demands distract us from the task at hand. She vowed that when she had two hands free again, she would write a book that would help others survive this awkward period in the kitchen.

Catherine is operationally very different from Cynthia and is the first to admit that she simply not as organized in the kitchen. She learned to cope in her own way, gradually reclaiming successes in her culinary life with a baby on her hip. The fact that her husband and three children are alive and flourishing after almost two decades of kitchen challenges can attest to the fact that there is more than one right way to do things.

Cynthia and Catherine’s parallel paths converged because of a special friendship their 2-year-old sons bonded in preschool. Their second children were born four months apart and they were each enduring round two of the “one-armed” life, only this time also with a toddler in- tow.

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In carpool line and around their dining room tables, Cynthia and Catherine fostered a close friendship. They brought their families together for many meals and holidays, generating mutual respect and admiration in the kitchen.

Several years passed and Cynthia finally sat down to start writing her book. She asked Catherine to join her to keep her focused and on deadline and to lend her unique perspective and motherhood experience in the kitchen to the project.

They gathered their favorite family recipes and began weeding through them. For each one, they called for a manageable list of ingredients that were easily obtained at a local supermarket. They substituted convenience items into their recipes without sacrificing workability or taste. No fancy culinary skills were required. Then they began testing, and tasting, and testing again, all with an eye on their kitchen timers and one arm behind their backs.

The result of their collaboration is *The One-Armed Cook*, a book that combines inspirational and informative narrative with more than 120 baby-holding, mom-tested, easy recipes. It is the first book to offer so many creative ideas for parents on preparing a family meal while keeping their children safe and entertained in the kitchen.

With honesty and humor, two different voices of experience, well-organized information, step-by-step directions, sample menus with timelines for preparation, and girlfriend-ly reassurance, *The One-Armed Cook* entertains and empowers parents in the kitchen. It helps those who find themselves completely lost at the thought of making it through meal preparation with a baby on their hip answer the question, “What’s for dinner?”

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*Cynthia Stevens Graubart and Catherine Fliegel, RN, CCE are the authors of “The One-Armed Cook: Quick and Easy Recipes, Smart Meal Plans, and Savvy Advice for New (and not-so-new) Moms” published by Meredith Books (April 2005) ISBN 0-696-22682-0.*

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