

“Lunch For 30, Please!”

BY LEAH RAMELLA

*With Baby Bites,
Laura Deutsch Brings
New Moms Together
Over Good Eats and Good
Parenting Advice*

THE FIRST THREE MONTHS of new motherhood can be exciting, exhausting and, at times, lonely. On that last note especially, just ask mom Laura Deutsch. “I would see two moms walking down the street, chatting away, and I would want to run up and say ‘How did you two meet?’” recalls Laura, who gave birth to her daughter, Ava, in 2005 and, as of press time, was due to give birth to her second child in late March. “I was desperate to meet other new moms, if only for the adult company and to talk with someone who was going through the same thing that I was.”

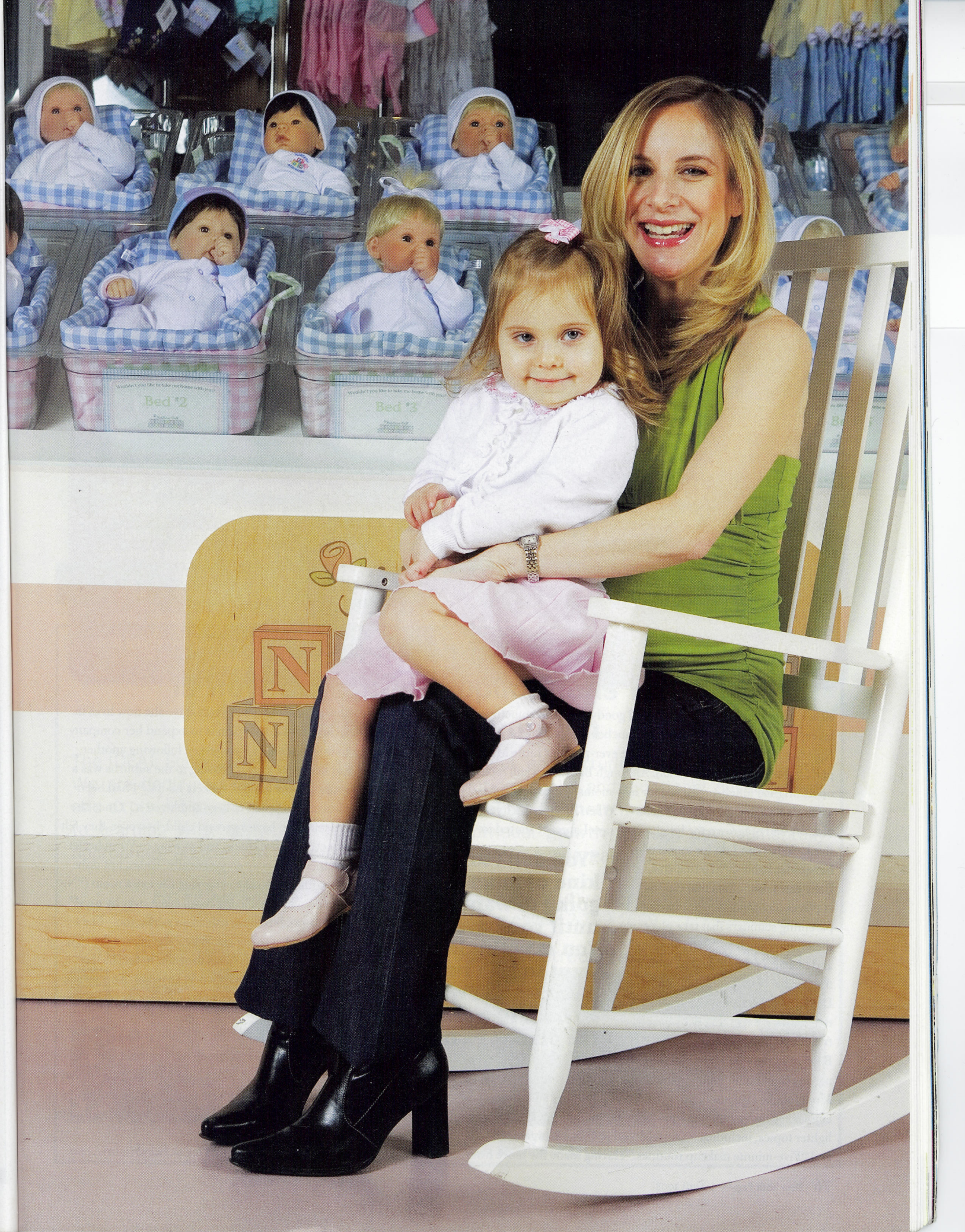
The need to connect with other new moms—and the belief that there must be other parents out there feeling the same way she did—propelled Laura to form her own moms’ group, Baby Bites, the following year. Though it started out small—to promote her first event, a luncheon at the Metropolitan Cafe on the Upper East Side, Laura stood on a street corner with Ava handing out flyers—word of the group quickly spread, and soon Laura was running weekly lunches on the Upper East and Upper West Sides. Today, Baby Bites is one of the most popular moms’ organizations in the city. Laura says new moms really respond to the luncheon format, which lets them connect while also having the chance to hear a guest expert speak about a parenting-related topic. “It’s such a winning concept,” she says. “They stroll in with their infants, eat a nice lunch, hear a speaker, and go home. It’s very easy and non-committal.”

Like many “mompreneurs” who hit upon a good idea, Laura, who was formerly a teacher on the Upper West Side for seven years,

is now working full-time at her business, something she didn’t necessarily see herself doing before she had Ava. “I thought I wanted to be a full-time mom,” she says. Upon becoming a mom, however, she realized she wanted to work at least on a part-time basis and, not wanting to return to teaching, instead embarked upon founding Baby Bites. She offers sage advice for other moms: “You don’t know what kind of mom you are going to want to be until you have a child. You may think you want to be a full-time mom, or you want to go back to work. I’m the perfect example.”

Many of Laura’s ideas for luncheon topics come from her own experiences as a mom, and others are gathered from the mothers who attend her events. “In the first year of Baby Bites, I handed out feedback cards, and I built a complete list of what new mothers want to hear about. I continue to ask for feedback from all the luncheon participants so we cover what moms are most concerned about,” she says. The “Tips on getting your baby to sleep” luncheon, where an expert talks about the best ways to help your baby slumber, is a perennial favorite, not surprisingly. Other popular topics include “Traveling with your baby,” “Classes around town,” and “Doula, nanny, or baby nurse?” Recent featured speakers include sleep expert Janine Heyward from Swell Being; Dr. Sarah Klagsrun from Uptown Mommies, who spoke about building a child’s self-esteem; and the potty training experts from Urban Nurture. While filling their stomachs at restaurants such as Arte Cafe on the West Side, Cilantro on the East Side, and The Mad Hatter Saloon downtown, Baby Bites luncheons don’t let moms leave empty-handed

■ *Laura Deutsch and her daughter, Ava, photographed at the Lee Middleton Doll Shop in FAO Schwarz by Thaddeus Harden/www.thaddeusharden.com*



“SHOULD I

Stay OR SHOULD I Go?”

Laura's "Pros And Cons"
For Raising A Family In
The Burbs Versus The City

By Laura Deutsch

Pros

1. If you shop for a home in the burbs, there's a very good chance you could double, if not triple, the size of your Manhattan apartment and still pay less for it. Of course, this is more likely the farther you get from the city.
2. Space, space, and more space! Space everywhere. Space in the backyard. Space in the basement. Space between homes. Space to breathe.
3. The city has some great playgrounds, but there is something very comforting about setting your kids loose in the backyard and watching them play on their own jungle gym and swing set.
4. You have a car, and you get to use it. And you don't have to pay extra rent just to house your car in a big parking garage!
5. To make life more pleasant, many communities have town pools and beaches just for residents.
6. We have the convenience of malls, along with the ability to shop in bulk and actually have space to store the items when we get home.

7. You don't live in the city, but you're still close enough that whenever you feel a craving you can just go on in and do what you want: shop, see a friend, check out an art gallery, etc.

Cons

1. Not being able to walk everywhere. I love my car, but I do miss the ability to use my two feet to get to a convenience store or to Starbucks or anywhere else in the neighborhood.
2. Doing errands with a baby can be much easier in the city. It's you, her, and the stroller. You don't have to keep buckling her in and out of the car seat at each stop.
3. In the same way that adults tout the city's cultural offerings, it also has an unbelievable variety of children's classes and activities. The burbs are more limited in this regard. (Then again, when the kids get older, we have more playing fields and affordable and available tennis courts.)
4. Missing the hustle and bustle and just everything that comes together in one amazing city.

either. There are always well-stocked goody bags and sometimes more; at the recent Valentine's Day luncheon, for example, a Stokke Xplory stroller was raffled off (and the ever-popular Little Maestros performed for kids and parents). Although Baby Bites still focuses on its original luncheon format for new moms, the company has expanded as Laura's daughter grows. "When Ava turned 1 year old, she had outgrown the luncheons," says Laura. "I started to think, 'What can I do for moms who have older babies?'" To that end, Baby Bites now offers trial classes at places like MoonSoup, as well as parenting seminars that take place in the evening, such as "Potty training" and "Charm school: dealing with the terrible twos," at places like Destination Maternity. And, now that Laura is expecting baby number two, she recently added a Baby Bites luncheon for parents expecting a second child. Laura has added some nighttime soirées (à la Moms Night Out) to the Baby Bites menu. At a recent one, moms enjoyed refreshments and wine while listening to speakers discuss lighter topics, including "Keeping your apartment organized" and "Five-minute makeup routines." Having made the move from

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the city to the suburbs one and a half years ago—she now lives in Larchmont, Westchester—Laura's plan is to expand her company there, and then to do the same in New Jersey, following another upcoming move to her home state. "Moving to the suburbs was a huge decision for me and my family," reflects Laura. "I had been living in the city since I graduated college and loved it." Once she and her husband decided to have a second child, however, they felt

they needed more space, and moving to Westchester made the most sense economically. Today, not only do they find themselves enjoying the extra room ("No longer do we have a living room taken over by toys!" notes Laura), but other suburban perks, too—like a backyard with a swing set. When she misses the city, Laura says she simply takes the train in for the day (which she often does for work, anyway). And, as she describes it, the core focus of the company is still very much on city moms.

While feeling a bit overwhelmed at times, she loves every minute of running her business, and can already envision its future. "My daughter Ava is my inspiration for everything," says Laura. "She really guides me." Ever the entrepreneur, she adds, "Maybe by the time Ava is 5 I will start doing things for moms with 5-year-olds." ☺

You can read more about Baby Bites at www.babybitesnyc.com.