

5 Tips on Being a Helpful House Guest for New Parents + Curried Roasted Butternut Squash Soup w/Coconut Milk



I heart Chicago.

I took a couple of days off. My best friend had a baby several weeks ago and dang it, I wanted to meet her. It's hard taking

time off. I work more than full time. I've got my little critter plus the 150 students I attempt to take care of at work and on top of that, Thanksgiving is around the corner and we're hosting again this year. I was supposed to book this trip in December but then December's proposed trip date turned into a proposed January trip date and it was beginning to feel like I would never really get there. And yet, something happened while sitting in yet another meeting at work and I thought to myself, "I gotta get out of here". And so, in less dramatic fashion than I'm making it seem, I booked my ticket and arrived in Chicago this past Wednesday night (Sidebar: Dressing for a November trip that departs from Miami but arrives in Chicago is really an art form I've come very close to mastering).

I thought maybe I would have forgotten what it was like to travel solo; it had been so long since I'd traveled without baby and husband in tow. I spent over a decade traveling all over the world by myself but since getting married, the traveling has become a partner-based endeavor. I wondered if I'd remember what it was like to not worry about things like when I'd be able to change Siona's diaper next or if we factored enough time into our schedule to account for the ever-so-fun security line with a toddler. Turns out, I never lost my travel legs and to be perfectly honest, it felt great to fly alone. Folks, I don't mean to alarm you but I read an ENTIRE magazine— cover to cover! I mean I savored every second of my uninterrupted magazine-reading and even read the silly ads in the back (Yes, it was an US Weekly and no, it turns out that I do not need a tank top that reads, "Team Peeta").

Hell, I watched a whole movie on my iPad without interruption. I was not going to let this alone time go wasted. 'Twas glorious.



Cozy, comfort.



Hot coffee on a cold day . . . I think I remember what that was like.



Glazed and Infused: All the hype was pretty much worth it.



Daniel and his baby Judah.

But I digress. This is a “how to” post. But I’m not writing it because I think I know it all. Oh no my friends. I’m writing this because my dear friend, Annie, knows it all. The four days I was in Chicago were spent repaying a favor. I needed to take care of my girl (and new mom), Jackie and her baby girl, Violet, the way she took care of me when Siona was born. I was supposed to do this last year when Annie had her baby boy, Judah, since she had spent 5 days with Siona and me in all my

post-partum glory. But sadly, I got the flu and had to cancel my trip. So, one year later, in Annie's honor and with her by my side, I finally landed in Chicago to take care of Jackie and Violet.

When you're a regular guest, it's safe to say that there's a level of comfort you look forward to or might even expect from your host/hostess (or maybe this is just me being SUPER Southern). But when you're the houseguest of new parents, it's your job and, in my opinion, your obligation to not just "pitch in" but to be altogether expendable to new parents.

And no one, I mean, no one, has mastered this art of being the perfect new parent houseguest than my girl, Annie. She's helpful in ways that might border on Saint-like status. So, the following list has been compiled from watching her at work in all her glory. For if you are of an age where your friends aren't quite having babies yet, I promise you, one day they just might and you will need to be there for them as, Gd willing, they will be there for you. Or, you might find these tips helpful if you're possibly in a stage in life like me where roughly 65% of your Facebook feed is purely pictures of your friends' kids (the other 35% being BuzzFeed round-ups and cat memes). Or maybe, just maybe, you just had a baby and your in-laws are coming in for a stay and you want to be all, "Hey, Mom-in-law, isn't this post about how to be a good houseguest to new parents funny? You should read it . . . carefully."

1. Take Care of the Animal – Your friends, new mom and dad, are exhausted. They are knee-deep in care-giving for their tiny new human and sometimes, their first-born, the dog/cat/hamster/fish/etc., gets overlooked. Pets aren't overlooked because there's a lack of love. Pets in the homes of brand new parents are overlooked because new parents are experiencing an exhaustion that can't be topped. They're barely taking care of themselves, much less their beloved pet.

So, if there's a pet in the house, clean the cage/litter box/tank or take it for a walk. Fluffy will be very grateful.

2. **Cook** – Make sure what you cook is healthy and will last at least a week or can be frozen. I spent all day on Thursday cooking for Jackie and her new family. She requested homemade pasta sauce so, obviously, I complied. I also made curried roasted butternut squash soup with coconut milk (**recipe below**) and mini zucchini muffins and homemade granola as Jackie expressed concern of her lack of eating in the morning (Jake and Jackie are foodies. They went to El Buli for their honeymoon. Cooking for them is very intimidating).

3. **Don't Leave the House Empty-Handed** – Taking out the trash/recycling is obnoxious when you don't have a new baby to take care of. Plus, for some reason trash and recycling seems to pile up quicker when you've just had a baby than in your previous life. So, after your visit of cleaning and cooking, make sure you don't leave empty-handed and offer to take out the trash on your way out.

4. **Address the Thank You Notes** – My girl, Annie, actually offered to write Jackie's Thank You notes. I could see the temptation in Jackie's eyes but ultimately, she wrote her own while the baby was napping. However, the real time-suckage of Thank You notes is the addressing part. If baby is sleeping or in someone else's arms, ask for that address list and start writing. You'll rescue new mama from trying to find the time for addressing a sea of envelopes but also the inevitable guilt of being late on her notes (or that's just us Jewish mama's having to battle our guilt-complexes yet again).

5. **Hold the Baby** – Hold that baby for as long as your arms can stand it and give mama an opportunity to take a bath, take a nap or whatever else she's been itching to get done. Heck, even if it's 15 minutes of Pinterest surfing, give her that opportunity. It's not for you to judge how she spends her time. It's for you to offer and allow her that sacred thing called, "free time".



The woman knows how to decorate.



Homemade tomato sauce on some crusty bread and some creamy cheese.



The murals in Chicago



Me and our sweet Violet.

Curried Roasted Butternut Squash Soup with Coconut Milk:

Ingredients:

- 1 whole butternut squash – halved & peeled
- Coconut oil
- 1 small onion – diced
- 2 cloves of garlic – diced

2 cups of veggie broth or water
Curry powder
Sea salt
Cayenne pepper
1 can coconut milk
1 bunch chopped fresh cilantro

Method:

Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. After peeling and cutting in half length-wise, slather the inside of your squash with just enough coconut oil that is evenly covered but not “oily”. Place your halved and peeled squash oil side down on your baking sheet and roast for 40 – 45 minutes or until soft. Once it’s finished, let cool for about 10 minutes or so. Once cooled, chop your squash into small-ish pieces and set aside.

During the cooling phase, sauté your diced onion in a large stock pot using about 3 tbsp of coconut oil. Sauté for one minute and add garlic. Sauté for another 3 minutes or so or until onions are translucent. Add your seasoning – I go heavy on seasoning this so roughly 2 tbsp of curry or so. Then add a dash of the cayenne and salt. Stir all together and let sauté for another minute. Add the squash and stir. Add the stock or water and stir. Bring mixture to a boil, cover and reduce heat to simmer. Let simmer for about 10 -15 minutes, adding more stock or water along the way just so it stays since and moist but not overly “soupy”. After about 15 minute, remove from heat and, using a hand immersion blender, blend all ingredients until smooth. Add the coconut milk and stir. Season to your tastes. Top with fresh cilantro and enjoy.



Roasted Butternut Squash + Coconut Milk
Soup