

GOING PLACES WITH RAMONA

By Melissa Favara

At month's beginning, I nursed baby Ramona at night. At month's end, big kid Ramona won the Hustle competition at a dance club. ...

Ramona celebrated her half birthday on Feb. 4. At 1.5 years of age, my baby is no longer a baby. Fascinated with infants, she wraps her stuffed frog in a dishtowel, cradling it and pretending to blow its nose. Weaned two weeks now, she sleeps through the night and is reluctant to abandon her bright red plastic car to come home with me from daycare. I can diet, drink wine and write in the evenings uninterrupted. I draft lesson plans while Ramona dances with her towel-wrapped frog to Robyn Hitchcock in the living room. I have my life back.

I am freaking out. I was ready for a little independence of my own. I wasn't ready for Ramona's.

The list on an 11x14 rectangle of cardboard we taped to the fridge to record Ramona's new words topped 80 this month with the addition of "read" "ready" and "music," the last of which means "put on a record." I was tickled three weeks ago when Ramona responded to a CD of my favorite indie rocker Hitchcock with laughter, clapping and a dance move we dubbed "The Piston." Ramona raises her hands ballet style and turns in circles, then bops up and down, fingers fastened to her rocking horse.

Twenty-one days into "music," I hate Robyn Hitchcock. The album Ramona insists on five times a day has become an emblem. My small person, already full of her own preferences, practices and tastes, is soft-shoeing away from me. As ready as I felt for that a month ago, I'm nostalgic now about hospital photos of the pink little kitten I brought home only 18 months ago.

Ramona needed to expand her musical palate, and I needed to find fresh ways of being close with her. Newly lacking the trump card of the breast, I'm shopping for rituals to replace what we've lost. I learned about Baby Loves Disco the way I learn about everything: someone forwarded me an e-mail. Happy on a Sunday morning that Ramona had someplace to wear the fabulous bell-bottoms my mom overpaid for at Christmas, we headed for the Wonder Ballroom to cut us a rug.

Baby Loves Disco is one of those terrific ideas you swear you almost had yourself when you first hear of it. Founders Heather Murphy Monteith and Andy Blackman Hurwitz, assisted by local businesses and host parents who organize the event locally and supply food, merchandise and sometimes spa services, gleefully exploit a much-neglected



Chapter 3: Sunday Afternoon is the new Saturday Night, and Baby Does Love Disco

niche: Have kids? Still want to go clubbing? Go clubbing with your kids!

I've often heard my mother bemoan how bereft her childhood was of the Great New Stuff They Have Now. Walking into the Wonder, I lamented that my grownup nightclub experiences weren't like this. Swarms of glad tots, ages 1 to 6, wiggled and hopped to tracks cheerfully spun by a real live DJ. Instead of glow sticks, these dancers wielded string cheese from the free buffet and juice box bar at the dance floor's perimeter. I spotted a former county commissioner doing a modified cabbage patch with her 10-month-old strapped to her chest, a mom and dad two-stepping while their kindergartner leapt and posed. Kids all a-tilt near the bubble machine, women talked to each other for minutes at a time. Ramona wandered ahead of me in the crowd, randomly high-fiving other toddlers (a new skill) and doing The Piston for all she was worth. Never one to underutilize a buffet, she managed to eat three mozzarella sticks and a tangerine while shuffling to Blondie, the b52s, and Sly and the Family Stone.

We giggled. We joined the Love Train. We did a really messy hustle for the hustle contest, and won a disco CD: the judge, a speechless 8 year old boy, handed us our prize. While only a few parents took advantage of the cocktail service in the Wonder balcony, many (including me) accepted the free mini-massages provided by Crescent Moon Oasis. Ramona chose her friend Violet to hold hands with during the "people of the world join hands" segment of the song. I admit to being a little heartbroken.

My dancer whirled, independent in her orbit.

Then, just as Abba's "Dancing Queen" began, my girl rubbed her eyes. We walked into the Chill Out Room, a space cordoned off for kids who need a break from the dance floor, where pillows, toys and miniature tents provided rest and comfort. Ramona quickly located a giant stuffed dog and a copy of *Blueberries for Sal*, which she handed to me. "Mommy read?" she asked, settling into my lap.

If you go:

Baby Loves Disco's next party is from noon to 3 pm on March 30 at the Wonder Ballroom, 128 NE Russell. Local DJs Greasy Kid Stuff will spin records. Don't bother to pack a snack – a kid-centric buffet by P.B. & Ellie's comes with the ticket price of \$12 per walking human. And do bring friends – if you can get someone to monitor your child, you can have a free massage from Crescent Moon Oasis. For more information, visit www.babylovesdisco.com.