

# *WORN STORIES*

**EMILY SPIVACK**

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**Andy Spade** 11  
**Simon Doonan** 13  
**Greta Gerwig** 15  
**Ross Intelisano** 17  
**Niki Russ Federman** 19  
**Brian Balderston** 21  
**Margaret D. Stetz** 23  
**Rosanne Cash** 25  
**David Carr** 27  
**Ariel Schrag & Matt Wolf** 29  
**Kelly Jones** 33  
**Brandi Chastain** 35  
**Jeff Zimbalist** 37  
**Jill Meisner** 41  
**Kenneth Goldsmith** 43  
**Pat Mahoney** 45  
**Laura Jane Kenny** 47  
**Meghan O'Rourke** 49  
**Kayla Klepac** 51  
**Jonathan Levine** 53  
**Yael Meridan Schori** 55  
**Albert Maysles** 57  
**Paola Antonelli** 59  
**Catherine Pierce** 61  
**April Bloomfield** 63  
**Brian Dwyer** 65  
**Debbie Millman** 67  
**Harvey** 69  
**Susan Orlean** 73  
**Stephen Elliott** 75  
**Emily Spivack** 77  
**Piper Kerman** 79  
**Sabrina Gschwandtner** 81  
**Dorothy Finger** 83

**James Johnson III** 85  
**Dustin Yellin** 89  
**Cynthia Rowley** 91  
**Marina Abramović** 93  
**Edith Raymond Locke** 95  
**Kathleen Drohan** 97  
**Tiler Peck** 99  
**Miss Lisa** 101  
**Jenna Wortham** 103  
**Andrew Tarlow** 105  
**Jeremy Bailey** 107  
**Brian Droitcour** 109  
**Lindsey Thornburg** 113  
**Kitty Stryker** 115  
**Andrew Kuo** 117  
**Davy Rothbart** 119  
**Maira Kalman** 121  
**Tito** 123  
**Dapper Dan** 125  
**Sasha Frere-Jones** 127  
**Tamara Santibanez** 131  
**Courtney Maum** 133  
**John Hodgman** 135  
**Heidi Julavits** 139  
**Ellisabeth Subrin** 141  
**Rachel Comey** 143  
**Marcus Samuelsson** 145  
**Sanya Kantarovsky** 147  
**Susan Bennett** 149  
**Pamela Jones** 151  
**Karuna Scheinfeld** 153  
**Sherry Turkle** 155  
**Becky Stark** 157





## Sherry Turkle

My purple sweatshirt, well, it's not quite a sweatshirt at all. It is a cotton waffle weave. It has little holes where mice ate away at it. But that is why I love it.

I bought it as one of my comfy mommy outfits, when my husband and I adopted our daughter Rebecca. I never really was much for sweatpants and soft shirts, but a baby seemed to call for this new garb since the baby wore such soft things. I was thin and stylish; it was the early 1990s, and all of my clothes seemed rough to the touch when I was around the baby. I wanted fleece.

From the moment I held Rebecca in my arms I loved her wonderful baby body. How she smelled, the light blue vein on the bridge of her nose, the smell of powder on the top of her head. I made up rituals around changing diapers and bath time. At diaper time I would say "Creeeam," as I dabbed on the diaper ointment. "Creeeam," she would laugh back. At bedtime, we counted her baby blankets as I tucked her in. Pink Blankie, White Blankie, Flannel Blankie, Waffle Weave Blankie. At eight months Rebecca put Waffle Weave Blankie against my purple sweatshirt and pointed from one to the other. It led to a song: "Waffle weave. Yellow. Purple. Becca. Mommy."

Most of all, I loved feeding Rebecca. Since I had not been able to nurse her, giving her a bottle, having her body that close, was precious to me. When she was born, MIT, where I taught, had no parental leave for mothers who had adopted children. (Childbirth counted as "medical leave." Adoption counted for nothing.) I worked full time when Rebecca was an infant. I missed so much time with her, so many bottles. I still get upset thinking about this.

When Rebecca was one, I took a leave of absence. I needed to be closer to my child, and my husband and I were having problems. We moved from the city to the country. We dreamed that this would help: a life in the country with our new baby, a lack of city pressures, waking up to the possibilities of our beautiful garden. But now it was winter. We couldn't see possibilities.

One night I was giving Rebecca a bottle after her bath, and before I had a chance to burp her over my shoulder, protected by a cloth diaper, she spit up all over the front of my purple sweatshirt. The macaroni and cheese of that evening's dinner had not agreed with her. I grabbed a few baby wipes. I wiped my shirt. I wiped her soft mouth and changed her pajamas. I sang my daughter to sleep as I always did with the lullabies of my childhood: "Tura Lura Lura," the theme song from *The Goldbergs* television hour, and "You Are My Sunshine."

Getting ready for bed, I took the purple shirt off and threw it on the hamper. I looked around the big house for my husband. He waved me away; he was watching television in his study.

That night, mice feasted. When I saw the holes in the morning, the spit-up of macaroni and cheese eaten away, I washed the shirt carefully and put it back on. Soft, with its traces of Rebecca—Rebecca was where the shirt was not—it comforted me. It still does. Perverse? It's possible. I'm wearing the purple sweatshirt now, twenty-one years later, and it still reminds me of the season when I had my life's sweetest and saddest moments at the same time. I was closest to my baby's body and frozen out by the winter that was supposed to bring me back to the man I loved.

Sherry Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé professor of the social studies of science and technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the author of numerous books, most recently, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.