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Letter from the Editor: We've Come a Long Way, GGMG

By Kirsten Pflieger



Kirsten Pflieger lives in the Castro with her husband, Karl, and their two daughters, Serenity and Sierra.

At GGMG's inception 20 years ago, I was a recent college graduate enjoying the freedom that comes with having a well-paying job in a city hundreds of miles from home. I had no computer, no email address, and still paid attention to when rates for long-distance phone calls went down. Thus, I lost contact with most of my high school

and college friends and concentrated on building new relationships where I was. As a single woman working full-time and able to choose social sports and activities, this was not difficult.

Many of my high school and college friends had gotten married and started having children. Without cell phones and social media, our physical distance and significantly different priorities meant that I didn't have much of a window into their lives. I do recall conversations with one good friend from high school who had three children in 13 months (a singleton followed by twins) soon after moving to a new town. She was lonely. Getting out of

GGMG has come a long way since its beginnings in 1996, when one new mother saw a need and worked to fill it.

the house on any given day was a feat, and she did not have the time or the energy to find the support that she needed. She didn't know anyone else with children born close together or with twins. She didn't have a community to provide a meal train or anyone to meet at the playground. She made it through, and the twins will

be graduating high school this year, but I can't help but wonder how her experience of early motherhood would have been different if she had had an organization like GGMG to call upon.

As GGMG members, we have access to forums 24/7 and numerous opportunities to meet up with other moms through neighborhood groups, kids activities, or just for moms events. GGMG has come a long way since its beginnings in 1996, when one new mother saw a need and worked to fill it. On page 16, Shaheen Bilgrami shares how this organization grew in the days before online forums. The management of 4,300 members and more than 180 volunteers lies with GGMG's Board of Directors. Get to know the women behind the organization, and get a glimpse of what is in store for us on page 26. In addition to providing benefits to our members, GGMG also works to improve our greater community. Much of this work is done by the drives arm of the Member Support Committee. On page 22, Bobby Shukla and Jessica Williams provide an overview of organizations that have been impacted by our members' generosity. Kate Williams Hoepke on page 8 gives insights into why community is important throughout our lives and how to continue to expand ours.

We also have a couple blasts from the past for you. Our I Heart Mom column on page 39 is written by long-time member, former editor-in-chief of this magazine, and current Books for Kids (page 12) contributor Laure Latham. And for those of you who read the Daditude column in our magazine between 2010 and 2013, Ethan Karson is back to talk about life with a new baby on page 10.

Personally, I have benefited from my 5-year membership with GGMG in numerous ways. The forums were a saving grace during late night breastfeeding sessions, I still get together with the women I met at my first playgroup formation event, and probably the most life changing has been volunteering with this magazine. I have learned so much and feel blessed to be a part of this vital community. I look forward to seeing what GGMG has in store for San Francisco mothers over the next two decades.

KPflieger

Housekeeping

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THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: the return of rain, ER visits, hospital stays, colds that never end, first trips to Tahoe, baby showers, El Nino,

Gore-tex boots, a House of Cards binge, FLOMAX, Daniel Tiger, Uncle Steve & Aunt Glo, poopenfreude, TK spot allocation anticipation, the kindergarten waiting game, toddler Adele crush.

COMING NEXT: May—Identity; June—Under the Hood; July—Feminism

CONTEST: Congratulations to **Talya Sanders** who won InteriorCrowd's Stylin' Space Giveaway.

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggmg.org.

Letter from the Board: Looking Forward to Looking Back

By Laurel Kellam and Cathy Tran

When we look at our kids, we sometimes think, "I can't believe you'll be 20 years old someday." The founders of GGMG must feel that same disbelief seeing where the organization is today. What started in 1996 as a group of 14 women meeting to discuss the formation of a moms' group has grown to a community of 4,300 San Francisco moms from all walks of life.

It is amazing to recount what GGMG has accomplished in over 20 years, especially as a completely volunteer-run organization. Over 180 volunteers coordinate and manage every single aspect of the organization, including this amazing magazine, all of our wonderful kid and parent events, and the indispensable forums. The dedication with which the volunteers work to keep GGMG going is truly a testament to the founders' visions and mission statement.

You'll read more in this issue about GGMG's impact on its members and community, but here are some highlights from this past year. Our membership has grown to 4,300 strong who, in 2015, generously donated more than 50,000 wipes, 80,000 diapers, \$16,000 cash, and much, much more to various community organizations. A truly wonderful and generous figure that we hope to beat in 2016!

But it's not just about numbers and items. For many, GGMG is their "village." For many moms it is everything from a lifeline—a place to confess that you don't love every single second of this crazy journey—to a resource to find the best bikini waxer in the city or the hottest plumber in town. It's also where many of us made some of our best friends in the world. Here's what GGMG means to some of them:

"GGMG provided the platform that enabled me to meet a

fantastic playgroup for me and my daughter. The playgroup has become a true group of invaluable friends to whom I am forever grateful for their love and support."

"When I had a newborn, I posted anonymously on GGMG seeking help in this major life change and the outpouring of love and support I got back helped me out so much through those first weeks and I will never forget the kindness of these



Laurel and Cathy are the chair and vice chair of GGMG. They have been volunteering since 2011 and 2012 respectively and previously both served on the GGMG Membership Committee before joining the board.

The dedication with which the volunteers work to keep GGMG going is truly a testament to the founders' visions and mission statement.

complete strangers during that time."

"As a new mom, and new to San Francisco, GGMG was my lifeline. I wouldn't have survived without the forums and the friendships. I'm so thankful that I joined and whenever I see an expecting mom, I strongly encourage her to join as well!"

We feel privileged to be the chair and vice chair for GGMG during its 20th year, and we hope that in another two decades, GGMG is still the amazing organization that lifts each other up, supports each other, and gives back to its community.

Laurel Kellam *Cathy Tran*

Volunteer of the Month



Congratulations to **Kate Kirschner**, our volunteer of the month! Kate began volunteering with the GGMG Magazine in September 2012, serving as a copy editor and, most recently, senior editor. Kate and her husband, Todd, are parents to Arlo (5) and Ames (4).

We want to know your favorite **Pastime(s)**: Being physically active; **Books**: *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World* by Tony Wagner. Currently reading and enjoying *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr; **Film**: *North by Northwest* and most Quentin Tarantino films; **Restaurant**: Wayfare Tavern; **Destination**: Tanzania, but many places still to visit; **Parenting advice**: Instead of saying "no," empower children by saying what they can do, i.e., "I see that you really want to climb. This shelf is for books, but here is a stack of pillows you can climb on."

Kate will enjoy a 60-minute massage at International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at www.internationalorange.com.

Ask the Expert The Importance of Community

By Kate Williams Hoepke



In 1996 you facilitated some early GGMG meetings and helped forge the organization's framework. What key elements make a social group like GGMG so enduring?

In the early '90s I helped launch 40 different mothers clubs in the Bay Area. My

early vision for these groups was rooted in the knowledge that human beings are hard-wired for cooperation and connection. We're social beings and yet, at different times in our lives, we find ourselves feeling separate and unmoored. Having the courage to step outside ourselves and say "I need other people" is a critical component to authentic community. If our vulnerabilities are met with care and acceptance, we learn to trust others and a non-judgmental culture is created.

Fostering intimacy and authenticity is critical to long-term sustainability. Does the group take risks to facilitate intimacy? Do members feel a shared sense of ownership? Does membership foster growth and learning? In my experience, groups often opt for structures that lead to efficiency and avoid the messier opportunities for intimacy. Brené Brown, author of *The Power of Vulnerability*, says, "It's challenging to be real in a world that wants us to fit in and please everybody. I truly believe that most of us will take messy and real over flawless and inauthentic every time. To be authentic we must cultivate the courage to be imperfect and vulnerable."

Many of us seek out others to counteract the isolation that can accompany motherhood. But motherhood can really turn one's sense of self on its head. How do we create meaningful relationships even as our identities are in flux?

Erik Erikson categorized psychosocial development into eight stages. His model suggests that identity formation begins in adolescence and leads us into the three stages of adult development: intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Becoming a parent signals a significant shift in our identity. Our choices are not just about ourselves anymore. We begin to question our values, what we believe in, and what we want to teach our children.

In the '80s, feminist and developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan challenged Erikson's theories because he only studied men. She hypothesized that for women, the stages of identity and intimacy occur together. She said that a woman comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others. In other words, we become who we are in the reflection

of other people. It makes sense that young parents seek community at a time when they are eager to know themselves differently.

Having young children often means built-in community (e.g., parents of school friends). How can we expand our communities as our kids become independent and those early ties fade away?

I believe there is a big difference between proximal communities, like neighborhoods and school associations, and intentional ones. They differ in how we are connected to the group and what we intend to gain. Through my work with parents groups, I saw the opportunity to create a deeper sense of belonging for my family and myself, which led me to study community-building, human consciousness, and sociology. I bring what I've learned about empathy, deep listening, and critical self-reflection to every group I'm a part of.

Curiosity is the key to creating community in our lives. My friend Rabbi Eric Weiss says, "Curiosity builds empathic bridges." In other words, when I am curious about the other person, I learn what connects us. For example, tell me about your family. Where did you grow up? What makes your heart sing? Who do you admire? What inspires you? This is the foundation of community: discovering the values, experiences, and beliefs that we have in common, so that when our differences surface, we can navigate them with respect and mutual understanding.

With many of our members entering motherhood later in life, we find ourselves struggling with assisting our aging parents as we tackle early parenting. How can we support our parents in finding community ties at this stage of their lives?

At San Francisco Village, we believe relationships across generations are transformative. Every day we foster connections that keep our members engaged, curious, and giving back, whether by mentoring a young adult, tackling the latest technology, or simply sharing their own personal stories. When older adults value themselves and are valued by the community, we create a vastly better experience of aging.

As we age, our social networks diminish and many older adults feel marginalized. We need support at every age, but especially as we get older. Creating new connections late in life, while still staying in one's home for as long as possible, is vital to facing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Doing so with a team of kindred spirits who can empathize with these challenges is the gateway to shared experience and a deep sense of belonging. ❖

Kate is the executive director of San Francisco Village. Prior to working with older adults, she founded 40 parents clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area, which have served more than 500,000 families to date. Kate has a BA in Sociology and an MBA from San Francisco State University.

GGMG: Helping Others, Treating Yourself

Community Support

Drives



Please join us in supporting the [Children's Book Project](#) and the Felton Institute's [Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program \(TAPP\)](#) through April 15.

The Children's Book Project accepts new and gently used books for children of all ages—infants to teenagers—as well as other resources that aid literacy, including curriculum materials, magazines, dictionaries, posters, CDs, and DVDs.

TAPP accepts a wide variety of new and gently used baby items, such as:

- Clothes and shoes for children of all ages
- Maternity clothes
- Receiving blankets and baby towels
- Car seats, strollers, highchairs, and baby carriers
- Toys and books in good condition
- Diapers, wipes, and training potties
- Pregnancy and parenting books
- Unopened toiletries, including baby shampoo and soap, toothbrushes, and sunscreen

For drop-off locations, please visit the GGMG website at www.ggm.org or email drives@ggm.org to drop off items with a community support volunteer. For more information on the Children's Book Project and TAPP, please visit their websites at: www.childrensbookproject.org and www.tinyurl.com/feltonTAPP. **Thank you for your support!**

Contest

Beauty Brigade

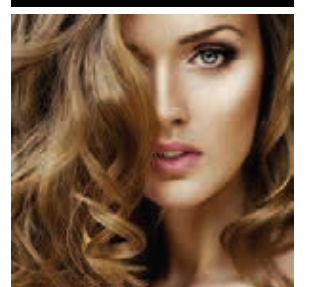
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DADLANDS

Second Shift

By Ethan Karson

When my son Milo was born, I had no idea what I was doing as a parent. I like to think I was taking an “intuitive” approach, but I admit that this has led to some questionable decisions. Maybe I should not allow him to swear so much—I think it’s cute that he sounds like a little sailor...but his teachers don’t. Or maybe we shouldn’t have watched *Coraline* when he was 3 years old. (Pro tip: it is actually a horror movie.)

My wife sometimes worries these choices are messing him up, so I’ve reassured her by explaining that Milo is like a starter pancake. When you’re making a batch of pancakes, the first one is always a little off no matter what you do—the griddle isn’t heated evenly, the batter hasn’t rested enough, and you don’t know quite how long to let it cook before flipping, so it turns out too burned or too blond. I reasoned that the same thing is probably true of children. Since we had no experience raising them, we were probably going to screw the first one up no matter what, so there was no point in getting too worked up about it.

Now that we actually have a second baby, I realize that children are not like pancakes at all. They’re actually more like Christmas cookies. You put a lot of effort and care into the first one—if it’s a snowman, for example, you’ll trace the outside with red and green icing, fill the center in evenly with white, and then place tiny candies to be the eyes, nose, and coat buttons. That process takes 10 minutes per cookie, though, so by the time you get to the end of the batch you’re cutting corners:

It turns out most of the ‘expert parenting’ skills I developed with Milo don’t even help with Cleo.

just squirting out three globs of frosting and calling it done. So whereas I would focus all of my attention on Milo when bottle-feeding him (making sure that the temperature was just right, testing an array of rubber nipples to find the one that fit his mouth the best, and patiently coaxing him into finishing every last drop), with Cleo I just wedge the bottle upright between a couple of couch cushions so my hands will be free to hold a PlayStation controller while she sucks it down happily on her own.

When we first brought Cleo home from the hospital, I justified this type of laziness to myself as an indication of how much I’d already learned as a parent. I didn’t have to try particularly hard to care for Cleo, I reasoned, because I was so good at baby care

that it was now effortless to me. After all, when Milo was born I had no idea how to change a diaper, swaddle an infant, or mix a manhattan. By the time he was 12 months, I was an expert in all three. But now that Cleo is 3 months old, I’m forced to admit that the real reason I’m not putting as much effort into parenting her is because I’m taking it for granted. It’s like when I was learning to drive, I was really conscientious and alert. Now I already know how to drive, so I barely pay attention when I’m behind the wheel; as a result, I’ve gotten much worse at it. Similarly, I used to engage baby Milo during every waking moment—I would tickle him, play

peekaboo, or read books. The only time I play with Cleo is when I’m using her as a paddle in a game of balloon ping-pong with Milo.

What’s even worse is that it turns out most of the “expert parenting” skills I developed with Milo don’t even help with Cleo. Sure, the basics apply—a manhattan is still a manhattan, after all—but shushing her doesn’t make her calm down when she’s crying the way it did with Milo. This is shocking to me because I spent months practicing shushing, and once I had it down, I was very proud of how reliably I could shush Milo to sleep. Now I suspect that the shushing

never worked at all—maybe Milo was just learning to go to sleep on his own while I thought I was “perfecting my technique.”

Realizing that, in the end, it doesn’t really matter what I do as a parent has been somewhat ego-crushing, but on the other hand, it makes me optimistic about Cleo’s future. Whenever I encounter a parenting challenge (like the fact that whenever we put Cleo in her car seat she acts as if it’s murdering her) I just remind myself that these things are temporary and will resolve on their own. I’m currently

grappling with the fact that she bursts into tears if I put her down for more than six seconds. That means I only have one hand available for my entire morning routine, so the most elaborate breakfast I’ve been able to manage is a slice of toast. But I know that she’ll soon be happily crawling around on her own and I’ll have both hands free. I’ll even be able to make pancakes from scratch if I want to.

Just as long as I remember to toss out the first one. ♦

Ethan Karson performs in the main stage company at BATS Improv—visit improv.org for show schedules and tickets. You can email him at ekarson@gmail.com.





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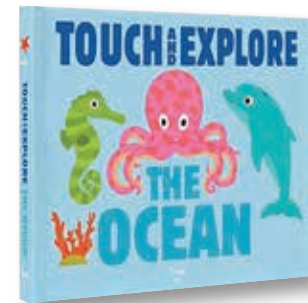
PILATES
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April is Earth Month, a month to celebrate nature in all forms. To inspire kids to learn more about the planet and its fascinating flora and fauna, check out one of these great reads. While younger kids will get to daydream about beautiful places, older kids will learn about environmental challenges and conservation causes that they can embrace and support. Try hugging a tree; it won't hug back, but scientists say that trees communicate between themselves. Wild, right?



The Ocean (Touch and Explore)

Written and illustrated by Nathalie Chou

Ready to explore the ocean? A lovely introduction to the marine world, this board book combines textures with pictures of ocean animals for a multisensory experience. Whether it's scales, tails, flippers, or fins, the various textures encourage little ones to discover more than two dozen sea animals. If you can plan a trip to the aquarium to see the real thing, your young marine biologists will get the full treatment! *Ages: 0 to 2 years*



All Aboard! National Parks: A Wildlife Primer

Written by Haily Meyers and Kevin Meyers, illustrated by Haily Meyers

From the creators of *BabyLit*, this book is a fun introduction to our glorious parks via a retro steam train. Exploring the country from coast to coast, each stop provides vignettes to illustrate the unique elements of each national park. Now, if only such a train existed in real life...

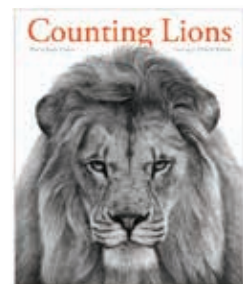
Ages: 3 to 5 years



Wild Backyard

Written by Kate Riggs, illustrated by Fiammetta Dogi

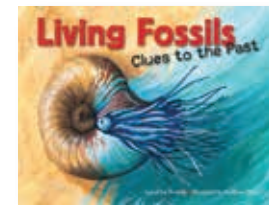
The word "wild" often refers to vast, uncharted territory far from home, but what about your own backyard? With this board book, your preschooler will be invited to find microhabitats by looking more closely at wild spaces closer to home. From a robin pecking berries off a bush to moles digging tunnels and finding worms underground, this is the perfect opportunity to look at your neighborhood with a fresh eye for all things wild. Who knows what butterflies, birds, and bugs you can discover? *Ages: 3 to 5 years*



Counting Lions: Portraits from the Wild

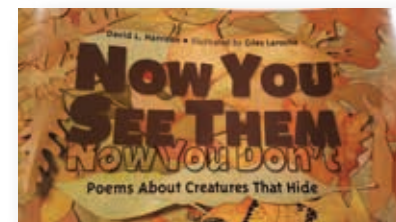
Written by Katie Cotton, illustrated by Stephen Walton

This is an oversized counting book for school-age children with a plea to protect 10 species that are threatened. The book features wonderfully realistic drawings to render the splendor of the wild. Ending with unique facts and additional resources, *Counting Lions* will inspire more than one young conservationist. *Ages: 4 to 10 years*



Living Fossils: Clues to the Past

Written by Caroline Arnold, illustrated by Andrew Plant
Coelacanths, horseshoe crabs, and dragonflies have more in common than you might think. They are living fossils who haven't changed (in appearance) since they lived alongside dinosaurs. Are your kids ready for a flash from the past? Thanks to this book, they can find out who these animals are, how they survived, and where they live today. In the animal kingdom, ancient is definitely the new young! *Ages: 4 to 8 years*



Now You See Them, Now You Don't: Poems About Creatures That Hide

Written by David Harrison, illustrated by Giles Laroche

This amazing book is both fun and educational. Listing 19 different species that hide in nature, the author introduces each with an illustrated poem. The end pages provide more facts about why such creatures have developed certain styles of camouflage. Would you believe that lying still can be the key to finding dinner, or that blending in with your environment can help you avoid being eaten? This is a great book full of fascinating animal behaviors. *Ages: 4 to 8 years*



Time Riders: Day of the Predator

Written by Alex Scarrow

Part of the *Time Riders* series, this book brings together three kids who work undercover for a secret agency preventing time travel from destroying history. In *Day of the Predator*, one of the children is mistakenly sent back to the dinosaur age (65 million years in the past), and his friends need to get him out of a very bad situation. Including grim predictions that fossil fuels will run out and that scientists will try to create a new "zero point" energy, this adventure and spy book is a creative view of what the Earth would have been like before dinosaurs were extinct. Presumably, not the best place for a relaxing vacation. Tweens should love this fun series. *Ages: 10 to 14 years*

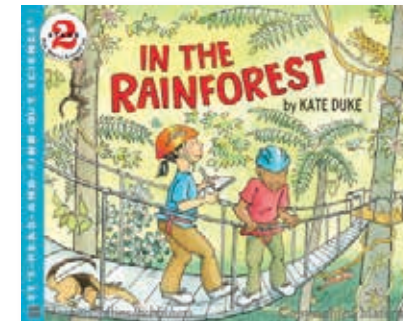


Sydney & Simon: Go Green!

Written by Paul A. Reynolds, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds
On field-trip day at the aquarium, young Sydney is

shocked to find out that a rescued sea turtle named Greenie ate plastic garbage and got sick. On the way home, she enlists her twin brother Simon to create an action plan and reduce trash. They embark on a mission to find creative ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle with the help of family and friends. With an emphasis on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics), this book will inspire young nature lovers with problem-solving ideas, fun illustrations, and a feisty duo they can relate to.

Ages: 6 to 9 years



In the Rainforest

Written and illustrated by Kate Duke

This book starts with a packing list for a trip to the rainforest and a list of stuff to leave at home. If your kids are going to explore the rainforest (on paper), they might as well do it right. The book then follows two kids and one adult as they discover what rainforests are made of. Do you know how much water tropical rainforests get per year, or which animals live there? Containing lots of fun facts and words related to this unique habitat, this book will surely trigger lots of questions from budding scientists.

Ages: 4 to 8 years



Dan vs. Nature

Written by Don Calame

Teenager Dan and his soon-to-be stepfather embark on a survival trip to Alaska to bond. Seems like the premise of a wonderful return to the wild, except

everything goes wrong. Dan brings along a friend to sabotage the trip, but when a wild bear spots them near a lake, sabotage takes a backseat as they run for their lives instead. Peppered with bathroom humor (lots of it) and a few sexual references, this book is for mature tweens who aren't afraid of graphic descriptions, but enjoy a good adventure with jokes gone wrong.

Ages: 12 to 16 years

Laure is the author of the mommy blog *Frog Mom* (www.frogmom.com), as well as the book *Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area*. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops. You can reach her at info@frogmom.com.

From Womb to World

Your Map to GGMG

By Juli Fraga

After your baby's arrival, you will likely want to connect with some other mamas so you can discuss the joys and challenges of parenthood. It's not uncommon for motherhood to redefine friendships—it's often a time to form a new community. If you're looking for an incredible tribe of mothers to help support you during your first year of motherhood and beyond, GGMG is the place for you.

Forums

Hosted on BigTent, our forums provide a space to ask questions about new parenthood, childcare, and pediatricians. The forums offer a bevy of resources for mothers, and are one of the most utilized aspects of GGMG during your baby's first year of life. You can log onto BigTent through www.ggmg.org.

Events

We don't just want to connect with you online; we want to meet you in person, too. GGMG hosts a variety of activities for the entire family. Playgroup formation events and new member mixers are a way to meet women in the same phase of motherhood. Neighborhood meetups are a great way to meet families with children of all ages in your area. Additional just for moms events and kids activities can be found at www.ggmg.org/events.html.

Member Perks

Your yearly subscription to GGMG offers a plethora of community discounts and resources. Our volunteers work hard to set up community partnerships with local businesses and practitioners who offer discounts for all GGMG members. This year we've partnered with Gymboree, JCCSF, Peekadoodle, Recess, UrbanSitter, and Wondersitter among others. For a comprehensive list, visit: www.ggmg.org/partnerships.html.

Magazine

As a GGMG member, you will receive our monthly print magazine which includes feature articles on parenting and

motherhood in San Francisco and the Bay Area. To read some of our previous issues, you can access our magazine archives at www.ggmg.org/narchive.html.

Community & Member Support

GGMG supports our members by providing meal delivery and resources for mamas who need some extra TLC during the first months of motherhood, or later during any sort of family transition. We also offer peer-led support groups including ones for postpartum depression, infertility support, and single mothers. Community support organizes a number of drives, supporting organizations such as Project Night Night and the Homeless Prenatal Program. Instructions about how to connect with these groups are available on BigTent, or you can reach community support at communitysupport@ggmg.org.

Volunteer with GGMG

GGMG is run entirely by volunteers and we are always looking for outstanding members to join our team. Each committee listed here seeks volunteers to help organize their section of our organization. If you would like to volunteer, please contact volunteer@ggmg.org. Open positions are listed in the *GGMG Magazine* and the monthly bulletin.

Juli Fraga is a psychologist, mother and writer. She lives in San Francisco with her husband, daughter and their two cats, Mango and Squirrel. Her essays about motherhood, psychology and health have been featured on The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Guardian.

If you're looking for an incredible tribe of mothers to help support you during your first year of motherhood and beyond, GGMG is the place for you.

New Arrivals



Adriane B.
Angeli J.
Bea L.
Christy S.
Cindy M.
Clemence Vincent
Diane G.
Jenny Y.

Babies Victoria Elise & Sabine Kate
Baby Avyan
Baby Vivian S.
Baby Matthew Craig
Baby Olivia Keiko Yu
Baby Corentine Chloe Julianne
Baby Mateo
Baby Elise Madeline

Kathy L.
Kathy P.
Kim S.
Mareen W.
Preeya Dabir
Sarah P.
Stefanie S.

Baby Ashley
Baby Patrick
Baby Miles Lawrence
Baby Jonas Benjamin
Baby Deven Jayakar
Baby Henry
Baby Fiona Grace

Congratulations to Stephanie S.!

She will be pampering her little one with products from **Babyganics**. These plant-based, tear-free, hypoallergenic cleansers and lotions clean and protect skin from head to toe.

To announce your new arrival in the *GGMG Magazine* and for a chance to win a Babyganics gift set, fill out the form at www.ggmg.org/community.html.



Our GGMG Village: Two Decades in the Making

Growing from 14 to over 4,300 members

By Shaheen Bilgrami



Carolyn Soling Photography

Beginnings

In 1996, Wynn Burkett, an overwhelmed first-time mom, had recently moved back to San Francisco after 10 years away and was unable to find an existing mothers group to join. Before having her baby, Wynn had a successful professional career. She says, “I was kind of shocked that there wasn’t something in place...so I did some investigation and found out how mothers groups worked and what they did, and thought, ‘Wow, that would be a really positive thing to have in San Francisco.’”

Wynn mobilized interested friends and acquaintances, and on April 18, 1996, she convened a group of 14 moms to discuss forming such a group. Wynn employed mothers groups expert Kate Williams Hoepke to help facilitate the creation of the group. The original 14 women each took a role as a member of the first steering committee.

Intention

The original 14 moms met a few times between April and June to discuss what the group would offer, who it would serve, and how the steering committee would run it. They then crafted a statement of values and motto, which is still used and is printed on every issue of the magazine.

Many moms in the original steering committee came from professional backgrounds. They used their experience

and skills to establish a professional structure and organization to sustain the group even once they had moved on. “What you have 20 years down the line is the result of this,” says co-founder Faith Anaya.

Integrity

From the start, the group was completely self-funded. The membership dues, which were originally \$24, were used to cover all overhead, including meeting and facilitator costs, printing and mailing flyers and newsletters, and the annual Halloween party.

As the group has grown, there have been and continue to be increasing opportunities for sponsorship and commercialization, which the board is eager to resist.

Jin Sun Park (co-chair 2011–2012) says that during her tenure as co-chair, the board was constantly approached with commercial requests, including some offers to buy the membership list. She says, “The thing about GGMG is that [members] pay for membership, so it self-supports, so we don’t have to take advertising dollars from anybody else, which is why...it’s got a reputation of being non-associated with sponsorships or [anything] commercial.” She adds, “It was extremely important to make sure that we were not influenced by anything from the outside and that...our members trusted what we were doing.”

Monthly meetings

The first general meeting was held in the basement of St. James Church on California Street on June 27, 1996. The meeting was advertised by word of mouth and by posters all around the city. Wynn still remembers the anticipation she felt at the meeting. “We sat in the basement of the church wondering, ‘What if nobody shows up?’” But people did show up—50 people, which far exceeded her expectations. Little did she know at the time that the turnout would continue to grow, and that 20 years later GGMG would still be in existence with a membership of more than 4,300!

The monthly meetings continued for



Lori Ogden Moore, circa 1997

many years and went on to include a playgroup formation event. The role of the steering committee at these meetings was to welcome new members. Wynn says, “Our job was...to reach out to people who hadn’t been there before or were feeling shy and make sure that they had a way that connected with other moms.”

Today, the group has regular new member meetups and playgroup formation events to serve this same purpose, as well as separate parent education events focusing on topics similar to those early meetups.

Making connections

In addition to the general meeting, playgroups were and still are a key part of the GGMG experience. Initially members were put into playgroups with moms with other children of a similar age. The playgroups were critical in helping people feel connected and supported.

Many moms, past and present, are still close friends with moms they met in their playgroups. Faith articulates the reasons for this: “It’s so helpful when you’re doing something new to have people going through the exact same experience.”

Long-term member and mom of four Lisa Krim (GGMG member 2002–present) joined her first playgroup when she was expecting her first child in 2002. Talking about her first playgroup experience, she says, “I was really interested in meeting moms who were going to have babies the exact same age as my baby would be. I got a lot out of the ages

being so close.” She said that she and another playgroup mom were in the hospital at the same time delivering their first and their second children. She laughs. “The doctor literally showed up saying, ‘Here I am delivering you, and two years ago, I delivered you back to back!’”

Lisa revisited playgroups when her youngest child was born four years ago. She says, “I recreated everything I loved about the playgroup with my son...nine and a half years later...with my daughter. In

that group...everyone else was a first-time mom and I was a fourth-time mom!”

Kris Otridge (member and volunteer 2001–2008) also has fond memories of her playgroup. “Just having the ability to talk to other moms who were experiencing the same thing was hugely important,” she says. “I am still in touch with almost all of my original playgroup friends!” She adds, “If you stay in the city of San Francisco with your kids, you end up going through the kindergarten process and seeing all these people again. Then there’s the high school process, and it happens again! I ended up reconnecting with some people that way.”

Today, in addition to the original age-based playgroups, there are special-interest subgroups which reflect the now-diverse membership. The organization includes subgroups focused on various languages and cultures, entrepreneurship, single moms, as well as neighborhood playgroups, toddler playdates, and family meetups.

Newsletter and magazine

The first newsletter was a single double-sided, black and white photocopied sheet. First printed in June 1996, it simply highlighted the goals and intentions of the organization, had a contest to design a logo, and included a homemade playdough recipe. By 2000, it was 14 stapled pages. It included general meeting information, a list of playgroups by age, a list of new members, and a recipe. In 2004, it became a bound magazine with 22 pages and included some

familiar columns, such as an exploration of “The Neighborhood of the Month,” which is now “Li’l Kid, Big City.” In November 2009, it grew into the 40-page, full-color magazine we have today.

Lisa Krim reminisces: “I know the magazine was black and white and very different when I started...it’s changed a lot. What probably has struck me most about reading the magazine today are the articles...stories of moms struggling, living in really small apartments, postpartum [depression]...it gives me the feeling that I am not alone...it gives me perspective!”

Women only

One of controversies of the group from the start was the exclusion of men. In 2011, this was critiqued at length in a *New York Times* article titled, “In a Clubby World of San Francisco Mothers, Men Needn’t Apply.” Co-founder Faith says, “This is not a new subject. It comes up every four years or so.” Wynn is very clear about her thoughts on the subject. “We were very intentional about wanting to have [GGMG] be for moms...it was really designed for women and the unique experience that they have when they have a baby.”

Kris Otridge (member and volunteer from 2001–2008) has an additional perspective. “We had a lot of high powered women who had either been executives or very successful careers who [after having a baby] were facing the struggle of, ‘What do I do now?’ and ‘Am I going to go back to work?’ and ‘Do I have to go back to work?’...being a mom and being a woman, these were really ‘lifeline’ subjects to discuss.”

Kris adds, “It was an interesting time in the U.S. right after I joined...September 11 happened...I had this idea of, ‘I just brought this child into the world and look at what’s happening’...And to be able to have a group [of women] to go talk to about that...was an anchor for me.”

Changes

The membership of GGMG has changed considerably over the past 20 years. Faith remembers that in the early days, as a working mom, she was in the minority. “It was hard to find other working moms. I had



a corporate career...I lived in the Marina and was driving to San Jose every day. It is different today.”

Lisa is still in touch with three or four of her original playgroup friends from 14 years ago. This group had a brush with fame that tightened their bonds. They were featured in a 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article titled “The Opt-Out Revolution” about professional women leaving the workforce at different stages. A reflection of many of the members at the time, a lot of Lisa’s group had MBAs and “all of us had been professionals with...intense

careers.” The article was a discussion about leaving the workforce after having a high-powered career. This was a hot topic at the time and there was a lot of media attention following the article. “It was pretty exciting!” says Lisa.

When asked about changes in the group over her membership period, Lisa notes that the membership was not very diverse early on. It comprised “a very specific subset of San Francisco, who lived in the north side of the city.” Lisa is really happy at how the membership has changed now. She says, “I definitely think that it became much more accessible, much more diverse, much more catering to lots of different types of moms, which I think is great.”

Online forums

GGMG created a website and online forum in 2001. The immediate effect was a sharp increase in membership.

Wynn is really excited by the online element. She says, “I love what GGMG has become now, because I think it has evolved as the world has evolved, and the fact that it is really large and has a huge online community...is fantastic because, this is a way for people to connect with each other without even getting dressed.”

She adds, “I read the forums and find [GGMG] to be a very thoughtful group of women, especially those who are stewarding it through the changes.”

Volunteer opportunities

The professional setup of the GGMG was designed to give moms an opportunity to use

skills they had or develop new ones, even if they were no longer in the formal work environment, to benefit the group.

Wynn says, “From the beginning we encouraged the membership to get involved...by serving on committees, writing for the newsletter, bringing food to the general meetings, taking a meal to another new mom...Many women stepped up, which was great, since GGMG is a member-run organization; the more engagement the

Motherhood is still at its heart motherhood...all the fundamentals are the same today as they were 20 years ago!

better.” In June 1996, there were 17 volunteers serving 75 members. By 2015, there were 191 volunteers serving approximately 4,300 members.

Volunteer opportunities have expanded from the early years to include the web team, Entrepreneurship Committee, and expanded Community Support Committee, which assists members and allows them to give back to the wider community.

Legacy

Faith credits the longevity of the group to its focus. “The issues you have in San Francisco today—schools, childcare, the housing crisis—were just beginning to surface 20 years ago. But sleep deprivation, breast-feeding, potty training...they were just as primary then as they are today. Motherhood is still at its heart motherhood...all the fundamentals are the same today as they were 20 years ago!”

Wynn says, “Whenever I’ve met anyone who has been part of GGMG they have got a lot out of it, especially if they have taken some role in running it. It’s been a really been a big part of their new parent life, which it was to those of us who started it, so I am delighted that it still serves that purpose for people.”

For Wynn, co-founding GGMG opened up doors professionally. She went on to write a book about being a new mom, which is still in print, titled, *Life After Baby: From Professional Woman to Beginner Parent*. She is now an executive coach, working with women and helping them to figure out their paths forward. She is also currently leading a series

of classes called “Mindful Parenting of Teens,” which she sees as “a sort of a bookend” to her GGMG experience.

Like Wynn, Faith completely changed her career path after becoming a mom. She has a business in Arkansas, where she currently lives, teaching kids about food and cooking. She credits GGMG with some of the confidence she had to make the change. “The playgroup gave me so much confidence...and had a wonderful positive impact on [me].” She adds,

“Wynn and I did a lot of writing in those first two GGMG years. That reminded me that I’m a decent writer. And

that’s another little piece of what I do now.”

Wynn says that for herself and for many moms she has spoken to, GGMG was “life-changing, because, becoming a mom was life-changing.” Looking back over the past 20 years, she says, “We thought it was getting big when there were 150 members. I do appreciate that it has retained the same mission and purpose despite the size. It’s fantastic that it has grown to have 4,300 plus members. I’m impressed with the care people are taking with the organization, and with each other, and really doing it because it serves a need in the San Francisco community.” ❖

I’d like to thank the following GGMG members and alumni for agreeing to be interviewed for this piece:

- Wynn Burkett, co-founder
- Faith Anaya, co-founder
- Lisa Tafuri Krim, member 2002 to present
- Kris Otridge, member 2001 to 2008; volunteer with memberships and playgroups
- Jin Sun Park, member 2010 to present; chair 2011 to 2013

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GGMG's Community Support: A Continuing Legacy of Giving Back

The drives program provides GGMG members an opportunity to make a difference in our community through support of local nonprofits

By Bobby Shukla and Jessica Williams

Many moms join GGMG in search of community and remain involved because the organization has enriched their lives. Those benefits are precisely the purpose of GGMG's Community Support Committee, whose mission is to impact members' lives for the better and create a sense of community amongst members.

Community support comprises three programs: member support, events, and drives. While member support provides assistance to members experiencing challenging times, and the events team provides helpful seminars such as CPR or self-defense training, the drives program is aimed at giving back. It identifies local nonprofits with which GGMG can partner to raise funds and awareness and has a proven track record of making a difference in our community.

GGMG mom Corinna Lu has served as co-chair of drives since March 2015. As co-chair, Lu spearheads the planning effort for various drives throughout the year, organizing donations of diapers for the Homeless Prenatal Program, books for the Children's Book Project, clothing for Dress for Success in conjunction with the Jewish Community Center, as well as toy drives, and even an impromptu breast pump drive. Lu says, "it feels good to know we're helping to support organizations that resonate with us."

Although the drives may change from year to year, the program tends to focus on smaller, local organizations to make a difference in the community. Tiffany Bindoo, who

serves as board liaison to the Community Support Committee and supports the work of the co-chairs of the committee, says, "it is exciting to partner with new organizations, and always rewarding to go back to our regular partners. I really enjoy the opportunity to give back to our community."

Homeless Prenatal Program: a long-time partner

The drives program has an ongoing relationship with the Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP), a local family resource center founded in 1989 to partner with and support low-income families to break the cycle of childhood poverty. HPP currently serves 4,000 low-income and homeless families annually, providing a variety of programs and services (including job training) to help families

become healthy, stable, and self-sufficient.

More than half of HPP's talented staff are formerly homeless mothers who were clients. Former client Heshima describes her experience at HPP as a positive, nurturing one: "I always felt like I could be a leader. HPP helped me fulfill my potential."

GGMG holds two annual drives for HPP: a diapers and wipes drive in the spring and a funds drive in December. The 2015 funds drive raised a record \$23,000. As part of that drive, Elizabeth Jansson, co-chair of the Community Support Committee's events program, organized a showing of *Toy Story*, complete with a popcorn machine and balloon animals, to thank donors and provide an opportunity for GGMG members, their children, and HPP members to meet.

Sharon Bechtol, HPP volunteer and donations coordinator, says, "We love GGMG and are so fortunate to have their support for our families." Bechtol values the unique benefits that come from mothers helping other mothers: "GGMG members know how difficult it can be to have a newborn and small children and understand what HPP's moms are going through." As a recent example, when HPP sought breast pumps for its clients, GGMG moms answered the call by donating high-quality Medela breast pumps to help make breastfeeding a little easier on new moms receiving services at HPP.

Happening right now

Many times, ideas for new drives come from members' suggestions, such as the idea for this year's Children's Book Project drive, which Lu found on the GGMG online discussion forums. The Children's Book Project was founded in 1992 by San Francisco mother and credentialed reading specialist Vicki Pollack. It collects new and gently used books to distribute to hospitals, daycares, shelters, and other community organizations for Bay Area children in need and gives away close to 150,000 books annually.

It feels good to know we're helping to support organizations that resonate with us.

The Children's Book Project "was born out of compassion," says Violeta Krasnic, its executive director. "It's really about compassion and love for learning and love for our kids." Krasnic captures the joy of seeing the organization's mission in action each day: "My heart is full and my work feels relevant."

For this year's drive, the Community Support Committee is collecting new and used books at popular indoor playspaces Peek-a-Boo Factory, Peekadoodle, and Recess through April 15. The Children's Book Project is always in need of used books (from infant to teenage levels), particularly board books, elementary

school books, and books written in Spanish or Mandarin. The organization also accepts monetary donations that it uses to purchase books.

Concurrent with the book drive, community support is collecting toys and baby gear for the Felton Institute's Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program (TAPP). TAPP offers programs to pregnant teens and young parents as part of the Felton Institute, the oldest nonsectarian, nonprofit social service provider in San Francisco. TAPP partners with Hilltop High School, and its many services include

onsite childcare for teenage mothers attending core classes needed to graduate. The Felton Institute's TAPP Young Family Resource Center also offers classes on a variety of topics such as prenatal health, child development, and early literacy. Mim Shafer, parent education coordinator for TAPP, is most proud of the organization's work in supporting young adults "to parent with dignity despite adverse circumstances."

Toy drives—not just for the holidays

Other drives have supported groups such as the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program,

the oldest and largest organized firefighter toy program in the country. GGMG first partnered with the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program about eight years ago after a GGMG mother contacted the organization to coordinate a volunteer opportunity for her daughter. Although often associated with the holiday season, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program actually provides toys for community organizations and Bay Area children in need year-round.

As first responders, firefighters frequently see children who have been burned out of their homes or have become victims of other disasters. “The first things the parents are replacing are, of course, not toys,” says Sally Casazza, chairperson for the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program, explaining that parents are busy trying to find a new home and replace clothes or items needed for school.

Recently, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program provided an entire family with new bicycles after responding to a call of a child’s foot caught in bicycle spokes. Because firefighters cut the spokes to free the child, the family was left without a bicycle, which happened to be shared by all the siblings—ages 4 to 14. The San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program not only replaced the bicycle but provided each sibling with a new, appropriately sized one.

Because the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program accepts donations year-round, it is able to respond throughout the year to children in need. In fact, many donations come in after the December holidays from business toy drives or children who have a surplus of gifts they wish to donate. Last year, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program provided toys to 31,000 families. Each child received four age-appropriate toys. “We don’t toot our own horn a lot,” says Casazza, “but we really do make a difference here in San Francisco.”

Supporting GGMG members’ organizations

GGMG also supports local nonprofits founded by its members, such as Project Night Night. Founded by Kendra Robins, a former corporate lawyer, Project Night Night provides packages to homeless children who need childhood essentials to foster a sense of security during times of upheaval in their

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

GGMG COMMUNITY SUPPORT COMMITTEE Please donate to or help with a GGMG drive by assisting with collections and drop-offs. Suggest a local nonprofit for GGMG to support or serve as co-chair for events, a position that community support is currently looking to fill. For all the above, contact Corinna Lu at drives@ggmg.org .
CHILDREN’S BOOK PROJECT The Children’s Book Project always needs children’s gently used or new books and welcomes monetary donations. Adult volunteers can help sort and organize books, and children can help by organizing their own book drives. www.childrensbookproject.org
DRESS FOR SUCCESS Dress for Success helps disadvantaged women find economic independence by providing professional attire and career development tools. You can donate new or nearly-new suits, business-appropriate apparel, shoes or accessories like handbags, jewelry, and unused cosmetics at 500 Sutter St., Suite 218. sanfrancisco.dressforsuccess.org
HOMELESS PRENATAL PROJECT (HPP) HPP always welcomes donations and has a wish list on its website. The website also lists a variety of ways to volunteer, including opportunities in its technology center assisting clients with basic computer work, like setting up email accounts and creating resumes. www.homelessprenatal.org
PROJECT NIGHT NIGHT Project Night Night relies entirely on donations from individuals and companies. Please visit the website for a wish list of donation items or to learn how to make a monetary donation. The organization also encourages a “Birthday Hero Program” that enables people to collect donation items at their children’s birthday parties. www.projectnightright.org
SAN FRANCISCO FIREFIGHTERS TOY PROGRAM The San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program always needs toys and welcomes monetary donations. Adults and children can volunteer by making greeting cards or categorizing toys and stocking shelves at the organization’s warehouse. www.sffirefightertoys.org
TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND PARENTING PROGRAM (TAPP) TAPP currently needs some big-ticket items as donations, including baby carriers, diaper bags, strollers, nursing guards, diapers, board books (especially in Spanish), pumping bras, unused pumping equipment, disposable nursing pads, and gift cards for grocery stores, baby gear stores, etc. felton.org/about-us/make-a-difference/donate

lives, such as when they first become homeless and go to a shelter. Each package includes a new blanket, book, and stuffed animal. Robins made 1,200 packages on her living room floor her first year and now the organization provides 35,000 packages to 900 shelters nationwide. For some children, the package’s stuffed animal is the first new toy that child has ever received.

For the last two years, GGMG has organized a drive for Project Night Night in the fall. Robins describes the partnership with GGMG as “wonderful” and reminds us that small

actions can have a big effect. “GGMG’s reach is wide. Even if just 10 percent of its members take action, that may not initially seem big but is, in fact, substantial.” ❖

Bobby Shukla is a lawyer who represents employees in a variety of employment law areas, including discrimination, harassment, disability accommodation, retaliation, whistle-blowing, and severance negotiations.

Jessica Williams is a former teacher and lawyer. Her writing has appeared on Lucie’s List, A Survival Guide for New Moms.

GGMG Love: Our Members’ Perspectives

GGMG literally changed my life. I had been a member since I was pregnant, but didn’t really do a whole lot. Then my husband and I split up. I wanted to stay a GGMG member, but the \$75 fee was a lot. I renewed anyway and decided to start volunteering so that I wouldn’t have to pay again. Through volunteering, I met Vicky and was encouraged to join the single mom subgroup. By that point, I was already divorced and didn’t want to attend. She kept encouraging me to go and mentioned that it might be nice for someone to speak about how things can be positive post-divorce.

I finally went. I met so many women who are in the same situation as me and have the same struggles I do. I now have a core group of friends that I met only because of GGMG and who are my rock. Not only do we plan outings together with our kids, we plan moms only type outings as well. Then I joined the GGMG board and made another group of friends. Because of these new found friendships, I gained the courage to sign up for dating sites and now I even have a boyfriend as well!

I used to basically stay in my jammies and feel sorry for myself all weekend and now because of

GGMG, I’m sometimes busy ALL weekend and my DVR is full.

— *Addie Bjornsen*

In some ways I feel like GGMG saved my life. I spent two years living through secondary infertility including five pregnancy losses. The support I received from the community was a lifeline for me to sort out how to move forward and face what I was going through.

There are a ton of other reasons I value GGMG, but the secondary infertility support is the top reason. When I became pregnant for the sixth time, and when that pregnancy worked and I birthed a healthy baby, the community continued to support me through the challenges of sleep deprivation, low milk supply, etc.

— *a member*

I’ve been a member of GGMG for eight years now, and I love the forum the most. It is by far the most valuable resource I’ve tapped since becoming a mom. Whether it’s asking for parenting advice or questions about hair salons, I love sharing and networking with

the variety of parents on this forum. It’s helped open my eyes to people’s differences and allowed me to be more accepting and understanding which has lead to much personal growth.

Thank you GGMG for providing this community!

— *Anya Hall*

GGMG has been an amazing resource for me. I moved to SF from the East Coast two and a half years ago with a 2 year old and 7 month old. I knew about five people and was struggling as a SAHM with no childcare help. Through GGMG I figured out which playgrounds were enclosed so I could let the 2 year old roam while I fed the baby, indoor play spaces, how to apply to preschools, and met some wonderful moms at playgroup events. I could go on and on. And the virtual support network has been amazing for me. I’ve now transitioned back to full time professional work, and GGMG continues to be a great resource for how to balance a job and kids and life hacks to make things easier. Thank you!

— *Julie Patel*

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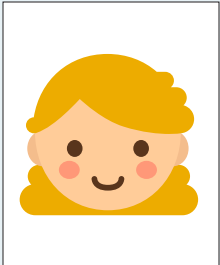
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APRIL 2016 | GGMG MAGAZINE | 25

Leading the Way

Managing GGMG is a labor of love for our dedicated board of directors

By Catherine Symon



LAUREL KELLAM
Chair

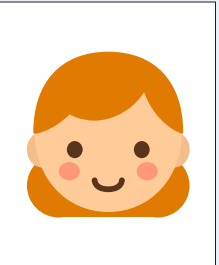
A GGMG member for almost seven years, Laurel has held too many volunteer positions on too many committees to list! **What are your responsibilities, and what are your goals for the organization for the next three to five years?** As the board chair, my main responsibility is to make sure all the i's are dotted and t's are crossed to keep GGMG in legal compliance. I deal with insurance brokers, conflict of interest forms, board bylaws, etc. I also help other board members achieve their committee's goals and make sure the organization functions as we hope it will. My main goal for the next year is to have stronger policies and procedures in place for volunteers, and to improve continuity during transitions. One way I hope to achieve this is by storing all of our documentation in a central place. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** I was just starting college. Hmmm...probably *Mission Impossible*. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** It is so hard to predict the future. I think I'll be in San Francisco for the next five years, but beyond that...we could be in our same house, closer to family on the East Coast, or traveling with the kids on a world adventure!

CATHY TRAN
Vice Chair

Cathy has been volunteering since June of 2012. Her first position was on the Membership Committee, later becoming membership chair, then director of member engagement, and finally vice chair. **What are your responsibilities, and what are your goals for the organization for the next three to five years?** The vice chair is responsible for the internal workings of the organization. I serve as a human resource advocate for our volunteers, supporting them and getting them the resources they need so they can make GGMG awesome. In three to five years I would love for GGMG to still be the same supportive, welcoming place for moms to connect and help each other. And maybe have a subgroup dedicated to Bravo TV. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** I was a junior in high school and fully in on the Macarena craze. I loved it! My favorite movie was *Romeo + Juliet*, the all-time hottest version of Leo. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** I hope we are still living in San Francisco and I hope my boys have MOVED OUT! But not too far. Hopefully they'll both be in college at Berkeley so I can go eat dinner with them every day. Because I'm sure that's what every teenage boy wants, right?

LAURA KABLER OSWELL
Secretary

Laura has been a member of GGMG for almost five years. She began volunteering a little over a year ago. **What are your responsibilities, and what are your goals for the organization for the next three to five years?** The secretary is responsible for maintaining the records of the organization and to assist the board. My goals for GGMG are to continue to grow, find new ways to help moms in San Francisco, and keep building this great community. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** Twenty years ago I was a freshman at USC, living in the dorms and loving every minute of being in California and in a big city for the first time! *Jerry Maguire* was a good movie—back when Tom Cruise was more like the *Top Gun* Tom Cruise. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** I hope we will still be living in San Francisco and probably still with the same careers, but most importantly I hope both of our kids will be off having amazing adventures somewhere, while still visiting home often (because they'll still think that spending time with mom and dad is the best thing ever).



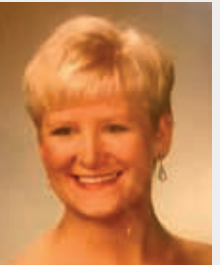
KRISTEN MCGUIRE
Treasurer

In January 2013 Kristen joined the Playgroups Committee as a volunteer for playgroup formation events, then served as the committee's co-chair for two years. This past July she became the membership engagement board director and in November she became treasurer. **What are your responsibilities, and what are your goals for the organization for the next three to five years?** I am committed to establishing stronger fiscal controls. I am excited that this board is focusing on improving the infrastructure within GGMG so the organization can be a resource to moms for another 20 years. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** I was a senior in high school. (Confession: I had to look at what movies were released that year.) *Trainspotting* and "Just a Girl" by No Doubt. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** I think my husband and I will be enjoying our empty nest and our son will be finding his own happiness and success at his first job post-college. If I am lucky enough to have retired, I will be trying to convince my husband to join me in a stint with the Peace Corps.



TIFFANY BINDOO
Director of Community Support

Tiffany joined GGMG in the fall of 2013 and began to volunteer the following year on the Community Support Committee. **What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?** Community support has three distinct programs. Member support provides assistance during tough times and facilitates support groups for our members to help each other. The events team provides our members with valuable resources such as CPR classes and seminars on earthquake preparedness and child safety. The drives team executes all of the GGMG fundraising activities. The committee's goals include strengthening and expanding our support groups, providing support to more of our members, reaching out to new partner organizations, and revamping our online resource list of suggested charitable organizations to support. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** I was graduating from Presque Isle High School and getting ready to go to college at the University of Maine. My college roommate had *The Shag* on VHS and I watched that movie until the tape was about ready to break. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** Hopefully we are all happy and healthy and doing lots of traveling.



ADDIE BJORNSEN
Director of External Communications

Addie joined GGMG when she was pregnant with her son, Oliver, five years ago. She has been volunteering for two years, acting as social media co-chair for a year prior to joining the board. **What committees do you oversee and what are their goals?** I oversee marketing, public relations, and social media. The goal for my position is to lead the marketing and communication efforts for GGMG in order to grow awareness of the group and increase membership. Over the next few years I would like to increase our presence in the community by identifying events and other opportunities to market to potential members. I also want to continue to showcase GGMG events on social media and partner with local businesses for contests and giveaways that are of interest to our membership. **Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?** I was a senior at Iowa State University majoring in political science and international relations with a minor in Spanish. I loved *The English Patient*. **Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?** I'll probably wind up an old crazy cat lady, waiting for my son to graduate from medical school and take care of me.



SALLIE HESS
Director of Internal Communications

Sallie began volunteering as a copy editor on the GGMG Magazine in October 2011, became managing editor in January 2014, and joined the board in June 2015. She has been a member of GGMG for five years.
What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

I oversee the GGMG Magazine in addition to producing the annual report and monthly email bulletin. The magazine started off as a xeroxed, stapled newsletter. The current version is pretty great and is one of the things that really sets GGMG apart from other similar organizations here in San Francisco and around the country. One thing I would like to continue to foster is coordination between the GGMG Magazine, bulletin, and forum.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

I was at Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, playing Division 3 lacrosse, writing poetry, and smoking cigarettes. I also spent a semester abroad that year in Limerick, Ireland. I think I was listening to a lot of Grateful Dead. So, not very current on my 1996 pop culture. It's a chronic issue for me, actually; I don't think I could tell you what my favorite song or movie is this year.

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

I really really really want to live in the country. I don't know if I could tear my husband away from city life and his job, but I am ready to leave now! I had better be in the country growing tomatoes and wearing a big crazy hat by 2036.



JUSTINE SIMPSON
Director of Events

A GGMG member for five years, Justine has volunteered since January 2011, first as a volunteer on the Entrepreneurship Committee and then as chair of the Social Events Committee, before joining the board in January 2015.

What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

The Kids Activities Committee focuses on giving parents access to activities for themselves and their little ones, with the goal of having at least one smaller scale event each month that focuses more on parents and children getting to know other members.

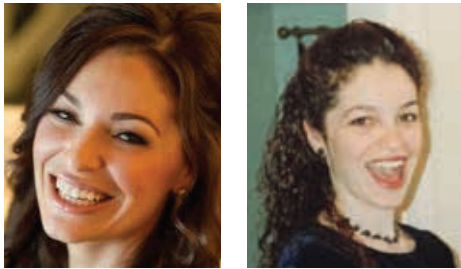
The Social Events Committee hosts our largest and most public-facing events. These events are intended to bring together our members and their families, sometimes including grandparents and other extended family. We aim to provide a diverse set of activities that would be relevant for infants to 11-year-olds and provide space for other needs such as diaper changing and nursing. For many members this is the only in-person activity they engage in as a GGMG member.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

Studying abroad in Italy. Tie between Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise" and Gwen Stefani's "Just a Girl."

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

Hopefully, still in SF.



SASHA FAHIMI
Director of Member Engagement

Sasha started volunteering just six months after joining GGMG. She previously held the position of chair of the Neighborhood Meetups Committee, but has recently moved up the chain of command to a position on the board.

What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

The Membership Committee oversees all new member applications and answers any questions related to membership and renewal. They have worked with other committees to host member mixers, and are planning to host more events going forward. The new member engagement branch rolled out a four-part e-newsletter series for new members earlier this year, aimed to encourage an early connection to GGMG.

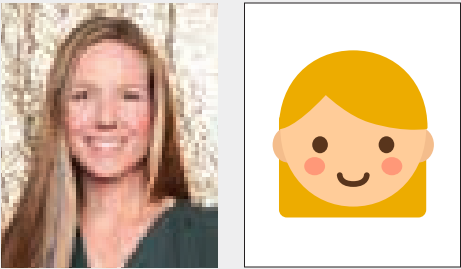
The Playgroups Committee organizes a playgroup formation event each quarter. Neighborhood meetups consists of 34-plus amazing volunteers who devote a substantial amount of time and energy to plan and host recurring weekly, monthly, and special holiday play dates as well as moms-only events. This committee has representatives in 11 different micro-hoods within the city.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

I was a junior in high school in Salem, Oregon. *Happy Gilmore*.

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

I see us dedicating more time to travel, like we used to do in our pre-baby days. Hopefully we will still be living in San Francisco, continuing our frequent adventures all over the Bay Area, including hiking, camping, and trips to Tahoe and Napa.



LAURA KIM
Director of Operations

A GGMG member since she was pregnant with her son, Teddy (3), Laura started volunteering in 2014 for the Membership and Recruiting Committees. In November of 2014, she became the co-chair of the recruiting team, and she joined the board this past October.

What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

The Recruiting Committee helps to recruit, track, and onboard new GGMG volunteers. Just five years ago, we only had 75 volunteers, and today we have more than 180! The Recruiting Committee strives to further streamline the volunteer recruiting process moving forward.

The Operations Committee is designed to support our amazing volunteers. They plan our monthly volunteer meetings, and they execute an amazing volunteer appreciation dinner every November. The team also plans a yearly "chairs only" evening, ranging from sit-down dinners to fun bowling nights. One important goal of the committee is to find a monthly meeting space we can call home so that we may continue to improve GGMG into the next 20 years.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

I was a student at Clemson University (Go Tigers!!!). I majored in English education and worked as a resident assistant during the school year, then sold bras at Victoria's Secret and waitressed during the summers. I loved Gin Blossoms and Goo Goo Dolls.

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

I hope that we continue to be a strong family unit, that we are all healthy, happy, and haven't accumulated too much junk. I do hope our family will expand in some capacity: whether it is another dog, a bunny, or maybe another little one—it would all be wonderful!



KATRINA DIRKSEN
Director of Parent Events

Katrina has volunteered for three years with parent events: first as a volunteer, then as co-chair, and now as director. She has been a GGMG member for five years.

What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

In 2015, the Just for Moms Committee (JFM) hosted more than 30 events for GGMG members, allowing them to take time to nurture themselves, build community, and experience new things. JFM volunteers are working to host events in different parts of the city and to offer a greater variety of events.

Being a mom in the city can be challenging, and parent education aims to help by providing qualitative information, resources, and a diverse educational curriculum to increase their confidence as parents. To give busy moms a new pathway to participate in GGMG's educational series, we are working to record some of our speaker events and offering access via weblink. We also hope to provide childcare at more of our events.

Entrepreneurship and careers aim to support all working moms. Our goal is to increase the number and quality of events.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

Twenty years ago I was living in Melbourne, Australia, and studying for a double degree in education and history/politics. There was generally a lot of hanging out with friends, partying, going to clubs, and seeing bands. "Wonderwall" by Oasis was my favorite song.

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

I have no idea where we will be—we could end up anywhere if the last 15 years is anything to go by. I see my husband and I spending lots of time with our family and friends and I look forward to watching our kids become adults.



SARAH SOTO
Director of Technology

A GGMG member since 2008, Sarah has held five volunteer roles to date: Web Team Committee volunteer, web team chair, board vice chair, board chair, and her current position, director of technology.

What are the goals of the committees that you oversee?

The web team moderates the forums and administers the subgroups on BigTent, as well as manages our email and *ggmg.org* hosting account. In the next three to five years, we anticipate having moved off BigTent to provide a more comprehensive GGMG experience, hopefully, making the site a one-stop shop of resources for membership, forums, classifieds, partnerships, and volunteering.

Where were you 20 years ago and what was your favorite song or movie?

Twenty years ago I was an undergrad student at the University of San Francisco and spent the summer volunteering at a leadership conference helping to run mock interviews for high school students. Song: "Unbreak My Heart" by Toni Braxton. Movie: It's a tie between *The Rock* and *A Time to Kill*.

Where do you see yourself and your family in 20 years?

Most likely not in San Francisco, unless these ridiculous home prices come way down! I see myself traveling or living in another country during the summers and watching my boys develop their careers and relationships. I envision we will have an ongoing ritual of participating together in at least one sprint triathlon a year. ❖

Catherine is a medical writer. She has been a GGMG member since 2013 and a volunteer since 2014. She loves being part of the hard-working GGMG Magazine team and really needs to get started on her next article.

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS: Sunset/West Portal

Sunset/West Portal has a very active neighborhood meetup group, with moms and kids of all ages coming from Balboa Terrace, Forest Hill, Golden Gate Heights, Laguna Honda, Lakeshore, Miraloma Park, Parkside, St. Francis Wood, Inner/Upper/Lower Sunset, and West Portal.

Dru Garza is the neighborhood director and hosts our Wednesday playgroup at the Sunset Recreation Center. She volunteers with several fantastic ambassadors. Katie Gerber and Kim Pikul co-host a Saturday play date at one of our beautiful neighborhood playgrounds. Jessica Ronco and Jessica Di Martino host our monthly wine night, which is a favorite among our moms. Kate Bartenwerfer hosts our book club every six weeks, which is open to anyone who has read the book or just wants a night out. And we recently welcomed Amy Odessky, who is quickly becoming very active in the neighborhood.

We love to keep busy in our neighborhood—if you live in the area (or even if you don’t), we look forward to seeing you soon!

Wednesday Playgroup at Sunset Recreation Center

This recurring playgroup allows parents to meet and chat while babies, toddlers, and children play together and form friendships. A true Sunset gem, the rec center has an indoor area with all sorts of toys, even a full-size bounce house, and a beautiful playground outside.

- DATE:** Wednesdays
- TIME:** 10 to 11:30 a.m.
- PLACE:** 2201 Lawton St.
- COST:** \$7.50 for inside play area; FREE outside playground

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/95665268

Saturday Playgroup at Blue Boat Playground

Our weekend recurring playgroup is perfect for the entire family. Come chat with neighbor parents while the kiddos play on the fantastic playground.

- DATE:** Saturdays in April
- TIME:** 10 to 11:30 a.m.
- PLACE:** 4400 Lincoln Way
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: Location subject to change weekly. Please register with the Sunset/West Portal subgroup on BigTent to stay up to date on details



Moms Only Book Club: The Martian

Do you love to read or would you simply like a night out with the ladies? Join our awesome book club! We’re a casual group that meets every six-ish weeks. Finishing (or even starting) the book is not a requirement. We are planning an upcoming movie night to watch *The Martian* as well.

- DATE:** Thursday, April 14
- TIME:** 8 to 10 p.m.
- PLACE:** Location will be sent with RSVP
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/news/entry/96476339

Moms Only Wine Night

Our fabulous neighborhood mamas love our monthly wine nights. Whether at a local restaurant/bar or a member’s home, we fill our time together with laughs, stories, and, of course, vino.

- DATE:** Thursday, April 21
- TIME:** 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
- PLACE:** Location will be sent with RSVP
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/96517758



Family Playgroup at the San Francisco Botanical Garden

Calling all moms, dads, partners, and kids—join us for a picnic in the park! Pack a lunch, grab a blanket, and meet us on the left side of the front lawn through the main entrance.

- DATE:** Sunday, April 24
- TIME:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- PLACE:** 1199 9th Ave.
- COST:** FREE for SF residents (bring proof of residency)

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/96461346

Get connected

Connect with other moms in your neighborhood by joining your Neighborhood Meetup subgroup on BigTent. From wine nights to playgroups, there are 11 neighborhoods hosting events every week! Contact Tracy at andreassen.tracy@gmail.com for more information on what’s happening in your neighborhood.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Unfolding Your Dream: From the Idea to the Realization of Your Own Business at Presidio Library

Have you been dreaming about starting your own business? Do you have unanswered questions regarding business planning, marketing, accounting, finances, management, or individual consultations? Join us in this interactive session to learn what having a start-up looks like and get inspired to forge your own path. Our panel includes Kim Burns of Fresh Baby Bites, Beauty Brigade, and Flourish Foods; Ching-Yee Hu of Sprogs; Heather Natsch of Potrero Media Corporation and InteriorCrowd, Inc.; and Tejal Shah of KidAdmit and Peninsula Wealth.

- DATE:** Wednesday, April 20
- TIME:** 6:45 to 8:15 p.m.
- PLACE:** 3150 Sacramento St.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/96457099

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

CPR Class with Babysitting at Sports Basement

Join us for an evening with CPR expert Shanda Manion, who instructs at UCSF and with other parent groups. She will provide the latest CPR techniques and answer all of your questions. This session will address basics in CPR as well as how to approach choking incidents. There will be FREE childcare with limited spaces, but we ask that you tip the sitters for their time.

- DATE:** Thursday, April 21
- TIME:** 6 to 8:30 p.m.
- PLACE:** 610 Old Mason St.
- COST:** \$55 (includes certification)

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/95074279

PARENT EDUCATION

Positive Discipline for Preschoolers at Recess

Am I expecting too much or too little from my preschooler? Do timeouts work? How can I be kind yet firm? What do I do when my child has a tantrum? Aki Raymer of Parenting Paths will answer these all-too-common questions and arm you with the tools that help foster cooperation instead of chaos. Learn how to support your child’s curiosity and need for independence without letting him walk all over you!

- DATE:** Tuesday, April 12
- TIME:** 7:30 to 9 p.m.
- PLACE:** 470 Carolina St.
- COST:** \$38 per individual; \$58 per couple (save \$5 with promo code GGMG15)

REGISTRATION: www.recess-sf.com/workshops

Real Estate and Schools in San Francisco and the Peninsula at Sports Basement

Join us for a discussion about the best schools, best communities, and cost of housing in San Francisco and the Peninsula. Hosted by parents and real estate professionals, Paul Huber with Pacific Union, Heidi Maierhofer with Keller Williams, and Julie Shumate with Stearns Lending, learn about choosing schools, housing prices and trends, and how buying real estate will tie into the school process. Dads are welcome to attend.

- DATE:** Wednesday, April 20
- TIME:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
- PLACE:** 1590 Bryant St.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: Please email shumate.julie@gmail.com

JUST FOR MOMS

Victorian Home Walk

Tour Pacific Heights, famous for its colorful Victorian row houses, opulent mansions, and beautiful gardens. Get a glimpse of the inside of a period Queen Anne Victorian. See where *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *The Princess Diaries* were filmed or where Francis Ford Coppola lived. The walk is easy with no hills. Enjoy lunch after the tour on Union Street or return directly back to Union Square.

- DATE:** Saturday, April 16
- TIME:** 10:55 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- PLACE:** Begin at Union Square
- COST:** \$16.30

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/95792602

Four Keys to Life Beyond Motherhood at Sports Basement

Hear proven strategies to reclaim your dreams and find the time to make them happen. Participants will get the chance to discuss the challenges they are facing and learn tools to overcome these challenges.

- DATE:** Wednesday, April 27
- TIME:** 7 to 9 p.m.
- PLACE:** 610 Old Mason St.
- COST:** FREE

REGISTRATION: Register on BigTent



Committee Spotlight: *Membership—Operations*

With Co-chair Kasey Balin

Describe the personality of your committee.

Warm and caring moms who want to give back to GGMG but maybe don't have as much time to be involved in person as they'd like.

Why do you do what you do?

I got so much help from GGMG when my daughter was little and I felt like it was important to give back a bit of what I received. An unexpected benefit of being involved in the operations division of the Membership Committee is that my team has really rallied around me this past year as I've dealt with medical issues. They have been so kind and supportive and gone so far out of their way for me.

What types of activities or projects do you undertake?

We do all of the membership approvals/rejections/renewals. We also answer many questions daily from current members and from moms all over the world.

How do you know when you are making a difference?

When we take that extra step and answer people's questions and direct them to where and what they need. We are helping thousands of moms connect and stay connected every year!

Who are your current volunteers?

Wendy Lai, Lauren McDowell, Iryna Filimonova, Monica Harbell, Jennifer Barrett, Heather Nichols, Viorica Ciobanu, and myself.

What's next for the Membership Operations team?

Keep doing the work we're doing every day. We listen to the needs of the members and advocate for adjusting our membership criteria accordingly. For example, we recently communicated to the board an idea to approve members who are planning to move to San Francisco in the near future. The board listened and we are in the process of trying it out!

How can interested GGMG members get involved in the Membership Committee?

We don't currently have any openings on our team. If someone is interested, they can certainly contact us at membership@gmg.org to be placed on a waiting list or we can help match them with another team.

Member Support

Infertility Support Group

Dealing with infertility can be very overwhelming. Joining the GGMG Infertility Support Group will help you navigate through what sometimes can feel like a very dark tunnel.

We are a group of women experiencing primary or secondary infertility issues, miscarriages, and recurrent loss. Some of us have already investigated infertility options and are ready to share our experiences. By joining the group, you will have the option to trade information or participate in meetings with women who can help guide you through some of the options and listen to your story in a private setting.

We hope that you will actively join the group and help us support each other in what can be a very isolating time.

To join, please register through BigTent under the subgroups section. Also, check the resource list compiled by member support: www.gmg.org/member_support_resources/fertility.html.

Recruiting

GGMG is Looking for Great Volunteers!

Are you interested in giving back to a great organization? GGMG's amazing community is completely volunteer-run, so we are always looking for volunteers to help out.

Our volunteers get as much as they give with perks like fun social events, a volunteer appreciation dinner, and expanded discounts from local businesses—not to mention it's a great way to connect with other great moms! If you would like to learn more, please reach out to volunteer@gmg.org.

OPEN POSITIONS:

- **Community Support:** Co-chair of drives and events
- **Parent Education:** Volunteer
- **Kids Activities:** Co-chair
- **Magazine:** Photographer; Writer
- **Neighborhood Meetups:** Committee Co-chair; Directors for Nob Hill/ North Beach, NoPa; Ambassadors for Haight, Marina, Mission/Castro
- **Recruiting:** Co-chair
- **Social Events:** Co-chair; Volunteer, planning committee

GGMG Forum FAQ

How do I check when my GGMG membership expires?

Follow these four easy steps!

1. While signed into BigTent, click your name on the top navigation bar.
2. Then select "Settings" from the drop-down menu.
3. Click "Membership info" in the list of links at the top of the screen.
4. Under "Golden Gate Mothers Group," you will see "Membership expires" followed by a date. This page, printed or on a screen, can also be used as proof of membership.

Near the expiration date, you will receive an email from no_reply@lists.bigtent.com with an invitation to renew your membership. In the email, click on the link and you will be launched into the renewal process. The invitation will expire 60 days from the date it was sent.

If your renewal invite has expired, you will need to contact membership@gmg.org to ask for a new invitation to GGMG.

As always, feel free to contact webmaster@gmg.org directly for help or questions about online forums or the GGMG website. GGMG Forum Guidelines can be found at www.gmg.org/Forum_Etiquette.html.

Membership

Taking Advantage of Your GGMG Benefits

Whether you are a new member or have been one for years, the Membership Committee wants to thank you for your loyalty to GGMG. Remember to take advantage of ALL your membership benefits!

PARTNERS AND FRIENDS OF GGMG: For the amazing list of partner perks offered by Gymboree, JCCSF, Peekadoodle, Recess, UrbanSitter, and Wondersitter, visit www.gmg.org/partnerships.html. Additionally, download the entire list of local business discounts in BigTent "Files" under the "Friends of GGMG Benefits" tag.

EVENTS, PLAYGROUPS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS: Have you taken full advantage of GGMG's varied events? Meet other moms and families face to face and turn online connections into real-life friendships. Join your neighborhood's subgroup on BigTent to learn about upcoming events near you.

NETWORKING AND VOLUNTEERING: Want to keep in touch with the working world? Need help navigating both career and kids successfully? Look into Entrepreneurship Committee workshops and volunteer for GGMG with other talented moms. Email recruiting@gmg.org.

COMMUNITY AND MEMBER SUPPORT: These rockstar groups facilitate donation drives and support members in need. Know another mom—even yourself—who could use a little help? Email membersupport@gmg.org.

Thank you for being part of THE BEST mom community in the city. Questions? Email membership@gmg.org.



SAVE THE DATE!

GGMG-wide Annual Spring Social at the Bay Area Discovery Museum

Sunday, May 15

9 a.m. to noon

Fort Baker, 557 McReynolds Rd., Sausalito

You can look forward to all the museum's regular exhibits, plus other special activities for children up to age 11. Open only to GGMG members and our guests. Keep an eye on Facebook and BigTent for more details.





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I ♥ Mom

Finding and Growing My GGMG Village

By Laure Latham

Prior to my first daughter's birth in 2003, my pregnancy was filled with dread and terror. I had never been a "baby" person, was an epic fail at babysitting, and frankly, had no clue about babies. My family was far away, which meant that it was just my husband and me in a city I was still learning to tame.

At a prenatal appointment that spring, I saw a black-and-white Golden Gate Mothers Group brochure in the waiting room. It had a funky logo and was free. I picked it up to read at home, thinking: *This could be a good idea. Other moms—how novel!* I didn't know anyone else with kids.

After signing up online, I showed up at a new member meeting at a fancy house in Pacific Heights. Though I felt shy and didn't know anyone, the hostess graciously welcomed me, directed me to a buffet, and introduced me to another woman. She already had three children and seemed oddly fit, articulate, and dynamic. *So it could be done! Having kids and living a healthy life, that is.* What a relief.

That first day sealed a long relationship with GGMG. The group had a couple of hundred members, and meeting other moms was easy. I attended monthly meetings, started knowing people by name. By the summer, GGMG was looking for volunteers. Coincidentally, I was still waiting for my green card; volunteering beat sorting cans at the Food Bank.

At the volunteer meeting, I picked the newsletter committee on a paper ballot (there were three of us) and that was that. I started writing short pieces but as a newbie, my pieces were way too wordy. A cultural distortion from my native French, perhaps? Thus, I learned the art of copy editing and cutting words, which I hated because I love words. But hey, space was a constraint, and when I still couldn't cut enough words, our designer reduced the font size to fit them all. That month's column was very hard to read, even with magnifiers!

The two original newsletter volunteers changed committees, so I recruited a new team, including Inga, who became one of my closest friends. It was a blast, writing with a group of friends.

Our newsletter grew from 16 to 24 pages, and GGMG grew from 200 to 1,000 members. Advertisers fought for space in our pages, and managing the monthly content was a kick. One winter, we were bold and the holiday issue exploded to 32 pages—twice as long as my first issue! By then, I had taken over writing the Books for Kids column from a librarian.

After my second daughter was born, the newsletter team was

the village that supported me when she had medical problems. Additional volunteers came on board, each of them bringing new expertise and unique personalities. *Betsy, Jenny, Sarah, Roseanne, Stephanie.* We organized social nights out to get to know each other and two yearly family events to meet the rest of their tribe.

I became editor-in-chief and after awhile, recruited my first managing editor, Jennifer (who later became GGMG board chair). Best decision ever. She was full of life, got things done, and had

a true business vision. Within a year, the newsletter was a full-color magazine and our team grew again. *Ryan, Rio, Kait, Rachel, Tara.*

Jennifer took over as editor-in-chief and I kept writing features, but my favorite remained the Books for Kids column. GGMG membership went through the roof—2,000 and then 3,000 members.

I have volunteered for GGMG for 13 years now. Yes, it's a lifetime. My girls are 10 and 12 years old. When we moved to London in 2012, I was afraid that I would have to sever my GGMG ties. GGMG was part of my girls' childhood,

and I loved being a part of it. Luckily, each new magazine team has been understanding, so I still write the books for kids column. *Vicky, Kirsten, Rhiana, Kristen, Laura, Fe.* Though I'm regularly late, they are really cool about it.

The best part? My girls actually look forward to reading the monthly batch of new books, and they now help me select the right titles "for the little ones." The new generation is taking over,

From the first day I joined, GGMG became my surrogate family and helped me become the mom I am.

and GGMG is coming full circle.

From the first day I joined, GGMG was my surrogate family and helped me become the mom I am. Gaining friends in the process was icing on the cake. Without GGMG, my world would have been a very lonely place.

I hope that you too will find your own GGMG village, but before you do, please join me in an enormous round of applause to all the volunteers who work behind the scenes to make GGMG the substitute family that will always be there for you. Love ya. ❖

Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (www.frogmom.com), as well as the book Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops.





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