

DECEMBER 2019/JANUARY 2020



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MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine

Connections





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EVENTS

Letter from the Editor: Pruning the Friendship Tree

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is an editor, photographer, mom to three, and an unabashed extrovert.

I was part of a three-member best friend group in high school. After our yearbooks were signed and our mortarboards tossed, we vowed to stay close, even as colleges pulled us in different directions. A year into our new lives, however, one of my friends called me in tears. She had written a casual catchup email to the other member of our trio. In response, she had received a polite but dispassionate message announcing an intention to dissolve the friendship between the two of them, stating that there wasn't anything substantive holding them together anymore. Why continue to misdirect precious energy by catching up, our third friend wrote, when both people could focus on establishing college friendships? Goodbye, don't reply. It was a staggeringly callous move by an otherwise warm person. I was floored.

New motherhood is a time when many of us actively reach out to forge new bonds with other moms. I was aggressive in my efforts to connect, joining numerous mothers groups, book clubs, coffee meetups, and later hitting up every preschool moms' night and school campout that came my way. Consequently, I made a lot of friends. But as my holiday invite

"New motherhood is a time when many of us actively reach out to forge new bonds with moms."

list grew, so did my confusion. It became harder to tell which friendships had depth and which were just the result of briefly shared experiences. Who could I trust to be there in times of crisis, and who was just a passing acquaintance? Add to this social media's tendency to artificially keep friendships alive, and I began to feel very insecure, wondering which connections were actually real.

In this issue, our writers think about how we connect and reconnect with each other. On page 20, Jennifer Butterfoss explores the wild world of mom friends, sharing best practices to land your friends for life. Victoria Dvorak explores on page 24 our connections with our partners and how parenthood must force us to be united. And on page 16, Sandy Woo takes it back, way back, in a discussion of our ancestral connections and the growth of the DNA-testing industry, the promises and pitfalls.

Although my instinct is still to click "yes!" on every Evite, I've been working on disciplining myself to replace quantity with quality and focus on deepening friendships with people whose values and personalities resonate with my own and who I can help support along life's bumpy road. It's been hard to consciously let some relationships wither, but I know I'll be a better friend to the other people in my life. It takes courage and laying bare one's emotional vulnerability to pursue meaningful friendships at the risk of rejection, but as someone who's constantly coaxing my children to be brave and face their fears, it's time to follow my own advice.

Sonya Abrams

Letter from the Board: Reflections on 2019 and beyond

By Karen Brein

As I end my tenure as GGMG board chair, I can't help but reflect on the myriad connections I have made thanks to this fantastic group of mothers. I did not know any other moms my age prior to joining GGMG, and I will forever be grateful to this group for welcoming me into motherhood with open arms.

Volunteering for GGMG has made a lasting impact on my life. I am grateful that I took the leap to show up to my first volunteer meeting, even when I was terrified of knowing no one. I was welcomed with open arms and talked to several smart and funny moms who would later become my friends. I make new connections each month as I get to know more and more GGMG volunteers and members. It's not always easy to show up. As mothers, we are always tired, trying to "do it all," and carrying the brunt of the domestic load, but carving out time to connect with other moms is invaluable. I urge anyone reading this to make a commitment to yourself

"As mothers we are always tired, trying to 'do it all,' and carrying the brunt of the domestic load, but carving out time to connect with other moms is invaluable."

that you will show up this month—with yourself and others, whether it's with the GGMG community or elsewhere.

One of my goals this year as GGMG board chair was to increase the number of connection opportunities for our members. This goal has been realized thanks to the

dedicated volunteers who have worked with me. To name a few accomplishments this past year, we increased the number of Neighborhood Meetups events from 65 to over 150, partnered with an astounding number of businesses, nonprofits, and local organizations to increase our impact on our community, and we continue to make enhancements to our website to best suit the needs of our members. I am

so proud of the work we've done and can't wait to see what the GGMG board and volunteers accomplish next year under the leadership of new board chair Virginia Green. Thank you to everyone I have connected with so far on my motherhood journey. We are all extremely lucky to be a part of the GGMG community. My wish is that every member is able to find meaningful connections through this group and takes time to connect to oneself in the process.



Karen is mom to three adorable and spirited kids: Adam, Ava, and Nina. Her favorite pastimes include coffee, wine, indoor cycling, and taking long walks around San Francisco.

Karen

Housekeeping

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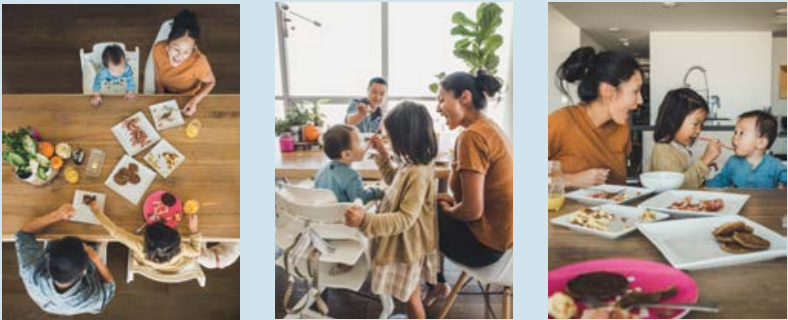
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COMING NEXT: February/March: Love & Passion

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

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: Girls' weekend in Santa Fe; Gin and Tonics by the pool in Tucson; surviving potty training; regretting having the kids sort and count their Halloween candy because now they notice if I eat one; learning to balance my priorities; a broken toe and vain decision to reject the hospital boot and buy some new comfy Uggs instead; computer hard drive failure—hooray for cloud backup!; debating, during the power outage, whether moving to the North Bay was a good idea; trip to Thailand to visit mom and seeing wild elephants in the mountains for the first time; almost done photographing 75 families this this season!

Cover Outtakes



Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography
Cover models: Wang Family

Holiday Adventures Around the Bay

By Christine Chen

Deck the Hall with the SF Symphony, December 8. This kid-friendly concert features festive favorites and sing-alongs with appearances by beloved holiday characters. Tickets include post-concert festivities with entertainment, arts and crafts, and refreshments.

Mark Foehringer's Nutcracker Sweets (multiple dates) at Fort Mason is a 50-minute production of the classic ballet, a great way to introduce young children with shorter attention spans to the story.

Fairmont San Francisco's life-sized Gingerbread House returns November 30. Go early in the season before the hotel begins restricting viewing to guests only.

Embarcadero Building Lighting Ceremony, November 22. Four iconic buildings lit with 17,000 holiday lights, fireworks, and an ice skating show. A family carnival begins at 4 p.m. while the Building Lighting Ceremony is at 6 p.m.

30th Annual Union Square Christmas Tree Lighting, November 29. Artists and performers entertain locals and tourists until the tree lighting at 6:40 p.m.

California Academy of Sciences offers ice skating, indoor snow flurries, and a giant snowman theater.

San Rafael Annual Holiday Parade and Winter Wonderland, November 29 to 30. This free event offers snow sledding, a parade, and a tree lighting.

Lemos Farm in Half Moon Bay offers pony and train rides, Play Town, a Dig Zone, and a free petting zoo. Hop on a hayride to cut down your own Christmas tree or select a pre-cut one.

San Mateo's CuriOdyssey's IlluminOdyssey is a dazzling winter light experience on four levels for kids. It opens November 9 through January 5 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with late hours until 8 p.m. on December 6 and January 3.

Oakland ZooLights, December 6 to January 5. Experience the Oakland Zoo with a million glowing lights from the gondola ride and Outback Express Train. Enjoy as swirling snow falls over a Winter Wonderland attraction and meet Santa every night from December 7 to 23.

Free Pop-Up Glowing Hanukkah Party at Ghiradelli Square December 22 from 3 to 6 p.m. Celebrate the first night of Hanukkah by dressing up in your favorite light-up, glittery, and glowing outfits. Play with dreidels and enjoy arts and crafts and fresh Harvey's donuts. Candle lighting at 4:30 p.m.

Celebrate Hanukkah at the JCCSF, December 22 to 30. Celebrate Hanukkah by attending the lighting of the hanukkiyah at 4:30 p.m.

Contemporary Jewish Museum Community Free Day, December 25. View the exhibitions while on a scavenger hunt and participate in fun activities like playing with puppets and embroidery.

Alive and Free Omega Boys Club's Kwanzaa Celebration at the Bayview Opera House December 26. Join a free potluck dinner and watch an African dance troupe, listen to the spoken word, and learn about the principles of Kwanzaa.

Christine loves the holidays but is dismayed that pumpkins get no respect since Christmas seems to start in October. Her almost 6- and 4-year-old children would love to have the tree up all year.



Li'l Kid, Big City: Salesforce Park

By Sonya Abrams

Winding its way across 5.4 acres, several stories above the streets of SoMa, Salesforce Park is a lush oasis and a family-friendly escape from the hustle and bustle of the city below. For maximum thrill, start your downtown adventure by ascending in style aboard the park's **free gondola**, a one-way ride starting near the corner of Fremont and Mission Streets. When you exit, 70 feet in the sky, you'll encounter **a path dotted with 600 trees** and thousands of plants. Burn some energy at the **children's play area**, featuring an intricate rope course. A **1,200-foot interactive fountain display** will delight little water explorers (check winter hours for availability). A **children's reading room** has books to curl up with on the lawn, and there's an **art cart** with free materials for your budding Picasso. **Toddler Tuesdays** (10 to 11 a.m.) boasts special activities and guests, and there's a rotating series of **after-work musical performers**. Though there's no permanent restaurant yet, a few **coffee shops** open up directly to the park, with offerings to fuel your explorations. The park is open year-round, and there are adult-focused events as well, from Zumba to DJ classes. Check out the event calendar for all the action: salesforcetransitcenter.com/events.

Sonya is a mom to a 4-, 5-, and 8-year-old, and shakes her tiny fist in rage that Salesforce Park wasn't yet open during her 13-year tenure as a SoMa office worker.

Volunteer to Support the Elderly

By Jennifer Sato

I have loved volunteering at Bay Area senior centers, including Kimochi, Inc. and the Institute on Aging, since I was a teen. I first volunteered serving lunch in the Nutrition Program at Kimochi, Inc. The holidays are an especially wonderful time to volunteer. Here are local organizations with ways to help out during the holidays and beyond.

Institute on Aging, 3575 Geary Blvd.

Locations: San Francisco, Peninsula, Santa Clara

- Friendship Line, artists, social day program, office support, data entry

Kimochi, Inc., 1715 Buchanan St.

Locations: San Francisco's Japantown and San Mateo

- Nutrition Program: Food prep, serving meals on-site, delivering meals to home-bound seniors
- Kimochi Home SF and Kimochi San Mateo: Daily walks, social daycare/companionship, receptionist, group activities (bingo, arts and crafts, calligraphy), various projects (gardening, clerical)
- Kimochi Lounge: Greet visitors, assist with Japanese books/visual rentals, organization and labeling
- Special events, escort/home visitor

Little Brothers—Friends of the Elderly San Francisco Bay Area, 909 Hyde St., Suite 628

- Visiting volunteer, holiday home or birthday visits, medical escort, office/phone, social excursions, and special events

San Francisco Village, 3220 Fulton St.

- Board of Directors/Advisory Council, Companion/Friendly Visitor, special events, personal assistance, transportation, technology, wellness program

Self Help for the Elderly, 731 Sansome St., Suite 100

Locations: San Francisco, Daly City, Oakland, San Mateo, San Jose

- Senior Center, office work, data entry, tutoring, phone line, projects

Jennifer is a mother of a 4-year-old son, Leo, and with her hubby, Javi, has a baby girl on the way! You can also find her on www.nutritionformoms.org.



Women’s Health Physical Therapy

with Alicia Willoughby

Alicia Willoughby (www.aliciapt.com) is a Women’s Health Physical Therapist who specializes in pregnancy and postpartum. She works in Marin and San Francisco and is a mom to two kids. She was interviewed by Colleen Morgan, a fellow physical therapist and GGMG Magazine contributor.

What is a Women’s Health Physical Therapist?

A Women’s Health Physical Therapist (WHPT) is a physical therapist (PT) who specializes in the pelvic floor and is trained to do internal pelvic floor assessments and treatments. She has earned a PT degree from an accredited education program, has passed a state licensure exam, and has completed advanced training in the area of women’s health. She usually has special training in treating pregnancy and postpartum conditions and can evaluate and treat all pelvic floor dysfunctions (pain, urinary leaking, prolapse), abdominal separations, core weakness patterns, and pain in the pelvic joints, low back, or hips. In my practice, I also treat all orthopedic issues such as neck/shoulder/upper back pain.

What inspired you to focus your PT practice on women’s health?

I’ve always been interested in pregnancy as a transitional time in a woman’s life and was raised with a feminist mother who is very birth positive. Early in my career, I noticed a trend in my female patients: Many of their orthopedic injuries could be traced back to unresolved postpartum issues such as core weakness, muscular compensations, and poor posture/body mechanics. After my own pregnancies, I used my knowledge to heal my body. These experiences inspired me to provide PT for mothers during pregnancy, postpartum, and beyond so they have the care and support they need and deserve.

Six weeks after a vaginal birth, most women are cleared by their OBGYN for a return to exercise. What do you think about this from your clinical experience?

I’ve never met a woman who is ready to return to pre-pregnancy exercise at 6 weeks postpartum. There is no evidence to support the 6-week clearance mark. The medical system is failing postpartum women by giving them a generalized recommendation and unrealistic expectations. Studies show that it takes 4 to 6 months for the pelvic floor tissue to recover after vaginal birth and 6 to 7 months for the abdominal fascia to regain over 73 percent of its original tensile strength after a cesarean birth. We need to treat postpartum women like we treat athletes with an injury—as individuals requiring gradual guidance for return to exercise.

What about sex?

Some women get back to sex postpartum without issue, but the majority of women do not feel ready, mentally or physically, for sex at 6 weeks postpartum. Depending on your birth, the tissues may not be ready for penetration and need more time to heal. My recommendation is that when you are ready, start with non-penetrative sex and remind your body how to feel connected to pleasure, your own body, and your partner. Then the progression to penetrative sex will feel more natural.

Are there special considerations after a cesarean birth?

Since a cesarean section causes multilayer tissue injury, it is common to have a difficult time reactivating the deeper abdominal muscles. The presence of incisional scar tissue can also contribute to pain in the abdomen, pelvis, hips, or back, as well as disrupt the abdominal muscle function. One tip is to gently massage the scar to increase its mobility. It’s a myth that the pelvic floor is not affected by cesarean birth. Some women may experience pelvic floor dysfunction, such as painful sex or leaking urine. Regardless of vaginal or cesarean delivery,

painful sex or leaking is NOT normal and means the muscles that support the

pelvis are not functioning efficiently. Pelvic floor dysfunction can be treated by a women’s health physical therapist.

What else do women need to know about postpartum pelvic health?

For decades, the French government has subsidized 12 weeks of pelvic floor PT for all postpartum women. Unfortunately, since postpartum PT is not the norm in our country, it’s up to us to advocate for ourselves and other women. Too many women accept postpartum conditions as their new normal. We need to ask for help and find specialists that can help us even when we are told by the medical system and prior generations, “You had a baby, what do you expect?” With the right guidance and support, a woman’s body has the ability to heal after giving birth. It’s never too late! Whether you had a baby 6 weeks ago or 16 years ago, your body deserves to feel good. Every woman has the right to reclaim her body as her own and feel confident and healthy so she can show up for herself and for her family.

“I’ve never met a woman who is ready to return to pre-pregnancy exercise at 6 weeks postpartum.”

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Give Homeless Kids Bedtime Essentials for the Holidays

GGMG is partnering with Project Night Night (PNN) to host our annual holiday fund drive. PNN delivers packages of bedtime essentials to homeless children ages 0 to12 to provide a sense of security and support learning. Each Night Night package contains a new security blanket, an age-appropriate children’s book, and a stuffed animal—all nestled inside a new canvas tote bag. Every year, PNN delivers over 25,000 packages to children in need.

You can donate funds via www.crowdrise.com/o/en/campaign/ggmg-fundraiser-for-project-night-night. Any donation amount is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use by providing nighttime comforts for homeless children throughout the Bay Area.

Please read carefully:

- Drop off by December 10 at one of the listed locations.
- Books must be new with no wear.
- Tightly bag up donations for drop-off so they won’t get dirty or played with.
- Blankets must be new, child friendly, not handmade or no-sew, and store-bought with tags still on.
- Stuffed animals must be store-bought with tags.

Drop off locations:

- La Petite Baleen - 933 Mason St. (Presidio)
- Little Oceanauts - 1917 Ocean Ave. (Ingleside)
- Messy Art Lab - 345 Judah St. (Inner Sunset), Monday to Thursday 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Play Haven - 254 Laguna Honda Blvd. (Forest Hill)
- Recess Collective - 2226 Taraval St. (Outer Sunset)
- JCCSF at 3200 California St. is accepting donations, but they will not be counted toward our drive. For drop-offs after December 10, please utilize this location.

Another way to get involved is to help stuff the totes on December 10 at the South of Golden Gate Park neighborhood holiday party.



CONTEST

Movie Night!



Enjoy movie night (with or without kids!) with Alamo Drafthouse at its family friendly San Francisco location at 2250 Mission St. Founded in 1997, “The Alamo Drafthouse is good food, good beer and good film, all at the same place!”

Viewing a film at Alamo is an experience different from the average multiplex cinema. Ticket holders conveniently order food and drinks from their seats, and friendly film-loving servers fulfill your order (even during the movie!) without you ever having to get up. Free popcorn or soda refills? No problem! Alamo also highlights great local craft breweries on its menu.

Your prize package includes four adult movie screening tickets and a \$40 food and beverage credit. The total prize package is valued at \$100.

Enter the contest by emailing contest@ggmg.org with “Movie Night” in the subject line by December 31, 2019. Winner is selected at random.

Thank you to our prize donor, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in San Francisco. Find it at www.drafthouse.com.

Congratulations to **Abby Erskine**, winner of the October contest prize, an annual membership to the Commonwealth Club.

The Best Connections Are the Ones You Don't See Coming

By Robert Kopniske

Growing up in the bucolic Midwest in the '60s was blissful. Family, security, and economic stature were sound. I formulated my values from the '60s and economically secured myself in the late '70s and early '80s. I was happy at my job and thought marriage was just something other people did. As far as I was concerned, life was complete.

Then, in 1986, I was found by someone who believed in us and our love more than I could ever imagine. All of a sudden, I became one of those "married people." By getting married, I was lucky enough to have an instant family via a 12-year-old stepdaughter. Within the next five years, my wife and I had two more daughters. My thought process changed from "couldn't imagine being married" to "cannot imagine being single." I was fortunate to be part of something so loving. Once again I felt that life was complete.

Fast forward to 2015. My daughters were grown, and it was just my wife and me at home. What we thought would be a gentle ride into retirement came at us in warp-speed; I was disabled from a misdiagnosed foot injury, and my wife was diagnosed with early-onset dementia. Life dealt us a new hand and our main priority became the time we have left together.

By then, my middle daughter had moved to the Bay Area with her husband. In a leap of faith, my wife and I decided to move to the Bay Area as well, to be close to the daughter

whom we hadn't lived with since summer breaks during her college undergrad days. After a lot of paperwork and careful planning, I was able to carve out a life for my wife and I, with

me in my new role as her caregiver. Living only a few miles from one of our daughters, in a climate made to fit our lifestyle, life was once again complete.

Within the first six months of living in the Bay Area, I received an ultrasound photo from my middle daughter as a birthday gift. I was ecstatic. My daughter was becoming a mother. It was a dream come true for her, but I didn't initially think about how it would also make me a first-time grandfather.

Fast forward two more years and I have become the grandfather I never dreamed I would be for my daughter's son. Now I cannot imagine life without my grandson. The best connections in life are the ones you can't even imagine for yourself. In what seems like

a few short years, I went from forever bachelor to devoted grandfather. My daughters laugh at my obsession with "quote-of-the-Day" calendars, but I have found myself relating to the words of wisdom more and more each day. Now it seems my life has become

a "quote-of-the-day" as I find myself speaking in platitudes that ring true from my life experiences.

If I have learned anything from life—it's truly never complete.



"The best connections in life are the ones you can't even imagine for yourself."

Robert is originally from Cleveland, Ohio, where the span of his career was in the business forms industry. He is now retired, living in San Francisco, taking care of his bride of 30 years and enjoying every minute with his grandson.

Kwanua Robinson

Photo by Katya Mizrahi Photography

Kwanua Robinson is a mother of two living in San Francisco's SoMa neighborhood. Kwanua is a personal trainer and instructor who founded PowerPlaySF, a family-centric fitness studio with personal training, classes for moms, and creative play for kids. Kwanua was interviewed by UrbanSitter CEO Lynn Perkins, a fellow entrepreneur and SF mom.

What was your inspiration for PowerPlaySF?

When I was pregnant with my now 6-year-old, I couldn't really find a space that gave me a good mix of workouts for each phase of my pregnancy. I still wanted to do a lot of the same workouts: lift, box, pilates, not just yoga. My frustration increased post-baby. The only available option seemed to be yoga.

Which of your kids' classes do your own children most enjoy at PowerPlaySF?

Kaila has pretty much gone through each phase of our programming. She loved baby music and toddler art, but I would say her all-time favorite is capoeira and tot gym. She's a little sometimey on pre-ballet. Kaiden was all about the art classes and then our tinker and build class.

What keeps you motivated?

I'm motivated to help my extended family in Ghana. I came to the United States for college, as did my two younger sisters. Our parents have set the example of always helping family and community. Right now, my mom and grandmother, both breast cancer survivors, are raising awareness and education about breast cancer and breaking the stigma that can be associated with it in Ghana. I want to build something for my own family—then something that goes well beyond that—to help my cousins and cousins-of-cousins in Ghana.

What are a couple of things families can do to create a balanced life for the whole family?

I suggest creating "no-media" blocks of time. My husband came up with this idea. I have trouble switching off as a mom entrepreneur and felt compelled to answer work texts and calls. Now that my children are three and six and have some media access, we all participate in a family "no-media" block of time on Sundays. The kids sometimes protest, but after 10 minutes or so they adjust.

Do you have advice for parents whose kids prefer to be sedentary and don't love physical activity?

Get outside with your child and focus on the play aspect of physical activity. One of the reasons I named my business PowerPlaySF is that when you focus on the play component of physical movement it becomes more fun, while a 'workout' can feel like a chore.

Do you have any tips for moms who are struggling to find the time to work out or get back into a fitness routine?

Start by blocking off 20 minutes, one day a week.



Know a mom you want to spotlight in the next issue?

Email editor@ggmg.org with her name, email, and a few sentences about what makes her an awesome mom for our next Member Profile.

Holidays

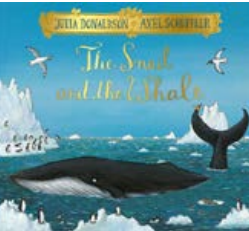
By Laure Latham

Candy canes! Snow fun! Hot chocolate! The holidays are one of the best times of the year to snuggle up and enjoy a good book with a comfy blanket in a warm bed. Whether you’re celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, or just the pleasure of the festive season, these books should become holiday classics for your home library.

The Snail and the Whale Festive Edition

Written by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler

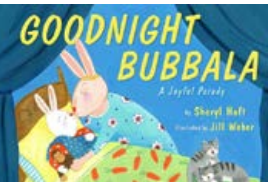
The Snail and the Whale Festive Edition features the classic story of a snail who wanted to sail around the world and hitched a lift on the tail of a whale. With a beautiful snowy festive cover, the story takes the unlikely duo past icebergs and volcanoes, through storms and sunny weather, until the whale beaches himself. Small in size but big in brains, snail saves the day! Young ones will appreciate this story of friendship that focuses on opening your heart and loving others. **Ages: 0 to 3 years**



Snow Much Fun!

Written by Nancy Siscoe, illustrated by Sabina Gibson

Sledding, skating, and baking cookies are only some of the winter activities enjoyed by three animal friends in this book that celebrates winter, inside and outside. Indeed, when a pale blue bunny named Willow prefers staying inside with hot chocolate and marshmallows, Berry the white bear and Ginger the beige squirrel encourage Willow to try ice hockey. The scenes are illustrated with photographs of the felt animals alongside small fabric sculptures, tiny props and costumes such as felt skates and knitted sweaters, and hats in miniature scenes of snowy outdoor settings or cozy, pink interiors. Winter has never been so charming. **Ages: 3 to 6 years**



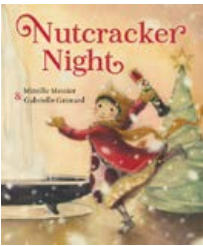
Goodnight Bubbala

Written by Sheryl Haft, illustrated by Jill Weber

This book is a festive reimagining of the *Goodnight Moon* bedtime story with a Hanukkah

setting. “In the small blue room there was a bubbala, and a little shmatta, and then—oy vey!—came the whole mishpacha!” Each page introduces young readers to fun Yiddish words, and the book ends on a culinary note with a recipe from Ina Garten, the Barefoot Contessa, for potato latkes. Oy vey, indeed!

Ages: 2 to 5 years



Nutcracker Night

Written by Mireille Messier, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard

Often the first ballet that children attend, *The Nutcracker* is a timeless story for the holidays. This book follows a little girl and her dad who attend a performance of the ballet together. With a diverse audience and

delightful observations, *Nutcracker Night* captures the magic of a school-aged child’s visit to the ballet where the ballet comes to life as a true auditory experience. The endnotes include a synopsis of the story told by The Nutcracker as well as the history of the ballet and its current cultural significance. **Ages: 2 to 5 years**



Mimi and the Mountain Dragon

Written by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Helen Stephens

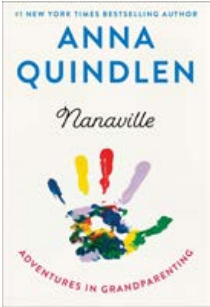
This book tells the story of a village living in fear of a mighty dragon. One winter, a little girl finds a baby dragon asleep and makes a perilous journey to return it to its mother—the dragon the villagers fear. Set in the mountains of Switzerland, this story offers a rare combination of dragons and Christmas in one book, with the added bonus that this book will soon be turned into an animated musical by the BBC. **Ages: 7 to 11 years**

Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (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 find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Perspective

By Gail Cornwall

A lot of what we read about parenting is written by women in the thick of it. While there’s value in capturing what it’s like to tread water in a pool of noise and need, there’s also much to be said for getting the perspective of a veteran, someone who’s experienced multiple iterations of the birth and rearing process.



Nanaville: Adventures in Grandparenting

Anna Quindlen’s latest book offers a satisfying mix of advice and reflection, but mostly reflection, about what it means to be a grandparent these days: “We are now the people whose names come in the smaller print in the movie credits.” Unsurprisingly, the Pulitzer Prize winner nails the mechanics of her task, writing with milkshake-esque prose: it goes down easy, and feels special but also familiar.

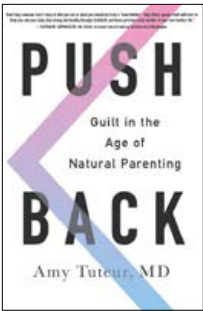
“And goodnight to the old lady whispering ‘hush,’” I say to Arthur, pretending to read although I am really remembering, falling down the well of memory as I speak, other children, other chairs.

It is with this literary prowess that Quindlen calls out parents’ “natural inability to see a child as himself alone, not hung about from the first with similarities, expectations, and assumptions like the familiar ornaments on a Christmas tree.” Grandchildren, by contrast, aren’t a reflection of their grandparents’ performance: “It’s pretty immaterial to

me at what age he learns to read, whether he has a good throwing arm or an eye for color and form,” she writes: “I am much more capable of seeing him purely as himself than I ever was with his father.” What results is “an undemanding love.” Quindlen’s ruminations on everything from wearing white pants to the texture of ham to daughters-in-law are offered with the benefit of hindsight, and humor is kept close at hand.

As for advice, in the aftermath of her first grandchild’s birth, she writes: “Thank God that Christopher and I were together that afternoon at the dining table, or else I might have run the ten blocks south to the hospital and insinuated myself where I was not needed or wanted. Lesson one of being a grandmother: do not do that.” As a current member of the sandwich generation, I appreciate this instruction both for its deference and its pragmatism.

Even more so, I value Quindlen’s many reflections, which encourage me to attempt more mindful caretaking now while simultaneously offering the reassurance that I’ll have another swing at it later.



Push Back: Guilt in the Age of Natural Parenting

Obstetrician and mother of four, Amy Tuteur, M.D., is on a no-holds-barred mission “to help women escape the feelings of guilt [attendant to] the currently popular philosophies of natural childbirth, lactivism, and attachment parenting.” Though Tuteur readily admits that aspects of these movements have value and that those who embrace them mostly mean well, she takes each phenomenon to task for using falsehoods and pseudoscience to disempower women while claiming to do the opposite.

It can be difficult to swallow Tuteur’s unflinching assessment. “You or I might imagine that dead babies would cause midwives to reassess their aversion to technology,” she writes: “Instead it has caused them to reassess their aversion to dead babies.” But Tuteur makes a convincing case that her bitter medicine needs to be taken, and I found it manageable in small doses over the course of a week or two.

I ultimately decided that while Tuteur may lay on the vitriolic gas and flog quite a few horses already gasping for air, she ain’t wrong. For one thing, labor is dangerous. The idea that it’s not has caused many women to internalize the message that an unmedicated vaginal delivery is both possible and ideal in all but the rarest cases. From this “glorification” of one birth method, we get the disappointment and shame that come when interventions are required for maternal and fetal well-being.

One could make the case that Tuteur acts as an apologist for modern obstetrics, which isn’t without its flaws. But she acknowledges many of them, and her bottom line is difficult to argue with: When it comes to birth, feeding, and parenting, several methods are reasonable, and it should be up to individuals to decide, unencumbered by the pressure to conform to ideals of dubious origin and validity.

Gail works as a stay-at-home mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com/articles.

Creating a Lasting Moms Group

By Jessica Perry

When people say “It takes a village to raise a child,” they are not joking.

I went into labor with my first daughter less than 12 hours after going on maternity leave, with little more than a trip to the local taqueria to help me decompress and get in the mindset for my new life. I was the first of my friends in the Bay Area to have kids, and although we had a mountain of baby supplies ready to go at our house and a hospital bag packed several months in advance, I remember thinking to myself as we left the hospital, *Are we really allowed to take this baby home with us? We have no idea what we’re doing!*

My first goal in getting my bearings was finding a good moms group. Although I had tried a moms group just a few weeks after giving birth, I hadn’t been ready to be out in the world just yet. A few weeks later, I joined GGMG and tried again. I responded to a post from another mom, titled something like, “I’m struggling. Are you, too?” A few days later, I met up with some other local moms in my neighborhood and we all caffeinated and bonded with babies in tow.

Once we got into a groove, we met up a couple times per week for more than a year to do various activities—always



Tips for Finding or Creating a Lasting Moms Group

1. If you’re still in the newborn stage, give yourself time to adjust to being a mom before reaching out. Getting out into the world can be tough when your body is still recovering and you’re adjusting to your new role and identity as a caretaker. Give yourself time to heal and bond with your baby for a little bit first if you need it.
2. When you feel like you’re ready to get out, ask veteran moms where they found their communities. If you don’t know any veteran moms, you can start with GGMG, Main Street Mamas, and The Motherhood Collaborative on Facebook, and *Meetup.com*.
3. If you decide to create your own group, your best bet at making meaningful connections is by meeting other moms who are hyperlocal to you and who share your interests and general sensibilities. If you’re looking to meet up with other moms in your area who like to run, knit, or do something esoteric, and that group doesn’t exist, start one yourself! You’d be surprised how many people out there are looking to connect with you.
4. Set up an easy means of communication for the group. If you are social media people, set up a Facebook page, a meet-up group, or a GGMG sub-group. If not, set up an email list or group text and go to town.
5. Once you find some people to meet up with, make a regular time to get together and stick with it. Some people are more likely to organize get-togethers than others. Identify who they are within your group and put them in charge of communication, or take turns organizing. It can take two months or more before something feels like a routine, so keep it up.

“When people say, ‘it takes a village to raise a child,’ they are not joking.”

keeping the conversation real. We talked about our struggles with breastfeeding and formula, the sleepless nights, teething, navigating all the relationships in our lives now that we were moms. We were each other’s confidants and back-up babysitters. Years later, we advised each other on preschools and how to deal with younger siblings. We were and still are each other’s village. Some of those moms are still my closest friends today, more than six years later.

Jessica is a copywriter, copyeditor, and mom to two little social butterflies. When she’s not hanging out with her family, you can find her compulsively organizing get-togethers for herself and everyone she knows.

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Seeking Answers in Ancestry May Yield More Questions

It's never been easier to trace your heritage via DNA, but what does that actually mean? Does it really work? And is it worth it?

By Sandy Woo

On an otherwise prosaic ride home the other day, my 6-year-old son sang-hummed Lizzo's "Truth Hurts," complete with "I just took a DNA test, turns out I'm 100 percent that [unintelligible]..." Fortunately it was the kid version (yes, there is one), and I didn't have to explain anything. It's official: DNA testing is pop-culture cool.

According to *MIT Technology Review*, more than 26 million people have taken at-home DNA tests by 2019. That's a lot of saliva—about 67 thousand gallons, if that's a better visual. Approximately 80 percent

of these tests were done on U.S. citizens, estimates The International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISOGG). Or, as a new Pew Research Center Survey found, about one in seven U.S. adults (15 percent) say they have used a mail-in DNA testing service from a company such as AncestryDNA or 23andMe. The popularity of these tests is only growing, particularly as the holidays arrive and people buy and receive these kits as gifts.

As a genetics geek, I am alternately fascinated and repelled by such testing, particularly since these tests are often

packaged with mostly recreational health information. In researching this article, I hovered over a 14-day free trial, wavering and waffling. After all, what would I find anyway? And could I trust the results? Ultimately, would I want this information?

Why do it?

The answer to this question seems fairly obvious. Any Google search yields a plethora of reasons. Many people unofficially report at cocktail parties that they did the test "for fun." Based upon the above cited Pew Research study, about 87

percent of mail-in DNA testers report wanting to know about where their families came from, 36 percent wish to know due to medical or health history, and 36 percent also say they want to connect with relatives they didn't know about (numbers not meant to add up to 100).

Julia Becker, a genetic counseling student who received an ancestry kit as a birthday present, muses that she "held on to it for almost a year and finally sent in my DNA. I think it was just out of curiosity, but maybe also because I was sick of looking at it on my bookshelf."

Local mom Karla (not her real name) was a "sympathy" tester. "I did the ancestry test mostly to support my husband in doing it," she says. "My mother-in-law had been trying for more than 20 years to find the child she had given up for adoption. She asked my husband and his brothers to do the test with her to try to find her adopted-out son. For myself, I was curious about the process of testing, and I thought it might be interesting to see my ancestry results. My grandfather was an orphan, and he had no information about his background—not even where he was born."

The drive for wanting to know where we come from is strong. Possessing this knowledge may have a therapeutic effect as well. A 2010 Emory University study showed that when children know stories about relatives who came before, they demonstrate higher levels of emotional well-being. This study is often used to promote DNA testing even though it didn't

specifically look at the psychological benefits of DNA testing to gain information about family. The benefits found in this study were gained the "old-fashioned" way, from conversations and family research through genealogy. Ancestry testing hadn't even really taken off yet then.

Is the testing reliable?

People often ask how can DNA results be wrong—it's a code after all. Answering this question is complicated and "the devil is in the details."

The DNA testing used by ancestry testing companies uses SNPs (single nucleotide polymorphisms), which are natural DNA spelling variations. A nucleotide is a chemical base that make the backbone of DNA. The SNPs are chosen due to their frequencies in a specific

"It is best to take percentages with a grain of salt, especially if they don't match up to traceable family history."

geographical population. Once a SNP is established as common in a population, it may have some significance or importance. It becomes an ancestry informative marker (AIM) if it exhibits substantially different frequencies between different populations. Proportion of ancestry derived from each population can be estimated from a group of AIMs.

Using SNPs allows for quicker and more cost effective testing, but that also means large amounts of DNA are not being used

by the services. Each company has its own proprietary platform and algorithm for interpreting the data. Unlike DNA sequencing, mail-in DNA tests are only looking at certain variants across an entire genome. Variants first need to be identified prior to any interpretation. To use a simplistic analogy, it would be like just checking the spelling of five out of the 10 words in a sentence. Perhaps there are errors in other non-checked words as well. This type of DNA testing is different from clinical gene sequencing, which spells out every letter of each word in the sentence, after which the results still need to be interpreted for significance. This is also one of the reasons why health information from such testing can be wrong.

The testing companies compare your DNA to a sample population, which is derived from a current population in a specific region that self-report the length of time their families have lived there. This is based on the assumption that people living in the area thousands of years ago would have the same DNA. The

probability of DNA being from a certain country is based upon comparing your DNA to their private database. The larger the company's database, the more likely the results will be accurate. On a related note, to find the most number of relatives, it is best to also test with multiple companies.

Camille Penrod, Senior Public Relations Specialist of Ancestry, says, "Determining AncestryDNA ethnicity estimates is not a guessing game. The estimate is based on shared DNA, probability, statistics, and ongoing research and science. AncestryDNA calculates your ethnicity estimate by comparing your DNA to a reference panel made up of over 40,000 samples from people with a long family history in one place or as part of one group."

Can the results be believed?

Many testing companies report that their estimates are 99.9 percent accurate, which simply means true. For example, a test is accurate if it reports someone's ancestry is European. Precise is the exact determination of ethnicity. (Some companies may list several hundred regions on their reports, but have only tested 20-30 regions, and





then list the countries in the regions without actually testing each country's DNA). This means that determination of ethnicity can be imprecise—Spanish versus Portuguese, for example.

An algorithm essentially takes a best guess at ancestral makeup as populations are deeply connected to one another. Since some places have very little genetic variation (Irish versus English), these percentages can vary from test to test, sometimes wildly so. It is best to take percentages with a grain of salt, especially if they don't match up to traceable family history.

Karla's results somewhat surprised her. "For the most part, my ancestry results matched what my parents had always told me. I was quite surprised, though, to discover that I am [about] 20 percent Spanish/Portuguese. This surprising information prompted my daughter to do a deep genealogy search over a summer... she found no evidence of any Spanish/Portuguese ancestry in her eight generation search. A year or two later, I got an update from the ancestry service saying that I was no longer 20 percent Spanish/Portuguese. That 20 percent is now German."

Most DNA testing companies provide more detailed results for people of European ancestry since this testing was initially only available in the United States. Understandably, the lowest concordance is with individuals of South Asian, East Asian, African and Hispanic descent. In certain populations such as Ashkenazi Jewish, values less than 2 percent are very unreliable. These companies recognize this racial bias and have goals to increase collection of samples from these regions.

This incomplete information is one of the reasons Emily Chen, clinical geneticist and co-director of the Regional Genetics Molecular Laboratory at Kaiser Permanente has expressed hesitation with testing. "The data are incomplete and biased due to insufficient data, so the results may not be accurate, and the results are dependent on what the testing platforms are."

Other concerns about testing?

Privacy is often a given reason for hesitation on such testing. The fine print details what each company does with your data. This data is a valuable asset and is sold to other companies, which can then do what they wish to your data. Data privacy, such as HIPAA, doesn't apply to direct-to-consumer testing. The scope of what each company can do with your data is broad, and it would be wise to carefully read the privacy policy of each company. Some companies may allow law enforcement to search the database while others don't allow it without a warrant. Recently, a judge ruled that these databases could be searched without consent. Data breaches are a real concern as well.

Julia expresses this sentiment. "To be honest, after doing the testing I

Family Tree DNA (Gene by)	
Middle Eastern	0%
Asia Minor	< 2%
East Middle East	0%
North Africa	0%
West Middle East	< 1%
European	96%
British Isles	51%
East Europe	18%
Finland	0%
Scandinavia	24%
Southeast Europe	< 2%
Iberia	3%
West and Central Europe	0%
Jewish Diaspora	0%

immediately had a tinge of regret. For one, it didn't give me any information I didn't already know, so its value to me was pretty minimal. I've also realized that I didn't fully consider the potential repercussions of giving my DNA to a profit-driven business like 23andMe. I'd like to think that they have de-identified my DNA and that it couldn't be used in a detrimental way either to me or anyone else, but I really have no way of ever knowing that now."

Another major area of potential surprises is finding long lost relatives. "Family matches are incredibly reliable. If you and another person are matches, it means that you both share DNA from one or more recent common ancestors and are related in some way," says Penrod of Ancestry. People can opt out as Karla did. "The test results and new family connections can have an impact on your identity. And whatever you discover, it is not just your information, it also ripples out to your people. I think we learned it is important to be mindful about these issues, before choosing to do the test and after."

Turns out, I am 100 percent...

Unconvinced. After all that research, I'm fairly certain that my results would be 'boring.' My ancestry is Chinese as far back as I can tell. I suppose it would be fun for me to discover that I'm a descendant of an emperor, but it's doubtful there is enough reference data for that. The potential for finding unknown family members was far too anxiety producing so that was never a draw. (My mother disappeared from my life at age 10.) I am ultimately ambivalent about my DNA resting in some company's database; this feeling is my own personal discomfort, curiosity be damned. On the other hand, my husband has ordered a DNA testing kit, under a pseudonym. Unfortunately, the kit was returned because his company didn't recognize said name. We are still waiting for the test laboratory to resend it so he can donate his spit. My curiosity remains unquelled at this time.

Sandy is a sometimes genetics junkie who is eagerly awaiting her husband's ancestry results.

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Building Your Local Mom Village, According to Research

Friendships are built through a delicate balance
of introspection and outreach

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

In September of 2019, an anonymous post on the GGMG forums caught my eye:

“Where and how does one make friends? Is there any hope? I used to post on Craigslist [SIC] 15 years ago for book group friends, but that seems weird now. I tried organizing book groups and wine nights through GGMG, but came up short. Many moms are busy and at this age, already settled with family and friends. School events are a bust too. At the annual fundraiser, moms who knew each other stuck together. I tried to have some small talk, but it went nowhere. And then there were the other events at school amounting to one play date here and there and then crickets, sigh. I tried to make friends in my neighborhood playgroup and I’ve been to a few events but no one really stuck. It’s so hard making friends!”

It’s an all-too common vent echoed far and wide, especially in urban areas like San Francisco, where the bulk of the adult population has moved for work-related reasons—in fact, only 37 percent of San Franciscans were even born in California—so close ties and family networks are far away. The ease of making friends during childhood gradually evaporates as opportunities for daily interaction and socializing that a school or campus

environment used to provide gives way to the responsibilities and formalities of the professional world. Studies support the notion that our social bonds are diminishing. A 2006 article in the *Journal of Sociological Review* showed that nearly 10 percent of adults in 1985 self-reported that they had zero confidants. About two decades later, this number jumped to 25 percent. In a grim and lonely reality check, it would appear that one out of four American adults have no one to talk to about the real things that matter.

Other life transitions like marriage, childbirth, and aging parents further erode our capacity to make meaningful new friendships. However, these very friendships and connections are critical during life’s major transitions...and as research shows, to

studies on the causes of friendship conflict and found the most common reason for problems was due to time commitments. Our schedules may simply be too full with balancing soccer games, weekly swim classes, and the demands of school and work. In her November 2019 article “Why You Never See Your Friends Anymore,” Judith Shulevitz makes the claim that our overburdened schedules are taking a dire toll on American society. In it she writes, “A calendar is more than the organization of days and months. It’s the blueprint for a shared life.”

Author Jenny Odell writes in her book *How to Do Nothing* about the “opt out” movement. Proponents call for people to “reject our culture of busyness and reject the notion that our every minute should be

down. Rather than fantasizing about our child becoming the next Simone Biles, maybe the entire family could benefit if Wednesdays are allocated to a weekly game night with a few neighbors instead.

Form social groups in your sphere

Dutch Sociologist Ruut Veenhoven is the founding director of the World Database of Happiness and a founding editor of the *Journal of Happiness Studies*. In a recent report, he determined that Denmark has some of the happiest people in the world. One reason is that 92 percent of its population belongs to a social group, including things like book clubs, sewing circles, sports, and cultural interests.

How is this different from the schedule cluttering discussed above? One key difference is to strategically limit after-school or evening activities to the ones that will yield the most social connection. Also, consider focusing more on existing social groups within your sphere: your child’s school, your neighborhood, your church. Toss out the dance class that has a small group of bored parents from all around the city sitting on a bench staring at their iPhones, and start rallying the soccer moms at your kid’s school to form a book club. Finding your next BFF at a weekly dance class is less likely when no one really talks to one another and the kids scatter to different schools during the week. It is infinitely more possible with other moms from your child’s school when you already have built-in Saturday hang

“...having a bigger network of friends and acquaintances
can lead to greater happiness overall.”

our overall happiness. Nicholas Christakis at Yale found that relationships are the number one promoter of happiness in life. According to his study, having a bigger network of friends and acquaintances can lead to greater happiness overall. This includes one’s number of friends, closeness of friends, closeness of family, and relationships with co-workers and neighbors.

“Once I became a mom, the saying ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ sounded less like a nice little proverb about the value of community and more like a warning to parents. Seriously, you can’t do this alone,” writes Kally Anderson in her 2017 article, “They say it takes a village to raise a child. But what if you don’t have one?”

Heeding Anderson’s warning, there are a number of actions moms in San Francisco can take to intentionally build up and fortify their village. While making, keeping, and strengthening our friendship bonds may seem like work no one quite has the time for, committing to a few key actions may actually make things much simpler. Our lives and happiness quite literally depend on it.

De-clutter your schedule

Arizona State University Anthropology Professor Daniel Hruschka reviewed

captured, optimized, or appropriated as a financial resource by the technologies we use daily.”

A mother who bemoans that fact that she has no friends will never be able to overcome this predicament if she’s never available for that impromptu mani-pedi date or a ladies night out. It may be time for American moms to go Marie Kondo on our calendars, thank those activities and extracurriculars for what they brought into our children’s lives, and consider paring



time on the sidelines of the soccer field. Indeed, while it may seem like more work, starting your own group with folks in an existing circle might actually be one way to ease the logistical burden of adding another activity to your plate. You can choose the shared interest, meeting location, meeting days and time and people to include. Socialization occurs largely on your own terms and you can work it around your own family's needs.

Finally, consider stepping up your friend game at work. After all, for many people that is where most of our daylight hours go. As a parent, happy hours may be a thing of the past, but what's stopping you from organizing a weekly outing to try a different restaurant (gasp!) outside the workplace cafeteria or rallying a few folks to check out the next Daybreakers event and do some early morning yoga and dancing before hitting the desks?

Check in regularly

If you want to stay close friends with someone, how often do you need to check in? A group of physicists from the University of Notre Dame studied over 2 million people and 8 million phone calls made amongst their sample group, noting frequency of calls to the same number. From this study, they determined that the leading cause of pervasive friendships was reciprocity, or put more simply, returning a friend's communication. When the phone data was drilled down even more, they saw a pattern in which people with the most consistent and pervasive friendships had a habit of checking in with others in their network an average of once every two weeks. Those who did not have this habit saw their friendships fade over time, as measured by decreased frequency in phone calls to those same numbers.

What about people who simply had more social ties in general? Are they barely skimming the surface of deeper connection, accumulating more superficial ties within their larger number of casual acquaintances? The answer is no. The research shows that having an even greater number of connections generally showed a proportionately greater number of closer connections.

In short, people who are more adept at making friends and casual acquaintances



are also better at keeping them, or turning those casual acquaintances into friends. The key action among these “super-connectors” was the frequency and reliability of a returned phone call. So how to translate this into mom-life? Consider putting a weekly reminder in your calendar and dedicate a small block of time twice a month to reaching out and saying hello.

Honor and enhance your commitments

In an analysis of the often quoted University of Kansas study that concluded it takes approximately 40-60 hours to form a casual friendship, 80-100 hours to become a friend, and 200+ hours to become a good friend, author Wanda Thibodeaux breaks down what this actually means for the average person. Using the Bureau of Labor Statistics time use study that states people spend an average of 39 minutes a day socializing with others, she makes the bold claim that it would take two months of spending time with someone every day to become casual friends. A more realistic amount for most people might be once or twice a week, meaning it could take over a year to make a single good friend, with deeper friendships taking up to five years. Frequently jumping from one commitment or opportunity to the next, whether it's a hobby, neighborhood, activity, social cause, or job, is what is wreaking havoc on our social lives. It may be time to slow down and stay put and honor the commitments we already have on our plates, or at least give them time to marinate.

So once we've decided to commit to a social group or school community, how do we enhance this commitment? Consider going digital. Offer to start a Facebook or email group for your child's class and send a periodic community-building question out, like “What's everyone planning to do for Halloween?” or “What's one thing you are looking forward to for the long weekend?” Don't just volunteer in isolation for a one-off event like setting up for the school carnival, but rally a few other parents in your child's class to join you for the explicit purpose of getting to know one another.

It takes work to have a strong marriage. Couples often schedule things like regular date nights or enlist the support of professionals to help work through communication issues. There are countless books on the keys to finding love and having a successful partnership. The same can be said about friendships. Making and keeping friends in San Francisco may indeed be getting harder and harder. After all, skyrocketing housing prices are driving families out in droves. This is all the more reason to heed some of the advice above and take a few small, deliberate and ongoing steps to slowly build that mom tribe and keep it going for years to come. Now if you'll excuse me, it's time to go make a few bi-monthly friend-phone-calls.

Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss is an educational consultant, friend-fanatic and mother of two fantastic little friends she and her husband made themselves! Find out more at jenniferkuhrbutterfoss.com.



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This FREE Seminar is for you!
You will learn all about Marin's:

- Public Schools and Preschools
- Communities and Towns
- Microclimates
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January 14th, 10am
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This free informational presentation is provided by Liz McCarthy, Marin local expert, mom and Top Producing Realtor.

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COMPASS

A photograph of a family of four playing outdoors. A man is lifting a young girl into the air, and a young boy is holding a camera. A woman is also visible, smiling. They are in a park-like setting with trees and a fence in the background.

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Connecting Across the Chasm

Learning to Reconcile Different Parenting Styles Between Partners

By Victoria Dvorak



One of my biggest fights with my husband began one night as I was buried torso deep in a corner cabinet trying to fish out old checkbooks. My husband was sitting at the dining table, and my stepdaughter came out modeling an outfit for a concert she was to attend the next day. “Dad, I’m going to wear these shorts. Don’t freak out.” My husband looked at her for a moment. “I think maybe you should find something else to wear.” “Dad, come on. I don’t have anything else to wear.” “What about jeans?” “Daaaad. I don’t want to wear jeans. So can I wear these?” “Well, I’d like you to try and find something else.” “You always do this. You always say no. Why can’t you just say yes like mom? What if I pulled them down so they’re longer? Or what if I put on bike shorts underneath so you can’t see anything?”

“Ok, show me what that looks like.” She came back. She and I knew the bike shorts were getting ditched the moment she was out of the house. “How’s this,” she asked. “I don’t—” my husband started to speak. Then my own voice pierced the room. “For crying out loud! No! You can’t wear those shorts. Either find something else to wear or don’t go to the concert!” These were the words that flew out of my mouth in extreme exasperation after listening to this verbal tug-o-war. Out of earshot of my stepdaughter, I said to my husband: “Goddammit! Why do you always have to let her do that? You let her control the situation and then I have to be the bad parent!” “What? I thought I was telling her she couldn’t wear the shorts?” “Um, no. You were *negotiating*. What’s there to

negotiate? Didn’t we give her the guidelines when we agreed to the concert?”

“Well yeah, but she was going to wear bike shorts underneath.” Cue scene in head of imaginary strangulation of husband’s neck.

The last thing I wanted to do was get in the middle of my husband and stepdaughter’s argument and then fight with my husband after. My husband doesn’t just say “no” to his daughter. He negotiates and mediates, which opens the door for pushback and accusations. In contrast, I find giving direct answers leaves little to no room for negotiation. We didn’t just have different parenting styles. Our parenting styles were like the East African Rift Valley. We were two divergent parental land masses pushed apart, fueled by forces well beyond our control.

Parenting styles explained

No one plans to fight with a partner over parenting, so how do so many of us get here? Different approaches are one culprit. Parenting differences cause fractures in families. Children are experts at identifying these differing styles and exploiting the situation to their own benefit. In the 1960s, a clinical and developmental psychologist created what would become one of the most commonly referenced parenting styles by category. Diane Baumrind classified parenting styles into four broad categories: Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Uninvolved.

The Sound Of Music cast provides a good cheat sheet. Authoritarian is Captain Von Trapp. He’s strict and rigid about rules. He’s punitive, communication is a one-way street to his children, and he’s not a warm

father. Frauline Maria is the authoritative parent. She has boundaries. She’s affectionate, loving, and warm. Communication with children is a two-way street and she’ll remind you of the rules with a song. The character Max Detwiler, who plays the entrepreneurial family friend, is like a permissive parent. He’s more friend than parent. Do what you want, kids—mom and dad are on their honeymoon. The uninvolved parent can also be defined as uninterested.

Case studies in parenting styles

I did an informal poll. Of the couples I spoke with, all had talked about what they wanted their family life to look like to an extent: Would they attend church? Would they participate in sports? No one discussed how to parent together.

Elizabeth, mother of three, is an authoritarian-authoritative parent, or in simple terms, strict, warm, communicative. Her husband, Peter, is either all strict or all

“Understanding the root of one’s own parenting style can lead to a more empathetic view of our partner’s style.”

uninvolved; his behavior varies according to the gender of his children. Elizabeth feels Peter unfairly focuses on their son, devoting time and energy to his activities and entertainment while spending time with their girls seems like a chore. Furthermore, Peter’s patience with his girls is thin. “Peter goes from zero to punish”, sighs Elizabeth. “But I think he’s getting it. Our youngest said ‘bye uncle’ one day.” Ouch.

And what about therapy? “It’s not going to happen. Peter won’t go. There’s so much to get through, not that we could go anyway...I think it would take us years to even get to our parenting differences.”

Family systems like Elizabeth and Peter’s are common, and couples with babies can be even more volatile, because parents suffering from exhaustion and shifting hormones are more likely to fight while impaired. Jenni and Taylor are new parents to Mae. Their parenting differences



were immediate. “We got home from the hospital and within two nights, I was daydreaming about putting a pillow over Taylor’s head while he slept,” Jenni confessed. Then, in a hurried whisper, “I bet I could get away with it too!” Jenni is not homicidal. She’s a new mother suffering from the I-want-to-kill-my-incompetent-spouse-

syndrome, or simply, co-parenting postpartum. Things continued downhill. Everything, from how often to change Mae to free-range versus helicopter parenting, bubbled to the surface, and soon they were spiraling out of control.

How to parent together effectively

So what can couples do when co-parenting fails and different parenting philosophies affect the union to the point that they start daydreaming about first-degree murder or divorce? And what if, like Elizabeth and Peter, therapy just seems impossible or the problems seem insurmountable?

There are no quick fixes, but there are some basic couple agreements, grounded in respect, that I learned about from a co-parent counselor.

1. Fight fair. What this looks like in action are with “I feel” statements as opposed to “You always/never” statements.



Mirroring your partner’s grievances also helps. If you can see that your partner can accurately mirror what you just said, it helps to feel heard.

2. Don’t undermine one another in front of the kids; it’s easy to back-pedal with kids, but it’s harder to ameliorate your partner feeling invalidated. (This was my faux pas in the step-daughter fight.)
3. Agree on a few rules. Jenni conceded to let Taylor do things his way, even if it means he royally screws up. Agreements, even small ones, are the base that strong unions are built upon.

Parenting styles are heavily colored by our own childhood traumas. Alice Miller, researcher and author, once said, “Children are the garden of the parents’ unconscious.” Miller maintains that childhood traumas are messages stored in our unconscious and manifest when we become parents. If unresolved, we parent under the shadow of our childhood fears. Furthermore, these same fears bubble to the surface when we are in conflict with our partners, especially when the conflict deals with parenting differences.

It’s easy to see examples of this phenomenon at work. My husband and I got into what most would consider a minor exchange. The kids get a couple of vitamins daily. Because he wasn’t paying attention, my husband gave the kids a full dose of melatonin. Matter of fact, it was three times the dose I would normally prescribe. My frustration was immediate. I rattled off all the obvious: It’s too much, it’s as-needed, not nightly, youngest has never taken melatonin and has basically gone from none to a full knock-out dose. My anger took me by surprise. After all, logically speaking, the kids were not in danger. The melatonin were mine, and confusion was easy as I take melatonin gummies made for kids. Aside from what most would consider an upside (very sleepy children), it was an honest mistake. But I was angry because my narrative of him in this moment became the narrative of my childhood: he’s asleep at the wheel; therefore, he’s not safe.

Pain and denial is a universal language. Finding a therapist—or as Miller radically calls it, an “enlightened witness,” who understands and continues to address the

couple’s own childhood traumas—is akin to finding a compass while adrift at sea. Of course therapy is a luxury, and if it’s not an option, reading books by enlightened people, like Jancee Dunn, Alice Miller, and Cheryl Strayed, will provide a light in the tunnel.

Understanding the root of one’s own parenting style can lead to a more empathetic view of our partner’s style. In the present, being cognizant of my narrative and recognizing where my husband is coming from helps to redirect anger when he makes a decision with which I completely disagree. If the too-short shorts scenario were to take place today, I am confident that I would not undermine and engage. I’d bring it up later in a neutral space, like I started doing not long ago. We don’t always agree, but we’re stronger because one of our pacts is to not break team in front of the kids. I’ll take that as a win.

Victoria, mother of three girls and one tortoise, cooks well, bakes badly, lives in SF, and loves fog.

From the Forums

Offbeat Ways We Met Our Partners

It’s not all freshman bio seminars or online matchmakers—many of us originally connected with our spouses or partners in unusual ways that cover the spectrum from weird to whimsical. Here is just a sampling of the fun, fortuitous, costumed, and occasionally absurd ways that members of the GGMG community met The One (or in some cases, The First One).



My senior year of college, I finally had a single room, but was in a dry spell. (My line was, “I’m celibate by choice. Someone else’s.”) A friend said he’d give me two beers if I got someone to sleep in my bed. Some cute random Swede was visiting my old roommate and so I told him I’d give him one of the beers if he slept in my bed. We ended up getting married a few years later. I was with him for 10 years (pre-kids)—longest one-night-stand ever!

A Halloween rave.



My husband was my customer at the restaurant I worked at in college. He came in every week and sat in my section, but never asked me out, even after we flirted back and forth for hours each time he came in. I finally took matters into my own hands and purposefully served him a few too many drinks, told him to pick me up on Saturday for a date, and the rest is history! Although he likes to joke and tell people he was tricked into the relationship, we’ve been together 14 years!



My husband and I went on Semester at Sea (different colleges) and met at a portside bar in La Guaira, Venezuela, where the clientele was a mix of college students from the ship, men working on large vessels docked there, and working women. They served beer through bulletproof glass. It was certainly an experience I will never forget!

Bay to Breakers 2008!



Roller disco!



He pulled me out of a cab and invited me for a drink. That was almost 20 years ago. We just celebrated our 16th wedding anniversary.



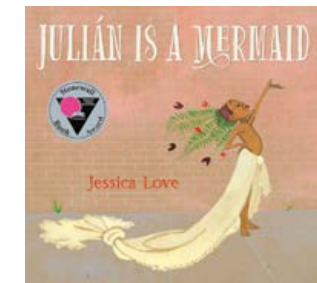
I’d been posting on a Dave Matthews Band message board with him since, like, 1998. Around 2001, we started chatting via AIM [Editor’s note: AIM stands for America Online (AOL) Instant Messaging for the young folks!]. We chatted for nearly a year before I came out to SF to meet him. Our first date was a picnic at the Palace of Fine Arts. We would travel around the country going to Dave Matthews Band concerts together.

White elephant sex-themed party!



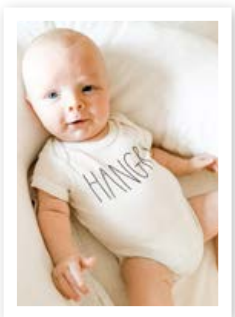
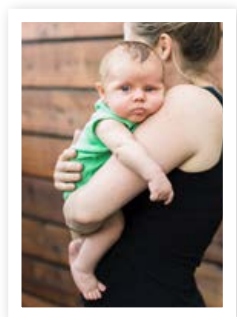
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Gender is More Than Binary



As kids learn about the world, they naturally have questions. Some of these are complex, including questions about gender and identity. It's important to note that gender is not binary: there are more than two genders. Many cultures across the world celebrate a variety of genders. Gender Spectrum out of Oakland offers a wealth of resources about gender (genderspectrum.org). As its website explains, "Understandings of gender continually evolve. In the course of a person's life, interests, activities, clothing and professions that are considered the domain of one gender or another evolve in ways both small and large. This has perhaps never been more true than it is now. The data show that today's young people have significantly different understandings of gender than previous generations, with consequences for all children, families, organizations and institutions." For parents, books such as *Julian Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love, *The Boy and the Bindi* by Vivek Shraya, and *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel can help open the conversation with kids. Any way you choose to talk about gender with your kids, know that the conversations may evolve in complexity over time. Acknowledge the things you don't know, and as you reflect on conversations, reframe things you wish you had said differently. We are all learning together.

NEW ARRIVALS



Sarah Woock Browne **Baby Laszlo Daniel**
Gillian Bruce **Baby Jack Thomas**
Geri H. **Baby Wilhelmina Oriana**
Laura K. **Baby Margaret Elise**
Catherine T. **Baby Ercole Quang Thái**

Congratulations to **Catherine T.!** She will be getting joyful moments captured by Anna Munandar from Mini Anna Photography. Anna specializes in capturing joy and every milestone in your family, from birth to college. See her work at www.minianna.com.

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at tinyurl.com/ggmgnNewArrivals.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Invite GGMG to your Event

The Social Media Committee is thrilled to be supporting all GGMG committees and volunteers by attending various GGMG events (albeit behind our cameras and phones), and by documenting the hard work of our volunteers in real-time. If you'd like someone from the Social Media Committee to be present at your GGMG event, give us a holler in advance, and we'll do our best to make it happen. We'd like to remind you that requests for publicity on social media should be submitted at least one week before the event to be promoted.

- All requests should include the following:
- the exact wording to be used for the brief description;
 - for events, the name of the event, date, times, location, and any link to the GGMG calendar, Eventbrite, etc.; and
 - any images to be used.

We'll make sure your post is taken care of, on the appropriate channel, within 72 hours of receipt.

Our engagement on all forms of social media has steadily increased. We now have over 1,300 followers on Instagram and nearly 6,000 on Facebook. Remember to like/follow us @ggmgf (we're on Twitter too!) and post GGMG event pictures with #ggmgf.



MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT

Take Five Minutes of Joy

Diapers, cooking, errands, work, packing lunches, camp sign-ups, cleaning house, laundry, tantrums, scheduling, etc. Self-care? Every mama knows that feeling of being harried, stretched too thin, and constantly running from chore to chore or place to place to keep the family happy. Over time, our bodies and minds get worn down and it becomes harder and harder to bounce back from these times of stress and exhaustion. These are the moments when it's most important to take five or ten minutes to yourself to enjoy life's little luxuries—like energy shots for the soul.



Try these tips the next time you need a moment of sanity:

- Meditate: take deep breaths and visualize your favorite place
- Give yourself a sheet mask or hand massage with your best lotion
- Write down what you're grateful for today
- Do three sun salutations
- Read a magazine article
- Order dinner from your favorite restaurant
- Turn on a favorite song and just dance
- Eat a "mommy-only" chocolate treat
- Text or phone a dear friend or family member

Remember that you can always reach out to us if you need additional moments of sanity. We're also looking for volunteers, should you be looking for a rewarding way to give back! Contact us at member.support@ggmg.org.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Volunteer with the Social Events Committee

Do you love planning a good party? Know what makes an event amazing?

We are looking for enthusiastic people to join our social events team. If you are someone with excellent organizational and follow-up skills, outstanding communication skills, and if you can multitask, be an effective communicator, thrive under the pressure of tight deadlines, and handle and deliver on multiple projects simultaneously, send us an email at RSVP@ggmg.org.

The role includes partnering with brands, creating relationships with influencers, and helping with social media strategy, etc. Come put your amazing party planning skills to use with us!



MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Build Your Mom Village



The Membership Engagement Committee welcomes new members and helps them meet other moms face-to-face, turning online connections into real-life friendships. There is nothing quite as rewarding, bewildering, and isolating as being a new mom, but having the support and kinship of other mothers sharing the same experiences can make all the difference. We are excited to help you find that support system and build your mom village! We facilitate this by organizing three types of events each year: Newborn Playgroup Formation events for new moms, Mom & Toddler Playgroups, and Member Mixers. These events are posted on ggmg.org and on our Facebook page. Please RSVP for all events through ggmg.org.

We also send out new member welcome emails and membership perk emails to remind all members of their membership benefits, which are also listed in the membership perks section on ggmg.org. We have great partnerships with vendors and service providers who offer special pricing or discounts for GGMG members.

Our goal is to engage moms in the early stages of motherhood. If you have questions or want to learn more about volunteering for our committee, please contact us at playgroups@ggmg.org.

Neighborhood Groups

East of Divisadero (formerly N1)
Marina, Cow Hollow, Fisherman’s Wharf, Russian Hill, Nob Hill, North Beach, Chinatown, Cathedral Hill, Fillmore, Japantown, Western Addition and Hayes Valley, and surrounding neighborhoods

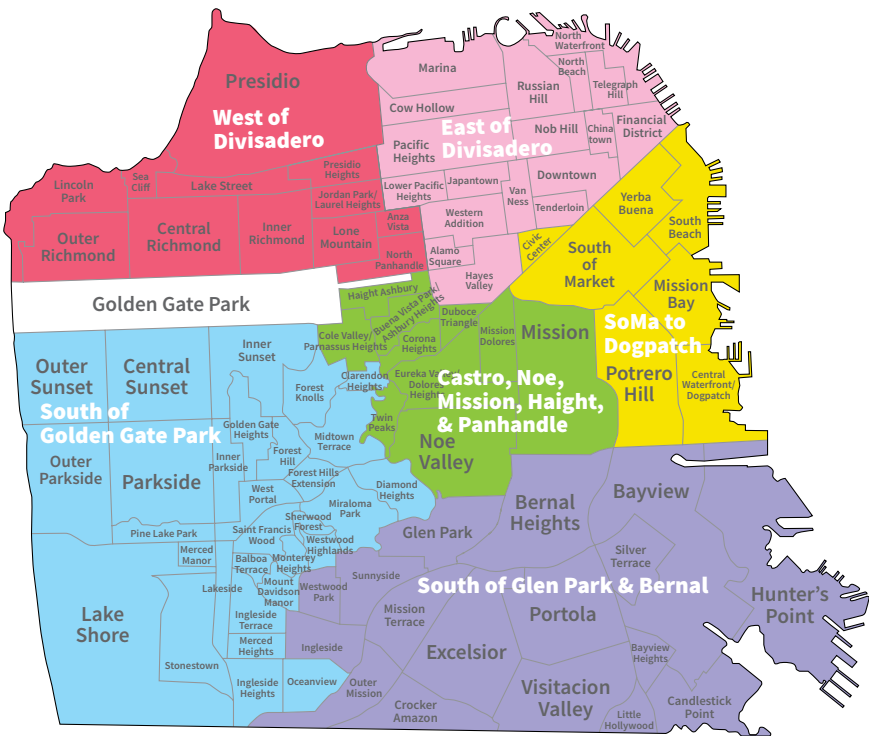
West of Divisadero (formerly N2)
NoPa, Laurel Heights, Pacific Heights, Lower Pacific Heights, Presidio, Richmond, Sea Cliff, and surrounding neighborhoods

SOMA to Dogpatch (formerly N4)
Civic Center, South Beach, SoMa, Rincon Hill, Mission Bay, Potrero Hill, Dogpatch, and surrounding neighborhoods

Castro, Noe, Mission, Haight, & Panhandle (formerly N5)
Castro, Noe, Mission, Duboce Triangle, Lower Haight, Haight Ashbury, Cole Valley, Panhandle, Twin Peaks, and surrounding neighborhoods

South of Golden Gate Park (formerly N6)
Balboa Terrace, Forest Hill, Laguna Honda, Lakeshore, Inner/Central/Outer Sunset, St. Francis Wood, Miraloma Park, Parkside, West Portal, Clarendon Heights, Golden Gate Heights, Midtown Terrace, and surrounding neighborhoods

South of Glen Park & Bernal (formerly N7)
Bernal Heights, Glen Park, Excelsior, Outer Mission, Mission Terrace, Ingleside, Sunnyside, Westwood, Visitacion Valley, Bayview, Portola, Crocker-Amazon, and surrounding neighborhoods



Coffee + Stroller Walks

Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee, and enjoy a stroller walk together?

GGMG Neighborhood Meetups Committee is organizing a stroller walk for you! There are multiple meetup locations throughout the city. Participants meet on the **third Wednesday of the month at 10:30 a.m.*** Visit the GGMG calendar to RSVP. Please select your designated meet-up locations so we can connect you with other moms in the neighborhood the day before the walk.

- Baker Beach Stroller Walk**
Meeting Location: Bazaar Cafe, 5927 California St.

Bernal Stroller Walk at Precita Park Cafe & Grill
Meeting Location: Precita Park Cafe & Grill, 500 Precita Ave.

Bernal Stroller Walk at Pinhole Cafe
Meeting Location: Pinhole Coffee, 231 Cortland Ave.

Cole Valley/GGP Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: Flywheel, 672 Stanyan St.

- Duboce Stroller Walk**
Meeting Location: Duboce Park Cafe, 2 Sanchez St.

Lower Pac Heights Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: b. Patisserie, 2821 California St.

Marina Green Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: Peet’s Coffee, 2080 Chestnut St.

Mission Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: Dolores Park Cafe, 501 Dolores St.

- NOPA Stroller Walk**
Meeting Location: The Mill, 736 Divisadero St.

***Noe Stroller Walk (second Monday of the month)**
Meeting Location: Bernie’s Coffee, 3966 24th St.

Richmond/Golden Gate Park Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: Rise & Grind, 785 8th Ave.

Sunset/Golden Gate Park Stroller Walk
Meeting Location: Beanery, 1307 9th Ave.

Evening



December Wine Night and Holiday Party
South of Golden Gate Park neighborhood is hosting our annual holiday party at the home of Dru Garza, who is again graciously opening her home to us. Join us and meet some new moms in your neighborhood or catch up with old friends you haven’t seen in a while. GGMG will provide light refreshments, beverages, and of course, bubbly! Feel free to bring a bottle to share if you like, but it’s not necessary. We will also be having our white elephant gift exchange; please bring a wrapped gift (\$25 or under) if you want to participate. Participation is not required. In addition, GGMG members will be preparing tote bags to support the Project Night Night drive. Exact location will be provided to those who RSVP a couple days prior to the event.

DATE: Tuesday, December 10
TIME: 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
PLACE: Details provided to registrants
COST: FREE



Weekend

de Young Family Art Making
The de Young Museum offers free family programming on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit the drop-in Family Art Making tables to explore a theme related to the art in the permanent collection or special exhibitions. Family Art Making is free and open to the public, and GGMG meets on the first Saturday of the month for a fun time together!

DATE: Monthly on the 1st Saturday
TIME: 10:45 a.m.
PLACE: de Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, meet in the lobby
COST: FREE

The first 2 RSVPs win a beverage from the cafe.

Weekend Playdates: Messy Art Lab
Looking for something to do Sunday afternoon after your little one’s nap and before dinner? Sunday Afternoon Open Studio Playdate at Messy Art Lab is the answer!

Messy Art Lab is a process-oriented art experience, focusing on the exploration of materials, colors, textures, art recipes, and all the squishy-gooey-messy stuff kids love to get their hands on. All materials and art supplies are non-toxic and made from scratch. Tickets for this event are steeply discounted at only \$5 (normally \$20). All ages welcome. Must RSVP and pre-pay.

DATE: Sunday, December 1
TIME: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
PLACE: Messy Art Lab, 345 Judah St.
COST: \$5 per child. Parents and caregivers FREE.



PARTNERSHIPS

Playdates at Recess
GGMG members get free access to Recess Collective’s play space with pre-registration, on Thursdays from 1:30-3:30 pm (limited to 6 members per day).

DATE: Every Thursday
TIME: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
PLACE: Recess Collective, 2226 Taraval St
COST: FREE, Must RSVP at <https://bit.ly/2r3JET6>

Saturday Playdate at Peekadoodle
Free Saturday playdate for GGMG members only at Peekadoodle’s new 2500 sq. foot outdoor play area, which includes a sandbox and other interactive play areas. For ages 0-5 years.

DATE: Saturday, December 7
TIME: 9 a.m. to noon
PLACE: Peekadoodle, 4228 Geary Blvd
COST: FREE

KIDS ACTIVITIES

Holiday Cookie Decorating at Macy’s Union Square
Calling all mini chefs! The Kids Activities committee is hosting a holiday cookie decorating event at Macy’s in Union Square. We will provide pre-made cookies and all the decorating accessories. There will also be light refreshments and a photo booth. Please join us for this special holiday event and create your one-of-a-kind festive cookie creations with sprinkles, icing, and all the bells and tinsel! This event is limited, so please be sure to RSVP to reserve your spot.

DATE: Sunday, December 8
TIME: 10 a.m. to noon
PLACE: 170 O’Farrell St.
COST: FREE but please register at gmg.org



CAREERS

Moms Networking December Downtown Lunch
Join us for this month’s moms lunch get together at Boudin at 4 Embarcadero. Please look for the GGMG Moms Networking Group sign on the table to find us. We usually sit in the back section at this location. We look forward to seeing you there. Everyone is welcome, from pregnant moms to working moms to stay at home moms and everyone in between!

DATE: December 10
TIME: Noon to 1 p.m.
PLACE: Boudin, 4 Embarcadero Center
COST: FREE but please register at gmg.org

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

GGMG Volunteer Project: Ages 4 and Up at the Food Bank
Join GGMG families and their kids 4 and up in a fun morning of giving back to the community. Please note that the food bank requires one parent per child 10 and under. We will be either sorting fruit (or vegetables) or packing food to go to various community organizations.

DATE: Sunday, December 15
TIME: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
PLACE: SF-Marín Food Bank, 900 Pennsylvania Ave.
COST: FREE but please register at gmg.org

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

LGBTQ Playgroup – Toddler with Me: Music & Movement Class
This music and movement class for LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers with toddlers promotes children’s overall development. Using creative physical expression, these classes promote gross and fine motor skill development, coordination and balance, as well as early literacy, pre-math, and social-emotional skills.

Participating families will receive **5** free passes to the playspace, and can also take advantage of In-A-Pinch Child Care courtesy of OFC!

DATE: Friday, December 6
TIME: 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
PLACE: Recess Collective, 2226 Taraval St.
COST: FREE

Monthly SF Queer Family Meet-Up and Playdate
Join queer families at Community Well (www.communitywellsf.com) for our monthly gathering which includes casually mingling/ chatting, a snack “potluck” (where people bring something light to share), discussions on agreed upon topics, and just sharing unique experiences and issues we have encountered as queer families.

Currently, a majority of families in the group have babies 3 years of age or younger, but all queer families are welcome!

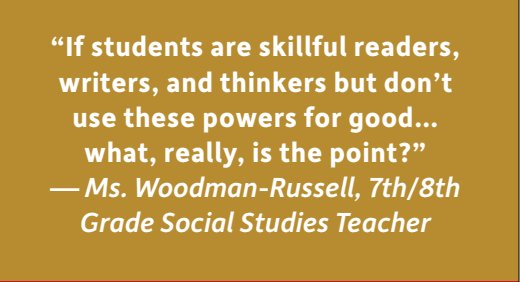
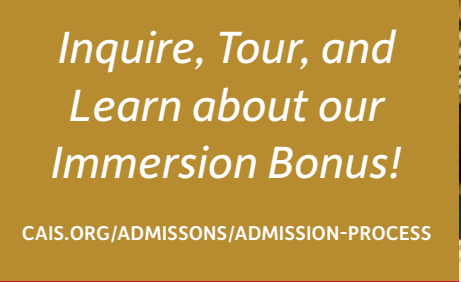
DATE: Saturday, December 7 and Saturday, January 4, 2020
TIME: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
PLACE: Community Well, 78 Ocean Ave.
COST: FREE

Drop-In Support for LGBTQ+ Parents
Enjoy a meal with your kids and other LGBTQ2SIA families, then parents and caregivers break off for facilitated discussions about family and child-rearing issues with their peers. This monthly group is held the 4th Tuesday at Our Family Coalition. Dinner begins at 6:00pm and the parent group will start at 6:30pm to allow ample time for discussion and peer support. First-time participants will need to complete a brief intake upon arrival.

Dinner and child care are provided FREE with advance registration at least 24 hours in advance. Please register all family members who plan to attend, including any dietary restrictions as well as ages of children, so staff can make arrangements. For more information, contact SF Programs Coordinator, Jeannette Page at jeannette@ourfamily.org or 415-981-1960 x309.

DATE: Tuesday, January 28, 2020
TIME: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
PLACE: Our Family Coalition’s Main Office, 1385 Mission St., Suite 340
COST: FREE

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Remembering Dad

By Jenny Shaw

My dad passed away a few months ago, after suffering a bad fall and breaking his neck. He had been facing a long, painful recovery when he passed suddenly, sparing himself months in a rehab facility and the prolonged anguish of his family. Our family's mourning was tinged with a bittersweet relief. We began losing him more than five years ago when Alzheimer's began taking over his brain. He was the same person, and yet he was not. As I've mourned the passing of my dad, I've sometimes wondered, which dad do I miss? The dad in my memories, or the dad that could have been, had he lived out his life with his memory intact?

Before he descended into dementia, he granted me power of attorney. It was all I could do to manage his care during those long years. Everything seemed like an emergency, be it a nighttime call from his memory care facility or one of his doctors calling to discuss a change in his medication. I had little free time outside of work and



By the time he died, it had been several years since I'd known the dad I grew up with. He was a nerdy engineer who thought nothing of wearing socks with sandals and always sported a pocket protector. He drafted in his home office while listening to classical music, saved money by fixing our cars in the driveway, and was always ready with a supply of "dad jokes." He was also a fervent lover of nature who took us on road trips to national parks and the California seaside whenever he could. He would shout to us with childlike excitement when he spotted a sea otter along the Monterey coast, or a crab hiding in a tidepool, or a small waterfall in Yosemite Valley. These are the memories that have come flooding back to me as I've gone through photos for the memorial service, as I've read over old emails I printed out 20 years ago, or as I've reminisced with my sisters. With him gone, I've found the mental space to process the ordeal of the last several years. I've finally had a moment to remember the dad he was for so many years, which got obscured while I was consumed with the dad he became as he aged.

A couple months before he died,

I took him to a doctor appointment. He walked slowly and with a walker. As we sat in the waiting room, he asked me the same questions a few times, which was normal by then. He didn't remember that I was married or that I had two children. When the nurse called us in, he shuffled slowly, pausing every few seconds to look at his surroundings. I walked ahead of him and urged him on. It was not unlike walking with my 2-year-old daughter or 5-year-old son. Once in the room, he sat quietly and asked more questions, sometimes repeating them. I looked at him with worry, wondering if he'd allow the medical staff to examine him. A nurse came in and asked him to hold out his arm so she could take a blood sample. Without missing a beat, he looked her straight in the eye, held out his hand, and said, "That'll be FIVE DOLLARS, please." We all laughed. My old dad was in there after all.

"Who knew that the same tactics prescribed for a 3-year-old can work just as well with an 80-year-old?"

raising my infant son, so that time spent on my dad got whittled down to business tasks only, like taking him to doctor appointments or having conferences with his care team. There weren't many opportunities to simply hang out together.

My dad slowly lost his cognitive faculties, starting with short-term memory loss. By the end, he still recognized me, but his brain blurred the lines between our family—my mom and sisters—and his parents and siblings. Alzheimer's had also stripped away my dad's social filters, and his behavior became more childlike—he had difficulty understanding why he had to do routine chores like going to the doctor and tending to personal hygiene, and as a result, he would often get angry or pitch a temper tantrum. Luckily, I'd been reading up on dealing with toddler tantrums. Who knew that the same tactics prescribed for a 3-year-old can work just as well with an 80-year-old? I was often struck by the parallels between the behavior of a person with dementia and that of a toddler.

Jenny is a scientist, editor, and a reluctant member of the Sandwich Generation.



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