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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

Within These Walls

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a mom to three kids, two cats, and one dog and loves discovering new things about her city daily; hidden San Francisco staircases are her latest obsession.

One of my favorite childhood movies was the 1987 Hallmark version of *The Secret Garden*. I always hoped that one day I'd peel back a bush along my fence line and discover a hidden latch to a secret garden of my own, a private place where I could escape and explore. Though that particular fantasy remained elusive, I made a remarkable discovery early in my childhood: the magic closet. This closet snaked from my bedroom along the inside

wall of the house, around several corners, ending at a hatch halfway up the staircase between the first and second floors, at least 15 or 20 feet

from where it started. **“Sometimes, in order to learn about yourself and the immense expanse of your imagination, you don't even need to leave the house.”**

At some places, the closet was big enough to store large furniture, but at other points, the walls and ceiling became so narrow that my small body could barely squeeze through. It was a strange feature of an old one-room schoolhouse renovated in the '70s by a friend of my parents, a friend with big ideas but no training in architecture. To a child's mind, this closet was a magical portal.

My childhood was spent exploring the closet. Sometimes these journeys were private—I once dared myself to spend the night in a sleeping bag alone deep in the closet, confronting my fear of total darkness. I dragged in mattresses and

cushions and created forts and rocket ship command centers with friends. We created storefronts and obstacle courses and pretended we were bunnies burrowing underneath the earth. We pretended we were evil agents and “captured” relatives walking down the stairs. We then negotiated for their release. The closet fueled endless adventures and opportunities to discover the characters inside us.

Our writers in this issue harness the power of discovery across a broad range of subjects, looking both inward and outward to provide opportunities for us to learn about ourselves, each other, and the world around us. Yuliya Patsay takes the cringe out of the topic of puberty as she explains different approaches to guiding our children and ourselves through this important and sometimes bumpy stage of life. H.B. Terrell offers ideas for family adventures around the Bay and beyond that provide an opportunity to discover the history of the land and its inhabitants. And from the archives, Shaheen Bilgrami takes our taste buds on a world tour, sharing tips for introducing young eaters to foods from different cultures, broadening horizons one bite at a time.

I learned a lot from my closet. I learned to be less afraid of the dark. I learned how to share space and ideas with friends and family, and sometimes cede creative control. And I learned that the most exciting and memorable explorations don't necessarily occur on a grand scale. Sometimes, in order to learn about yourself and the immense expanse of your imagination, you don't even need to leave the house.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD:

Expanding Borders

By Connie Lin



When she was a child, Connie spent many summers in the hot sun playing competitive fastpitch softball; she hopes her kids might find a sport they love as much.

This is one of my favorite times of the year, when there are more sunny days, the hills are green, and the flowers are blooming. With so much to do and see in San Francisco and the Bay Area, my family has been eagerly waiting for the rain to subside so that we can be outside again. On a warm weekend day with extended family in town, we caught the ferry to Angel Island from San Francisco, hiked to the top of Mount Livermore, and marveled at the spectacular

360 degree views of San Francisco and Sausalito before a quick picnic and the hike down. Long summer days are perfect for enjoying San Francisco's many parks. Golden Gate Park is blooming with gorgeous colors, and a stroll along Lands End to savor the view is magical with a warm cup of coffee on a Sunday morning.

Summer is also a wonderful time for my kids, when they get to try new things and expand their borders while school is out. While it would be simpler to pick a single camp for the entire summer, my kids are excited to have a smorgasbord of

different summer camps to experience, from bike camp to sleep away camps in the woods to Pokémon camp and sports camps. They'll get to practice making new friends, learn from a variety of counselors and teachers, and develop new skills and hone ones they already have. I can't wait to hear what new talents they discover along the way.

GGMG's community is another way to broaden your horizons. In June and July, there are neighborhood meetups nearly every week, and stroller walks and playdates galore to get to meet more mamas and families. Try out our online

“Summer is also a wonderful time for my kids, when they get to try new things and expand their borders while school is out.”

forums and connect with other GGMG moms to trade tips on sleep habits, favorite brunch spots where you can eat outside with your dog nearby, where to go for a fun day off, and so much more. Add your own tips and tricks, buy (or sell) baby and toddler gear, and find out where the next mommy meetup will be.

Enjoy the sun when it peeks out from the fog, and I look forward to seeing you at our GGMG events!

HOUSEKEEPING

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This issue made possible by: School fundraising, memoir writing, teenager taming, managing life with 2 kids under 2, long distance swims boot camp on a tiny Greek island

COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography
Models: Carolyn King, Sunny Driver (2 years)

I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Ice Cream (or Sorbet or Gelato)

By Christine Chen

Salt & Straw (Pacific Heights and Hayes Valley): Salt & Straw began as a food cart in Portland, Oregon, and has since expanded to multiple locations across many states. It has a cult following for its focus on handmade, small-batch ice cream with unique seasonal flavors. Lines are a frequent occurrence at the Pacific Heights location, particularly after school.

Philmore Creamery (Lower Pacific Heights): Husband and wife owners Phil and Mona Malik have created the best gelato in San Francisco. Shockingly uncrowded, the gelato and sorbet are all made onsite and the smoothest ever! The chocolate and lemon flavors are so intense it is like eating a chocolate bar or freshly-picked lemon!

Swensen's (Russian Hill): Established in 1948, this is the original location of the Swensen's franchise and is always a fun visit with cable cars going by. Swiss orange chocolate chip, lemon custard, and lychee are unique flavors not easily found elsewhere.

The Baked Bear (North Beach): Ridiculously large ice cream sandwiches that you can custom-make with a large variety of cookies or a brownie are a decadent option for kids and adults alike. I highly recommend sharing to try a variety, especially if you have young kids who can't or shouldn't finish the ginormous sandwiches before they melt.

Amorino Gelato (Union Square) is a French gelato shop founded by Italians. I first had the gelato in the Marais in Paris and was thrilled when they opened a location in San Francisco as they now are a global phenomenon. The beautiful flower-shaped scoops on a cone are a sight to behold, with the rose flavor delightfully French. They also offer sorbets and macarons as a bonus. It's worth braving the tourists for a visit.

Toy Boat by Jane (the Richmond) is the revived version of this long-running classic ice cream shop by the owner of SF mini-chain Jane the Bakery. Reopened in September 2020, the vast toy collection has been preserved and this location sells local ice cream favorites from Mitchell's, Double Rainbow, and Hometown Creamery. In addition to ice cream sundaes, it's a great place for Jane's baked goods, to-go sandwiches, and salads.

Joe's Ice Cream (the Richmond) has been a classic family-run scoop shop since 1959 and offers burgers, sandwiches, and salads to go as well. While most flavors are classic Americana, they do have a few that are uniquely San Francisco such as wasabi, chai tea, and sweet red bean.



Bi-Rite Creamery (the Mission): Small-batch, seasonal, hand-made, and local ice cream draws lines out the door and down the block with people waiting for tastes of salted caramel and balsamic strawberry, two of Bi-Rite's most popular flavors, or the more unusual options like basil and honey lavender, my personal favorite. Go to Bi-Rite Market Divisadero for a less crowded ice cream experience.

Smitten Ice Cream (the Mission): Owner Robyn Sue Fisher created and patented

the liquid nitrogen machine that makes ice cream in front of you in about 90 seconds, much to the entertainment of both kids and adults. The only downside is no samples. Both classic favorites like chocolate ganache and salted caramel are supplemented with seasonal options.

Garden Creamery (the Mission): Churro-like chimney cones, made with sweet yeast dough baked and covered in cinnamon sugar are worth having just on their own! The unique and vast selection of flavors includes matcha with toasted rice, black sesame, Mexican and Manila mango, salted plum, and Thai tea, reflecting the background of the owners, one of whom grew up in Hawaii.

Mitchell's Ice Cream (Noe Valley): A family-run, classic ice cream shop that has been open since 1953, Mitchell's is known for its Mexican, Peruvian, and Filipino options, including horchata, Mexican chocolate, lucuma, coconut, and a special bright purple ube with its own fan following.

Double Rainbow (Castro): Originally founded by two best friends in the Castro in the 1970s, it is known for its combo flavors such as strawberry matcha, chocolate raspberry, and peanut butter and jelly.

Polly Ann Ice Cream (the Sunset): Spin the wheel to decide which of the more than 500 rotating flavors to try. Open since the 1950s, Asian flavors like durian, lychee, and jasmine are local favorites.

For those with nut allergies: Dairy-free or vegan options may use cashews, which may not always be well-labeled or known by the servers.

Christine is partial to fruit or floral flavors while her two kids are staunchly chocolate fans.

Ferry Adventures in the Bay

By Sonya Abrams

Bridge and tunnel traffic got you down? Ditch your car and explore the Bay Area by boat. A network of ferry companies connects downtown San Francisco and Fisherman's Wharf to Sausalito, Tiburon, Angel Island, Vallejo, Angel Island, Berkeley, Alameda, Oakland, and Richmond. So put on your walking shoes and grab your bike helmet (space permitting, all local ferries allow bikes on board), and head out on the open seas—er, bay. Here are a few ideas to jumpstart your imagination.

The Golden Gate Ferry whisks passengers from San Francisco's Ferry Building to downtown **Tiburon** in roughly half an hour, with gorgeous views of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and Angel Island along the way. Once in Tiburon, stop by Sam's Anchor Cafe to enjoy brunch al fresco (ask your server for free popcorn for the kids), then stretch your legs with an easy half-mile walk up to Old Saint Hilary's Preserve, featuring 122 acres of trails overlooking the bay and a historic chapel dating back to 1888.

On the weekends, ferries depart the Ferry Building in San Francisco for **Oakland** from roughly 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., offering ample time to explore Jack London Square. Set your sights on Plank, a can't-miss gathering spot, with food, fire pits, bocce, bowling, backyard summer BBQ, and live entertainment. Watch the clock, though, because it's 21+ after 8 p.m. If you're craving more time on the water, stop by California Canoe & Kayak to rent kayaks, standup paddleboards, and more. They also offer classes. Reward your children's good behavior with a stop at Ben & Jerry's before heading back to the city.

Hop on the San Francisco Bay Ferry for a day out in **Vallejo**, an hour-long journey. Dine and imbibe at the Mare Island Brewing Company, with locations next to the Vallejo Ferry Terminal and on

Mare Island, 15 minutes further by ferry. Built in 1854, Mare Island was the first naval station on the West Coast and is open during the daytime for exploration, featuring art studios, a distillery, tours of historic naval sites and infrastructure, and walking trails.

Craving more American history? Then hop on the 35-minute San Francisco Bay Ferry to **Richmond**, where you and your little history buffs can visit the Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historic Park. Learn how Americans back home supported the war effort through interactive displays. Then satisfy rumbling tummies at Assemble Marketplace, a small nearby food hall offering everything from BBQ to oysters to standard bistro fare.

Angel Island is in full swing in summer, so hop aboard the San Francisco Bay Ferry and enjoy the island life (a quicker ferry operated by a different company runs between Tiburon and Angel Island as well). Explore miles of hiking trails on foot or take advantage of bike rentals on the island, including a new fleet of electric vehicles. Visit the immigration station and other historical landmarks. There is a small cafe offering light fare, and check the events calendar, as live music can sometimes be on offer during summer weekends.

Sonya is a mom in San Francisco to three very quickly growing kids and loves introducing them to new adventures around the bay and beyond.



Photo by Niagara



Ocean Conservation

With Laure Latham



Laure Latham is a nature and lifestyle blogger at FrogMom, the honorary secretary of the Serpentine Swimming Club in London, and the co-founder of Veeveo, an electric vehicle startup. She wrote Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area, was featured in National Geographic as a guest writer, and was invited as an expert to discuss ocean conservation and swimming at the Lloyd's Register Foundation Safer World Conference. She is currently

training to swim the English Channel as a solo to raise funds for The Nature Conservancy.

At what age do kids show an interest in ocean conservation?

There is no minimum age, as most kids love playing with water, but generally, toddlers “get” the concept of caring for the ocean. Board books are an ideal way to expose young ones to ocean creatures and develop their understanding of the ocean, an essential stepping stone into ocean conservation.

“[My girls] would spend a long time gazing at small colorful creatures living in tide pools at low tide, learning about their habitat and marveling at their diversity.”

Families in the Bay Area are blessed with having the Pacific Ocean on their doorstep and one of the best things you can do is take a day out on the coast. Whether it's a Santa Cruz tide pool day, a Crissy Field picnic day, or an Año Nuevo elephant seal day, being by the ocean gets your little ones used to the idea that the ocean is part of their natural environment. It's easier to care about a place that you are familiar with.

How did you get your kids involved in ocean conservation?

Tide pools were probably my girls' first window into the ocean. We would spend a long time gazing at small, colorful creatures living in tide pools at low tide, learning about their habitat, and marveling at their diversity.

Every time I took my girls to the beach, I packed a trash bag to pick up plastic trash washed up on the sand. Now, whenever they spot plastic waste outside, they are real ocean stewards and pick it up so it can be recycled or disposed of properly. Beyond talks about ocean plastics, sustainable fishing, and coral bleaching, I've also taught my girls to respect the power of the ocean, to spot rip currents, and to assess risks before going in.

What is the most important thing to remember when introducing ocean conservation to kids?

The opportunity to learn that our actions can have a positive impact on the environment is a privilege. Part of teaching our children to be good community members is instilling in them the value of conservation—giving them tools they can use to make a difference and protect the natural resources they hold dear.

How can I involve my family in ocean conservation initiatives?

Laminated field guides are a great entryway to learn about the ocean, enabling kids to identify sea anemones from seaweed, barnacles from starfish, crabs from clams. If you want to join volunteer projects to help protect the ocean, the Parks Conservancy, the Marine Mammal Center, and the Aquarium of the Bay are good places to start. As kids age, learning to surf or sail will teach them about ocean currents, waves, and offshore wildlife, adding another layer to their appreciation for the ocean.

How did you connect ocean conservation and swimming?

After an ice swimming event in northern England, I heard Lewis Pugh, UN patron of the oceans, tell a fascinated crowd how he pioneered some very tough swims to convince governments to protect marine areas. His “Speedo Diplomacy” secured full protection for over 2 million square kilometers of vulnerable ocean habitat. In awe, I was inspired to set my big challenge to advocate for ocean conservation too—by swimming the English Channel for charity. My club, the Serpentine Swimming Club in London, has been recognized by the International Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame for its contribution to distance swimming.

In the United Kingdom, water companies have been dumping untreated sewage directly into waterways and the ocean for the past 20 years. This has a devastating long-term impact on marine ecosystems and water quality. As a result, a lot of swimmers, including those in my club, have joined national and local campaigns to restore or protect rivers, lakes, and the coast. You can help by donating to my fundraiser for The Nature Conservancy at gofundme.com/f/dxp9xn-swimming-the-english-channel.

What are your top recommendations to protect the ocean?

Educate yourself so you can educate your kids. Watch nature documentaries together, read books, visit aquariums, and walk on the beach. Make it a family bonding experience.

Growing Pains: What's Really Going On?

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

It is a scenario that many of us have experienced: our growing children come home complaining of knee, ankle, and foot pain without any discrete injury. The pain is worse in the evening, and they occasionally wake you up to let you know. You suspect it's just “growing pains,” but no one, not even your doctor friends, can tell you what exactly that means. Are you being a good parent by listening and then telling them it'll be OK? Or might you be missing something dreadful? Let's dive in and discuss.

Growing pains are loosely defined as dull, achy pains that occur in the lower extremities of any kid who is still growing, but are most common in kids under 10 years old. They are usually not focused in one specific area, but rather in multiple places in the thigh, calf, foot, or less commonly, in the arms.

Dr. Ravinder Brar, an orthopedic surgeon at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals in Oakland, describes growing pains to families as “intermittent muscle soreness and aches of the legs. Many times they don't bother a child while they're playing and are distracted. Instead, kids may complain at night, when their mind is quiet and they're paying more attention to their body.”

Most importantly, there is no evidence to suggest that the process of growth in and of itself is causing structural injury or risk for future problems. In fact, the most common theory is that this is just children's muscles being worn out from an active day—running and jumping in a way and with a frequency we rarely achieve as adults. It's important to note that this is different from overuse injuries that occur from playing a high volume of a single sport. In those cases, we see structural changes in tendons, joints, and muscles, but these growing pains are much more likely in adolescence and beyond.

Even though this all sounds reassuring, parents aren't crazy to remain concerned. Even as an orthopedic surgeon (who shares this information with parents all the time), the episodic complaints of leg pain in Nirav's 9-year-old daughter at the end of a long day of sports gave him pause. And Brian's 8-year-old daughter would complain of achy leg pains keeping her up after flag football. So we wanted to offer more detail about when to be concerned, walking you through the checklist we use with our kids and patients.

Although each case is unique, visit your pediatrician if your child has pain that:

- occurs after a fall
- is on just one side
- localizes to a single spot
- is accompanied by visible changes in an extremity (redness, bruising, muscle loss, swelling)
- is associated with a fever
- causes a limp
- is associated with systemic symptoms (fatigue, appetite loss, weight loss)

For Dr. Melissa Zimel, an orthopedic cancer surgeon, “Red flags are pain that doesn't improve with rest and worsens over time...swelling or a mass, or fever, weight loss, or

fatigue.” While tumors are extremely rare, they are always on the radar of your healthcare providers.

Also incredibly infrequently, a rheumatologic condition is to blame. Dr. Nicole Ling, a pediatric rheumatologist, states, “The most common complaints that lead to a rheumatologic (joint) diagnosis are persistent joint swelling or limp. Many patients present to [our] rheumatology clinic with joint pain as their chief

complaint, and a minority of these patients end up with a diagnosis such as [Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis] (JIA).” So for most kids, a persistent limp and some swelling are likely your best indicator to get checked out.

Assuming it's just run-of-the-mill growing pains, as it almost always is, how do you deal with the pain? Massaging the

impacted extremities, applying ice or heat, and stretching can help. In addition, encouraging stretching can help. If pain does not resolve with these modalities consistently, ask

your pediatrician if the occasional use of ibuprofen or acetaminophen is warranted.

But really, just hang in there. And give yourself a pat on the back. These pains are a sign that your child is living an active life.

Brian Feeley, MD, is the Chief of the Sports Medicine Service at UCSF. He has five children, four in San Francisco schools and one at UCLA. Nirav Pandya, MD, is the Chief of the Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery Service at UCSF and is a father to two children in Oakland. You can find them on Twitter or listen to their podcast, “6-8 Weeks: Perspectives on Sports Medicine.”



“[T]he most common theory is that this is just children's muscles being worn out from an active day—running and jumping in a way and with a frequency we rarely achieve as adults.”

My Grief Awakened My Soul

By Elizabeth Neal

We grieve as hard as we love. That's how I knew just how much I loved my spirit babies. My miscarriages felt unsurvivable. They devastated my soul. They ripped my heart open. They left me shattered.

But I know now they also allowed me to rebuild. There's no way past or over grief, there's only through. Sorrow. Rage. Guilt. Shame. Fear. Hopelessness. Joy. Peace. Hope. Through it all. Through scalding hot showers on the tub floor with heartbreaking music blaring so I could allow myself to cry, scream, and let my rage out. Through replaying the day of my miscarriages—both from my husband's perspective and mine—to release the grief and guilt I was grappling with while receiving compassion. Rejuvenating myself with daily nature walks and reconnecting with people brought me joy to find hope. It was through honoring and releasing my grief that I've been able to find the courage to honor my babies by living fully and authentically.

With each of my pregnancies, I felt this unleashing. A fire in my belly, newfound energy and joy, a deep knowing, and a sense of freedom. I felt more empowered to say "no," trust my intuition, take risks, be afraid, and do the scary thing anyway, and advocate for myself. It was exciting and invigorating. Why am I not living life this way? What am I afraid of?

I didn't realize the real me was hiding. I was conforming to what I thought I "should" be doing. I was just existing. I was stuck in this monotonous check-off-the-list routine with 80-hour work weeks. Work. Sleep. Eat. Repeat. I wasn't truly living.

I wanted more for the precious lives growing in my belly. With each of my little loves, I had a soul awakening that brought me closer to who I was and the life I wanted to live. I

"My babies taught me how to live. Who I am. Who I want to become. And how I show up for life."

learned how to live authentically and take bold leaps, set and honor boundaries, practice self-compassion, communicate what I was feeling, and ask for what I needed.

I felt this innate desire to show my babies who their mama was and all that she is capable of. They inspired me to be better, shine brighter, and dream bigger. They challenged me to take all of the risks. They taught me to not let fear cripple me—because I've survived the unsurvivable. They helped me find who I am past all of the societal conditioning telling me who I should be, where I should be in life, and how I should act.



I made a conscious decision to leave my cushy corporate life behind for presence, joy, balance, and a lifelong dream of becoming a writer and publishing a book. I chose to put my health, happiness, and family first. Now, I feel like I'm breathing fresh air for the first time. I am unmasked. I am free.

I'm so grateful to each of these precious little souls because they have helped me come home to myself. I'm now able to bring my truest self to motherhood—and I have their sibling, my little adventurer, to join me on that journey.

Adorning a shelf in my daughter's nursery are two gemstone angels, one amethyst and one carnelian, to honor my spirit babies' birth months. She glances up at them now and then with curious eyes. One day, she and I will have a conversation about the siblings that came before her, the beautiful souls that changed our lives forever. These precious keepsakes give me comfort and serve as a reminder of the joy, love, and hope we felt with each pregnancy and my choice to honor them by living my best, fullest life.

My babies taught me how to live. Who I am. Who I want to become. And how I show up for life.

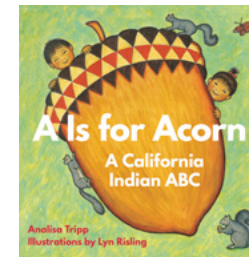
I choose to honor my spirit babies with light, love, and joy—and that's what I choose to bring to motherhood.

Elizabeth is a free-spirited creative, writer, nature lover, and mother.

California and the Bay Area

By Laure Latham

Kids are never too young to discover the world they live in. Taking place in California—some close to home, others further afield—these books offer a fun introduction to local history. Whether your little ones love cable cars, famous gangsters, or the mystery of a song, they will enjoy reading these great books.

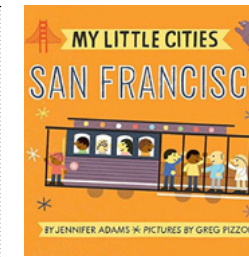


A is for Acorn: A California Indian ABC

Written by Analisa Tripp, illustrated by Lyn Risling

Discover the culture of California indigenous tribes with this child-friendly ABC illustrated in soothing pastel colors. Each letter of the

alphabet is represented by some of the elements that matter a lot within California Native culture, whether an animal, a tradition, or a plant. This book makes a great bedtime read before outdoor adventures around San Francisco. **Ages: 0 to 2 years**



My Little Cities: San Francisco

Written by Jennifer Adams, illustrated by Greg Pizzoli

Make storytime an adventure with this adorable board book. This book is packed full of famous San Francisco landmarks, such as the

Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island, a dragon dance in Chinatown, a Pride Parade by City Hall, and colorful Victorian townhouses, bringing the bustling world of the city to life.

Ages: 0 to 3 years



Maybelle the Cable Car

Written and illustrated by Virginia Lee Burton

This classic children's book tells the story of how the people of San Francisco fought to keep cable cars in the city when they were threatened by more profitable and modern means of transportation.

Featuring political activism, cable car tourism, and good old San Francisco nostalgia, this book's storytelling feels timeless. A reissue with original art retrieved from the San Francisco Public Library archives, this book is a must-have for train and cable car lovers. **Ages: 3 to 7 years**



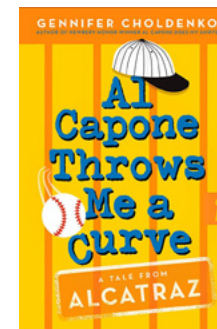
Dear Miss Karana

Written by Eric Elliott

While 10-year-old Tishmal reads *Island of the Blue Dolphins* at school, she writes emails to Miss Karana, the woman whose life inspired the book. Young Tishmal realizes that some of the words of Miss Karana's song sound very similar to Chamtéela (Luiseño), the language spoken on her reservation. Thus begins

a quest to understand the lone woman's song. This book was first written in Chamtéela and provides fascinating historical information and cultural context on a children's classic.

Ages: 9 to 12 years



Al Capone Throws Me a Curve (Tales from Alcatraz)

Written by Jennifer Choldenko

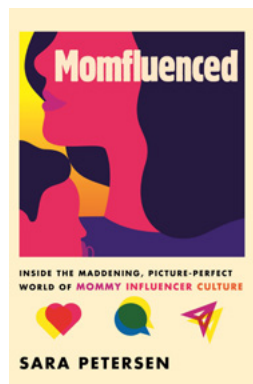
If you are planning to visit Alcatraz as a family, this book (and the others in the *Al Capone* series) is a must-read. Thirteen-year-old Moose lives on 1930s Alcatraz Island with his family. As Moose's father is a prison guard, they live with the families of other guards, and unavoidably, Moose gets to interact with some of the island's characters, including gangster Al Capone. In this book, it's the summer before high school, and Moose is dying to join the baseball team. The problem? The captain will only let Moose and his best friend on if they get him something from Alcatraz—something impossible. This book ends with historical information about Alcatraz, the guards, and the prisoners. It's a heartwarming read with a solid historical background. **Ages: 9 to 12 years**

Laure blogs on healthy living and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She is the founder of a tech startup and lives with her teenage girls in London, where she is training to swim the English Channel in 2023. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Societal Messaging: How Will You Respond?

By Gail Cornwall

What do three new titles on momfluencing, anti-fat bias, and toxic masculinity have in common? Each of these talented writers has thoughts on how societal messaging impacts us and our kids, and what we should do about it.

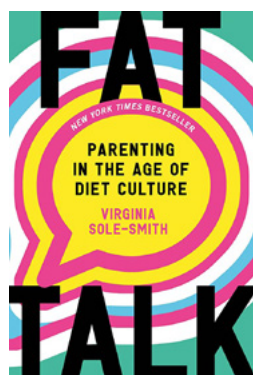


Momfluenced: Inside the Maddening, Picture-Perfect World of Mommy Influencer Culture

Imagine you have a friend who's smart and insightful, but also snarky and silly. Now imagine she gets obsessed, personally and professionally, with social media influencer culture, specifically "momfluencers." Sara Petersen is that friend. She writes, "Taza was just a person on Instagram, someone who made motherhood look way better and more rewarding than my own experience, and I wanted more. Whether that *more* was tricks or tips for figuring out how to wear my motherhood so it fit more comfortably and was more flattering, or whether that more was just a citron-yellow maxi dress or suggestions for entertaining children on an airplane, I didn't know." *Momfluenced* unfurls in this way, thinking seriously—without getting too serious—about the history of the Internet and the psychology of parasocial relationships, toxic positivity, socially prescribed perfectionism, social comparisons, and more. Each time Petersen introduces a new expert or commentator it has the flavor of "so I was at the mall and I ran into Katie, and Katie said..."

Is momfluencer culture "voyeuristic, car-crash entertainment"? Yes. Is it often an insidious exaltation of the nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and maternal sacrifice? Yes. Do we seek validation, community, inspiration, and escape, yet end up with "cringe follows" in the deal? For sure. Do momfluencers bow to consumerism and ultimately try to convince "a mom that she can cure her hopelessness by cooking and tidying up...that relief lies not in structural change but in a Nap Dress...or [that] this cleaning spray in a pretty glass bottle will transform the wiping of the kitchen island into something soothing"? A lot of them do, while waving the banner of authenticity. And yet, Petersen still sees value in being the person with wool over her eyes: "I needed to believe in a motherhood...that would fill me up, not leave me empty and searching." At the end of the day, she says, "We perform motherhood online as a way of accessing meaning when, most days, the work of motherhood doesn't seem to mean much of anything."

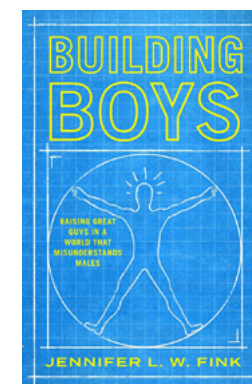
Petersen doesn't offer a verdict. She calls out many momfluencer posts' racist underpinnings, and also how social media can be an intersectional megaphone. She gives momfluencing credit as a way for mothers to get clout in a society that makes parenting "a job where clout is hard to come by." Women "controlling their own narratives and imagery" in a multibillion-dollar industry seems like a good thing. But if momfluencing can be good, how can it also induce "a perpetual teetering between self-loathing and self-righteousness" where "bursts of feeling good and of feeling bad are nearly imperceptible...but they pile up somewhere inside"? Well, Katie said...



Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture

Virginia Sole-Smith wants you to take a few minutes—a few sittings really, if you read every chapter of her well-paced book—to consider whether a lot of what you think is a well-established fact, a lot of what you think is necessary, is actually bias and bullshit. "What most of us think we know is that thin bodies are not only healthier but also more attractive and more virtuous than fat ones," she writes. "And because we've tangled health, beauty, and morality all together in this way, preventing or reversing fatness has become our most popular national pastime."

The beauty of Sole-Smith's book is that you don't have to pick up everything she's putting down to get value out of it. Just asking yourself whether she could be right about diet culture will change your life—and your impact on others' lives—for the better. Though Sole-Smith will undoubtedly make readers in bigger bodies feel more valued, that's not her only goal. "[I]t's to help parents (and anyone who cares for children) understand the impact of anti-fat bias on kids. Because once we do that, we can name it when it happens—and start to think critically about what we can do to make the world a safer and more weight-inclusive space for kids of all sizes." That's a world "where panicked parents don't lock up the Oreos. Where fat kids have a place on every team and in the classroom. Where thin kids don't think of their body size as a status they must preserve at any cost."



Building Boys: Raising Great Guys in a World That Misunderstands Males

I wish Jennifer L.W. Fink had just written a parenting book. Her prose flows well, and *Building Boys* is packed with important, research-backed advice. But it's also packed with the message that prepubescent boys are fundamentally different from prepubescent girls and need to be parented and educated differently. Fink fails to emphasize for readers the relative size of these differences—small—and the considerable overlap between school-age girls and boys—very large. She does, at one point, acknowledge the raging academic debate over whether the disparities (which show up starting in preschool) are innate or the result of being treated differently for years, and says she isn't choosing a side. But then Fink basically does, on the one hand quoting gender essentialist pseudoscience, and on the other repeatedly writing "boys xyz" when the expert quoted says "children xyz."

For parents who believe in the *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* theory, Fink's book could be super helpful, moving them toward what their kids need. And the uber-enlightened can surely read *Building Boys* for practical tips without allowing Fink's framing to sway them. But since

most people will be tempted to take her assertions as truth and since the subconscious is slippery and there are lots of implicit messages about who naturally likes sticks and roughhousing and balls, I recommend most of us to take a pass.

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.



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Wise Wandering

Educational travel can add depth to learning, foster family bonding, and expand our worldview.

By H.B. Terrell

In *Airman's Odyssey*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, "Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." This sentiment provides a synopsis of the benefits of family travel. Travel with an intentional educational focus benefits kids (and adults) through hands-on learning and strengthens family bonds through spending high-quality time together. According to a study conducted by New Mexico State University, spending time with caregivers helps children feel secure in their relationships and allows parents to get to know their children better. When families learn together, they are amassing reference points of shared experiences that are the building blocks of an empathetic family unit, i.e., love, as described by Saint-Exupéry.

Educational travel can consist of a simple excursion, such as a few hours in the Japanese Tea Garden, or a longer trip, like a visit

to the temples, memorials, and museums of Hiroshima. The key to family educational travel is learning jointly: looking outward and reflecting together. A 2019 study of 22,000 children concluded that the time parents spend with their children has a strong effect on their educational achievement. Research co-author Bruce Weinberg says, "In the ongoing debate over what helps children succeed academically, we show that genetics is not the only major factor. It is also about the time that parents spend with their children."

Outside the structure of an academic setting, kids are able to dig deeply (sometimes literally) into what interests them most—whether that consists of the tactile experience of digging for fossils in La Brea, exploring the immersive sights and sounds of the Gold Rush in Placer County, or eating the Indigenous food served at Café Ohlone, which also features singing trees, a lavish

shell mound garden, and a vibrant community space. Multi-sensory experiences help kids retain knowledge, step outside their comfort zones, and explore in a self-directed way, fostering not only knowledge but curiosity—a key component of lifelong learning.

National parks: Nature's learning lab

With more than 400 sites to choose from, national parks, monuments, battlefields, seashores, and recreation areas can be an ideal starting point for educational travel. American novelist Wallace Stegner called the establishment of the National Park Service (NPS) "the best idea we ever had" for protecting the country's natural treasures and providing access to these wild spaces. "Americans developed a national pride of the natural wonders in this nation and they believed that they rivaled the great castles and cathedrals of Europe," explains David Barna, National Park Service Chief of Public Affairs. But as NPR's Ailsa Chang points out, "...that idea came at a cost—the cost of 85 million acres that once belonged to Native Americans."

The national parks are public resources for recreation, education, scholarship, and the preservation of endangered landscapes, natural communities, and species. An estimated 60 percent include

important historical sites like battlefields, memorials, and historical homes, as well as prehistory: ancient dwellings, petroglyphs, and pictographs.

More than 150 years ago, the United States created the world's first national park across 3,400 square miles spanning Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Yellowstone National Park is an iconic site for tourists,

"Multi-sensory experiences help kids retain knowledge, step outside their comfort zones, and explore in a self-directed way, fostering not only knowledge but curiosity—a key component of lifelong learning."

naturalists, and families. However, the displacement of the Shoshone people preceded the establishment of the park, a legacy that in itself can be an education in Indigenous land rights, opening space to discuss both the colonization and forcible removal of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands, and to understand modern-day Indigenous land reclamation efforts, including the call to return the national parks to the tribes. The dissection of this history might be particularly engaging for teenagers and enlightening for parents.

Planning a park adventure

On another level, national and municipal parks are educational in their own right as outdoor splendors in varying degrees of wildness. To find national parks that are less well-known but offer the beauty of nature and the power of history—only with fewer crowds—try an advanced search on the NPS website by topic, activity, or location. Individual park websites include ideas about trails, sights, lodgings, activities, and most importantly, what to include in planning for "just in case." For all park trips, flexibility and a backup plan are key to navigating changing weather conditions, road closures, full parking lots, where to replace gear you forgot at home, etc. Don't forget to make a reservation if one is recommended.

Where to go?

Besides the renowned, (and often crowded-for-good-reason) Alcatraz Island and Muir Woods National Monument, there are

a few lesser-trod Bay Area sites to explore as a day trip.

Rosie the Riveter / WWII Home Front National Historic Site is tucked away in the cavernous Ford Assembly Plant in Richmond, one of only three tank depots in the United States during World War II. The site hosts videos detailing how life on the home front was impacted during the war as

well as interactive exhibits, including Rosie the Riveter Memorial walkway and sculpture, Shipyard No. 3, and the Visitor Education Center.

Catch a reserved shuttle to the spacious grounds of the Tao House at the **Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site** in Danville. Small tour groups mean rangers customize the information to the age of those in their group. Older teens and drama students studying his plays might be interested in the annual festival of O'Neill's work, which includes onsite performances.

Pay homage to conservationist John Muir in Martinez, exploring his ranch and catching a guided tour of **John Muir National Historic Site**. The grounds bloom with unique plants sent by Muir back to his ranch as he traveled. The Martinez Adobe on this site houses an exhibit about the 1,200-mile **Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail**.

For budding hikers, **Point Reyes National Seashore** is a sanctuary for native flora and fauna, with more than 150 miles of trails, winter whale watching, lively elephant seals, kayaking, and a lighthouse. The Tomales Point Trail is a family-friendly hike of two miles featuring perfect views of the Pacific and chances to spot native Tule Elk.

Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve (part of the East Bay Regional Park District) contains Round Top, one of the Bay Area's highest peaks composed of lava and volcanic debris. During the past 10 million years, massive tectonic forces on the Hayward and Moraga earthquake faults lifted the Berkeley hills, folding bedrock





formations and tilting the Round Top volcano complex on its side. When sedimentary rock from the Orinda Formation eroded, the Round Top volcano was exposed. Quarrying in the north half of the preserve subsequently revealed cross-sections of the bedrock geology, an essential visit for fledgling and experienced geologists to examine the history of the Central Coast Ranges.

If this day trip sparks an interest, plan a weekend trip to **Pinnacles National Park**. A two-hour drive from San Francisco, it offers 42 square miles to Yosemite's 1100 square miles, and because it is relatively newly minted (2013), it is off the radar of most folks. The park boasts a campground, several family-friendly hiking trails, and stunning flora and fauna. Pinnacles encompass the remains of an ancient volcanic field that once rested 200 miles from the current site of the park. Over the millennia, the Pacific Plate edged northward, breaking the volcanic field and carrying it to the current site of Pinnacles National Park. The park's landscape of monoliths and canyons formed as a result of 23 million years of exposure to wind, rain, and ice. Visitors can explore two talus caves created when a pair of massive boulders lodged between rock walls during earthquakes. It is home to distinctive bats, more than 400 species of bees, the once-endangered red-legged frog, and the majestic California condor.

The Amah Mutton Tribal Band and Chalton Indian Nation work on eco-cultural

restoration projects and land management. In Amah Mutton mythology, the condor (wasaka) escorted the spirits of deceased relatives to the next world across the sea. The condor ceremony was traditionally held every two years to honor and communicate with the dead. In 2011, the Amah Mutton conducted a ceremony to celebrate the return of the condor to Pinnacles after it had become all but extinct.

If a weekend of spelunking spurs your family to go further afield, drive about four hours for an extended weekend in **Lassen Volcanic National Park**, one of the few areas in the world where all four types of volcano can be found: plug dome, shield, cinder cone, and stratovolcano. The park's dominant feature is Lassen Peak, the



largest plug dome volcano in the world. The area is a subduction zone, which means that the land around the Peak is dotted with boiling mud pools, fumaroles (vents), and hot springs. Although Lassen is best known for its geology, there is also fantastic biodiversity—more than 700 flowering plant species and 250 vertebrates, and a host of invertebrates and insects—owing to the abundance of habitats within the park produced by elevations from 5,000 to 10,457 feet above sea level, varying precipitation levels, diverse rock type and soil depth, and temperature differentials.

This area spreads across the ancestral lands of the Atsugewi, Yana, Yahi, and Maidu. Tribal members have worked with the National Park Service to document collections, develop exhibits and publications, and demonstrate Indigenous cultural activities. In 2018, the Kohm Yah-mah-nee (Snow Mountain) Visitor Center became the first park facility with a tribal name.

Roam if you want to

Wherever you travel, doing so as a family with an intentional focus on educational trips can benefit kids through hands-on learning, strengthen bonds as you focus on one another, and inspire new interests and awareness for the whole family. Travel offers kids opportunities to see new things, taste new flavors, hear new sounds, and feel new emotions within the safety of the family unit.

Planning educational trips offers more benefits than the knowledge kids acquire. It helps them appreciate the differences and similarities between cultures, understand concepts or histories they learn in school in a more visceral way, ask questions, question answers, and be more thoughtful citizens of the world. Traveling as a family is precious time to put away screens and get our hands on the world, to listen to one another, learn from one another, and share these moments that often tick by so quickly that we don't notice how much time has passed. Stop and smell the roses; then share them with those you love.

H.B.'s favorite trips (so far) have been an Italian adventure through five cities, starting in Milan and ending in Naples, and an Alaskan adventure with Northern Lights! She looks forward to traveling with her spouse and daughter, once the baby is a smidge older.

The Joy of Cooking

Nicolette Manescalchi was born in San Diego. After graduating college, she attended the Art Institutes International Minnesota, where she earned her culinary degree as well as her Level 2 Sommelier Certificate from the International Sommelier Guild. After 5 years with A16 in San Francisco, Nicolette opened Le Marais Bistro. Missing the cuisine of Southern Italy, she returned to A16 a year later and became the Executive Chef of both A16 restaurants and the catering department. Nicolette started at Luke's Local in January 2022 as Executive Chef and resides in San Francisco with her husband, Nick, and their two sons.



How did you make your way toward becoming a chef?

I grew up cooking with my parents and developed a passion for it, even aspiring to become a celebrity chef. In college, I rushed through my homework so I could focus on cooking and baking. Before graduating, I was torn between becoming a chef and pursuing a graduate degree in English. My English professor asked me if I wanted the degree because I had a passion for English literature or because it would make me feel more important. I knew then that I needed to pursue my culinary passion because it was what I loved. Before starting culinary school, I landed a job as a line cook at 20.21, a Wolfgang Puck restaurant near my home in Minneapolis. I loved it right off the bat and knew I was making the right choice.

What do you do in your role at Luke's Local?

I am the executive chef at our commissary kitchen, overseeing the preparation of house-made items for our three grocery stores. My responsibilities include creating and testing recipes, training the cooks, and ensuring quality control. Sourcing high-quality ingredients is a top priority, as we value knowing their origin.

You have had an impressive career in restaurants. How has it been different utilizing your skills in the grocery industry?

Transitioning from the restaurant industry to the grocery industry has definitely been an adjustment. Now, we carefully plan our menu to ensure the food remains delicious and fresh, even after being packaged and reheated. It's been a valuable learning experience, discovering which ingredients work best in this context and understanding the impact of compostable packaging on food quality.

Another noticeable shift is in the work culture. Unlike the reputation sometimes associated with the restaurant industry, our team strives to foster a friendly, inclusive, respectful, and accommodating environment. It's been great to be part of a supportive workplace that values positivity.

Have you encountered many challenges as a woman in a field that can feel very male-dominated?

Overall, I've been fortunate to work in supportive kitchen environments that value women. However, I have encountered behaviors and comments that wouldn't happen if I were a male chef. I've been told I look too young or too pretty to be a chef, and even heard derogatory remarks about other female colleagues. My first boss told me I was "too cold." Male coworkers often used coded language to discuss the appearance of female customers. As a woman in the industry, you learn to work harder and brush off these comments to progress. There is still much work needed to improve the overall working environment and culture in the food industry. Each business must commit to the desired environment and make concerted efforts to uphold it.

What have you learned in your career that has helped you as a mom?

Patience and stress management are essential in both my professional and personal life as I balance my work as a chef with raising my two boys, ages 2 and 7. Nurturing, guiding, and collaborating with individuals of diverse skill levels, ages, personalities, and backgrounds continually tests my patience. However, I have gained confidence in handling these challenges over time.

Previously, while working in the restaurant industry, I dedicated long hours, including nights and weekends, without adequate compensation. I prioritized career over family. The pandemic abruptly changed everything. With the closure of my son's preschool and the need for in-person work, I reassessed my priorities.

I was fortunate to find Luke's Local, where I can continue my culinary journey, earn a good living, and have the family life I always dreamed of. Now, I get to be a chef, cook, and spend quality time with my family on a daily basis. It's a balance that I am grateful for.

Awesome and Awkward: Embracing and Engaging Your Child Through Puberty

Puberty has changed and so have parents' approaches towards it.

By Yuliya Patsay



What comes to mind when you hear the word puberty?

Perhaps you think back to “the talk” you had with your parents, your middle school health curriculum (and that one terrifying video), or the journey your child will soon embark on. Either way, this one word can elicit a myriad of feelings, associations, and (mortifying) memories.

Puberty is the period of time in a child’s life when they experience physical, mental, and emotional changes as they mature into adulthood. It’s a complex and multifaceted process that varies from person to person. While the transition from childhood to adulthood has occurred since the beginning of time and remained relatively predictable across generations, there are some key differences today, both in the way this generation of kids experiences puberty and how their parents support them through this life stage.

Puberty today

While adolescence has long been understood to be a period of emotional and psychological change, today’s generation faces unique stressors, mental health challenges, and increasingly early puberty.

A 2022 study published in *The Journal Pediatrics* shows that puberty is starting earlier. Using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) to track the age at which girls started puberty over a 20-year period, the study found that the average age at which girls started developing breasts has dropped by about 1.5 years since 1999. The study also found that the average age at which girls started menstruating has dropped by about 1 year since 1999. Why is this happening? Researchers are looking at obesity, stress (especially COVID-related), and environmental factors, particularly the class of chemicals known to be endocrine disruptors. For people of color, puberty can occur even earlier than their white peers due to increased exposure to stress, which may stem from or be exacerbated by discrimination, historic marginalization, and other factors.

Konika Ray Wong, founder of [Girl Power Science](#), is on a mission to flip puberty positive. Because the onset of puberty is occurring earlier, she recommends that puberty education begin earlier too,

especially since “the younger ones are more receptive and are naturally curious at this age.” As an educator, she encountered seven-year-olds with developing breast buds and third graders starting their periods. After a second grader came to her panicked that she had breast cancer after discovering a breast bud, Konika developed a curriculum for kids as young as kindergarten.

Today’s kids and teens are experiencing puberty with the challenge of being digital natives. While technology has provided both kids and parents with increased access to information, the downside is social media comparisons, cyberbullying, easy access to

“Experts agree that parents should be ready and willing to talk about things with their kids whenever they are.”

pornography, and other factors that have all contributed to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among young people. Social media platforms, for example, can create unrealistic standards of beauty and warp body image perception by distorting reality through filters. This exposure can create dissatisfaction with one’s appearance and over time negatively impact children’s mental health. Mom of two, Brandi, is particularly conscious of not making her fourteen-year-old Black daughter seem more mature than she is, so she limits and supervises screentime to preserve her childhood.

One positive change in today’s puberty experience is the de-stigmatization of menstruation. Having a period is just not that big a deal, according to Brandi, who also volunteers with middle school girls. She routinely observes these girls in their natural habitat with a confidence Brandi’s generation never had—they feel free to “walk to the bathroom pad in hand.” Period products have also been a game changer in reducing shame and embarrassment—today’s menstruators have so many options, from period underwear (and swimsuits) to organic tampons and flexible discs. They can also use technology like Flo and Teena to track their periods and harness their hormones as a superpower. Kate Bedford supports the “no big deal” approach to periods. “People have gotten periods in space with zero gravity, we can have a period and still go to volleyball practice.”

Parenting through puberty

Today’s parents are responding to their own upbringing by doing things differently with their kids. Conversations with their own parents about puberty and sex were awkward, incomplete, or sometimes flat out non-existent. These conversations were often fraught with tension, steeped in embarrassment, and came with a side of misinformation. Kira, mom to two young sons, shared that her parents largely “ignored what was actually happening,” which left her feeling scared and unsure who to talk to. Their attitudes through her struggles with acne were dismissive, telling her, “you’ll outgrow it.” Conversely, Kira

tries to acknowledge and discuss the changes her boys are experiencing, actively supporting them through the reality of their changing bodies.

Similarly, Belana, a mom to two daughters in the Bay Area, hopes her kids aren’t ashamed of what’s going on with their bodies and wants them to know that “everything is normal and it’s OK to just have a conversation about it.” Belana is not alone—today’s parents strive to be more open and honest in their communication with their kids. They want to create a supportive environment so their kids can feel comfortable to discuss anything from changes in their body to mental and emotional challenges. Belana’s personal motto is “it’s only uncomfortable if we make it uncomfortable.”

Modern parents also place a greater emphasis on empathy and validation. They seek to understand their children’s experience, normalize any challenges that come up, and validate their children’s feelings. As a result, more parents are helping to navigate this experience with patience and compassion. A 2017 study by the Pew Research Center found that 72 percent of parents believe that it is important to teach their children to be empathetic, and 69 percent believe that it is important to teach them to validate the feelings of others.

Modern parents are more likely to be aware of the negative effects of childhood trauma and there is a growing awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence.

Being the go-to puberty resource is possible, in part, to parental access to information through the Internet, social media, and the plethora of resources that simply didn’t exist for previous generations. Parents and kids can easily seek out information or create an online community for everything from answers to basic questions to unique and less common experiences. Even the advent of period products (and the accompanying websites with puberty education content) is a sign that times are a changin’.

In the Bay Area in particular, parents are more attuned to gender and sexual diversity, and work to create an inclusive environment so children can explore their identities and orientations. They have access to resources on LGBTQ+ topics, engage in discussions about gender norms, and support their children’s self-discovery during puberty.

Top tips for parenting through puberty

- Pause and reflect on your own puberty experiences. Acknowledge your child’s experience will be different from yours.
- Treat puberty as a time of openness and exploration—notice there is a joyful vibrancy to it.
- Have short, low-key conversations with kids to show you’re comfortable with the subject matter.
- Discuss how sexual curiosity (in the form of feelings, urges and arousal) is completely normal and it is okay to seek out those experiences.
- Explain non-concordance: feelings in the brain are not necessarily reflected in feelings in the genitals and vice versa.
- Celebrate the transition of puberty with your child. Gift a period pack or find a community that celebrates their transition into adulthood.

Modern parents are also more likely to emphasize body positivity—developing a healthy body image and self-esteem. Parents actively promote acceptance of diverse body types and challenge unrealistic beauty standards. This positive approach can help children navigate the physical changes of puberty while avoiding negative self-perception.

Finally, today's parents may find themselves confronting the outdated views of previous generations and may call out grandparents on harmful comments about gender identity, sexual orientation, and body sizes. Kira has pushed back with her own parents to normalize things like her sons wearing nail polish.

Talk it out

The only thing parents shouldn't do regarding puberty is avoid the topic completely. Experts agree that parents should be ready and willing to talk about things with their kids whenever they are. Anya Manes, an educator for parents and kids on sex and relationships, encourages parents to become fluent in terms like biological sex and gender identity to have

informed discussions. Talking about puberty and sex with kids might bring up big feelings for parents. Anya encourages parents to work through those feelings with a qualified therapist or even a good friend to avoid passing them down to their children. She puts it bluntly, "It's your job to break the shame cycle."

Shame can occur when kids don't understand what's happening to their bodies. For example, if a boy wakes up from a wet dream and doesn't have context for what is going on, he may think he's wet the bed at an age where bedwetting no longer occurs. He may believe his wet dreams are shameful. When parents talk about these changes with their kids, they interrupt the association with shame. The absence of parental action can send a negative message.

Kate Bedford, a puberty and sex educator puts it thusly, "You are your kids' first and best sex educator." Talk to them before they talk to Google. She encourages parents to talk about the easy stuff first—like puberty. "Talking about puberty and all that comes with it like zits, boobs, and periods are the deposits you make in

the bank so that later you can make withdrawals as you get into the harder topics—safe sex, consent, etc."

Ultimately, puberty is a time of transition to adulthood. Kate reminds parents how hard it is to be a kid in an adult-centered world—adults can choose how to spend their time, what to eat, and who to hang out with. One way to approach talking about puberty is to emphasize all of the cool things kids will have to look forward to as they become adults like a job they love, hobbies, a partner, or a family. She muses, "an entire world that you didn't even know you were missing out on opens up to you, and I'm not talking about sex, but things like trying a grown-up dish at a restaurant." To get psyched about parenting through puberty, think of it as an opportunity to slowly meet the adults your kids will become and to share more parts of the world you love with them.

Yuliya (rhymes with Goo-lia) grew up in a small town in the former Soviet Union and learned English by watching Star Trek. At the core of everything she does is storytelling and as a voice actor, she lends her voice to tell the stories of brands and characters of all kinds.



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Content as a conduit for conversation

An excellent way to broach some tricky topics is to explore content together and use it as a springboard for conversations.

Books

One in a Million – A First Book About Periods by Konika Ray Wong
It's Not the Stork! A Book About Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families, and Friends by Robie H. Harris
It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Health by Robie H. Harris
It's So Amazing! A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families by Robie H. Harris
Sex is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU by Cory Silverberg
Girls & Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape by Peggy Orenstein
Boys & Sex: Young Men on Hookups, Love, Porn, Consent, and Navigating the New Masculinity by Peggy Orenstein
Celebrate Your Body (And Its Changes, Too): A Body-Positive Guide for Girls 8+ by Sonya Renee Taylor
Rebel Girls: Growing Up Powerful: A Guide to Keeping Confident When Your Body is Changing, Your Mind is Racing, and the World is...Complicated by Nona Willis Aronowitz
Calling the Moon: 16 Period Stories from BIPOC Authors by Aida Salazar and Yamile Saied Mendez

What's the Big Secret?: Talking about Sex with Girls and Boys by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

Boys Will be Human: A Get-Real Gut-Check Guide to Becoming the Strongest, Kindest, Bravest Person You Can Be by Justin Baldoni

TV/Movies

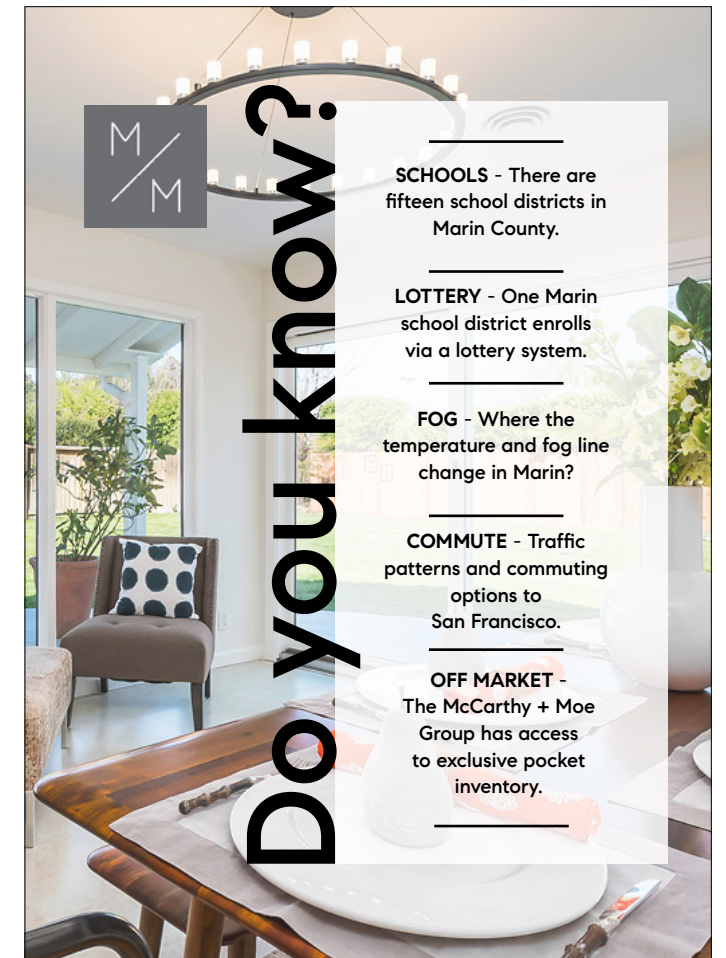
Turning Red
Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.
"The Summer I Turned Pretty"
"Never Have I Ever"

Podcasts

The Puberty Podcast
Amy Lang's Bird & Bees & Kids

Media

Amaze
Girlology
Ooma (a clothing brand) has a [puberty portal](#)



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The World on a Plate

Connecting food with cultural education is an engaging (and delicious) way for kids to explore our multicultural world.

By Shaheen Bilgrami

Photographs by Petra Cross Photography

Originally published in the December 2017 / January 2018 Food for Thought issue. This piece has been edited for accuracy.



When I moved to San Francisco from the United Kingdom, I was excited to meet people with interesting and different cultural and culinary backgrounds. New friends exposed me to new cuisines—South and Central American food, Burmese food, and regional cuisines from the United States. Once I became a mom to a child who is extremely wary of new foods, I found myself trying to think of innovative ways to make her more interested in the bounty that surrounds us. I wanted to ensure she had a healthy appreciation of her Indian and French heritage, and I wanted to pass on my love of food itself. By connecting food with cultural education, my daughter became much more interested and engaged and willing to try, taste, and experience new things.

I spoke to a number of fellow GGMG moms and food experts who agree that this immersive, multi-sensory experience appeals to the naturally curious mind of a child. Stacie Dong, co-founder of A Little Yumminess blog and cooking school, met her co-founder, Simran Singh, when their children were in the baby and toddler years. Coming from different cultural and culinary backgrounds, they bonded over a shared passion for food, leading them on many gastronomic adventures with their children

throughout San Francisco. Their blog and cooking school came about because so many friends started asking them to recommend interesting food finds and fun foodie places to go with kids. Stacie says that the great thing about food as a medium to teach children about different cultures is that “it’s hands on, accessible, and it’s good for any age.”

Founder, CEO, and Chef Instructor Vanessa Silver of Culinary Artistas also utilizes the link between food and culture in her programs. In fact, Culinary Artistas hosts a Global Goodies cooking camp where kids can “journey to new parts of the world, broaden your palate, and discover new dishes from countries across the globe!” Read on for some tips, tricks, and activities for kids of all ages (and their parents).

Read all about it

Expose your children to books that include interesting foods and be inspired to buy and taste the foods mentioned after reading about them. The *World Snacks* board books series by Amy Wilson Sanger are particularly good for babies and toddlers. Topics are global, from *Chaat and Sweets* (Indian) to *Let’s Nosh!* (Jewish) to *Yum Yum Dim Sum* (Chinese).

For preschoolers, select picture books that feature a particular food, such as *Dragons Love Tacos* by Adam Rubin, *Bee-bim Bop!* by Linda Sue Park, *Cora Cooks Pancit* by Dorina K. Lazo Gilmore, or *Round Is a Tortilla and Noodle Magic* by Roseanne Greenfield Thong. After reading together, cook the featured food or sample it at a restaurant. Use the holidays—any holiday—to broaden your search for new and interesting foods you might not otherwise encounter, especially for holidays you don’t typically celebrate.

Stacie Dong also suggests that the simple act of looking at international cookbooks

with kids can be a fun activity. Let them pick out what dishes look yummy and guess what they contain. Older kids can select recipes they like the look of and think about the ingredients required to make them. Is it possible to cook this at home? What ingredients do we need to buy?

I also discovered the fantastic series of picture books by Norah Dooley, which includes *Everybody Cooks Rice*, *Everybody Bakes Bread*, *Everybody Serves Soup*, and *Everybody Brings Noodles*. These stories function as the perfect starting point to investigate foods that are common to multiple cultures. For example, select breads from different countries and compare and contrast each kind as you think about the cultures that eat them. What dishes are they served with? How does the climate of the bread’s origin affect its appearance or taste?

“By connecting food with cultural education, my daughter became much more interested and engaged and willing to try, taste, and experience new things...[T]his immersive, multi-sensory experience appeals to the naturally curious mind of a child.”

Cook up a storm

Invite your baby or toddler to investigate some of the ingredients you are using to cook an international dish. Set up sensory plates with ingredients to explore. Encourage them to use their senses to touch, look, smell, and if appropriate, taste what is presented to them. You can also do this while out and about, shopping for produce.

Cooking international foods with your kid has the potential to be a culturally rich educational activity. If you are not that comfortable in the kitchen and/or have limited time, Janine Gee recommends you try to commit yourself to cooking one international meal per month. Get your children involved in choosing recipes, and explore ingredients and learn a little about the country of origin. You can tailor the activity by complexity according to the time you have and your child’s age and ability.

Have realistic expectations for the activity. Think in advance of your child’s level of understanding and their staying



power. Be realistic about their practical skills, and make sure that they are able to do the jobs you designate to them. (If the idea of cooking sends a shiver up your spine, or if you just don’t have time, there are a number of great cooking classes and camps available in our beloved city, such as Culinary Artistas and A Little Yumminess.)

Spice it up

Try spice painting with your littlest tots. Select a variety of vibrantly colored ground spices, place a small amount into individual wells of a plastic egg carton and add a few drops of water to make “spice paint.” Let your toddler use this to paint fragrant pictures using a brush or their fingers. This activity definitely needs close supervision—avoid burning spices such as cayenne pepper and make sure you thoroughly wash everyone’s hands afterwards.

Invite your older kids to look at spice blends and to explore the individual spices that have gone into them by touching,

smelling, and tasting them. Encourage them to compare the difference in taste after grinding and/or roasting them. Once they become familiar with individual spices, you can see if they can identify the ingredients of ready-made spice blends. You can also explore the geographical and historical reasons for certain spices being used in certain cuisines.

Planting a garden of herbs that flavor your favorite ethnic foods is another wonderful activity for green-thumbed kids. Your kids can try growing herbs from seeds or start with small plants. Easy-to-tend herbs include chives, mint, parsley, basil, cilantro, thyme, and lemongrass. They can even plant a themed herb garden, such as a “pizza garden” in which they grow basil, parsley, and oregano.

Explore your amazing local food world

Kids love to see how food is made. Stacie suggests tasting and discussing individual ethnic foods such as tofu, tortillas, tamales, and dumplings with your kids and asking them to guess how they might be made. Then see them made in person! You can watch tortillas and tamales being made at La Palma Mexicatessen in the Mission. Several restaurants on Clement Street in the Outer Richmond have dumpling makers at work near the front windows of the stores.



Explore your local ethnic neighborhoods to find what's offered. Local markets in Japantown, the Richmond, the Mission, and beyond are a treasure trove for the curious foodie. Stacie gets her kids to each select a snack and/or an interesting fruit or vegetable to buy and try. She says "it's a great way to spark conversation and to be curious [with your child]."

One way to tempt a picky eater is to select a food that your child likes and find international or different versions of it. For example, if your kid loves pancakes, maybe she'll be willing to try French crepes, Danish æbleskivers, Indian dosas, Japanese okonomiyaki, or Eastern European blinis, to name a few. Get older kids to think about ingredients used in different places and consider why these ingredients are used. Alternatively, select a favorite raw ingredient, such as an avocado, and explore the different cuisines in which it is eaten. Investigate this further with your child in an age-appropriate way. Are there any geographic links between the countries where it is eaten? Similar climates?

Many local churches host cultural food festivals. Vanessa says these offer a good opportunity to see food in context. Look for events hosted by Middle Eastern, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian church communities in the city and beyond.

Ready, set, eat!

To set yourself up for success, really think about what you want your kid to get out of the experience and consider different ways of achieving this. Give yourself extra time to introduce the cultural elements into the activity. For example, if you're cooking international food, make sure you put aside time to talk and give your kid the time to ask questions, rather than try to talk to your kid at the same time as hurrying to get your meal made.

Do not expect your child to taste everything that is being prepared or being offered to them while out and about, but encourage them to keep an open mind and not to insult another person's food choice. The phrase used for this at A Little Yumminess is, "Don't yuck my yum!" At Culinary Artistas, children who are enrolled in their classes are expected to take part in the cooking activities, but are not pushed to taste the fruits of their labor unless they want to.

Food exploration is a natural and fun part of childhood. Harnessing this interest to give your child a taste of cultures beyond their own, through play, food preparation, and investigation, can be fulfilling, educational, and lots of fun for both parent and child.

Shaheen is a freelance writer, editor, and mom. Contact her through her website, shaheenbilgrami.com

6 Fun Foodie Field Trips in San Francisco

Modified and updated from Shaheen Bilgrami's GGMG blog posted December 4, 2017.

A visit to the famous **Japanese Tea Garden** in Golden Gate Park, accompanied by a cup of tea and snack in the tea house, is a great way to introduce Japanese culture to your kids. Read about the history of the garden and its landscape designer Makoto Hagiwara.

A visit to the humble **Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory** to see how the cookies are made could be a fun and delicious trip. For older kids, this adventure could spark discussions about how some foods that have a popular perception of belonging to a particular culture may have their roots right here in the city.

For a taco/burrito crawl in the Mission, stop at Tacolicious, La Taqueria on Mission Street, and the vegan Gracias Madres (or taco trucks, such as El Tonayense) and order a small amount of food at each place to share. You can focus on one particular dish or choose a specialty of each restaurant, and compare the various culinary offerings.

For a one-stop, round-the-world culinary adventure, take your kids to a **food truck venue** such as Off the Grid or SOMA StrEat Food Park. Many food carts offer fusion food, which can be the source of more food-related discussions with your kids. *Food Trucks!: A Lift-the-Flap Meal on Wheels!* by Jeffrey Burton is a fun book to read beforehand.

Enjoy **afternoon tea** for a fun and delicious way to sample a little bit of English culture. Lovejoy's Tea Room and The Crown & Crumpet have a special kid's tea on the menu!

Introduce the delights of **dim sum**—bite-sized dishes, including dumplings, buns, sticky rice, and noodle rolls. Kids will enjoy choosing interesting offerings from the traditional food carts.

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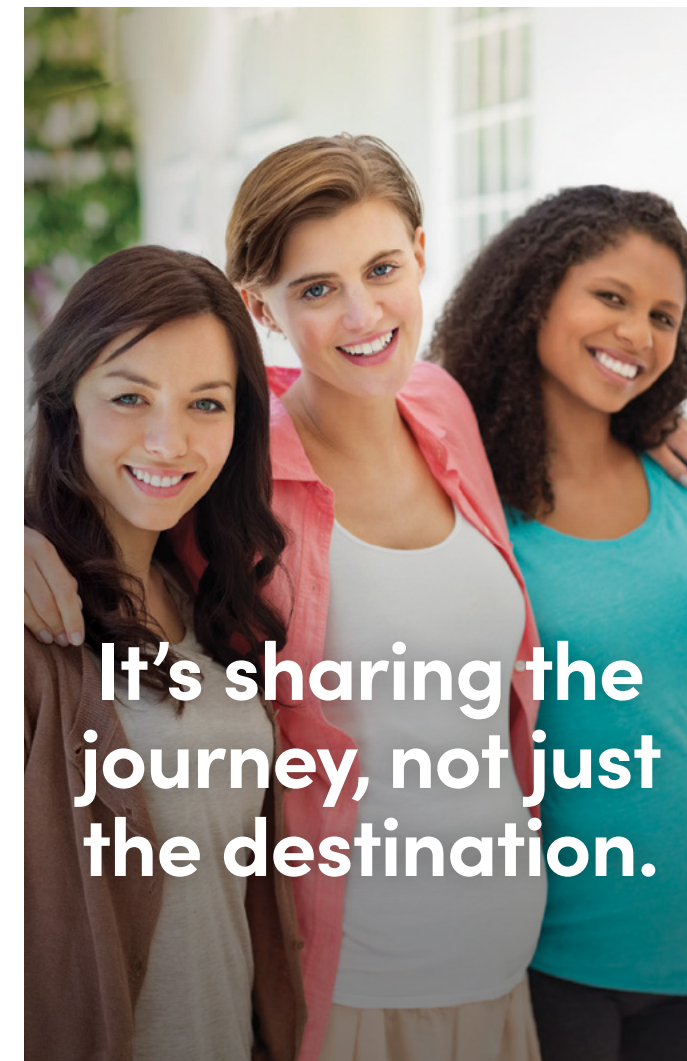
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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

Join queer families for a walk/hike, which includes casually mingling/chatting, discussions on agreed-upon topics, and just sharing unique experiences and issues we have encountered as queer families. All queer families are welcome!

- Date:** First Saturday or Sunday of the month: July 1 or 2, August 5 or 6
- Time:** Typically 10 a.m. to noon
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** FREE for members
- Registration:** Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

GGMG New Mommies + Babies Meetup June 2023

Our next quarterly playgroup formation event is coming up in June!

Are you looking for your own mom village? Sign up to meet other moms!

If you have children under 12 months old or are expecting, we would like to invite you to a small, casual gathering where you will meet GGMG moms similar to you.

Snacks and drinks will be provided while you and other new moms meet, connect, and take the first steps to plan a stroller walk, find a workout buddy, or plan a playdate for your little ones.

- Date:** TBD
- Time:** TBD
- Place:** TBD (five locations in different parts of the city). Info will be emailed to participants close to the event date.
- Cost:** \$5
- Registration:** See gmg.org/calendar or email playgroups@gmg.org

South of Golden Gate Park Monthly Mom's Happy Hour

Join us every fourth Thursday for drinks and appetizers at a neighborhood restaurant and meet some new moms in your community! Details for each month's venue will be posted/announced through our website.

- Date:** The fourth Thursday of every month: June 22, July 27
- Time:** 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (drop in anytime)
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members
- Registration:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sunset-supper-club-for-moms-tickets-501285397117>

Glen Park Coffee + Stroller Walk for Mommies (& Babies)

Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee and enjoy a stroller walk together? We're organizing this Coffee + Stroller walk for you! You'll meet at a coffee shop before you go for an hour of fresh air, light exercise, and great conversation!

- Date:** The first Wednesday of every month: July 5, August 2
- Time:** 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
- Place:** Bosworth and Diamond side lot by Pono Skincare in Glen Park and we can figure out which coffee shop to stroll to.
- Cost:** FREE for members

South of Glen Park and Bernal Monthly Mom's Night Out

Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood. Moms only After kiddo bedtime, come enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other moms. Details for each month's venue will be posted/announced through our website.

- Date:** The second Thursday of every month: July 13, August 10
- Time:** 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- Place:** TBD (different place each month)
- Cost:** FREE for members

Little Oceanauts \$7 Playdate

Looking for an afternoon playdate for your kiddos? Little Oceanauts in Ingleside is open and is the perfect place for children to run off their energy before dinner time! Meet fellow GGMG moms and enjoy a fun afternoon together.

- Date:** The third Friday of every month: June 16, July 21
- Time:** 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- Place:** 1917 Ocean Ave.
- Cost:** GGMG members pay a special rate of \$7 per child. Infants 6 months and under are free. Parents/caretakers are free. Must RSVP and PREPAY. Limited spots available.

Noe/Mission/SoMa Mom's Monthly Happy Hour

Join us the third Thursday of every month for drinks and appetizers at a local restaurant to meet new moms in San Francisco. Appetizers will be provided while moms meet and connect.

All parties, feel free to take a COVID test in advance.

- Date:** The third Thursday of every month: June 15, July 20
- Time:** 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Place:** TBD (a different venue in a different SF neighborhood each month). Info will be announced two weeks before the event.
- Cost:** \$5
- Contact:** Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Kids Playdate Monthly

Do you want your kids to run off their energy? Meet fellow GGMG moms and kids! The location will be the Panhandle Playground (unless noted otherwise). Sign up now!

- Date:** The second Sunday of every month: July 9, August 13
- Time:** 10 a.m. to noon
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** Free for members
- Contact:** Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Happy Hour in the Richmond

Meet other GGMG moms! GGMG will cover a happy hour drink and appetizers.

- Date:** July 18, August 15
- Time:** 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- Place:** Violet's, 2301 Clement St.
- Cost:** \$5

Family playdate in the Richmond

Families—including dads—are welcome! For the first play date, GGMG will provide bagels and coffee.

- Date:** Last Sunday every month: June 25, July 30
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** FREE for members

Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Mom's Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

- Date:** First Thursday of every month: July 6, August 3
- Time:** 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- Place:** Wildseed, 2000 Union St.
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Register for events at gmg.org/calendar unless otherwise noted.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Celebrating Juneteenth with Kids

Juneteenth, also known as Jubilee Day and Freedom Day, is a holiday celebrating the end of slavery in the United States. Juneteenth National Independence Day became a federal holiday in 2021.

Juneteenth takes place on the anniversary date of June 19, 1865, when Gordon Granger of the Union Army proclaimed freedom from slavery in Texas. While the Emancipation Proclamation had officially outlawed slavery in all states in rebellion against the Union in September 1862, enforcement in Texas was inconsistent prior to the announcement by Granger. Yearly celebrations began in Texas in 1866 and eventually spread from there to the rest of the country.

Celebrate Juneteenth with your little ones with these activities:

Attend the Juneteenth Freedom Celebration Festival in San Francisco's Fillmore District (Saturday, June 17, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.)

The Freedom Celebration will span eight blocks on Fillmore Street and will feature a kids zone, dozens of retail and food vendors, a free block party and music concert, and exhibitions for the whole family. All attendees will have access to free, unlimited carnival rides, pony rides, games, and much more!

Once deemed the "Harlem of the West," the Fillmore District was the Pacific Coast epicenter of Black entertainment, music, and culture. From the 1950s through the early '70s, it showcased legendary acts such as James Brown, Billie Holiday, and Charlie Parker; political headliners including Malcom X; and was home to 20 blocks of Black businesses.



Visit San Francisco's public art installation, Monumental Reckoning

The city of San Francisco has a public art installation to honor Black lives and the history of African Americans. Monumental Reckoning by Dana King, honors with 350 sculptural figures the first 350 Africans who were stolen and sold into slavery in 1619. Installed in

Golden Gate Park's Music Concourse, the installation is designed to allow visitors to "commune" with the figures. As King states, "The memory of African descendants deserves to be told truthfully and publicly." Use this art experience as an opportunity to start deeper conversations with kids about racism and systems of oppression.

Draw and create African flags

If your little one loves art, celebrate Juneteenth by making a banner of African flags. This is a great way to learn about and honor other cultures, as well as explore different colors! Draw and color or paint flags, or cut and paste different colored materials together.

Read about Juneteenth together

Juneteenth for Mazie by Floyd Cooper

Juneteenth Jamboree by Carole Boston Weatherford

All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom by Angela Johnson

The DEI Committee Needs Volunteers!

The mission of GGMG's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Committee is to build a safe and supportive atmosphere for all GGMG members through education and community outreach. We organize events and share resources that enhance equity and inclusion within the organization. **We are currently seeking a new Co-chair as well as Committee Members.**

Examples of Co-chair and Committee Member duties include:

- Write and/or edit articles for GGMG magazine six times per year (every two months).
- Plan and execute webinars, including speaker outreach, that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization. Past examples of themes have included: talking to your kids about race, land acknowledgement, and a spotlight on diverse kids entertainment.

- Coordinate and execute drives for non-profit organizations that bring awareness to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Represent the DEI Committee at GGMG events, such as Spring Fling and Fall Fest.
- Additionally, for the Co-chair role only:
 - Serve as a liaison with the GGMG Board and Committees
 - Coordinate allocation of tasks among DEI Committee members
 - Recruit and onboard new DEI volunteers

See page 29 for volunteering benefits. Please contact us at diversity@ggmg.org if you are interested in volunteering.

MEMBER SUPPORT

Seeking New Co-Chairs!

The mission of the Member Support Committee is to change a member's life for the better and create a sense of community amongst our members through support, drives, and special events. Member Support exists to provide assistance to our members experiencing challenging times or who are in crisis.

Examples of committee duties include:

- Coordinate meal delivery for members in need.
- Coordinate and execute drives to benefit local nonprofits including the Homeless Prenatal Program, Project Night Night, and many more.
- Manage the Member Resource List to share valuable resources with members, including crisis, abuse, and child therapy resources.
- Proactively monitor the GGMG online forums and manage requests for member support needs.
- Organize events that meet the needs expressed by members, including CPR and self-defense classes.

To volunteer, email member.support@ggmg.org.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends branch of the Partnerships Committee collaborates with local organizations and businesses to provide substantial discounts and resources for our members. We aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships with businesses in the Bay Area that provide useful services to mothers. Our goal is to work preferentially with small local businesses run by women and/or people of color in an effort to promote their professional advancements in our society.

The Partners branch of the Partnerships Committee manages our relationships with our large Partners including the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF), Luke's Local grocery, and UrbanSitter.

Committee duties in Friends:

- Input new offers by local businesses (Friends) looking to provide substantial (20 percent or more) discounts to GGMG members
- Maintain our relationships with our current Friends
- Seek out potential new Friends who provide services useful to our members
- Negotiate new business discounts
- Update members on new discounts

Committee duties in Partners:

- Maintain relationships with current Partners and seek out new Partners
- Negotiate new business discounts to expand the discount offerings for GGMG members
- Outreach for new Partners of interest with preference to small local businesses run by women and/or people of color

Open Roles: Committee Co-chair in Friends (one hour per week) and Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (one to two hours per week)

To volunteer, email partnerships@ggmg.org.

VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

We know that when you volunteer for GGMG, you are giving up precious time you could be spending with your family or splurging on yourself. We thank our volunteers in the following ways:

- Extra special extended benefits from our partners
- Professional development opportunities
- Social time at every general volunteer meeting
- Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner
- Annual membership reimbursement after one year of service

NEW ARRIVALS



Vanessa Kitchen Baby Henry Andrew

Congratulations to **Vanessa Kitchen**! 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 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 ggmg.org/about-us/ggmg-magazine.



Spark Imagination



Bay Area
Discovery
Museum

BayAreaDiscoveryMuseum.org

On Being Part of a Neurotribe

By Alyson La

Recently, I spent time with my 70-year-old autistic aunt, Monica, in Ohio. While out on an excursion to Put-in-Bay, an island in Lake Erie, she made quick friends with other passengers on our ferry, explaining to them, “I’m autistic.” She then proceeded to invite them to lunch and a wine tasting, where she talked without interruption for an hour about the history of the island where six generations of our extended family have lived and worked.

Aunt Monica calls herself a “high-functioning autistic,” “Asperger’s,” or “one of the lucky ones.” She says she likes being autistic because it allows her to speak without a filter and live a life of glee. She has led a “successful” life by conventional standards—earning an undergraduate and a masters degree in French literature and enjoying several careers, a marriage, and a son. She is now retired and works part time with special needs adults.

I marvel at listening to her as I realize she is the elder autistic in a clan of neurodivergent family members that includes my brother, a cousin, a niece, and my son. This clan started, as far as we can tell, with her father—my grandfather—Harry, who was what most people would consider successful. He flew a fighter plane in WWII, came back and got married, had 10 children in 12 years by my grandmother, Adelaide, and owned a profitable business distributing beer throughout northern Ohio. Some of his children later agreed that he had Asperger’s Syndrome, since he did not bond well with any of them. As the story goes, when one of his kids would try to talk to him while driving in his boat of a Cadillac, he would turn up the radio.

Our family history of autism was discovered when my cousin, Nathan (Aunt Monica’s son) was 8 years old. He was obviously different from other kids in his class and at the time he was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome (the term has since been removed from the DSM-5, but is still used by some). My cousin’s diagnosis led my mom to realize my older brother, who is profoundly deaf, also had Asperger’s. This revelation explained so much about why raising him was so challenging, beyond his disability of deafness. A few years later, Aunt Monica diagnosed herself as autistic and posthumously diagnosed my grandfather.

Despite my family history, I was completely unaware of autism symptoms in young children or how autism diagnoses work. I naively assumed that my son didn’t have autism



because he met all his early pediatric milestones. It wasn’t until he was almost 3 years old and still not speaking much that I began going down a Google rabbit hole. What we thought were cute kid quirks were actually symptoms of an emerging neurological difference—walking on his tip toes, lining up cars, and excessive spinning. Things that he did every day had specific medical definitions:

- Running away from us. That’s called *elop*ing.
- Acknowledging loud sounds, but not responding to his name. That’s called *responsive language delay*.
- Not speaking much but regularly parroting what others say. That’s called *echolalia*.
- Being obsessed with letters and numbers. That’s *hyperlexia*.

Shortly after, he received a formal diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)—mild to moderate. Having been raised with my autistic and deaf brother and having spent time with my autistic cousin and Aunt Monica, I was worried about what ASD would mean for my son. Thankfully, I have information and support regarding neurodivergence that wasn’t available to my mom and previous generations.

Over four years since his diagnosis, my sweet kid is in a first grade ‘inclusion class’ with mostly neurotypical kids. He has his struggles with autistic meltdowns when things aren’t exactly right or according to his routine. I have learned that

“My role as a mom, sister, and niece within our neurotribe has taught me that being autistic is ‘different, not less.’”

being empathetic, giving him time and space to be upset, and acknowledging his emotions helps him through these challenges. I’ve also discovered his special interest is music—he can listen to animated movie scores *all* day and name most scores along with their composers by ear.

My son is the youngest so far in the 4th generation of our neurotribe (that we know of). From what I can gather, each generation seems to be more and more impacted. My role as a mom, sister, and niece within our neurotribe has taught me that being autistic is “different, not less.”

What is my greatest discovery through this family journey? I thought I would be my son’s teacher, but as it turns out, he is mine.

Alyson is a lifelong learner, devoted mom of two kids, and avid reader. Alongside her passion for personal growth, she finds joy in cross-stitching and coding as a hobby. For connections and discussions on supporting each other and the autistics we care about, reach out to Alyson at alyson@alysonla.com.



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