

FEB/MAR 2017



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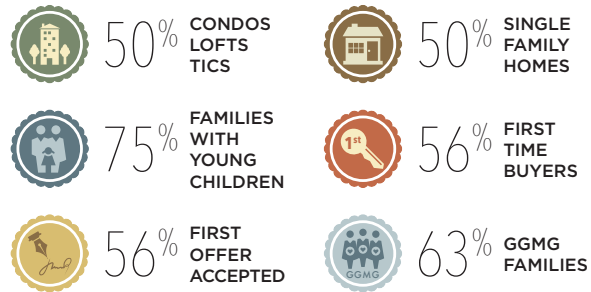
GOLDEN GATE
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine

Thinking Globally

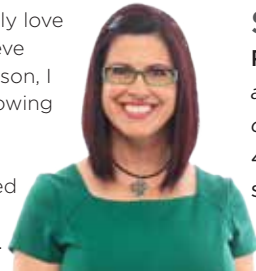
Sherri Howe's 2016 Real Estate Snapshot

16 BUYERS Price Range from \$780,000-\$2,850,000



A heartfelt thank you to the amazing families who entrusted me with their home purchases and sales this year. I absolutely love working with my fellow GGMG families to help you achieve your homeownership goals! As the mom of a 6 year old son, I truly understand the unique challenges and needs of growing families with young children.

If you are thinking about making a move, or are interested in learning more about the San Francisco market, call or email me today! Many GGMG family references available.

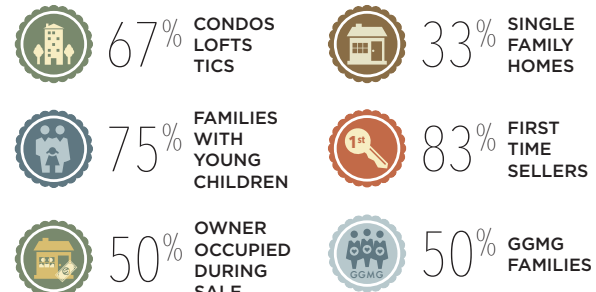


Sherri Howe
REALTOR® & GGMG Mom
a.k.a askhowe — look for me on the GGMG message boards
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www.ggmg.org

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MAGAZINE

Editor-in-Chief	Kirsten Pflieger
Managing Editor	Sonya Abrams
Senior Editor	Megan Bushnell
Art Director	JoJo Rhee Chevalier
Writers	Stephanie AuWerter, Shaheen Bilgrami, Jennifer Butterfoss, Ho-Ming So Denduangrudee, Tara Hardesty, Laure Latham, Bobby Shukla, Catherine Symon
Copy Editors	Sarah Brandstetter, Emily deGrassi, Anna Gracia, Arwen Griffith, Neha Masson, Jenny Shaw, Sandy Woo
Advertising	Sherri Howe
Designers	Juliana Egle, Jessica Franklin, Lani Schreiberstein, Lora Tomova
Photographers	Petra Cross, Anna Psalmond, Aviva Roller, Carolyn Soling

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For questions or comments regarding all other aspects of GGMG, including how to advertise an event to our membership, please contact feedback@ggmg.org.

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Cover Photo by Anna Psalmond Photography;
Cover model: Sienna Strader (2.5)

GYMBOREE

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Come to Gymboree for fun & educational classes for children birth to 5 years old!

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Letter from the Editor: Thinking Beyond Borders

By Kirsten Pflieger



Kirsten is celebrating the fact that her children have reached an age where they can sit still and entertain themselves coloring and doing workbooks, and that she is willing to let them watch TV shows and play video games long enough for a relaxing cross-country plane ride.

My first international trip was to Puebla, Mexico, in 1989. My parents and I were visiting my sister, who was studying abroad. Travel was definitely different then. I remember being amazed by how different everything looked, and vividly recall arriving at our host's home. The road was smooth, but the surface was packed dirt, flanked by austere walls that hid the homes behind. At their gate, I was worried about what we had gotten ourselves into. But behind that forbidding wall was paradise: a lush garden and a two-story home with terraces and a courtyard. There was color everywhere.

That trip was an amazing introduction to cultural differences, and how to look past your own biases to see the beauty in other cultures.

That trip was an amazing introduction to cultural differences and how to look past your own biases to see the beauty in other cultures. Although I have traveled a fair bit since that first trip to Mexico, I have not attempted an international trip with my children. This is partially because, with grandparents in the Midwest and on the East Coast, we travel a lot just to stay in contact with family, and

partially because it just sounds hard. On page 20, Stephanie AuWerter assures us that, with some advance planning and realistic expectation management, international travel doesn't have to be something that you put off until your children are older. Whether for adventure or as a job requirement, many families find themselves moving abroad. This can prove to be a daunting task, even for the seasoned traveler. The details of deciding what you can't live without and then figuring out how to transport it will probably feel overwhelming at some point in the process. Ho-Ming So Denduangrudee shares stories from fellow GGMG moms who have taken the plunge and come out smiling on the other side, on page 24. On page 8, our expert, Anne Fokstuen, delves into international custody laws. Inge Echth  lter and her family have combined international travel and moving abroad in an extended road trip. Six months into a trip from Canada to Patagonia with two children under the age of 4, Inge and her husband feel like they have just gotten started (page 39). Living in San Francisco, we are surrounded by a multitude of cultures. The impact of our culture on our children starts early with the names that we put on their birth certificates. Shaheen Bilgrami lays out some things to consider when making this decision on page 36. Sandy Woo looks at the decision to raise children bilingually, and how language is related to the passing on of a family's culture (page 16). On page 10, Matthew Visick reflects on how the decision to raise his son bilingually, including hiring a nanny who only speaks a language that Matthew himself does not speak, has brought both unanticipated challenges and rewards. Finally, we have added a new column—reviews of kids movies (page 14). We hope that you enjoy these Golden Globe-nominated selections. Maybe you will watch one on your next overseas flight!

K Pflieger

Housekeeping

Opinions expressed in this issue are those of the contributors. Acceptance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by GGMG of any products or services. The editors reserve the right to accept, edit, or reject any content submitted to the magazine.

ADVERTISING: Advertisements are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. For submission information, email advertising@ggm.org.

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: The polar vortex, the flu, family, blackberry gin brambles, the \$&@! SFUSD lottery, Obama nostalgia, showers (rain...as well as other types), monsoons, holiday binging, storage unit purge, kindergarten tours, Twitter rants, house swapping with a side of hand-foot-

mouth, goose fat, extreme jet lag, boxes... all the moving boxes, finding a bottle of Sazerac limited release at the local corner store, unexplained hives, a loop of colds, jet lag and starting a new job, teething teething teething teething, delaying potty training, finding a daycare opening, new rainboots.

COMING NEXT: April/May—Fertility

CONTEST: Congratulations to **Daisy Church**, the winner of the Forever Green Living Christmas Tree package.

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

Letter from the Board: Thank You to Our Outgoing Board Members

By Cathy Tran

Welcome to 2017—how time flies! In 2015, GGMG expanded the board of directors from 6 to 13 members in order to support our growing number of members. Each director serves a term of two years, and several members are nearing the end of their terms this year. There are no words to express the appreciation I have for all the hard work and volunteer hours they've put into GGMG; nonetheless, I want to acknowledge their vast contributions to our organization. First, a huge thank you to Katrina Dirksen, a long time GGMG volunteer who will be rolling off as our director of parent events. Katrina has been invaluable to us, having managed three to four committees during her tenure. She was in charge of all parent-oriented events, including Just for Mom Committee events, Parent Education Committee events, and Careers and Entrepreneurship Committee events.

[A] big thank you to our retiring board chair, Laurel Kellam.

Thank you also to Justine Simpson, our director of kid events. Justine started off as a volunteer on the Careers and Entrepreneurship Committee, then became chair of the Social Events Committee. Justine managed two of our popular Halloween Spooktacular events before joining the board. She also ran the Kids Activities Committee where she helped plan events including the recent Winter Presidio Trust event which was a big hit! Justine has always focused on what is best for GGMG, and we appreciate her support. Laura Oswell joined the board as a first time volunteer and has kept us organized and provided leadership during her tenure as

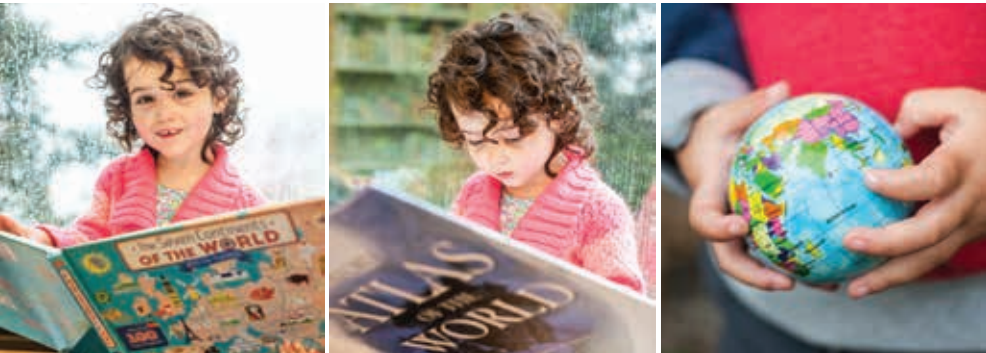
board secretary. Being an officer on the board is a big commitment and the buck stops with you, so we thank Laura for the seriousness with which she has performed her duties. Lastly, a big thank you to our retiring board chair, Laurel Kellam. Laurel has been a volunteer for over six years, spending almost four of them on the board. There isn't enough space to thank her for all that she's done for GGMG and we will miss her greatly. With Laurel stepping down, I will be starting my tenure as your new chair and I hope I can fill her shoes well. Our current director of member engagement, Sasha Fahimi, will be taking over as vice chair. With these transitions, there will be several openings on the board for moms to join us on this exciting and fulfilling journey. Keep an eye out for information on how to apply to these positions. If you have any questions about GGMG board matters, email us at board@ggm.org. And finally, an exciting follow-up to the news about our new website! Our volunteers have been working hard and we hope to launch in March of 2017. Keep an eye out for an email from GGMG with information about how to migrate to the new site!



Cathy Tran is mom to two boys, Charlie and James, and wife to an amazing and supportive husband, Peter. She is the co-host of the parenting podcast The MomVent. She enjoys dinners out with friends, nights in watching Bravo, and finding the best breakfast burrito in San Francisco.

Cathy

Cover Outtakes



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

New Year’s Resolutions in Action

Now that the holidays have passed and New Year’s resolutions are in full swing, it’s the perfect time for the whole family to get outdoors, embrace novel experiences, and make lasting memories. Increase your exercise, connect with nature, or try some new cuisines with these family-friendly activities in February and March. Let’s keep those resolutions alive long past January!

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

GET MOVING

KNBR Giants FanFest 2017

Get batting advice in person from Buster Posey. Show your city pride with your own photo alongside the World Series trophies.

DATE: February 11
PLACE: AT&T Park
COST: FREE
www.sanfrancisco.giants.mlb.com

San Francisco Summer Resource Fair

Visit over 200 exhibitors and learn about camps and activities to keep your kids active all summer long.

DATE: March 11
PLACE: County Fair Building in Golden Gate Park
COST: FREE
www.dcyf.org

The Super Run: Heroes vs. Villains

Bust out those capes, masks, and tights for a morning 5K with your favorite heroic characters!

DATE: March 19
PLACE: Little Marina Green
COST: \$40 Individuals, \$34 Team
www.thesuperrun.com



EXPERIENCE SOME CULTURE

Chinese New Year Parade

Experience one of the world’s top ten parades and say hello to “Gum Lung,” the 268-foot Golden Dragon, carried by over 100 people.

DATE: February 11
PLACE: Chinatown at Kearny and Sutter Streets
COST: FREE
www.chineseparade.com

37th Annual Black Cuisine Festival

In need of some comfort food? Enjoy live music, vendors, games and soulful delights like catfish, ribs, and sweet potato pie.

DATE: March 4
PLACE: 3rd Street and Carroll Avenue
COST: FREE
www.bhpmss.org/black-cuisine

San Francisco’s 166th Annual St. Patrick’s Day Festival

Dig out those green accessories and cheer on SF city workers and organizations. Find beer and bounce houses at the end of the rainbow.

DATE: March 11
PLACE: Civic Center Plaza
COST: FREE
www.UISSF.org



Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss is a school administrator with SFUSD. This year’s resolutions include hugging some goats and running a 5K in tights.

ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

Valentine's Day Tea at the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden

Enjoy a nature walk and tea party with loved ones. Collect herbs to make tea party snacks and create valentines from pressed botanicals.

DATE: February 11
PLACE: 200 Centennial Dr., Berkeley
COST: \$22 Adult, \$17 Child
www.botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu

Bay Natives Nursery Garden Party

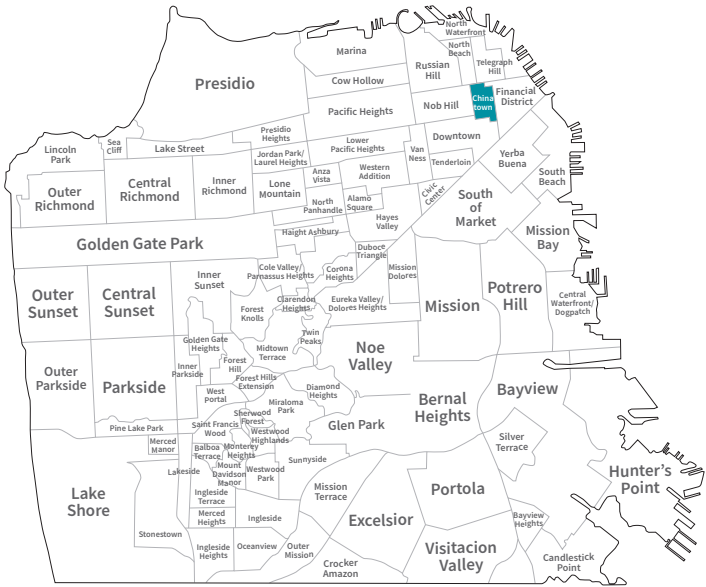
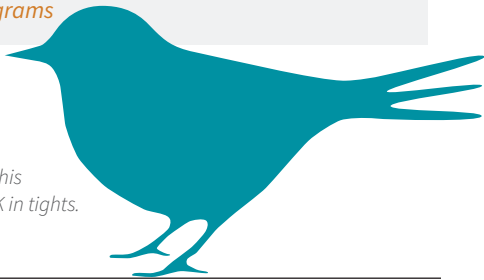
This party will feature live music, free food and drink plus a free plant to take home with you! Cuddle goats or feed chickens right here in SF.

DATE: February 11
PLACE: 10 Cargo Way
COST: FREE
www.baynatives.com

Spring Birds Family Farm Day at Slide Ranch

Learn about the many birds that live at Slide Ranch. Milk a goat or two. Take a deep breath inside the organic garden.

DATE: February 25
PLACE: 2025 Shoreline Hwy., Muir Beach
COST: \$25
www.slideranch.org/upcoming-family-programs



Li'l Kid, Big City: Chinatown

By Jenny Shaw

San Francisco boasts the largest Chinatown outside of Asia—a colorful neighborhood that is a feast for your senses. Grant Avenue is the main street, while side streets offer hidden gems and fewer crowds.

Wander the crowded aisles of knickknack-filled bazaar shops, like **Bargain Bazaar** (667 Grant Ave.). **Chinatown Kite Shop** (717 Grant Ave.) has a dizzying array of gorgeous kites.

Order dim sum off wandering carts at **City View Restaurant** (662 Commercial St.), or stop by **Good Mong Kok Bakery** (1039 Stockton St.) to grab goodies on the go. **House of Nanking** (919 Kearny St.) offers traditional Cantonese food.

Your sweet tooth will enjoy boba tea from **Sweetheart Cafe** (909 Grant Ave.) and the famous custard tarts from **Golden Gate Bakery** (1029 Grant Ave.). Watch and eat fortune cookies being made at the **Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory** (59 Ross Alley).

Let the kids run wild at one of the local playgrounds: **Portsmouth Square** (50 Walter U. Lum Pl.) is the “heart of Chinatown,” with locals practicing tai chi and playing chess. Quiet **St. Mary’s Square** (651 California St.) has a play train and climbing structures. ♦

Jenny grew up making regular trips to Chinatown, when her suburb-dwelling parents would stock up on Chinese groceries and herbal medicine. She plans to continue the tradition with her toddler son, but she’ll spare him the pungent herbal medicine.

Global Cuisines

By Neha Mandal Masson

San Francisco has its share of Michelin-star restaurants, celebrity chefs, and trendy food movements. But what makes this city so special is the wide representation of authentic cuisines and cultures from around the world. Families can experience world class food destinations without leaving this 7-by-7 mile expanse.

SUPPENKÜCHE \$\$

525 Laguna Street, Hayes Valley

Before Hayes Valley was trendy, there was Suppenküche. This classic German restaurant turns out authentic favorites including schnitzel, giant pretzels, grilled sausages, and enormous boot-shaped steins of beer in a lively atmosphere that’s also kid-friendly.

MASSAWA \$

532 Green Street, North Beach

Hidden amongst the Italian restaurants of North Beach is this Ethiopian gem. The cozy space is family friendly, and the food invites sharing and sampling new things. Indulge in flavorful stewed meats and slow cooked vegetables served on huge shareable platters. Come prepared to eat with your hands!

LIHOLIHO YACHT CLUB \$\$\$

871 Sutter Street, Lower Nob Hill

Grab a coveted table and explore Hawaiian cuisine with an Asian twist at one of the most popular restaurants in the city. The menu ranges from fresh tuna misoyaki to the famous fried game hen. Perfect for date night.

GRACIAS MADRE \$\$

2211 Mission Street, Mission District

Everyone knows that Mexican cuisine is well represented in SF, but vegan Mexican food? Gracias Madre delivers flavor and interest without meat, seafood, or dairy. Try the fresh tamales filled with roasted vegetables, or mole enchiladas topped with cashew cream. Perfectly enjoyable for adults and kids alike, regardless of dietary preferences.

DRAGON BEAUX \$\$

5700 Geary Boulevard, Inner Richmond

This classic dim sum joint offers excellent soup dumplings, egg rolls, shumai, pork buns, and mochi in addition to typical Chinese dishes. Fun for adventurous kids but be prepared to wait in line!

Neha lives in Hayes Valley with her husband and 18-month-old son. In her spare time, she experiments with new recipes, explores the city, and listens to children’s songs on repeat.

Ask the Expert

Demystifying International Custody

With Anne Fokstuen



GGMG: Who presides over international custody for couples whose relationships end while they are living in the United States?

AF: If an international relationship ends while the couple is living in the United States, couples can negotiate a custody agreement on their own or hire a mediator. It's usually a good idea to

consult an attorney who specializes in custody to review or draft an agreement. If you can't reach an agreement, you must go to court in the county where you have lived for six months or longer. In the Bay Area, a family judge will require couples to attend family court services mediation to try and reach an agreement. If you can't, a judge will make the custody decision in the case.

GGMG: What happens if you have custody established in the U.S. and want to move abroad, but your ex-partner does not want the children to move? What if you are the one who doesn't want the children to move outside the US?

AF: If you want to relocate with children but don't have your ex-partner's consent, you must go to court and request a move-away order. The court will appoint a child custody evaluator who advises the judge on whether the court should grant the move-away request. The custody evaluator, usually a child therapist, will meet with you, your children, your ex, and others who know your family well to determine whether it's in your children's best interest to move or stay. The custody evaluator may also visit the place to which you want to relocate. Not all custody evaluators are the same, so it's critical to consult an experienced family law attorney to get the best possible custody evaluator for your case.

GGMG: How do you protect your desire to emigrate from countries that make it particularly difficult to leave with the children if your ex-partner doesn't want you to move?

AF: Before you go, if your relationship is already rocky, consult an international family law attorney to find out what the custody pitfalls may be in your new country. Make sure that your visa provides an independent right to live where you are moving. Many Americans find themselves stuck in countries where they have limited rights after the dissolution of a marriage. The non-working spouse can be prevented from

repatriating with the children, forcing her to leave without the kids or live there illegally. You should ideally reach an agreement with your partner before moving overseas that determines what will happen with the children if the relationship doesn't work out.

GGMG: Do international custody rules differ based on the status of a couple's relationship (e.g., never married, separated, divorced, same-sex, opposite-sex)?

AF: Many countries treat parents differently depending on whether they have been married or not, based on how that country defines marriage. If you are thinking of moving internationally, it's important to find out how your relationship will be recognized and treated. In some countries, if you are not married, the father of the child must go to court to establish rights to custody, while the mother has an automatic right to custody. If you are divorced, you usually already have custody orders which can be enforced by the court wherever you move. If you are divorcing, the court will help you get custody orders. If you are a same sex couple, your marriage may not be recognized in certain countries, which means you can't get divorced and may have problems trying to get or change custody orders.

Many countries treat parents differently depending on whether they have been married or not, based on how that country defines marriage.

GGMG: An ex-partner takes the children abroad on a mutually agreed upon trip but never brings them back to the United States. Is this abduction? Who do you contact if this happens?

AF: This is child abduction. You should file a child abduction report with the police department where you live as soon as possible. Make sure you have copies of the child's passport, medical records, and photograph(s) on file at all times. You should contact the State Department which can provide resources for getting your child back. If your child has been abducted to a Hague Convention country, the State Department can help monitor developments in getting your child back. If your child has been abducted to a non-Hague Convention country like India, Pakistan or China, there's unfortunately no formal mechanism to force the return of your child. ♦

Anne specializes in international family law and child custody cases. She has lived, worked, and traveled in Europe and Asia. She is fluent in French, German, and Spanish and has worked with clients from more than 10 countries.

GGMG: Helping Others, Treating Yourself

Community Support

La Casa de las Madres Supports Women and Children in Need

GGMG is proud to be partnering with La Casa de las Madres. La Casa de las Madres' mission is to respond to calls for help from domestic violence victims of all ages, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and provide them with a safe haven.

Throughout **FEBRUARY**, we are collecting:

- New socks and underwear for women, children, and teens
- Wipes and diapers (especially sizes 4, 5, and 6)
- New, unopened baby formula

Drop-off locations can be found at ggmg.org.

Support San Francisco CASA to Help Foster Youth

GGMG is proud to be partnering with San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocates (SFCASA) from **MARCH 15 to APRIL 15**. Youth and families in the foster care system have unique needs that often go unmet by the system. Your gifts will cover important assets essential to healthy development and bonding, such as access to technology, support for visiting relatives, or even a cap and gown for graduation. Learn more about SFCASA at www.sfcasa.org.

Please donate funds directly to SFCASA online at www.sfcasa.org/ggmg.

By donating to these organizations, GGMG moms can truly make a difference in the lives of women and children in need. Please contact drives@ggmg.org if you have any questions.

Contest

Declutter Your Living Space to Create a Stress-Free Home



It's never too early to start your spring cleaning. Let Stephanie at Bins and Labels get you started. One lucky family will receive a free consultation and six hours of in-home organizing, including:

- Complete reorganization of living space
- Set up closet area to efficiently use available space
- Sort through dated or outgrown clothing
- Label, sort, file, or dispose of household items
- Fashion kid-friendly play area
- Prepare and oversee installation of organizational systems
- Coordinate donation and bulk pick-up



These services are valued at \$400. Please visit www.binsandlabels.com for pictures and details, and feel free to email questions to Stephanie@binsandlabels.com.

20 percent discount offered to the first 20 customers when you reference GGMG magazine.

TO ENTER THE CONTEST, SEND AN EMAIL WITH THE SUBJECT LINE "BINSANDLABELS" TO CONTEST@GGMG.ORG BY FEBRUARY 28, 2017.

DADLANDS

Love in Any Language

By Matthew Visick

Looking back on it, I really had no idea what we were getting into when we decided to raise our son to be bilingual. My wife Jenny wanted him to understand her Chinese language and culture, albeit a language she had eschewed early on in an effort to fit in with the other kids in her predominantly white suburb. We had both read about the potential neurodevelopmental benefits that can result from learning two languages as a young child. I figured I would end up learning at least a survival level of Mandarin. What a cool idea.

The practical consequences of our decision started sinking in months later when we began interviewing Mandarin-speaking nannies—with little to no English proficiency—for a “share care” with our neighbors. Jenny, the only one of us who spoke any Mandarin, translated small talk and interview questions. We had lots of questions; we wanted reassurance that this stranger would be a careful and loving companion for our kids. The interviews took much longer than we’d expected, as every question and every answer had to be repeated twice, and subtleties were often lost in translation, so many questions had to be asked more than once in different ways. Not being able to speak Mandarin, I watched the potential nannies’ body language closely to see if it told us anything. Somewhere during the first interview, it finally dawned on me that that this



We repeated the word back to each other a few times until I got my pronunciation right. He got a huge grin on his face and we laughed together.

person sitting across from us was going to be an intimate part of our household, and that she and I would need to get creative if we were going to be able to communicate.

Nancy, our nanny, only speaks Mandarin. Nancy and I have developed our own way to communicate that includes lots of hand gestures, and a few Mandarin words I’ve learned for things that come up a lot, like Woods’ favorite foods. Our communication reminds me of experiences traveling in countries where people don’t speak English, except in this case we are sharing information about this precious little person, and not the location of the bathroom or the price of something on a menu. As

someone who talks a lot, I am not accustomed to getting to know people without being able to ask questions or listen to their stories. With Nancy, our shared love of my son and his antics has offered a way for me to get to know her. I don’t need to know Mandarin to see how cleverly she works with him to manage a tantrum or get him dressed when he is feeling defiant. We connect through laughter when he does something funny, and by looking at pictures on her phone from their day together. By bonding over these shared experiences, we have become friends and she’s become a member of the family.

It’s not always easy. The sense of isolation I feel sometimes when Woods is speaking with Jenny or Nancy in Mandarin can be tough. I only understand about half of what he says, or what others say to him, in an average day. Jenny tries to mitigate that by translating for me, which helps tremendously, but there is still a sense that I am watching rather than participating in the interaction. And, while he is also a very verbal kid in English, he and I

haven’t yet developed the depth of interaction that he is capable of when speaking Mandarin. His first words for things are in Mandarin and, perhaps as a result, his Mandarin vocabulary is much bigger. I watch him engaging with Jenny or Nancy about something in Mandarin and can see how the interaction is more complex and how he is better able to express himself with words. I want to be able to participate in that.

All is not lost in translation, however. Lately I’ve begun asking Woods to teach me Mandarin words. We will settle in to read *Goodnight, Goodnight Construction Site* or *Busy, Busy Town* and Woods will start naming the things he sees on the page in English. I will stop him after each one and ask “what else do you call that?” A few nights ago we were doing this in his crib before bedtime. I’d ask him for the Mandarin word, he would say it, and then I would repeat it back to him. I repeated one back to him that I thought I knew how to pronounce correctly, but his brow got a little scrunched up. So I asked him “Is that how you say it?” We repeated the word back to each other a few times until I got my pronunciation right. He got a huge grin on his face and we laughed together. My toddler son is teaching me Mandarin. This is a much cooler experience than I could have ever imagined. ♦

Matthew Visick is a land use lawyer and developer living in Bernal Heights with wife Jenny, son Woods, cat Wonton, four chickens, and several fish. When not with his family, he can be found in his woodshop building furniture.



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Balanced Approach to Learning | Low Student : Teacher Ratios | Potty Training Not Required | Starting at 2.5 Yrs

JCCSF SUMMER CAMP



2017

SIGN UP FOR SUMMER CAMP TODAY!

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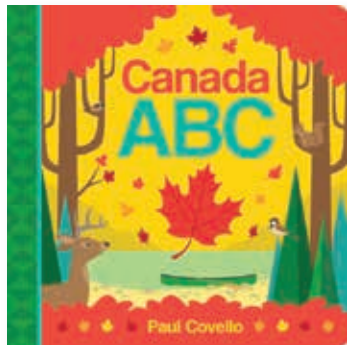


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Whether you are raising a young world traveler, living in a multicultural family, or simply interested in other countries and cultures, these books are great picks for young children. From a classic ABC to a Japanese teen manga, each of these books has an international element to it and should delight young readers (and make bedtime an international affair).



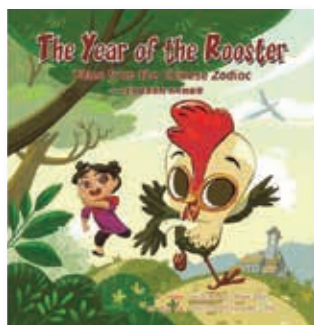
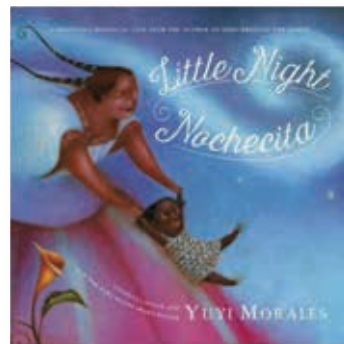
Canada ABC

Written and illustrated by Paul Covello
As Canada prepares to celebrate its 150th year since Confederation, *Canada ABC* will introduce toddlers and preschoolers to Canadian landmarks and traditions. Whether it's H for hockey or B for beaver, each letter of the alphabet is clearly illustrated in

pastel colors. *Ages: 2 to 5 years*

Little Night/Nohecita

Written and illustrated by Yuyi Morales
This bilingual English/Spanish book follows Mother Sky and Little Night at bath time. While Mother Sky wants Little Night to step into a tub of falling stars, Little Night prefers to play hide-and-seek. This book is a fun read for preschoolers who will enjoy the story of a girl who plays at night when all children are sleeping. *Ages: 2 to 5 years*



The Year of the Rooster: Tales from the Chinese Zodiac

Written by Oliver Chin, illustrated by Juan Calle
As the Year of the Rooster rolls in with its dragon parades and lion dances, this book shows a young chick looking for the mystical phoenix and learning about himself along the way. This is a fun way to

celebrate the Chinese New Year or children born in the Year of the Rooster. As the book features a bilingual translation in simplified Chinese, it also works well for kids in bilingual school programs.

Ages: 3 to 7 years

Moana Big Golden Book

Written by RH Disney
Set in the ancient South Pacific world, this story of a teenage girl who attempts an impossible quest is a great way to learn about the culture of Oceania. Whether or not you've seen the animated movie, this Big Golden Book features all the elements of tropical island life as well as legends of the demi-god Maui and tales of ancient ocean navigators.

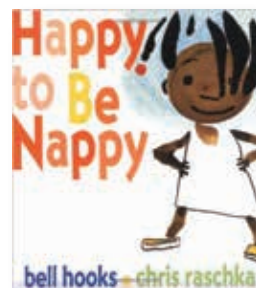
Ages: 3 to 7 years



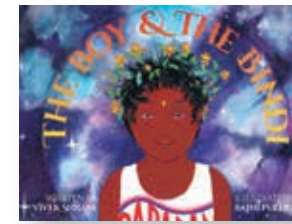
Happy to Be Nappy

Written by bell hooks, illustrated by Chris Raschka
A celebration of natural hair textures, this book is a total confidence booster for young African-American girls. Illustrated in exuberant watercolors, *Happy to Be Nappy* teaches kids to love their unique hair styles and natural curls. Warm and feel-good, this book will delight young children with unruly textured hair.

Ages: 4 to 8 years



The Boy & the Bindi



Written by Vivek Shraya, illustrated by Rajni Perera
A gentle introduction to Hindu culture, this book tells the tale of a young boy who wants to wear a red bindi on his

forehead like his mother. After she explains its meaning and significance in India and South Asia, the mother gives him a bindi, but it is a different color. Touching on international cultures as well as gender and mother-son relationships, this book is a great introduction to multiculturalism. *Ages: 4 to 8 years*



Fatima the Spinner and the Tent

Written by Idries Shah, illustrated by Natasha Delmar
This 18th-century Turkish tale shows Fatima setting off on a sea voyage with her father, a successful spinner, to find a husband. Shipwrecked and left alone near Alexandria, Fatima picks herself up and learns new skills in her new life. This is the first of three disasters that strike Fatima. With grit, she manages to overcome each challenge and grows into such a gifted spinner that she ends up making a tent for the emperor of China. Brave and able to survive disruptive adventures, Fatima is a timeless hero with a positive attitude.

Ages: 4 to 8 years

The Cricket Warrior: A Chinese Tale

Written by Margaret Chang and Raymond Chang, illustrated by Warwick Hutton
This Chinese folktale tells the story of a young boy who captures a cricket and considers the emperor's court cricket competitions to pay off his family farm's debts. Unfortunately, the cricket escapes and young Wei Nian has to find another way to save his family, or he risks losing them forever. This traditional tale evokes timeless Chinese landscapes and young warriors of a bygone era.

Ages: 5 to 9 years



Journey's End

Written by Rachel Hawkins
A supernatural mystery set in the Scottish Highlands, this tale takes place in a remote village by the sea. While young Nolie Stanhope spends the summer at Journey's End with her scientist father, she learns about a

mysterious and cursed fog bank called the Boundary. When a boy who disappeared in 1914 emerges from the Boundary not a day older and without any memory of the past 100 years, Nolie goes into full detective mode. What is the Boundary, and can the curse be defeated?

Ages: 8 to 12 years

Ryan Quinn and the Rebel's Escape

Written by Ron McGee, illustrated by Chris Samnee
In this James Bond meets Spy School novel, teenager Ryan Quinn moves to New York after growing up all around the world. He hopes that his traveling days are over, but when his parents are kidnapped, he must launch a daring rescue mission that sends him to the heart of international intrigue. This fast-paced action novel will delight tweens and teens.

Ages: 10+ years



Orange #1

Written by Ichigo Takano
Blending sci-fi, great characters, and a fantastic story, this is the first in a series of books about a Japanese 16-year-old girl who receives letters from herself 10 years in the future. These letters warn her of a coming tragedy and though she initially thinks it's a bad joke, she starts believing the letters as events unfold as predicted. This series is immensely successful in Japan and has been adapted into a film. *Ages: 12+ years*

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

Top Kids Movies of 2016

By Anna Gracia

So many kids movies are released every year that it’s hard to know which are worth a watch, and which you’re better off skipping (*cough cough*, *Ice Age: Collision Course*). With ticket prices what they are and a backlog of “This Is Us” waiting on the DVR , no one has the time or inclination to pre-screen all the choices. No one, that is, but me. Here are the top five children’s movies of the year, as determined by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (aka the Golden Globes).*



ZOOtopia
Judy Hops is a bunny determined to leave her small town and become the first police officer of her kind in the metropolis of Zootopia, where all species peacefully coexist. In trying to prove herself, she volunteers for a mysterious case where she must reluctantly team up with a con-artist fox named Nick. Packed with progressive lessons on racial and gender stereotypes,

Zootopia embeds a message of tolerance and withholding judgment in an accessible way that even the youngest viewers can understand.

Bottom line: Contemporary and witty, but a few intense scenes may scare little ones.



KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS
Similar to other studio Laika offerings, like *Coraline* and *ParaNorman*, Kubo is a dark and haunting tale involving death, ghosts, and abandonment. Kubo is a young boy, raised on the heroic folk stories his mother recounts in her rapidly decreasing lucid moments. He sets off on a quest to obtain a magical suit of armor to defeat the vengeful spirits chasing him, aided

by a talking monkey and a giant beetle. The fantastical story transports viewers to another realm as the beautiful stop-motion animation showcases everything from the vivid action sequences to the delicate origami Kubo magically folds through the notes of his shamisen.

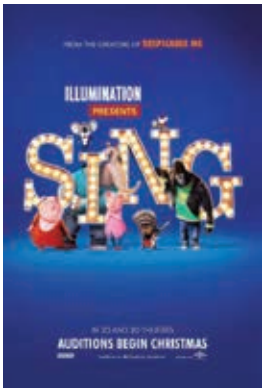
Bottom line: The dark themes and violence would be better suited toward older kids.



MOANA
Moana is a fearless heroine who sets off on a quest to both fulfill her own curiosity and save her people from a dark curse with the help of the hilarious demi-god Maui. With no romantic storyline, *Moana* is a twist on the regular Disney princess trope, but with all the trappings of the classics, like a funny animal sidekick and painstakingly detailed scenery. The story is packed with

authentic Polynesian folklore and history, and topped off with a soundtrack from *Hamilton* darling Lin-Manuel Miranda. Your kids will be singing “How Far I’ll Go” so often, you’ll forget all about Elsa and “Let It Go.”

Bottom line: A must-see, though there is a questionably frightening lava monster.



SING
Like *Zootopia*, *Sing* also centers on defying stereotypes through the use of anthropomorphic animals, though less adroitly. Viewers are treated to an “American Idol”-type experience, with a slew of animals competing to win a competition put on by a koala, desperate to revive his sagging theater. Along the way, contestants discover new things about themselves, and the tone is kept light

hearted with frequent musical numbers. While silly and fun overall, the film does include some slightly more mature themes that can be confusing for kids, like cheating boyfriends, burglary (and jail), and the everyday drudgery of parenthood. There are also twerking bunnies involved.

Bottom line: Fun enough.




QUEEN OF KATWE
Though not nominated for any major awards (yet), Disney’s heartwarming film based on the life of Ugandan chess prodigy Phiona Mutesi is a great watch for elementary-aged kids. Born in the slums of Uganda, Phiona learns to play chess and cope with the changes it brings to her life as she finds success. This inspirational tale teaches kids about gratitude, hard work, and family, without the usual theme of sports or heroics. The fact that it features a full cast of African and African-American actors and is filmed exclusively in Africa only adds to its uniqueness.

Bottom line: Inspiring, but may not appeal to younger kids as it isn’t animated and doesn’t feature animal characters or musical numbers. ❖



MY LIFE AS A ZUCCHINI
Also known by its French name, *Ma Vie de Courgette*, this Swiss stop-motion animated film is about a 9-year-old boy who loses his mother and must move into a foster home. The U.S. release date for this film is set for February 2017.

Anna Gracia is a writer who watches nearly every Oscar-nominated movie every year. You can read her thoughts on them and others, at www.TheSnarkyReviewer.com.




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*Oscar nominations have not yet been announced as of press time.



Passing Down a Parent’s Tongue

Exploring the benefits and challenges of raising a bilingual child.

By Sandy Woo Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography

In the hazy first few weeks after an unexpectedly early delivery, before I could string together coherent sentences, my husband had a brilliant idea. “You should speak Mandarin to M. You’ll regret it if you don’t pass down your culture.” I looked down at the warm, floppy lump attached to me yet again for the millionth time that day and thought, “*Yeah, I’ll get right on that...(!?#@!)*” Passing down culture wasn’t at the top of my to-do list at that very moment. Beyond imparting the stereotypical Asian practices—respecting elders, shedding shoes before entering a house, frugality, academic excellence—I was shamefully at a loss. Though conversationally fluent in Mandarin, I am an ABC (American-born Chinese), meaning that Chinese natives consider me an outsider. Growing up, I spoke Mandarin because I had to. I was told that Chinese language and culture were “important,” with no other explanation given. Wasn’t it enough that my German husband would teach the kiddo his language? Did I really have to attempt this torture? As an occasional Mandarin speaker, I could not fathom how I could speak it all day long. Especially to someone who wouldn’t be able to speak back for years.

Taking a step back, I eventually realized my husband was right, that it would be a pity for my son to “lose” any of his cultural heritage. Though I hadn’t given extensive thought to what language I would speak to my offspring, language had always fascinated me. As a child, I understood three different Chinese dialects (which is like knowing Spanish, French, and Italian). It blew my mind that Eskimos have 50 words for snow, and I marveled at the flexibility of the human brain. Then there were the studies showing that children who spoke Chinese, Korean, and Japanese had an inherent advantage at math, due to the languages’ logical, base-ten number system. For example, 42 would be translated as “four-ten-two.” Such knowledge provided the fuel to charge ahead and I embarked on a journey of passing on my ancestral language and, hopefully, culture.

I’ve come to appreciate that language defines humanity. All animals communicate in some way, but only humans communicate complex and abstract thoughts through

language, which also forges friendships and cultural kinship. Language organizes thoughts and views the world, also key components of culture. To better understand how others views this topic, I spoke to many parents raising children in another language. All my interviewees were either the first-generation Americans or immigrated here with excellent command of English. They wanted to pass on a language and heritage to their children despite the challenge of living in an English-centric country. When I asked about motivations, many of the parents cited multiple studies showing better executive and cognitive function in multilingual children. But ultimately, they were driven by the belief that passing down language is passing down culture.

Many reasons and rewards

The major themes that came up frequently in my conversations with parents in multilingual households were pride and maintaining a unique identity. My husband crystallized the unspoken desire to pass on language—our biological instinct to procreate is shaped by the need to pass on our genes and by default, our way of thinking. He said, “I want our son to understand where I’m coming from, how my thoughts were shaped. [I think] there is value in such perspective.” Language and culture can be connected to the same motivations.

Pratima Gupta, who speaks Hindi to her mixed-race child, spoke about having “pride versus disdain.” She recalled growing up feeling pressure to “look like everyone else,” shunning Indian culture, and hating that she had a cheese and chutney sandwich for lunch. Gupta recalls having a “sudden awakening” regarding her Indian heritage at age 12 and hopes to instill some of this pride in her son from the beginning. To her, “culture is more important than language. Language is easier to bring [when they’re younger] with the hope that culture will follow... [and] persist.”

Carri Martino, who grew up speaking Italian and English and wishes to raise her children the same, echoes these sentiments. “With respect to what I value in the Italian culture, I want my kids to have an appreciation for family, friends, food, and traditional celebrations. We have nightly family dinners

at the table while enjoying thoughtful and enriching conversation.” Other parent have a more intense view. “Language is huge when it comes to culture and being able to relate to another human being. When you lose a language, you lose the identity and the history,” says Vera

Some of the parents I spoke with admitted a fear of whether they were “good enough” to teach a second language...

Cherepakho, who immigrated to the United States as a child. “As I get older, I’ve started to lose Russian.” Klaudia Kristina, who lived in Mexico in her early childhood and discovered its culture on her own, teaches her children Spanish so that they can communicate with her family and to provide them with “independence, being progressive—to understand the mentality of others” with the hope that this foundation will “open minds/doors.” She worries that if she doesn’t pass on her language and culture, her children’s heritage will be taken from them. Her fears are bolstered by official policies in countries like China and South Africa, where the dialects and cultural practices of certain populations were prohibited to subjugate groups and people.

Recent studies appear to validate Kristina’s and other parents’ views on the benefits of language learning. Researchers at the University of Chicago found that children simply exposed to another language were

better able to anticipate another’s perspective. In this study, certain objects were blocked from the researcher while the children could see all of them. The children knew that the researcher’s view was partially blocked. The researchers would then request children to pick a certain object. Multilingual

children performed significantly better at picking the correct object from the standpoint of the researcher, as opposed to monolingual children, who typically picked the object from their own perspective.

There are also practical reasons for teaching kids another language. “Our parents are not very good English speakers and we wanted to enable the kids to communicate with them and everyone else when we go home,” says Lora Tomova, who speaks Bulgarian while her husband speaks Bosnian. Thirty-year teaching veteran Sue Arandjelovic adds, “There can only be advantages, both linguistic and cultural. Brain development is enhanced and learning is accelerated because of the ability to make comparisons from one language to another.”

A child’s first word is a widely celebrated milestone, but hearing my son ask for milk in Mandarin was even more awesome because it finally seemed like my efforts were paying off. Martino, who speaks Italian and English,



described this feeling perfectly: “Hearing them speak in another language...this is priceless. You will be stricken with awe.”

Before long, my son was translating German to Mandarin and vice versa depending on the audience, which impressed us to no end. Additionally, communicating discreetly among other people can be helpful. “It is sometimes handy to have our own ‘secret’ language whilst out and about in public,” says Martino.

Very real challenges

When my husband and I started our language experiment, we knew just enough to frustrate ourselves. Consistency is key for any language to stick, so we each committed to speaking to our son in a language the other couldn’t understand. In the first year of life, speaking to one’s child is already a somewhat lonely, one-sided conversation, unless one is also narrating thoughts for a partner’s benefit. I often felt crazy talking to “myself,” and then felt excluded when my husband spoke in a language I didn’t comprehend. It took some getting used to, especially since other parents advised us to be “fanatical” about always speaking the target language. Eventually, my Mandarin improved, and it became less weird to not understand what we were each saying to our child.

Some of the parents I spoke with admitted a fear of whether they were “good enough” to teach a second language. I am far from being an expert on Chinese culture, and never previously endeavored to teach Mandarin, so I feel this acutely. Many parents expressed difficulty in consistently speaking the language in question, especially if their primary language was English. One parent advised, “Put forth the effort. Read in English first, then in the target language the same way.”

Nearly everyone described the difficulties of speaking in a language that others did not understand. Many felt guilty about leaving people out. “In front of other people, I feel obligated to speak English to not be rude or non-inclusive,” says Gupta. Some felt overwhelmed by the energy it took to switch between two languages after working all day. Says Martino, “It did become exceedingly difficult to launch into another language in



the evenings, or to switch back and forth for the sake of my husband, who only speaks English.”

Another common reality is that children quickly learn that English is the dominant language in America and they can become resistant to communicating in another language. “My children speak English with their peers all day, so they tend to be reluctant to converse with me in another language,” Martino laments. “I hesitate to embark on a power struggle with them on this. We also reside far from my family of origin with whom they would have ample opportunity to converse in Italian.”

Some practical tips


Sue Arandjelovic, who grew up in a household exposed to Slovak and then German, stresses that learning language should be fun. In other words, sing songs, read stories, play games, and keep a non-threatening environment. Make the language meaningful to the child’s life, whether that means eventual formal instruction or having the opportunity to speak the language with another person consistently or travel to a place where it is spoken. Many parents recommend just continuing to speak the language even if the child responds in English. “You can’t force the child to speak, but you can encourage his comprehension while acknowledging his

response. It might be possible to set aside a time of day every day, maybe at a family meal, where it will be ‘second language only’ time, open to any give and take discussion. The rest of the day is pressure free, and the child is allowed to respond to the second language however he prefers,” she advises.

In our household, we do a mix of fun and “tough love.” We repeat what our son says in English in the language we wish for him to speak. We pile on the praise when he does speak in the language. Frequently, we also pretend we don’t understand his English, forcing him to respond to us in the target language (he has caught on now, though). His screen time and storytime are often in German or Mandarin. He also Skypes with his German-speaking grandparents and chats in Mandarin with my father.


For other parents contemplating such a journey, Martino enthuses, “take on this feat!” As parents, we wish the best for our children, and go to great lengths to pass on what we think is best. “Keep plugging away even if it feels like torture for you and them. At the end of the day, when your children are mature adults, they will see how this helped them,” Kristina says. My hope, exactly. ❖

Sandy is grateful for language apps and delights in having a secret language to goad her son into playing pranks on her husband. Of course, the tables are frequently turned on her.



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Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Traveling internationally with kids is not only feasible, but deeply rewarding—if you plan it right.

By Stephanie AuWerter
Photographs by Petra Cross Photography

When my daughter was 6 months old, my husband and I traveled with her to Iceland. We have a photo of me holding her on the airplane as we settled onto the red-eye to Reykjavik. Amelia is shrieking while I am bug-eyed. My panicked face reads: *Why are we doing this?*

After traveling so far, did we luxuriate in the Blue Lagoon, tour the glaciers by snowmobile, or enjoy the legendary Reykjavik nightlife? Nope.

Traveling abroad with kids brings, perhaps, many things to mind: added expenses, debilitating jetlag, suitcases that weigh more than Stonehenge, and of course the tears (yours). Combine this with the likelihood that younger children won't remember much of your adventure, while older ones are unlikely to appreciate the time, money, and effort, and suddenly, a "staycation" has never sounded more appealing, right? But those bitten by the travel bug say there's no need put away your passport for the next 18 years. Yes, traveling with the kids will be different—but in some ways it may even be better.

"Kids are the ultimate ambassadors," says Christine Sarkis, senior editor at the SmarterTravel website. "They have a curiosity that's infectious." Seeing a foreign destination through a child's eyes may allow you to better immerse yourself in the culture: you'll meet other parents and visit locations where the locals really hang out, like parks and hidden ice cream shops. "Kids can find small delights pretty much anywhere," says Sarkis.

You'll also be expanding your child's world, literally and figuratively. "Travel will teach kids flexibility," says E. Ashley Steel, co-author of *100 Tips for Traveling with Kids in Europe*. "It helps them learn to be open-minded to different people and cultures." She notes that we read books to babies not because they will remember the words, but because they will learn that it's a fun



and positive experience. The same principle applies to travel. Children will learn to enjoy the new, the unexpected, and as it inevitably happens on trips, the unplanned. With time, they will start to notice more of what they have in common with people in different corners of the world versus focusing on differences.

But let's get our heads out of the clouds, and prepare for reality. What practical tips can make an international trip enjoyable for all? Here's what some travel pros (and fellow moms) advise.

The destination

Traveling with kids doesn't mean you're relegated to beaches or theme parks. Cities, for example, are great destinations for babies who are content to be carried or wheeled around in a stroller. "Get in the museums and art galleries while you still can," says Corinne McDermott, founder of the Have Baby Will Travel website. Hiking is also great when your child is still easily portable.

If planning a trip seems overwhelming, consider a group tour, says Sarkis. Adventures by Disney and Intrepid Travel, among others, organize family-friendly tours all over the world—think camping in the Sahara or visiting China's giant pandas. Road Scholar also offers intergenerational trips—grandparents can join—for those traveling with kids ages 5 and up, such as swimming with whale sharks in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula.



To get your kids excited for a trip, read books and watch movies that feature your destination, encourages Cindy Richards, editor-in-chief of the website Traveling Mom. And teach your child how to say a few key words, such as "hello," "goodbye," "please," and "thank you" in the native language of the place you're visiting. It's the ultimate ice-breaker, says Steel, who did this with her then 3-year-old daughter before a trip to Japan. "Here was this tiny little girl saying 'thank you' in Japanese...people loved it!" she says.

Seeing a foreign destination through a child's eyes [means] you'll meet other parents and visit locations where the locals really hang out, like parks and hidden ice cream shops.

The room

Perhaps the number one sanity-saver when traveling with kids is having access to a kitchen. "It's tiring and expensive to go out for every meal," says Liz Kohler, founder of the family travel agency The Family Odyssey. A quick search using the "amenities" feature on TripAdvisor can help you find hotels with kitchenettes.

Keep in mind that international hotel rooms may not be as spacious as some in the U.S., warns Richards. If you need space to hang after the kids go to sleep, or a kitchen



you can really cook in, consider renting an apartment or home instead. Many websites, including Airbnb and HomeAway offer international rentals. You can also consider a home exchange, where you and a family swap homes for a period of time. Swapping with a family with kids of a similar age could mean that crib, toys, and high chair are all provided, says Sarkis.

Know that wherever you stay is unlikely to be child-proofed, says Steel. Be prepared for open stairwells and pools without lifeguards or fences. Pick rooms accordingly; for

example, you may avoid rooms with easy access to a pool. When checking into a new room, give it a quick, child-friendly makeover: push sharp-edged coffee tables to the side and remove delicate decorations from a child's reach.

The itinerary

When traveling with kids, give yourself permission to not see everything a destination has to offer. "If you take it slower and think smaller, you will have a better time," says Sarkis.

Create a to-do list that's a mix of physical

activities, culture, and kid-centric fun. “Kids aren’t going to get excited about temples the way that adults do,” says former Silicon Valley resident Cindy Bailey Giauque (author of www.mylittlevagabonds.com) who, along with her husband, packed up her two kids and set out to see the world nearly two years ago. “They’ll be excited about the ice cream they get after the temples.”

So keep visits to tourist sites to a minimum, and instead try to find more authentic activities, says Kohler. Rather than waiting in line at Rome’s Colosseum, opt for a bike ride in the country, she suggests. Or say a quick *bonjour* to the Louvre’s Mona Lisa, and then head to a macaroon making class. Seek out local experiences not listed in guidebooks, even if it’s just a trip to the grocery store for picnic supplies.

And above all, know when to retreat. “Be open to not being on a tight schedule,” says Bailey Giauque. If the kids (or you) are exhausted, there’s nothing wrong with spending an afternoon at the hotel pool, a fun adventure itself.

The plane ride

When it comes to a full day of air travel, your goal should be to make things as easy as possible, not to win the mother-of-the-year award. Start by prepping your child: explain how security works, and that she will be expected to sit in a chair for a long time and even sleep in that chair. There’s nothing wrong with sweetening the pot with as many *Daniel Tiger* or *Peppa Pig* videos as are



necessary (be sure to download videos onto your device of choice ahead of time).

Other strategies to avoid meltdowns: when booking a flight, focus on your arrival time rather than your departure time, says Sarkis. If that means doing an overnight flight, do a bedtime routine on the plane. Change into pajamas, bring a familiar blanket or pillow, brush teeth, and read books. Use www.seatguru.com to pinpoint seats that are away from the bathrooms and galleys to minimize disturbances.

Be prepared for the inevitable flight delays and mishaps: pack extra diapers, wipes, snacks, and a change of clothes for you and your child. Keep a few inexpensive surprises to pull out when things get ugly, such as a

new sticker book or a small stuffed animal. Plan ahead for jetlag, too. “Enjoy the drift,” says Steel. “Don’t force it.” If you anticipate being up at an unappealing hour, find attractions that open early, such as a visit to Tokyo’s amazing fish market. On the flip side, if your kids are going to be up late, take advantage of that with an evening out to enjoy the local nightlife.

Now repeat

While the first trip is indeed overwhelming, it gets easier and more rewarding the more you travel, says McDermott. “I believe that travel will help my kids grow to be the adaptable adults I want them to be,” she says. “They will take those experiences with them as they go into adulthood.” That’s our dream for our daughter, too. Our Iceland trip generated lifelong memories for my husband and me. We packed Amelia into the Baby Bjorn, visited stunning waterfalls and walked amongst the fissures of the tectonic plates. We laughed from our hotel window when we woke up at 5 a.m. terribly jetlagged and watched some very inebriated Reykjavikers staggering home from bars. As for Amelia, she officially started to babble while there, possibly stimulated by her surroundings. Ultimately we loved the trip so much that we’ve since visited Mexico and Costa Rica and hopefully this summer, we will travel to Thailand. The question of “*Why are we doing this?*” has been answered. ❖

Stephanie is a freelance writer and editor. Her work has been published in The Wall Street Journal, Real Simple, Money Magazine and more.

THE SAFETY PLAN

Talking to your children about your safety plan is empowering, says Sarkis. “It teaches them to react calmly in situations that don’t go right.” Here are some tips from our experts:

Before you go:

- Make two copies of each family member’s passport: leave one at home and store the other with your travel documents.
- Check with your health insurer that your family is covered abroad. If not, get emergency travel insurance.
- Pack a first aid kit.

While you are there:

- At the start of every day, take a picture of your child so you have an accurate description of what he is wearing.
- Give your child a strategy for what to do if separated. Tell her to find a mom with kids to ask for help, or, if you are at an attraction, point out the employee uniforms and let her know that’s a safe person to ask for help.
- When traveling with older children, always designate a meeting place should you get separated.
- Give your child a whistle that he can blow if he can’t find you.

Local contact:

- As soon as it is developmentally appropriate, have your child memorize your cell-phone number.
- With a young child, tape your name, phone number, and local address to the inside of his shirt.
- With a slightly older child, you can put a card in her pocket with your contact information, which she can hand to someone.
- Another option is to buy wristbands with the contact information printed on it (like Mabel’s Labels).



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Home and Away: Moving Abroad

Turn your dream of living abroad into reality with a little research, endurance, and a sense of adventure.

By Ho-Ming So Denduangrudee Photography by Aviva Roller Photography

Internationalism is evident living in San Francisco, from the many languages spoken on playgrounds, at schools, and in stores to bilingual education in many of our public schools. Unsurprisingly, in a recent global survey conducted by InterNations, San Francisco ranked fifth as an “expat dream destination.” In such an international city, then, it’s only fitting that residents also tend to be outward-looking and interested in exploring far beyond the Bay, and some consider international moves of their own. Today, the opportunities for living abroad are more widespread than ever.

The nuts and bolts of a move

Prior to an international move, you will likely need to apply for the appropriate visa, pack, find housing (temporary or more permanent), and enroll children in schools. Requirements and rights granted through visas that provide temporary residency status vary from country to country. You will want to carefully check the conditions of your visa; for instance, many countries only grant the primary visa applicant, and not the “trailing spouse,” the ability to work.

Virginie Marine, a mother who immigrated to San Francisco from France, notes that “it took several months to get our visas [and] a few weeks to organize our move. I think it’s important to be organized, to ask the good questions and to be patient.” She spent a lot of time researching on the Internet. “I wanted to be ready...we found an apartment within a

week, but I [had] started to make appointments before our arrival.”

Sarah Brandstetter, a mother of three and current San Francisco resident, moved to Singapore just after the birth of her first child, when her husband was offered the opportunity to work for his firm’s Singapore office. “We were fortunate in that my husband’s firm arranged the movers and packers,” Sarah says. “We moved about half of our belongings (including furniture), and stored the rest. It ended up being the perfect amount for our new home.”

Getting settled in your new country

For Laure Latham, who relocated to the Bay Area from France and then again to the United Kingdom with two children, “the

slowest part of settling in anywhere, especially overseas, is getting new utility and service providers, new general practitioners, a new bank, and a new home. Quite often, utility companies need a permanent physical address to even accept you as a client (same for banks, car insurance, or medical practices) so you need to tackle a home search first before anything else.”

School applications may also be relevant, depending on the age of your children. In many countries, private international schools are the preferred option to ensure continuity of education in English and transferability of grades and credits. There is often a gamut of international schools catering to specific expatriate communities, such as French, Dutch, German/Swiss-German, American, or British schools, which enable easy reconnection to respective national systems. Virginie notes that the school “system is very different in France. There’s no lottery, for example, and tuitions/prices for school and daycare are much lower than [in San Francisco].” There are also new subcultures to navigate. Laure’s girls “did have a tough time adjusting to their new school because they moved from an American school to a French one, and culturally, the systems are worlds apart. They’re happy now, four years later, but the first year was very rough.”

In areas with steady expat populations, schools should have largely remote processes to accommodate a frequent flow of new and departing students. Kate Kirschner is a mother of two who relocated to Spain in early 2017 and engaged a “relocation consultant” who helped set up visits to various schools beforehand. “Through her, we connected with a family that moved from the Bay Area to Valencia this summer, and [with] several other interesting expats and Spaniards who continue to be sources for advice. She helped to line up interviews with the schools we were having difficulty reaching and drove [my husband] from school to school when he visited to meet with headmasters.” Kate underscores the importance of being physically present during the school hunt. “While many things can be accomplished online, keep in mind that schools get many ‘low likelihood’ inquiries, but by physically showing up, you are immediately in a



different league.”

Whether relocating independently or with support from a company or institution, make sure you understand your tax obligations as a U.S. citizen living overseas. In tackling the many challenges that accompany such an enormous life change, Kate notes that she “retained tax advice from both U.S.- and Spain-based accountants. Depending on where you go, tax issues can be real and it’s worth having a detailed conversation rather than getting surprised in April.”

Kate’s family also had the added complication of relocating a pet. “[We used] AirAnimal to oversee [our cat’s] transport. Other similar services are available, but none are inexpensive!” Be ready for a long quarantine and more complexities if you’re relocating to an island nation. Check the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s guidelines, but bringing pets (back) to the United States is generally a straightforward process.

Preparing for transitions, establishing community, enjoying life

Once you have relocated, establishing a community of friends and caregivers is key to helping settle in, particularly given that most people relocate farther away from family and

friends. Virginie has found that people “seem to be more receptive and supportive [in San Francisco] than anywhere else. Probably because we are all coming from everywhere in the world or in the U.S. Personally, GGMG brought me a lot in many ways. It’s important to make the first step and be open to people. Don’t stay home, talk to people.”

Similarly for Sarah, “Singapore has a very vibrant expat community. We were able to make friends through online groups (including active Facebook groups) and by simply walking around, going to kids events and activities, and through my husband’s job. I found it much easier to meet people there... the majority of expats were also there for a two to three year commitment and were seeking a community, as we were. It was easy to bond over travel plans, impressions of Singapore, and the difficulties of living across the world from family and friends.” A city’s individual qualities can greatly influence ease of immersion. “It helped that Singapore is a very safe, clean, and family-friendly country,” says Sarah, “so it was easy for us to venture out into the city as a family. Locals were generally friendly to us as well, and we were mutually curious about each other!”

Laure highlights some challenges of building a new community and ways to

overcome this. “The toughest part [was that] most of the parents at my girls’ new school had known each other since kindergarten or before. As I worked, I couldn’t really hang out for coffee after drop-off as a lot of the other

Though it’s an extremely challenging endeavor to move abroad, the rewards are immense.

moms did, so I ended up making fewer friends in the parenting community. I did, however, find a lot of new friends via one of my passions, open-water swimming. I became a member of the Serpentine Swimming Club in London and they are the people I hang out the most with. If you have an athletic passion or a serious hobby, it’s a great way to make new friends around the world.” Kate, a new transplant, says “we have not found a GGGM-like parenting community in Valencia. However, I am a member of the ‘Americans living in Valencia’ and ‘Expats Living in Spain’ Facebook groups and find those useful resources.”

Sarah also highlights the oft-overlooked challenges of returning home. “Our daughter was a baby when we moved, but she was around 3 when we returned to the Bay Area. Returning was more difficult for her than we expected; she had questions and confusion about our new life in California (to name a few: portion sizes, lack of taxis, temperatures below 90 degrees, pants, our inability to swim outside daily). She also missed her friends. We helped her adjust by talking about Singapore, and her favorite things there, and Skyping with her friends.”

The benefits of time abroad
Though it’s an extremely challenging endeavor to move abroad, the rewards are immense. Kate says her family’s “decision to move abroad was prompted by the desire to give our family of four a life-enriching experience, including the obvious benefits of becoming fluent in another language, immersing ourselves in a different culture and environment, and learning to thrive despite the challenges of being an outsider.” In

addition to providing the opportunity to become part of another culture, a move abroad may offer a jumping-off point for other explorations. Many locales offer a stunning array of nearby travel experiences, particularly when compared to the relative geographic isolation of the United States. As Laure notes, “Europe is a traveler’s dream! Within two-hours’ flying time from London, there are so many fun places you can explore.” She does admit, however, that



California is still on her mind. “I miss... camping in Yosemite, hiking in the Santa Cruz mountains, swimming in the Bay, or going for dinner at Sam’s Chowder House in Half Moon Bay because it’s Sunday and we want to take it easy.”
Similarly, Sarah says “the biggest benefit was that we were able to travel extensively throughout Southeast Asia, and offer a broader worldview to our daughter...We missed out on a few weddings, births, and holidays at home; conversely, we visited Angkor Wat for a long weekend, played in the sand in Indonesia, and spent Christmas in Langkawi, Malaysia. I also loved that my daughter formed relationships and found commonalities with people from all over the world. Although she was young when we returned to the U.S., she was shaped by the experience in many ways. She’s now 5, and

still talks about our life in Singapore. She can often be heard saying something like “Vietnam? I’ve been there! They have water puppets!”
In the 1950s, sociologist Ruth Hill Useem observed the children of American expats and coined the term Third Culture Kid, or TCK, to refer to children who grow up outside of their passport country or the “home culture” of their parents: not quite in the second culture of their host country or countries but rather in

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS: SOUTH/SOUTHEASTERN SF

If you live south of Potrero Hill or east of the Sunset, then **Bernal Heights/Glen Park** is your neighborhood meetup group! We have members in Bayview, Bernal Heights, Candlestick Point, Crocker-Amazon, Glen Park, Excelsior, Mission Terrace, Ingleside, Oceanview, Outer Mission, Portola, Sunnyside, and beyond. Of course, any and all GGMG moms are welcome to attend our events!

The Bernal/Glen group hosts activities for moms and kids of all ages throughout the year. On Wednesday mornings you can find us at Sunnyside Playground, and we host a weekend Family Play Date most months. Our most recent family events included October pumpkin painting and a Second Annual Wear-Your-

Costume-Again Halloween party the first weekend in November. We also organize monthly moms’ nights out that rotate throughout our many neighborhoods; in January we did a special Yoga & Wine event for the ultimate in Saturday night relaxation.

Megan Bushnell (Maslan & Eleanor) has operated as the Bernal/Glen director for over 3 years. Our fabulous ambassadors, who are responsible for hosting and organizing our multitude of play dates and Moms Nights Out, include Olivia Adams (Wes & Isadora), Amy Parke (Raymond & Louise), Christine Tantoco (Olivia & Alexander), Gabriela Wijegunawardena (Alessandra), and Miho Yamaoka (Rachael & Francesca). We are also looking for another volunteer to help



organize events, so please reach out to meganebushnell@yahoo.com if this sounds like something you would like to do!

Please RSVP for one of our upcoming events—we hope to meet you soon!

Bernal/Glen Valentine’s Day Family Play Date

Come celebrate Valentine's Day and make new friends at a member's house. Dads welcome, too! GGMG will provide crafts and some light snacks.

DATE: Saturday, February 11
TIME: 10 a.m. to noon
PLACE: please RSVP for address

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/99579521>

Bernal/Glen February Moms Night Out

Join moms from your local neighborhood(s) for drinks and camaraderie at the Ocean Ale House. GGMG will pay for appetizers.

DATE: Friday, February 24
TIME: 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1314 Ocean Ave.

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/99835440>

Bernal/Glen March Moms Night Out

Meet us at the Broken Record for good pub food and drinks.

DATE: Friday, March 3
TIME: 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1166 Geneva Ave.

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/99908134>

Bernal/Glen “Pi Day” Family Play Date

At our March Family Play Date, we will offer crafts inspired by the children’s book "Cherry Pies and Lullabies," by Lynn Reiser, including making pies from homemade playdough and crowns of flowers. Pie, mimosas, and coffee will be provided.

DATE: Saturday, March 11
TIME: 9:30 a.m. to noon
PLACE: please RSVP for address

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/99913241>

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & CAREERS

Baby Business at Carmel Blue

Thinking of starting a business in the baby market? Have an idea for a new product, service, or technology? Learn what it takes from Bay Area moms who have launched successful careers during this informative panel discussion. There will be a raffle along with wine and light appetizers. Speakers include:

Vanessa Wauchope Welstead, CEO, Sensible Sitters; Tarah Beaven, Founder, Tarah Photography; Sharone Mendes Nassi, Founder, Carmel Blue; Mara Lowry, Co-founder, Pariday; Ellen Park, CEO and Co-founder, Peekadoodle

DATE: Tuesday, February 21
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/99902458>



Getting Financially Fit in 2017

Is this the year you've promised to take charge of your personal finances? Start the new year off with a special event on developing personal financial policies for yourself and your family. Sheila Schroeder, director of client development at Mosaic Financial Partners and a mother of twins, will share tangible ways in which you can start the conversations and take action to gain control of your finances.

DATE: Thursday, February 9
TIME: 6 p.m.
PLACE: 465 California St., Suite 310
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/99902467>



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Volunteer with GGMG at SF-Marin Food Bank

Join GGMG families and their little ones ages 4 and up to give back to the community. You will either sort fruits and vegetables or canned goods to be used by community-based organizations in San Francisco.

DATE: Sunday, February 12
TIME: 9 to 11 a.m.
PLACE: 900 Pennsylvania Ave.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/99740686



Committee Spotlight: Social Events

Describe the personality of your committee.

Creative, thoughtful, and fun!

Why do you do what you do?

To help make other GGMG families happy.

What has been an unexpected benefit of being involved with the Social Events Committee?

Getting to know and work closely with GGMG partners has been a bonus. Also, becoming friends as a committee has been wonderful.

What types of activities or projects do you undertake?

We plan and oversee GGMG's two largest family events: Spring Fling (May) and Fall Festival (October).

How do you know when you are making a difference?

We've been very fortunate to get great feedback from other GGMG moms. We received a ton of virtual and in-person high fives after our last few events. We love that!

Who are your current volunteers?

Our co-chairs are Dru Garza and Nellyn Heckman; Kelly Kang, Graziela Gutierrez, Trish Fong, Jaimie Mak, and Theresa Kelly are our committee volunteers.

What's next for the Social Events Committee?

Save the date for our 2017 Spring Fling at the Bay Area Discovery Museum! It will be Sunday, May 7 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

How can interested GGMG members get involved in the Social Events Committee?

We're always looking to add passionate (and fun!!) women to our committee. If interested, please reach out to rsvp@ggm.org and someone will be in touch.

Greetings from the Diversity and Inclusion Committee!

We have big goals for 2017, and we invite you to get involved. First, we are planning a variety of events, including educational webinars and community-building meetups. We're also working on ways to make GGMG more accessible to a broader cross-section of mothers, and providing members with tools and resources used in everyday parenting. Those of you who read the online forum will notice that we are committed to encouraging a safe space for all viewpoints. Thanks to everyone who responded to our survey last year—we have used those responses to hone our 2017 agenda. We welcome hearing from you any time; simply email us at diversity@ggm.org.

Who We Are

Sasha Fahimi, board liaison;
Molly Agarwal, committee chair and co-chair of Communications
Monique Spyke, co-chair of Outreach/Access and Educational Events
Diana Young, co-chair of Educational Events
Jaysa Kass Zablatzky, co-chair of Outreach/Access and Finance
Kyra Jablonsky, co-chair of Outreach/Access
Krupa Antani, co-chair of Community Building Events



New Year's Resolution Still Not Resolved?

Come volunteer with GGMG! We can't guarantee weight loss, but many of our volunteers report feelings of euphoria and increased levels of contentment. Volunteering is not just good for the soul, it's a fun way to give back to this great organization. Many volunteer roles can be fulfilled from home, and there are a variety of positions available. Email volunteer@ggm.org to find out more!

Current open positions:

- **Kids Activities:** Volunteer
- **Web Team:** Co-chair
- **Magazine:** Photographer
- **Playgroup Formation:** 2 Volunteers
- **Neighborhood Meetups:** Directors for Haight, NoPa/Alamo, Mission; Ambassadors for Haight, Nob Hill/North Beach, Noe, Bernal/Glen Park
- **Recruiting:** Co-chair
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Co-chair

Starting 2017 After a Difficult 2016

Many of us began 2017 with trepidation. From personal tragedies to a divisive election, 2016 was not kind. In response, we at GGMG Member Support are doubling down to help our community. We invite you to join us.

What can you do? If you see a mom who is struggling, lend her an ear. Offer to make or send dinner. Watch her kid, especially if your kids are friends, to reduce her burden for a couple of hours. If she declines, offer again in a week or a month. Particularly after a significant tragedy, offers of assistance pour in immediately but dry up long before grief does.

If you witness hatred or bullying, stand next to and talk to the target, or call for help. Volunteer at your child's school or in the community. Donate to an organization that supports your beliefs.

Little gestures go a long way. It's the sweet and random acts of kindness that mean the most. The gifted meal during a rough week, the surprise e-gift certificates, the kind word, the offers to watch both kids when mom is sick or has an appointment...this is what we remember. This is what makes us a community. Helping others makes us happier and makes our community stronger.

Renewing GGMG

Renew your membership up to 60 days before it expires. Simply log in to BigTent and click the "Continue Enrollment" link. If you don't see that link, you can easily re-apply online at www.ggm.org/join.html. If you have any questions, please reach out to us at membership@ggm.org.

No longer living in San Francisco? You can still renew and maintain access to the forums, receive the magazine, and attend GGMG events.

Has your baby recently graduated from kindergarten? GGMG has raised the age limit to include moms who have a child 11 years old or younger.

Have friends moving to SF? They can join prior to moving, but must provide a local residential address within six months of joining.

New this year: Renew your GGMG membership and be automatically entered into a quarterly raffle for an Amazon gift card!

Forum Tips

QUESTION: Can I power-search forum posts and answers?
ANSWER: Yes, but not using the BigTent app. However, since there is a good chance another GGMG mom has already asked and received many responses to the same question you are now pondering, it's a good idea to search the forum archives prior to posting a new question if you are using a desktop.

To search the archive, click on the Forums tab in Golden Gate Mothers Group's BigTent page. Expand to advanced search by clicking the "[+] show advanced" link. Enter relevant keywords, select the forum to search from the scroll-down menu, and choose Type ("Topics only" or "Topics & Comments"). You can also specify posts from a particular author or within a particular date range, if desired. Then click the blue "Search" button and scroll through your results.

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

GGMG operations

On November 7, 2016, GGMG honored its hard-working volunteers at the annual Fall Volunteer Appreciation Event at SPiN San Francisco. We are so grateful for the donors who helped us give back to those who give so much of themselves. Without their generosity, these incredible gifts of appreciation would not be possible!



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- Camp Galileo
- Culinary Artists
- La Petite Baleen
- Otteroo
- Peek-a-Boo Factory
- Pleninaturals
- Seesaw
- SF Music Together
- Tantrum
- The Butterfly Joint
- Tiny Tots
- Tutu School

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- Tiva Lee Samaru Photography
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- Brit & Co
- Sherri Howe Real Estate
- Sleepless In SF
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- Moxbox Kids
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From Womb to World

What's in a Name?

By Shaheen Bilgrami

Choosing your baby's name can be tricky, and if you're picking a name that's unusual or ethnically different from where you live, it can be a minefield. Here are some things to consider if you are planning to choose this type of name.

Having to explain non-phonetic names

Some ethnic names are not phonetic. For example, the Irish names Niamh, Sian, and Siobhan are pronounced Nieve, Shaan, and Shevonne. Charming and delightful though these names can be, do not underestimate how exhausting it can be to have to explain the different pronunciation of these names over and over again. If you are particularly tied to these names or others that also have this issue, it might be worth considering spelling them phonetically.

Avoiding incorrect pronunciation

Ethnic names can sometimes be mispronounced, with emphasis being put on the wrong part of the name. It's easy to be myopic if these names are familiar to you and to overlook the possible ways they might be mispronounced. My own name, which has Persian origins and is popular in India where I was born, was pronounced "Sheh-een" by most of my school friends in England where I grew up, though it is written and pronounced "Shah-heen." Once you have a shortlist of names, get different friends or acquaintances, American as well as not, to pronounce each name with the surname. One GGMG mom recommended using the "Starbucks Test": ordering a drink at your local coffee shop using the names on your shortlist and seeing how they are heard, spelled, and pronounced.

Avoiding questionable associations

It is worth doing a quick check on Google and social media platforms to make sure that the name you are choosing is not strongly associated with a terrorist, felon, porn star, or other questionable person. One GGMG mom recommended checking the Google images that appear when the name is searched as well. It is worth checking for the name with and without a surname.

Cultural/linguistic association

Some names have different and sometimes undesirable meanings in other languages. For example, Zora is a Persian name meaning dawn, but it's also close to the Spanish word zorra, meaning fox, which is also used to describe a "loose woman." It is also the given name of pioneer author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. A quick search on Google translate or in urban dictionaries of places you might be likely to live might be worth your time.

Religious associations

If you are not of the culture of a name you want to use, it may be worth checking with friends or acquaintances of that culture or religion to make sure that using the name is not some sort of faux pas. For example, as the trend of using surnames as given names surged, Cohen started becoming a popular name used by non-Jewish families. The use of this name, which is traditionally a Jewish surname for descendants from the priestly Cohen lineage, offended some Jews, who likened it to a non-Christian naming their child Jesus.

Avoiding names that could sound like or rhyme with profanities

This may seem like an obvious, but you may not notice that a name you really like might be a little too similar to something negative. Popular though they might be in their home countries, names like Dung and Phuc, Vietnamese names meaning courageous and lucky, and An  is, a French girl's name of Hebrew descent, meaning grace, may invite teasing and bullying on the American playground.

Other things to consider

Regardless of whether the name is ethnic or unusual or not, here are some other things to think about: Will this name work for a teenager? Will it work for a 45-year-old? Try and choose a name that will age well.

Another thing to think about is if the name is "playground friendly." Adults can deal with unusual names better than children. It is worth mobilizing a couple of younger kids to check that they are able to pronounce the name.

A good fallback on an ethnic name is to choose a name that has a simple and Anglo nickname, such as Nikhil (Nick) or Zakir (Zac). Alternatively, pick one of the increasingly popular crossover names that straddle different cultures such as, Kamran/Cameron, Bela/Bella, Hannah/Hana. A third option is to choose a more straightforward middle name that can be used if the given name doesn't work out.

The above considerations aside, the most important thing in naming your child is choosing something that you and your partner love, which you feel suits the child. If the process is stressing you out, it's worth standing back, and giving yourself some space before returning to your list. ❖

Shaheen Bilgrami is a freelance writer, editor, and a contributor to blog.littlelane.com, when she isn't trying to keep up with her energetic 5-year-old! Contact her through her website, shaheenbilgrami.com.

New Arrivals



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

Cathy B.	Baby Cayla Harper
Talitha M.	Baby Taegan Hall
Candice L.	Baby Enzo George
Laura T.	Baby Morgan Marie
Michelle O'Connor	Baby Elle Celeste
Christi Zerbst	Baby Lauren Lynnleigh
Janet M.	Baby Vivienne Elise
Amelia M.	Baby Declan Burkett

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



Volunteer of the Month



Congratulations to **Andrea Semancik**, our February volunteer of the month! Andrea is a program manager at Adobe and currently serves as the co-chair of the Operations Committee. She and husband Dave are parents to Allegra (6) and Elodie (4).

WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...Pastimes: walking any direction from my home and taking the day to meander and discover SF, even after 15 years here; **Reading Material:** *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson; **Film:** *La Double Vie de Veronique*; **Restaurant:** Kin Khao; **Destination:** France; **Parenting Advice:** Do whatever works for you.

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

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I ♥ Mom

Time To Be Free

By Inge Echterhölter

We live in a tiny house on wheels on a long journey. The original plan was to take a year to drive from Canada to Patagonia, but after six months of traveling we've just entered Mexico. We won't make it in a year, and we're not going to try. There are so many amazing places that we can't rush through this.

We're a family of four: My husband Bastian and I are German; our daughter Juni (3.5 years) and son Mika (1.5 years) were born in San Francisco and Hood River, Oregon. We've driven 14,000 miles since June 2016 in a Toyota Tundra with a small camping trailer, exploring Oregon, California, Washington, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Alberta, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and now, Mexico.

The first five months were expensive, but since reaching Baja California, Mexico, everything is cheaper and we're well in our budget. Bastian works one day a week as a software architect, sitting all day in a cafe that offers sufficient wifi.

Our little ones accustomed to traveling quickly. We drive only short distances, usually less than 3.5 hours, during which they take long naps and are easily distracted with movies, snacks, books, and toys while awake.

During the first few months, Juni was shy when meeting strangers, but Mika has become a great partner in crime. He learned to walk at campgrounds, on beaches, in deserts, and on forest floors. Now the two start their investigations as soon as we arrive at a new place.

Any interesting neighbors? Any cool campers to explore?

Without hesitation, they approach nice-looking people to offer help cleaning, repair whatever the person is currently working on, eat all their food, or request to hear a story from a book that they brought, most likely a German one. Juni doesn't know which language is which; she just happens to speak both.

Living in a tiny home is interesting. We have roughly four square meters including a kitchen, bathroom, and beds for all of us. We were somewhat exhausted initially because Mika awoke around five times nightly requesting milk. Since night weaning in September, we sleep better, except for those nights where something like new teeth bothers him. Surprisingly, Juni keeps sleeping though Mika cries in the bunk below her.

Juni sometimes says she misses the old house and her friends



in Hood River. But most of the time, she is happy as can be, soaking up new things like a thirsty sponge. The kids have seen buffalos, geysers, blowfish, enormous bugs, and they've learned that there is a difference between pet and street dogs. They very much appreciate the endless sandbox called desert where even lizards stop by while they play. Juni loves dancing under the stars and the incredible Milky Way, which we couldn't see from our old house. Their favorite things so far are

oceans, lakes, and rivers for swimming and throwing stones; the many different animals and insects; and meeting new people, including children.

Things we had to get used to include: spending 95 percent of our day outdoors, disposable diapers (we drop off our laundry at local services or do it in laundromats, so no more cloth diapers), and tap water that isn't always potable, or has to be treated and filtered first. In many areas, only processed, packaged food is available, usually non-organic. On the other hand, we try many new types of foods, and once we reach mainland Mexico, we'll enjoy the abundance of its mercados of exotic fruits and veggies.

One could argue that we're depriving our kids of a regular, predictable life with a predictable schedule and safety day and night. What they get though is an open heart and mind for new things. They learn that there are many friendly, welcoming people in this world who may look, talk, and live very differently. Most of them have much less than we do. They learn that water and

One could argue that we're depriving our kids of a regular, predictable life...What they get though is an open heart and mind for new things.

energy aren't always magically available, and have to be used sparingly. And they learn a third language, too.

We'll see amazing, extraordinary things on our way, like millions of Monarch butterflies dancing in the sun in Morelia, Mexico; toucans and macaw parrots flying through the jungle while sitting atop of the big pyramid in Tikal, Guatemala; we'll listen to the sound of the howler monkeys and investigate the work of leaf-cutting ants.

We'll have time for predictable schedules later in life. Right now it's time to explore and to be wild and free. ♦

Fascinated by the Americas since backpacking through in her 20s, Inge is now living the dream with her family and blogging about the journey at www.picturingtheamericas.com.



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