

AUG/SEPT 2017



GGMG

GOLDEN GATE  
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine

# Relationships





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Cover Photo by Jill Baker Photography  
Cover models: Charlie (4.5), Lila (4.5)



# Letter from the Editor: The Ties That Bind

By Sonya Abrams



Sharing a home with three kids under 6 years old, three cats, a dog, and a husband, Sonya has a lot of relationships to manage. In her spare time she—wait, she has no spare time.

Filleted and stunned after having delivered my first child via emergency c-section, I held my wriggling, wide-eyed, cone-headed baby and felt...nothing. Like most expectant parents, I'd assumed that my bond with my son would be instantaneous, a gauzy Gerber commercial with coos and laughter around an improbably clean kitchen

table. Yet here was this tiny creature who had lived inside me, looked like me, and was in fact 50 percent me, but I didn't know him at all. We appraised each other with equally dazed expressions, realizing that we'd need to figure out this new reality together.

As I fumbled around the rituals of parenthood, I focused on building a relationship with my baby. Over time, his amorphous

*Parenthood sent a shock wave through my marriage, bringing both new highs and new lows as my husband and I learned to relate to each other from within our new identities as parents.*

newborn quality dissolved and he began to take shape, a tiny human with a big personality bursting through. I learned his likes—3 a.m. feedings, vigorous bouncing, the cat's twitching whiskers—and his dislikes—carseats, slow-flow nipples, peace

and quiet. He began to figure me out as well, discovering what got my attention and how to best make his case for whatever urge needed satisfying.

As our relationship deepened and grew in intensity, the other relationships in my life were changing quickly. Parenthood sent a shock wave through my marriage, bringing both new highs and new lows as my husband and I learned to relate to each other from within our new identities as parents. My social world scrambled and re-ordered itself as well. I entered the mom-friend dating world, trawling for connections at meetups, playground play dates, and coffee hours with neighbors. After casting a wide net, I established a solid community, and as our family enters new schools and activities, new layers of friendships and community have been woven into our lives.

In this issue, we take a look at how we make sense of and navigate the relationships that enrich, and occasionally derail, our lives. Taking this examination down to the molecular level, on page 16, Catherine Symon describes how social needs are hardwired in us, and warns that a lack of meaningful relationships can have devastating effects on our health and well-being. Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss takes a look at friendship in school on page 20, and offers advice to help children make meaningful connections with people who may look or act a little different from themselves. On page 14, she also offers tips to keep friendships strong after making the leap into motherhood. Sandy Woo keeps it all in the family on page 39 with a discussion of the fictive relationships that provided a rich source of love and support during a childhood that sometimes seemed unmoored. And on page 26, Arwen Griffith mines the GGMG membership for stories emblematic of the love and frustration that make up our complicated relationships with our partners' families.

Sonya Abrams

## Housekeeping

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**THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY:** Peloton highs and a couple of "those days"; Heartbreak, divorce, crying my eyes out, and moving; Bringing grandma with everyone on vacation; a stubborn 5-year-old growing out her

bangs; Wimbledon; Got a new job; Helping my San Francisco kid acclimate to the heat of a London summer; Endless summer cardboard crafting and pipe cleaners EVERYWHERE; Too-short visit from Oma and Opa; Visits from old friends who have moved far away!

**COMING NEXT:** October/November—Growth

**CONTEST:** Congratulations to **Katrina Dirksen**, the winner of the ultimate family photoshoot with Katie Hanrahan Photography.

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email [editor@ggmog.org](mailto:editor@ggmog.org).

# Letter from the Board: Fresh Starts for Fall

By Sasha Fahimi

It's hard to believe that another summer has passed and the fall season is upon us. For some, children are headed to a new school or back to their old school for another year. For others, the school selection process is just beginning.

For those of you who will be embarking on the challenge of preschool selection, I am so excited to announce that this year GGMG will be hosting the Preschool Preview Night, with the support of Parents Place. At this all-in-one evening for parents of young children, you can meet and talk with representatives from more than 50 local preschools and get answers to questions about school philosophies, costs, schedules, pre-admission visits, and more. You'll have the opportunity to meet representatives from a diverse group of family-focused organizations and learn about their programs, services, and products. The fun will take place at the Hall of Flowers on September 28, and this event is free for GGMG members, so make sure to register if you haven't already!

In addition to the Preschool Preview Night, Parents Place will also be hosting a class on how to choose a preschool for GGMG parents, at a discounted rate. This class will take place on September 13, with a goal of helping parents feel more confident in reviewing and identifying the preschool that is the right fit for their family.

We have also recently renewed our contracts with our partners to bring you all some wonderful deals and discounts, including one free three-pass card to the JCC's KinderFunKlub program, 10 percent off its camps, 2 single day passes to the fitness facility, and 50 percent off the first three months of group swim lessons. At Peekadoodle, we have complimentary access to their

playspace at designated times and \$100 off any exclusive party package. Recess also offers complimentary access to their playspace at designated times, a special discounted rate on playspace day passes, and \$5 off parent workshops. With UrbanSitter, all GGMG members receive 35 percent off fees (excluding babysitting fees) and new users of UrbanSitter receive a \$50 credit.

This is just a small selection of the member perks offered by our partners and volunteers receive additional perks on top of these! Please go to [ggmg.org](http://ggmg.org) and check under Member Perks for more information.

*[T]his year GGMG will be hosting the Preschool Preview Night, with the support of Parents Place.*

Want to give feedback about GGMG's partners or anything else? GGMG's annual survey will also be live as of August 1. Be sure to fill it out and enter your email address to win a Nob Hill Spa gift certificate: <http://tinyurl.com/GGMG2017>.

Sasha Fahimi



Sasha practices family law at DeLacey, Riebel & Shindell. She is mom to rambunctious Mila and her rescue pup, Norman Joe Biden Fahimi. She and her husband love to take the kids hiking and spend as much time outdoors as possible.

## Cover Outtakes



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

Outside Eats

“Fog-ust” is upon us (we all know it starts in June), but that doesn’t mean a good family-friendly restaurant with plenty of outdoor space can’t be a saving grace. Next comes September, with its warm golden evenings. Bocce anyone?

By Arwen Griffith

Park Chalet

1000 Great Hwy  
Park Chalet is a classic. With its extensive kids menu, relaxed atmosphere, and lovely outdoor space by the beach, it rarely disappoints.

www.parkchalet.com



Biergarten

424 Octavia Blvd.  
Outdoor tables make this a fun spot to unwind on a sunny afternoon. There’s no kids menu, but if your kid will eat a hot dog or giant pretzel, you’ll be ok (not to mention there are plenty of nearby options if hunger strikes after you leave). The Octavia playground is also conveniently across the street.

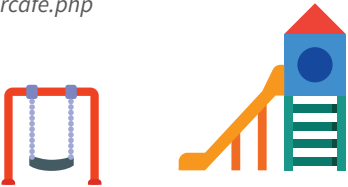
www.biergartensf.com



Crossroads

699 Delancey St.  
Good café food meets a large outdoor garden, and proceeds go to the Delancey Street Foundation. Win-win! Walk along the Embarcadero after dinner to stretch your legs.

www.delanceystreetfoundation.org/entercafe.php



Other options:

Presidio Picnic (Sundays seasonally, Presidio), Jupiter (Berkeley), Murray Circle (Sausalito), Fish (Sausalito), Mission Rock Resort (Mission Bay), The Surf Spot (Pacifica)

Arwen grew up on the East Coast, and is still trying to recreate those warm evenings spent playing outdoors while the grown-ups chatted. But with down jackets on.

The Ramp

855 Terry Francois St.  
Originally a bait shop, this popular spot is right on the Dogpatch waterfront and home to a huge patio where you can enjoy brunch, lunch, dinner, weekend BBQs, and even salsa dancing.

www.theramprestaurant.com



Spark Social

601 Mission Bay Blvd. North  
There’s plenty to like about this food truck hot spot in Mission Bay. There’s a beer and sangria garden, a rotating roster of food trucks, a giant retired bus to play around, and a wonderful playground nearby.

www.sparksocialsf.com



Presidio Social Club

563 Ruger St.  
This charming eatery has a patio and outdoor area for those among us who have the wiggles. There’s no kids menu, but plenty of kid-friendly food.

www.presidiosocialclub.com



Bar Bocce

1250 Bridgeway, Sausalito  
Right on the water, this stellar spot has a bocce court, a fire pit, and a beach. Kids will love their pizza! Check out the website for a weather cam to see if it’s foggy or sunny.

www.barbocce.com



Terrapin Crossroads

100 Yacht Club Dr., San Rafael  
You’d be hard-pressed to find a more kid-friendly outdoor space in the Bay Area. There are multiple playgrounds, an indoor train room, and Phil Lesh from the Grateful Dead hosts a story time for kids on weekends.



www.terrapincrossroads.net

Westbrae Biergarten

1280 Gilman St., Berkeley  
Beer, food trucks, kids menu, and a giant sand pit for kids? We’re in! Keep in mind that there is no indoor space, so save this one for good weather days.

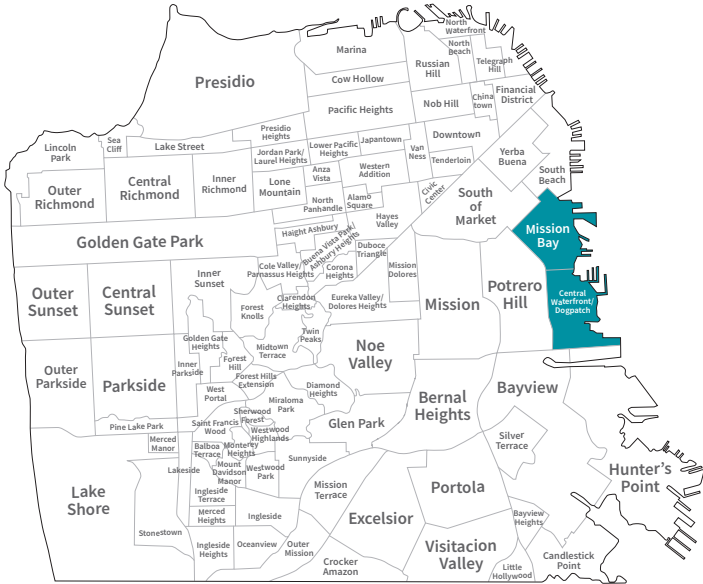
www.westbraebiergarten.com



Rock Wall Winery

3401 Monarch St., Alameda  
Alameda can feel off the beaten path, but it has a protected beach and one of the best sunsets around. Perched on the edge of the old naval base, Rock Wall has good food, a wine-tasting room, a geodesic dome, and a sprawling blacktop runway kids can make their own.

www.rockwallwines.com



Li'l Kid, Big City: Mission Bay and Dogpatch

By Jenny Shaw

Most people know Mission Bay as home to the new UCSF campus, and Dogpatch as a hub for creative types, but these former industrial zones also boast family-friendly activities worth checking out.

Start your morning with avocado toast at **Réveille Coffee** (610 Long Bridge St.) then head to the massive new playground at **Mission Bay Kids Park** (Long Bridge St.). Grab lunch from **Spark Social SF** (601 Mission Bay Blvd.), a food truck park with rotating options, or dine al fresco on the enormous back patio of **Stem Kitchen and Garden** (499 Illinois St.), amidst their organic planter boxes, bocce ball court, and fire pits looking over the bay.

Head south to the Dogpatch for a tour of some of SF’s finest small-batch fare. **Neighbor Bakehouse** (2343 3rd St. #100) offers sweet and savory pastries, while **Just For You Cafe** (732 22nd St.) is legendary for weekend brunch. Kids will love tasting samples at **La Fromagerie Cheese Shop** (2425 3rd St.). Enjoy family-friendly fine dining at **Piccino** (1001 Minnesota St.), then let the kids climb around at **Woods Yard Park** across the street. Finish with something sweet from **Poco Dolce Confections** (2421 3rd St.) or **Mr. and Mrs. Miscellaneous** (699 22nd St.).

Jenny is a scientist and editor who has enjoyed many a zeppole dessert at Piccino.

Not Quite Off-the-Grid Getaways

By Sonya Abrams

An influx of tourists and sub-optimal weather have you mired in the summer-in-the-city doldrums, and you’re pondering an escape to more pastoral environs. But maybe you’re not quite ready to strap on a 30-pound pack for some backwoods camping. Don’t worry—we have you covered with some non-traditional, rustic overnight options.

Bunk up in the windswept Marin Headlands. **Point Bonita YMCA Family Weekends** are offered throughout the year ([www.tinyurl.com/ptbonitacamp](http://www.tinyurl.com/ptbonitacamp)), featuring “military chic” dorm lodging with private rooms for families, hot meals, and facilitated activities for the whole gang and some for kids only, providing some much-appreciated parental relaxation time.

Is a weekend of outdoor movies, rock wall climbing, and a pool with cabanas more your speed? Petaluma’s **KOA campground** ([koa.com/campgrounds/san-francisco](http://koa.com/campgrounds/san-francisco)) is tricked out with amenities including wifi, a petting farm, playground, and accommodations ranging from tent sites to swanky cabins with cable and private bathrooms, some of which are handicap-accessible.

Feeling too hemmed in by the Bay Area? Set your sights on **Inn Town Campground** ([www.inntowncampground.com](http://www.inntowncampground.com)), nestled among the redwoods in the Sierra’s Nevada City. In addition to hosting tent and RV sites, Inn Town boasts a bevy of deluxe canvas tents with beds, heated mattress pads, electricity, and balconies; a few are even dog-friendly. Also on offer is a pool, laundry, and a camp store with beer, wine, and s’mores fixings.



Pescadero’s **Costanoa Lodge** ([www.costanoa.com](http://www.costanoa.com)) puts the “glam” in glamping. When not enjoying the coastal views from your lodge room, cabin, tent bungalow, or campsite, ditch the rugrats at the kids

club (ages 6-12) while treating yourself to a massage at the spa. There’s also horses, mountain bike riding, and a restaurant, complete with a kid’s menu.

A freelance photographer and editor, Sonya used to spend many summer nights in the woods under the stars, but nowadays she just longs for a time when sharing a tent with a family of five won’t be akin to entering the Thunderdome.



# Ask the Expert

## Getting to Know Your Post-Baby Body With Wendy Shaw Dahl, PT, NKT



**GGMG:** *What are some of the lasting physical effects of pregnancy?*

**WSD:** Post-pregnancy changes vary by individual, but the most common issues are caused by the lasting effects of the hormone relaxin. During pregnancy, your body produces high levels of relaxin to loosen your pelvic ligaments in preparation for birth.

But because relaxin travels through the bloodstream, it loosens all the ligaments in your body, not just the pelvis. Having loose ligaments throughout your body profoundly influences posture and increases the likelihood of lower back pain, sacroiliac joint dysfunction, neck and shoulder pain, and even knee issues and sprained ankles.

Additionally, ligaments stay relatively loose for up to 6-18 months after weaning for moms who breastfeed. So be patient with your recovery; it takes longer than you think. Throw societal expectations of what the postpartum body is supposed to look

*New moms are prone to repetitive motion injuries in relaxin-loosened joints due to frequent nursing, diapering, picking up or carrying the baby.*

like out the window! Ease back into exercise over a year (or more). Eat healthfully and don't diet—your body needs the calories to recover and make milk. Be super patient and kind to yourself. Respect and revel in what your body has just done.

**GGMG:** *What are some of the lesser known causes of pain after childbirth?*

**WSD:** Postpartum realignment of the pelvis can cause lots of issues. The pelvis is made of three bones held in place by strong ligaments. During delivery, the bones of the lower opening of the pelvis (pelvic outlet) are moved apart as the baby exits the birth canal. After birth, the bones of the pelvis tend to come back together haphazardly and often do not align the same way they were before pregnancy. Not everyone is bothered by this misalignment, but some women can experience varying levels of pain. Pelvic misalignment often goes undetected but is easily fixed with physical therapy (PT) or NeuroKinetic Therapy (NKT). This condition is so common that I believe it should be a standard component of postpartum care.

The tailbone can also get misaligned following childbirth.

Normally the tailbone aligns with the midline of your body (the imaginary line separating your right half from the left). As the baby passes through the birth canal, the tailbone gets pushed out of position and often ends up pointing to the side as the pelvic bones come back together. Because the tailbone is an attachment for the pelvic floor, misalignment in the tailbone can disrupt the function of the pelvic floor muscles, contributing to incontinence, difficulty urinating, pain during sex, and constipation.

Also, women who received an epidural during childbirth may be prone to back pain. The area in the spine where the epidural needle was inserted tends to stiffen and lose flexibility, which limits motion in that spot. When motion decreases in one area of the spine, motion increases in other areas to compensate. But this compensatory motion puts stress on the spine and the resulting overuse can lead to pain.

**GGMG:** *How can moms avoid the common aches and pains that come with taking care of a new baby?*

**WSD:** New moms are prone to repetitive motion injuries in relaxin-loosened joints due to frequent nursing, diapering, picking up or carrying the baby, etc. The best way to minimize these injuries is to be mindful of how you move and remember that pregnancy and childbirth have transformed the way your body works.

Avoid unnecessary neck and shoulder pain by keeping your back straight and a bit reclined when nursing. In other words, prop the baby up to your breast, don't hunch over to lower your breast. And when you change diapers, position yourself at the baby's feet so you can keep your spine in the same line as the baby's. Standing at your baby's side and twisting strains your back.

To safely pick up your baby, remember ABCD: Abs—keep them pulled in; Back—keep it tall; Close—carry the baby close to your body to reduce pressure on your vertebrae; and Don't—bend and twist if you need to lift or lower something at your side; make sure your whole body is facing one direction as you lift or lower. When carrying the baby, use a carrier as often as possible (front for younger babies, back for older babies) to keep them centered on your spine. To reduce the risk of shoulder (rotator cuff) injuries, never carry an infant car seat by the handle with one hand or arm! This goes for everyone, not just the birth mom. Carry infant car seats with two hands, like you would a laundry basket.

Remember, how you take care of your pregnant and postpartum body affects the quality of the rest of your life. Self care is important—be kind to your body! ❖

*Wendy is a Physical Therapist and Bay Area native living in San Luis Obispo with her husband, son, and two cats. When not working, Wendy is ski patrolling, traveling, walking on the beach, cooking, or baking. Read more at [www.mamamorphosis.com](http://www.mamamorphosis.com).*

# GGMG: Helping Others, Treating Yourself

## Drives

### Back-to-School Backpack Drive



GGMG is partnering with Raphael House ([www.raaphaelhouse.org](http://www.raaphaelhouse.org)) to host a backpack drive during the month of August. The mission of Raphael House is to help at-risk families achieve stable housing and financial independence while strengthening family bonds and personal dignity.



Raphael House is looking for donations of new backpacks for middle and high school students in any color except red and blue (many schools do not allow these colors). You can purchase via the Amazon wish list ([www.tinyurl.com/RaphaelBackpack](http://www.tinyurl.com/RaphaelBackpack)) and the backpacks will ship directly to Raphael House, or you can drop off your donation at 1065 Sutter St. anytime (front desk is staffed 24/7).

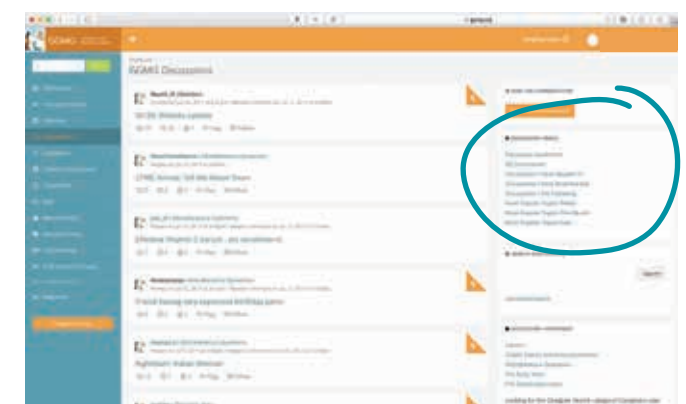
## Forum Tips

### Simplify Online Discussion

GGMG's new website is up and running, with a few new features that you may be unaware of. Want to know what hot topics you might have missed recently, including the most talked-about threads in the past day or month? Do you want to see all your postings on one page? Check out the Discussion Tools.

On laptops and desktops: log on to [ggmg.org](http://ggmg.org). From your dashboard, click "Discussions" in the left-hand menu. On the right side of your screen, underneath the orange "Post a Discussion" button, you'll see the Discussion Tools.

On mobile devices: from your dashboard, click the little four-lined icon next to GGMG at the top of the screen. A menu on the left will appear. Click "Discussions," then scroll down the list of discussion threads. At the bottom, under the "Post a New Discussion" button, you'll find Discussion Tools.





# DADLANDS

## Starring: Us

By Jon Rahoi

A romance is nothing but a story. A story two people tell each other, and their extended circle, that lasts longer than the natural span of their lives. It's a promise of adventure, of great things to come, of a safe home, of children, of prosperity, and of love. It's a story about someone always having your back, and you never being alone again.

Even the most epic romances start somewhere: with a look or a smile, by swiping right on an app, maybe with a sigh after last call, or at Burning Man. Maybe it's drawn out, maybe it's instant, or maybe there are fits and starts. It doesn't really matter, since that "how we met" story will evolve and one day come to resemble the romance itself. In any case, your kids will eventually be sick of hearing it.

Romances will endure the scrutiny of friends and family, the crippling self-doubt, crazy exes, the seven-year itch, difficult jobs, kids, sickness, health, weight gain, stretch marks, hair loss, politics, and one partner's obsession with Bitcoin.

And like all stories, the romance will eventually end. Most end when they're meant to—cancelled like a bad TV show. Some end with a bang of scandal and

yelling. Many end suddenly, sadly—that's just part of life. The great comedian Louis CK said, "...then you get old together, and then she's gonna die. That's the best-case scenario."

But between the beginning and the end, you have some serious romancing to do. How do you do that when your partner knows you by the sound of your footsteps? Or when she can tell you've eaten doughnuts because you avoid eye contact? How do you keep the spark alive when there seem to be no more surprises to make your story last a lifetime?

Be interested and interesting. Listening is the best foreplay of all. It may also be the hardest after the honeymoon. Life often becomes a predictable sitcom, where all of the jokes, catchphrases, and twists are visible from miles away. That can be comfortable, but don't become a rerun. Making an effort to stay interesting means you must retain the capacity for surprise and delight. Don't go overboard and wear a man-bun, guys, but small gestures can go a long way. Once, my wife was lying on the bed, chatting on the phone, and, unprovoked, I bit her on the buttock playfully and walked away. That was it, but weeks later her friends were still giggling about it.

All good stories have adversity and antagonists. If your story doesn't have either, then you will be those to each other. The reason that Marines bond so well is that they go through hell and fight common enemies as one. My wife and I have been arrested together, were robbed three times in the same day, accidentally rented our apartment to an international con artist, and learned each other's languages from scratch to be together. You don't have to do all those things, but you can take a disagreement with your HOA and turn it into "us against the world." Anything can be an adventure—it's all a matter of perspective. Again, don't go overboard. I don't want to see you on the news.

Lastly, don't forget who the main characters are. In the romance itself, there are two, and that's it. Dr. Drew of the radio show "Loveline" would always chastise people asking about threesomes. Introducing more people will ultimately destabilize a relationship, he said. Don't make love triangles; the triangle is nature's most uncomfortable shape.

Adding children is also destabilizing, but they also can be your greatest supporting characters (when they're not being

antagonists). It's tempting, when kids come along, to make the entire story about them. That's the destabilizing part: the "what" is great but the original "why" is forgotten. By the time the

*Once, my wife was lying on the bed, chatting on the phone, and, unprovoked, I bit her on the buttock playfully and walked away.*

whirlwinds are off to college, you've forgotten the story, and the empty nest is a lonely place.

So tell your romance story, one episode at a time, to each other, and to whomever will listen. You're doing something epic, and hard, and fleeting, but your friends and family are watching and learning from you, and they'll incorporate your story into theirs. Make it a good one. ♦

*Jon is a software architect, emcee, and part-time polyglot based in SF. He likes to argue about culture ad nauseam with his patient and lovely mainland Chinese wife of 15 years. Their three kids don't listen in any language.*



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# Books for Kids Travel Around the World

By Laure Latham

Raising globally minded children begins with knowledge of other cultures and countries. What better place to start than your local library or your favorite bookstore? Each one of these books will introduce children to geographies, cultures, and traditions from around the world.



## London: A Book of Opposites

Written and illustrated by Ashley Evanson

At tea time, plates and teacups are full, but when all has been drunk and eaten, plates and teacups are empty. The weather at Westminster Abbey can be sunny or rainy. With this book of London opposites, little ones will learn about British landmarks and traditions while expanding their vocabulary with simple words.

Ages: 0 to 2 years



## Cozy Classics: War and Peace

By Jack Wang and Holman Wang

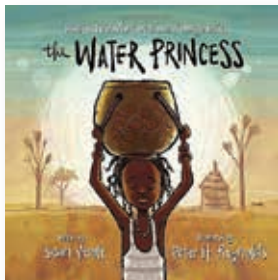
With adorable needle-felted scenes and only 12 words, this ingenious board book illustrates the spirit of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in a toddler-friendly format. Created by two very skilled twin brothers, this book is part of a series that introduces classics to the youngest of us, expanding their vocabulary with selected words and masterfully crafted felt figurines.

Ages: 2 to 5 years

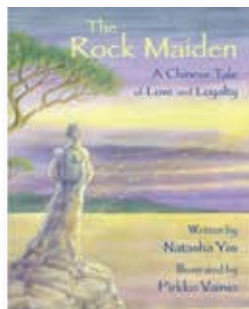
## The Water Princess

Written by Susan Verde and Georgie Badiel, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

Inspired by the childhood of Burkina Faso model Georgie Badiel, this book follows Princess Gie Gie's life as a little girl in a village in Burkina Faso. While she makes tall grass dance and tames wild dogs by singing, she cannot make water come closer to her village and must walk long hours every day to bring it home. The eyes of school-age kids will open as they realize that some children across the globe struggle to find clean drinking water. This is more than a book about Africa. It's a message of hope.



Ages: 5 to 8 years



## The Rock Maiden: A Chinese Tale of Love and Loyalty

Written by Natasha Yim, illustrated by Pirkko Vainio

If you've ever been to Hong Kong, maybe you've visited Amah Rock, a granite rock shaped like a woman carrying a child on her back. It is said that the woman was a fisherwoman turned to stone by the Goddess of Heavens to stop her from mourning her husband, who had disappeared at sea. This traditional folktale makes a lovely bedtime read, as

children imagine fishing sampans on the South China Sea and the Chinese world of gods and goddesses.

Ages: 3 to 7 years

## Nanette's Baguette

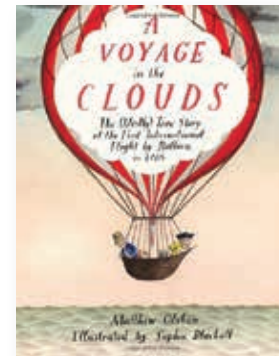
By Mo Willems

Bring a little bit of France home with this silly story about a little girl named Nanette who goes to buy a baguette at the boulangerie for her mother. But can Nanette resist the temptation of biting into a warm, crusty baguette?

Told in rhymes, this is a book to read aloud with baguette in hand.

Preschoolers will relate to the lure of fresh-baked bread and no doubt ask for more.

Ages: 4 to 8 years



## A Voyage in the Clouds: The (Mostly) True Story of the First International Flight by Balloon in 1785

Written by Matthew Olshan, illustrated by Sophie Blackall

Back in 1785, an Englishman and a Frenchman set out in a hot air balloon to cross the English Channel.

As to be expected, they ran into a few adventures and narrowly escaped

disaster, thanks to their teamwork. If you're flying internationally soon, this is just the book to introduce the concept. With baroque illustrations and word balloons, this book is both a delight to read and a pleasure to look at.

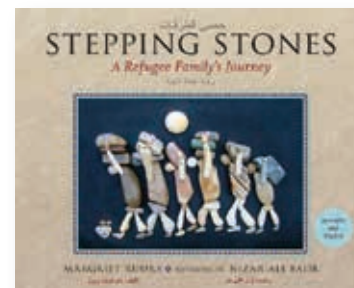
Ages: 4 to 8 years

## Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey (Arabic and English Edition)

Written by Margriet Ruurs, translated by Falah Raheem, illustrated by Nizar Ali Badr

Stone artwork by Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr inspired the story of Rama and her family, who had to flee their peaceful Syrian village because of war. Following the family's dangerous journey to safety in Europe, the book illustrates the struggle of refugees who've had to flee on foot with only what they could carry on their backs. The text, both in English and in Arabic, humanizes a conflict with powerful emotions from a child's perspective.

Ages: 5 to 8 years



## The Princess and the Warrior: A Tale of Two Volcanoes

By Duncan Tonatiuh

*Bienvenidas a Mexico!*

Princess Itza, the most beautiful and eligible maiden in Mexico, falls in love with a warrior, Popoca, who her father deems

unsuitable to marry her. He is poor and humble, yet Popoca is brave and accepts the emperor's challenge. If he can defeat Jaguar Claw, he will marry Princess Itza. School-age kids love a good adventure and this one will stir their imaginations, leading them to wonder how volcanoes are really formed and what leads to such traditional tales.

Ages: 6 to 9 years



## Amina's Voice

By Hena Khan

As if being 12 years old and in middle school isn't trying enough, Amina faces an internal dilemma. A Pakistani-American living in Milwaukee, she struggles to stay true to her family's culture while desperately wanting to fit in at school. If fitting in means giving up her own identity, will she do it? Providing a moving insight into Islamophobia and cultural

diversity at school, *Amina's Voice* also shows that music and innocence can transcend hate and ignorance.

Ages: 8 to 11 years

## Fatty Legs

Written by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes

In this memoir of an Inuit girl in Canada, Margaret Pokiak recounts leaving the high Arctic as an 8-year-old to learn how to read in a residential school. At school, this young girl faces the animosity of a cruel nun who makes her the laughing stock of the whole school. The book highlights hard topics such as loss of native culture and humiliation as well as spiritual strength, hope and human dignity. The endearing story provides a window into a different time and place.

Ages: 8 to 11 years



## Listen, Slowly

By Thanhha Lai

Almost 13 years old and looking forward to her summer at the beach in California, Mai must escort her grandmother to Vietnam instead, on a quest to find out what happened to her long lost grandfather. Less than thrilled, Mai is stuck with poor internet connection in a rural village in Vietnam. Enter new sounds, new sights, and new smells, as well as a new culture that

slowly redefines her heritage. Tweens will relate to Mai's reactions to new experiences in a foreign country.

Ages: 8 to 12 years

Laure is the author of the mommy blog *Frog Mom* ([www.frogmom.com](http://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](mailto:info@frogmom.com).



# From Womb to World

## Keep Your Friends Close

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

There is no doubt that pregnancy puts our bodies through a host of changes, some of them permanent. But what about changes to our friendships? What effects can pregnancy and parenthood have on these relationships, and what can we do to help them evolve?

### Friends without children

These are the friends who remind you of the wonderful and unique human that you were pre-kids. With the birth of a child can come the loss of identity. A girlfriend who hasn't had her world rocked by the arrival of a baby can serve as a benchmark of your pre-baby life. After my first baby was born and I was finally ready to step out of the house without my tiny bundle, these friends were the ones who jumped on their bikes and met me at the biergarten to share a Radler and help me escape another round of "Baby Beluga." My mom friends were all too busy or sleep-deprived to respond to my texts.

Try to refrain from too much baby talk. Use this time to ask about the lives of your friends and all the other wonderful aspects of life outside parenthood. Friends without children are your blessed cool "honorary aunts and uncles." Whether it's spoiling your little one with new toys and clothes or taking you out for a night of food-hopping in the Mission, keep these folks close as a reminder of your own exceptional and fun-loving self.

### Friends trying to conceive

Unfortunately, fertility issues often remain unspoken, even amongst the closest of friends. Maybe the only clue is a Costco-sized box of ovulation strips that you stumble upon while searching for more toilet paper in a friend's bathroom. In these tough situations, discretion, sensitivity, and space are key. Pregnancies (and all the joy, excitement, gifts, and social media updates that follow) can serve as unintentional stings of pain on a raw emotional wound. If you suspect that a friend may be dealing with infertility, ask how she's doing and don't stop checking in now and then, even if it's just a warm text message to say hello. Don't expect or demand a response, but don't assume she won't

want to partake in your rites of passage, like a baby shower or meeting your little one. She'll resurface in her own time and will be grateful that you didn't simply let the friendship slide.

### Friends with children

When it comes to these baby-bound friends, your pregnancy can feel like sudden admission into a very fun, complicated, and sleep-deprived club. They will be excited to add another member into their world, ready to discuss and unlock mysterious concepts like baby-wearing, weaning, teething, rooting, and co-sleeping that likely meant nothing to you in your previous baby-free life. Be forewarned though, you have now entered into a new dynamic with your besties that involves learning all about each other's parenting styles, while fighting the natural urge to judge choices

different from your own. I'll admit, I cringe when I hear of my friends' decisions to spank or homeschool their children, or purchase countless toys and candy on every errand. What I've found helps is keeping these issues compartmentalized. Dana, my atheist-turned Christian childhood friend, is now a father to three homeschooled

children (and likely a fourth, fifth, and sixth if that is in "God's plan," according to his wife). When we get together now, I keep my f-bombs to a minimum, our kids play freely together in his basement where we once played Truth or Dare, and we reminisce about the old days. I probably won't join them on a summer getaway anytime soon, but these small gatherings over the holidays widen our friendship circle in a way that can't be replicated in SF.

Pregnancy and parenthood bring such wonderful, special, mysterious, and exhausting times full of new emotions and discoveries with each little milestone. While many aspects of our lives do change, having children does not have to mean the end of our friendships. In fact, just as our hearts expand and grow with a newfound love we never imagined possible, our own friendships can expand and grow as well. ❖

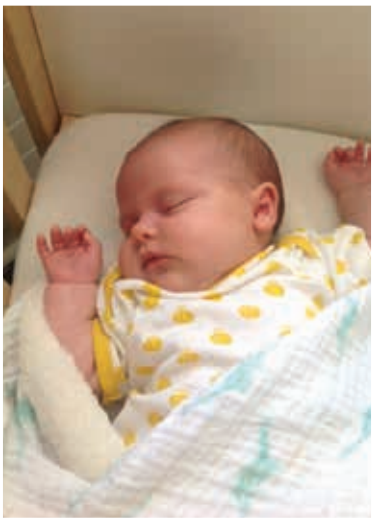
*Jennifer is a mom of two children, Lilly and James Duke, and she is also an awesome friend. If anyone has ideas on how she can do this professionally, please let her know.*

*Whether it's spoiling your little one...  
or taking you out for a night of food-hopping  
in the Mission, keep these folks close as  
a reminder of your own exceptional  
and fun-loving self.*

## New Arrivals



Lindsay W. **Baby Jack Michael**  
Jackie M. **Baby Kendall Ryan**  
Catherine V. **Baby Rose**  
Amy Spencer **Baby Jim Edan**  
Noelle R. **Baby Margaret Jean**  
Viola Lee **Baby Charlotte Kaia**



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

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a Babyganics gift set, fill out the form at [www.tinyurl.com/ggmNewArrival](http://www.tinyurl.com/ggmNewArrival)



## Volunteer of the Month



Congratulations to **Diana Young**, our volunteer of the month! Diana has been a volunteer with the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, working on educational events since fall of 2016. She is also the founder and director of Noe Valley Montessori and mother to a 4-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter.

**WE WANT TO KNOW...Place in the world you'd most like to visit:** Galápagos Islands; **Best feature in your neighborhood:** Noe Valley/Sally Brunn Branch Library; **Piece of baby gear could you not live without:** Boba baby carrier; **Most-admired heroine:** Jane Goodall; **First choice for new career or venture:** My current new venture—Program Director of Noe Valley Montessori!; **City slicker or outdoor enthusiast:** City slicker (and urban gardener)

*Diana will enjoy a 60-minute massage at International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at [www.internationalorange.com](http://www.internationalorange.com).*



# The Health Benefits of Social Relationships

*Understanding the social connections that we need to thrive in the brave new world of social media*

By Catherine Symon      Photography by Petra Cross Photography

We live in the Social Age. Social networking and media are so pervasive they have given new meanings to old words (connect, follow, share, like, post, tweet, status, troll) and introduced new words to our everyday vocabulary (hashtag, unfriend, Rickrolling). We are, after all, social animals. Living and traveling in groups helped our ancestors survive, and we retain that innate craving to connect with others.



Social media allows us to keep up with friends near and far, weigh in on group conversations, and establish dozens or even hundreds of online connections. But recent research indicates that despite the many opportunities to connect, our inherent biological social needs are not being met. More alarmingly, mounting evidence links the decline in the quality of social relationships and poor health. Social media isn't only to blame. In addition to spending more time with our laptops and mobile phones, we marry later in life (if at all), live alone rather than in multi-generational homes, and work more hours than ever before. What does this mean for our health and well-being?

## What is known about loneliness?

In the 1940s, psychoanalyst Rene Spitz published a series of articles on “hospitalism”—the psychiatric and physical decline of people who are institutionalized for extended periods of time. Spitz reported that babies who were raised in group homes didn't grow or develop like their counterparts who lived with families, even though they ate well, lived in hygienic and safe conditions, and received adequate medical attention. Not only were these “foundlings” more likely to have physical and mental developmental delays, one-third of them died before reaching adolescence, and a portion of the survivors never became self-sufficient and remained institutionalized for the rest of their lives. Given the level of care they were receiving, it became clear that the children were dying or becoming impaired due to a lack of social interaction. Nurses in the home worked in shifts and fed their charges on strict schedules but never picked them up (other than to clean or change them) and never nurtured them. The children were literally dying of loneliness.



While the importance of nurturing babies and young children seems obvious today, Spitz's findings took the medical community by surprise. And while the terrible effects of hospitalism became widely accepted and standards of care for infants changed accordingly, it took another 40 years for the research community to take notice that loneliness also seriously impacts the health of adolescents and adults. In 1988, social psychologist James House, PhD, and his colleagues at the University of Michigan analyzed data collected from five large studies and found that people who were socially isolated tended to die earlier than their socially connected counterparts. It was the first time researchers found such a direct link between loneliness and early death, and

## In relationships, quality matters more than quantity.

it triggered a sharp increase in the volume of research dedicated to understanding and documenting this correlation. In 2010, psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, and her team at Brigham Young University took advantage of the new wealth of data and pooled results from 148 studies to see if they could confirm House's watershed findings. Not only were the 1988 findings correct, Holt-Lunstad was able to quantify

the risks associated with social isolation: loneliness increases your risk of dying younger than your socially connected peers by 50 percent, regardless of your age, gender, or general health. This puts the risk of death associated with social isolation on par with the risks associated with alcoholism or smoking 15 cigarettes per day, and twice that of being sedentary or obese.

## How does social isolation affect us?

Everyone can feel lonely at times; it is a normal human experience and transient feelings of isolation are not detrimental to health. But chronic loneliness, which affects up to 30 percent of the population, is a growing area of concern. In the context of health effects, chronic loneliness (also called social isolation) is defined as the perception that one's social needs are not being met by existing social relationships. The key word here is “perception”: how connected you feel to your friends and family members has a much greater influence on your health than how many people are in your social circles. After all, it is possible for someone with very few friends to feel supported and fulfilled while someone else with a large entourage may feel alone. In relationships, quality matters more than quantity.

Researchers are not yet able to definitively say that social isolation causes early death,



but the association is so strong that many research dollars are being dedicated to understanding how social behavior triggers physiological changes in the body. One theory is that social isolation affects what is known as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis, the body's stress response system. The HPA axis influences inflammation, metabolism, glucose levels, cardiovascular effects, and other processes in the body. If chronic loneliness triggers an ongoing stress response, its effects in the body would be both long-lasting and far-reaching. It is also possible that socially active people are more likely to go to the doctor, exercise, and generally take care of themselves because they are encouraged and supported by their loved ones.

Evidence shows that people who feel lonely are more likely to have coronary artery disease, weaker anti-viral and anti-tumor defenses, higher levels of inflammation after experiencing stress, poor quality sleep, and depression. Social isolation can also affect us differently depending on age: lonely adolescents are more likely to be obese than their peers, whereas lonely adults have the same rates of obesity but higher blood pressure than their socially connected counterparts. One study found that lonely people are twice as likely to develop dementia in old age. Social isolation is even associated with lower resistance to the common cold.



## Are you lonely?

Researchers use questionnaires to assess the degree of a subject's loneliness. Responses to questions 1-11 are scored on a scale of 1-4 (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Always). Questions 12-20 are scored in the opposite direction (1=Always, 2=Sometimes, 3=Rarely, 4=Never). The higher the total score, the higher the degree of loneliness.

### How often do you feel...

1. that you lack companionship?
2. there is no one you can turn to?
3. alone?
4. you are no longer close to anyone?
5. your interests and ideas are not shared by those around you?
6. left out?
7. your social relationships are superficial or are not meaningful?
8. no one really knows you well?
9. isolated from others?
10. shy?
11. people are around you but not with you?
12. in tune with the people around you?
13. part of a group of friends?
14. you have a lot in common with the people around you?
15. you are an outgoing person?
16. there are people you feel close to?
17. you can find companionship when you want it?
18. there are people who really understand you?
19. there are people you can talk to?
20. there are people you can turn to?

*Adapted from the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), DW Russell, 1996*



## The benefits of social connection

The good news is that while chronic social isolation can make you more susceptible to health problems, having solid, supportive relationships has the reverse effect and is associated with better baseline health and resilience against stress or disease. Some researchers call this the “buffer effect” because social well-being seems to slow physical decline and increase the rates of healing and recovery. For example, women are more likely to survive breast cancer if their social support system increases after diagnosis. Adults in late life (the age group most susceptible to depression) show fewer symptoms of depression if they have people

*[S]ocial well-being  
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physical decline  
and increase the rate  
of healing  
and recovery.*

they feel they can talk to or rely on. The elderly are also at a lower risk of developing dementia if they have high-quality relationships.

Oxytocin is one reason social relationships seem to have a positive effect on health. These interactions increase your levels of this hormone, the same one that stimulates uterine contractions in childbirth, promotes infant bonding, and initiates the milk ejection reflex (“letdown”) for breastfeeding. Males and females of all ages produce oxytocin (sometimes called the “cuddle hormone”) when they bond socially or engage in reassuring physical contact with others, which may explain why social and physical bonding reduces stress levels.

In one study that investigated the link between physical contact and stress reduction, subjects had their blood pressure measured before and after a stressful public speaking task. Half of the participants sat quietly for 10 minutes before giving their speeches. The other half of the group held

hands with their spouses or life partners for 10 minutes and then hugged for 20 seconds before giving their speeches. In the end, the handholding/hugging group had lower average blood pressure readings and heart rates than the group that just sat quietly before performing the stressful task. Additionally, oxytocin increases trust in others and promotes social behavior, continuing the cycle of social interaction and stress reduction.

## What if I don't have a good network?

If you think you're alone in being lonely, don't. The number of Americans who say they have no one to confide in has tripled over the past 20 years. Many people rely instead on professional therapists or counselors to work through the challenges of everyday life. Ronald Dworkin, a physician and Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, noted there was a 100-fold increase in the number of marriage and family therapists, clinical psychologists, social workers, and life coaches over 60 years, even though the population only doubled in that time.

Building close relationships takes work and time. It can be challenging if you live far from where you grew up, are juggling jobs and family commitments, or simply don't feel you have the personality to surround yourself with lots of friends. One strategy is to start with the parents of your children's friends or classmates and identify the people that you would want to be friends with even if you didn't have kids. These are the ones who are most likely to be your confidants well after the kids have moved on to new schools or new friends.

Focus on quality over quantity. And if you spend more time on social media than you do with actual people, try to shift the balance and see how that changes your feelings about being lonely. Social networks can be a lifeline, especially to overworked parents. But don't let them replace face-to-face friendships. Your health depends on it. ❖

*Catherine is a medical writer and consummate introvert. She would rather be home reading a book, so she started building her social community by choosing a co-op preschool for her daughter and volunteering for GGMG.*







# Friends Across Difference

*Parents must model the inclusive behaviors they wish to see in their children*

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

Photographs by Aviva Roller Photography

Like many non-native San Franciscans, my husband and I were drawn to the city for its access and exposure to all kinds of diverse people, events, and opportunities. By virtue of our location, our children have the opportunity to hear more than one language spoken, encounter people of different ethnicities, and interact with adults who have special needs on a daily basis. (Our daily commute involves walking past The Arc, a local learning and achievement center, one block from our home.) Like many San Franciscans, we are regular attendees at Carnival, the Lunar New Year Parade, and Pride Day.

As two upper-middle-class, heterosexual, college-educated white folks, it's easy to feel self-satisfied with our children's exposure to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity as compared with their cousins living in East Coast suburbia. But experts warn that this smugness is misinformed. "There tends to be a sense in the Bay Area that perhaps we're in a bubble," explained psychologist, professor, and educational expert Allison Briscoe-Smith at GGMG's "How to Talk to Your Kids About Race" event in May. She is referring to how well we think we are doing in raising socially conscious children who are more comfortable with diverse groups

or people. "The research I have indicates that we're not [raising socially conscious children]...We aren't finding significant differences based on geographic regions."

As we try to raise the next generation of socially conscious and empathetic young people, parents like my husband and I, as well as other caregivers, must confront our premature complacency. We need to actually teach our children to make real and lasting connections with people who are different from themselves. But how? The research on helping children make friends across differences points to the critical need for adults to model these friendships first. How can we expect our kids to be comfortable with diverse languages, cultures, skin colors, ability levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds if our own close relationships don't reflect this?

Dr. Louise Derman-Sparks, author of *Children, Race and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops*, states that children will "naturally" grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society.

Until then, adults must guide children's anti-racist development. This includes the fostering of an accurate knowledge base and pride about one's own racial and cultural identity, accurate knowledge and appreciation of other racial groups, and an understanding of how racism works and how to combat it. She has developed a guide on how children's sense of racial awareness and identity develops through the years, and how we as adults can help guide their development. In many instances, these ideas and behaviors can be applied to areas of difference outside race, such as ability, as well.

## Infants and toddlers (6 months to preschool)

Babies as young as 6 months are already noticing differences in skin tone and race. Briscoe-Smith highlights studies that measure the amount of sucking and eye contact babies sustain, which indicates interest. When shown pictures of people of different ethnicities, babies tend to suck more and maintain longer eye gaze with people from a different racial background than their own. Toddlers are also very curious about their own physical characteristics and those they see in other people. They might show discomfort around unfamiliar people, including individuals with different skin color, those with an obvious physical disability, or even people with unfamiliar facial hair like a long white beard. (Anyone have a few photos of a screaming child on Santa's lap?) To combat these implicit preferences, parents can utilize books with characters showing different skin colors or written in other languages. Adult modeling continues to be key; we parents should be conscious of our body language and how we interact with others across difference in front of our little ones.

"Unfortunately, my friend group is not as diverse [as I would like]," admits Sara Sullivan, mom to Gavin, age 5 and Quinn, age 1. "We have some friends who are different than us but a lot more of the same. It makes it harder to teach friendship across difference, but I believe it starts with teaching compassion and the complexities. My son's preschool is not as diverse as I wish it was but that's part of the reason I'm choosing public [elementary] school."

*As two upper-middle-class, heterosexual, college-educated white folks, it's easy to feel self-satisfied with our children's exposure to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity...*

By preschool age, children tend to be both curious about and fearful of people with disabilities. Certain empathy-building activities can provide for rich discussion with our young people. For instance, children can experience what it is like to be blind by wearing a blindfold and talking about the experience afterwards. Preschool classrooms that focus on inclusion, community building, and "I-messages" start to foster the communication and relationship-building skills that will be key foundations for future school experiences.

## Early elementary (ages 5 to 8)

It's common for early elementary-aged children to initially play only with children who closely match their own gender, racial, or cultural identity. Certain attitudes around difference, either internalized or externalized, begin to calcify at this critical age. Frances

Abound, author of *Children and Prejudice*, goes as far as stating that after the age of 9, racial attitudes tend to stay constant unless the child experiences a life-changing event.

According to Derman-Sparks, the entry into elementary school can be a trying time for students who do not reflect the dominant group at their school site. If their own language, skin color, or family background is outside of the mainstream, they may react either by rejecting their home culture and learning the dominant one, or by rejecting the school's culture and insisting on only the one they are most comfortable with. In the best-case scenario, with caring support and coaching from parents, caregivers, and teachers, students learn to code switch and become bi-cultural. Teachers can play a crucial role in teaching students about sensitivity as well. Crystal Brown, a third grade teacher at Brandeis, a predominantly white private school, relates a frequent experience she has at the start of each school year. "Every year I hear a student make a comment about my last name, saying things like 'You're Ms. Brownie because your skin is brown!' I have to pause and state very firmly, 'No. A nickname can't be because of something about me that's different from all of you.'" Pointing out racism early, and non-threateningly, sets the tone for classroom social guidelines early.





One of the most popular school choices for many San Francisco families is an educational institution that features a language immersion program. Student Advisor Brenda Sandoval, a native San Franciscan, Spanish speaker, and product of SFUSD public school

*How can we expect our kids to be comfortable with diverse languages, cultures, skin colors, ability levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds if our own close relationships don't reflect this?*

immersion programs, has advice for families who reflect dominant white culture. “Be aware of your own privilege and how you look,” says Sandoval. “It does make a difference to someone who does not look like you.” In other words, it’s important to be sensitive and to respect other cultures in addition to gaining the positive benefits of learning language in an immersion setting. She also encourages parents to explore their motivations for choosing immersion programs. “It’s super admirable to want to take your kids out of that bubble, but [true success] goes beyond putting your child in Spanish immersion...What does it mean to be in immersion? Is it just because your neighbor got in too, or do you really [want your child to] know what it means to know the language?” Language is not just speaking, it is knowing and appreciating the culture that formed the language.

Fourth grade Spanish immersion teacher Charlotte Peterson notes, “As a white woman, having conversations with white kids about some of their [cross-cultural] experiences that play out in the classroom is hard.” Since it can be considered taboo to have open conversations about race and culture amongst the adult white community, talking about it with their children is that much more challenging. “I try to help [the children] see that what [they are] experiencing are cultural differences and we need to work harder to see where our classmates who are different are coming from. But children who have more privilege tend to push back more.” Simply by being part of the dominant culture, Peterson explained, white students have a harder time considering how their race might be factoring into social situations. This is where the

teacher’s guidance becomes invaluable. Around this time in school, we start seeing cliques form. School professionals supervising the yard during recess need to be particularly sensitive to this and monitor their formation. Organizations like Playworks work

proactively with schools to facilitate this important emotional and social development; the Playworks website notes that “when grown-ups or older students in leadership positions introduce basic rules and set the tone, children are better equipped to make play work.”

**Upper elementary, middle school, and beyond**  
*(ages 9 and up)*

As tweens, children continue to utilize learned misinformation and stereotyping they may have picked up earlier. However, Denman-Sparks notes that this age group also has the ability to examine their belief systems more objectively given new information and experiences, at least when compared to adults. As part of this challenging stage in life, young people rework and shape their own personal and group identity. Their own paths of consciousness



can go in any number of directions, positive or negative. Young adolescents of color may use this time to reclaim their identity and history, act out internalized racism against themselves and others, or both, depending on the level of guidance they receive. White teens may reject anti-racism teaching and actively carry out racism in speech and behavior by resorting to name calling or joining groups with an explicit bias against other groups. Alternatively, they may also insist on a “color-blind” stance and attempt to ignore reality entirely. Here is where trusted adults in their lives can provide proactive modeling and coaching toward breaking down barriers.

Everett Middle School baseball coach Ruben Urbina speaks passionately about sports as a means for helping children forge friendships across difference. “I’ve encountered throughout my years the need to move kids out of their comfort zone. Most kids feel very comfortable hanging out with their own race.” Coach Ruben explains that teammates are normally inclined to practice with their friends during practice. By forcing them to group according to his rules, he naturally increases the opportunity to make connections between different types of people. He also emphasizes that “on our team, we have check-ins that have nothing to do with baseball, but life. What do you have passion for? What are your interests and hobbies?...Sports are a wonderful way to break down barriers.”



**Striving towards a worthy goal**

My 5-year-old daughter happily bounces between boys and girls, babies and older kids, and students of all different races and languages, both in her social circles and amongst our own Colombian relatives. But it is my job to ensure that her eagerness to maintain a connection with those different from her continues in the years to come. This fall, she will be entering Grattan Elementary School. At just under 60 percent caucasian and located in the heart of upscale Cole Valley, this school hardly reflects the diversity of San Francisco, which is approximately 42 percent caucasian and more socioeconomically diverse. I am keenly aware that it was not the student population at Grattan that guided my choice, but rather the stability of the teaching staff and the potential for mom friends for myself—Grattan has a strong parent community with many opportunities for connection. Grattan beckons new parents to attend Mom’s Night Out or family bonfires on Ocean Beach, practices which are not necessarily a given at all SFUSD schools. However, despite the somewhat skewed demographics of Grattan’s student body, it boasts an Inclusion Committee, Black Parent Group, Multilingual Families Group, and an LGBTQ Kids Club. I recognize how much extra effort and conscientiousness will be required on my part to support these groups in the best, most appropriate, and sensitive manner. I will continue pushing my own family to be the kind of allies for equality we need more of in this world. ❖

*Jennifer is a proud German-Colombian mix, which she has dubbed “Gerlombian.” She is mom to two adorable children: Lilly, age 5, and James, age 18 months. She questions her school choice for both kids daily.*

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# Back to School Shopping

## Backpacks, lunchboxes, and name labels

By Shaheen Bilgrami

Whether you're packing your little one off to kindergarten, or getting her ready for preschool, or even if you're a seasoned pro preparing kids for an older grade, we've got you covered. We've scoured the GGMG forums to find the best backpacks, lunchboxes, and labels for the upcoming school year.

### Backpacks

The general consensus is that a kindergartener needs a regular-sized backpack that can fit a folder, lunchbox, jacket, change of clothes, and a couple of books. This should last through first grade, when a larger pack is needed. Preschoolers are fine with something smaller. Backpacks should ideally have comfortable wide straps with chest clips and be easy to open and close.

The lightweight and easy to clean **North Face Sprout** ([thenorthface.com](http://thenorthface.com), \$35) is perfect for preschoolers (our daughter carried hers for three years of preschool and it still has plenty of wear left in it). Its simple design, with one main pocket and a smaller front pocket, is easy for a younger kid to navigate.



Many forum moms loved the **Pottery Barn Kids Mackenzie packs** ([potterybarnkids.com](http://potterybarnkids.com), \$29.50-69.50). These come in a variety of gorgeous colors and patterns, including licensed characters. The small size is perfect for kindergarten and first grade. The large is great for second grade onwards, but some parents choose to go straight for the large-sized pack for their kindergarteners.

For older kids, a tough and long-lasting **L.L. Bean backpack** ([llbean.com](http://llbean.com), \$39.95-49.95) is a great choice. Forum moms seemed to particularly favor the Discovery and Explorer packs.



### Lunchboxes

Most moms want lunchboxes that are easy to open and close, don't leak, are easily cleaned, and allow kids to eat as much food as possible in their short lunch period. Bento boxes were the most popular choice that covered all these requirements.

The **Yumbox Original** ([yumboxlunch.com](http://yumboxlunch.com), \$28, with 20% discount code if you sign up for the mailing list) has six compartments including a small treat/dip section, so it's particularly good for a kid who enjoys variety. The **Yumbox Panino** (\$28) is a similar size with fewer compartments.



The **Omiebox** ([omielife.com](http://omielife.com), \$39.50) is a self-contained plastic bento with three large sections, with one section containing a small removable thermos which holds just under a cup of food, so you can pack hot and cold foods together. It's fairly heavy when you include the thermos, so it may not work for a preschooler or younger child.

The **Bentgo Kids** ([bentgo.com](http://bentgo.com), \$39.99 but can be found discounted on Amazon or Zulily) was another popular choice for preschoolers and younger elementary school kids. It contains five leak-proof sections for food, including one large enough for a half sandwich and one small enough for a dip or a treat.

### Name Labels

Kids lose stuff at school, so labeling is essential if you want any hope of retrieving lost items. Self-adhesive, washproof name labels are what you need, and the options on the market all work pretty well on everything from clothing and shoes to backpacks, water bottles, and lunchboxes. The choice comes down to aesthetics (colors, prints) and price. The most economical way to purchase labels for school is to buy a combo pack.



**Oliver's Labels**

[www.oliverslabels.com](http://www.oliverslabels.com)

Preschool package – 70 labels and tags  
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**Mabel's Labels**

[www.mabelslabels.com](http://www.mabelslabels.com)

Starter Label Pack –  
76 labels and tags  
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**Label Daddy**

[www.labeldaddy.com](http://www.labeldaddy.com)

Classic School pack – 136 labels and tags  
\$50 (Log onto [ggmg.labeldaddy.com](http://ggmg.labeldaddy.com) and enter promo code **GGMG** at checkout to receive 25% off your order!)

Seasoned moms recommend the use of permanent marker directly on clothing labels and shoes, or on a homemade masking tape label. If you want to go this route, it is worth considering a laundry marker such as the **Craft4All Permanent Laundry Marker** with non-bleed dual tip (\$6.49 for a 2-pack on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)), for more durability and a better finish.

Shaheen is a freelance writer and editor. She is also the mom of an energetic 5-year-old. Contact her through her website, [www.shaheenbilgrami.com](http://www.shaheenbilgrami.com).





# Ins and Outs with the In-Laws

**Y**ou didn't just gain a partner, you gained another family, sometimes with more baggage than you bargained for. Families are complex and families-in-law are no less so, adding richness to your lives in unexpected ways. Here we share GGMG member stories covering the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful.

By Arwen Griffith

**My MIL used to join us in New Orleans every year for Jazzfest. Every single year upon arrival, she would open up her suitcase and pull out a 2.5 lb bag of cashews and a fifth of vodka to share. That woman knew how to roll. —Sherri**

*Since my son was born, my mother-in-law has played a bigger role in our lives than my own mother, who, in her 70's, is too frail to provide any logistical support. When I went back to work, my mother-in-law brought over homemade meals to ease the transition and granted us date nights by babysitting. She goes out of her way to be respectful of our evolving family structure. I hope one day I will have the opportunity to be as gracious and loving a mother-in-law as she is. —Anonymous*

**I am the one who "has it together" (ha) in my immediate family. If there is a crisis or something to plan, I have to do it. My mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer right after I had my second son. She lives in Tennessee and is single. I was in the middle of trying to figure out logistics when my brother-in-law calls and says that he's got it. He'll fly out and stay for 6 weeks, putting his new job on hold. I've never felt the meaning of family more than in that moment. He wasn't worried about what was fair, or the expense, or the vacation time. As he was taking care of my mother-in-law, he was also taking care of us! —Anonymous**

*Arwen's in-laws live on the other side of the world, which may account for her wonderful relationship with them.*

*My mother-in-law is wonderful, generous, and kind, but has a serious case of control-freak-martyr-syndrome. She goes above and beyond for every holiday with meal planning, cooking, cleaning, decorating, etc...and no one can ever do anything right. Then she loves to complain afterwards about how "no one will help." She even remade the bed once that I had just made and I called her on it! We had a good laugh. Now she understands why my preference for curling up to a good book instead of helping in the kitchen is more out of self-preservation than laziness! —Anonymous*

**My very punctual German in-laws were staying with us once and we planned to leave at the crack of dawn to catch a flight. On that ill-fated morning, all alarms failed, including the 18-month-old. Waking in a panic, we rushed downstairs to check on them, convinced that they had overslept too. There they sat with jackets on, calmly waiting. Apparently, they didn't want to "disturb" us, flight be damned. —Sandy**

**My (ex) mother-in-law told me the reason I had to have a c-section was because I never worked in the fields. —Addie**

**My FIL and his wife got a new cat, and named it the same name as my daughter. Is it just me, or is that weird? —Jessica**

The first time I met my husband's parents was at his graduate school commencement. My husband was busy all day, so I had to meet his parents alone. At one point his mother expressed how interesting it was that the school's mascot was a beaver because of how "industrious" the animals were. I couldn't help but snicker. She asked what was so funny and it was clear she had no idea that beaver was slang for vagina. I thought to myself, "This woman is a nurse practitioner! It's my duty to inform her!" So I went for it. She turned bright red. That was ten years ago and needless to say she hasn't mentioned it since. —dbomba



## GGMG's Preschool Preview Night

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**DETAILS:** Meet and talk with representatives from dozens of local preschools

Get the answers you need to questions about philosophies, costs, schedules, pre-admission visits and more

Meet representatives from a diverse group of family-focused organizations and learn about their programs, services and products

**DATE:** Thursday, September 28, 2017  
**TIME:** 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** County Fair Building, Golden Gate Park, 9th Ave and Lincoln Way  
**COST:** \$15/person, \$20 at the door; FREE for GGMG members & guest  
**REGISTRATION:** <https://tinyurl.com/ggmgpreschoolnite>



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- **Getting Your Child to Listen, Oct. 19**  
REGISTER @ [www.kidslisten.eventbrite.com](http://www.kidslisten.eventbrite.com)

**[www.parentsplaceonline.org](http://www.parentsplaceonline.org)**

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[www.presidio.gov/GMG](http://www.presidio.gov/GMG)

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS: RENAMED AND REDRAWN

We've renamed our Neighborhood Meetup Groups and reconfigured the geographic divisions to support our community of moms and families. We now have 7 neighborhood groups. Please join as many neighborhood groups as you'd like, there's no limit! We encourage you to join at least three groups—yours and the two nearest to you.

Our dedicated directors and ambassadors organize and host playdates and special events all over the city. A taste of upcoming events are below, please RSVP through the link on GGMG website calendar. Be advised: in order to see the neighborhood events on the *ggmg.org* website calendar you must be a member of the appropriate Neighborhood subgroup. If you're interested in joining our committee, email *playgroups@ggmg.org* or *yanina.markova@gmail.com*.

Neighborhood 1

Marina, Cow Hollow, Fisherman's Wharf, Presidio, Russian Hill, Nob Hill, North Beach, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Wednesdays at 11 a.m.: Walk and/or Lunch—meet at Cheese Plus (2001 Polk St.)

Neighborhood 3

Cathedral Hill, Fillmore, Japantown, Laurel Heights, Pacific Heights, Lower Pacific Heights, Presidio Heights, and surrounding neighborhoods.

August 10th at 6pm: Heights Preschool Mixer at 2130 Post St. Community Room

Neighborhood 5

Duboce Triangle, Noe, Castro, Mission, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Every Second Thursday at Noon: New Moms Meetup at La Boulangerie (3898 24th St.)

Neighborhood 2

Richmond, Alamo Square, Hayes Valley, NOPA, Western Addition, and surrounding neighborhoods.

September 6 at 8 p.m.: Book Club at a member's home in the Inner Richmond—RSVP for address

Neighborhood 4

Chinatown, Dogpatch, Embarcadero/Financial District, Downtown, Civic Center, Mission Bay, Potrero Hill, SOMA, South Beach, and surrounding neighborhoods.

August 5 at 7 p.m.: Travel Tips and Stories at Atwater Tavern (295 Terry A Francois Blvd.)

Neighborhood 6

Balboa Terrace, Forest Hill, Golden Gate Heights, Laguna Honda, Lakeshore, Inner/Upper/Lower Sunset, St. Francis Wood, Miraloma Park, Parkside, West Portal, Clarendon Heights, Cole Valley, Lower & Upper Haight, Midtown Terrace, Panhandle, Twin Peaks, and surrounding neighborhoods.

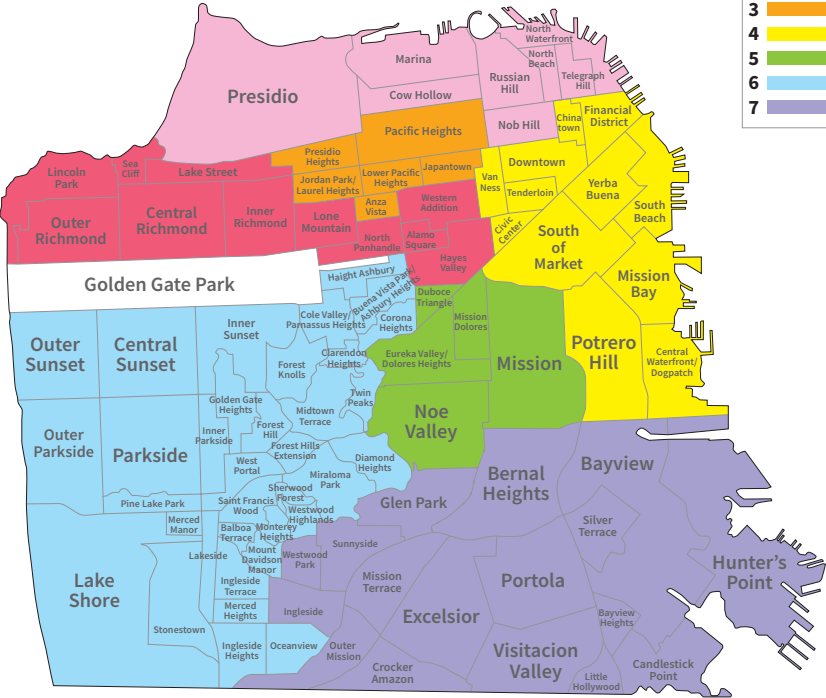
Last Tuesday of Every Month: Wine Night August 29 at 7pm: Park Chalet (1000 Great Hwy)

Neighborhood 7

Bernal Heights, Glen Park, Excelsior, Outer Mission, Mission Terrace, Ingleside, Sunnyside, Westwood, Visitacion Valley, Bayview, Portola, Crocker-Amazon, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Every Wednesday at 10 a.m.: Play date at Sunnyside Playground (233 Melrose Ave.)

GGMG Neighborhoods



KIDS ACTIVITIES

Beat the Witching Hour Play Date at Mother's Meadow Playground

Don't know what to do after nap time while you wait for bedtime to come? Join Kids Activities for an outdoor play date while your kids learn to make themselves a snack. We will supply food for an easy snack (or light dinner). Meet new playmates and enjoy this playground for all ages.

As always, please feel free to bring any gently used books and toys to trade or donate. Any leftover books and toys will be donated to the Homeless Prenatal Program.

DATE: Thursday, August 10  
TIME: 3:30. to 5:30 p.m.  
PLACE: 573 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.  
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: [www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/215191/2017/08/10](http://www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/215191/2017/08/10)

PARENT EDUCATION

Preschool Preview Night

Join the Golden Gate Mothers Group for the 24th annual Preschool Preview Night, an all-in-one evening for parents of preschool and pre-kindergarten kids! This year's event is hosted by GGMG, supported by Parents Place, at the SF County Fair Building (aka Hall of Flowers).

DATE: Thursday, September 28  
TIME: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
PLACE: 1199 9th Ave.  
COST: Free for GGMG members with discount code: ggmg17ppn

REGISTRATION: [www.tinyurl.com/ggmgpreschoolnite](http://www.tinyurl.com/ggmgpreschoolnite)

PLAYGROUPS

Playgroup Formation Event at Recess

Join us at this event and find that special circle of moms to help you survive motherhood. Get connected and start building friendships for both you and baby.

DATE: Thursday, September 14  
TIME: 6:30 to 8 p.m.  
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.  
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: [www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/214131/2017/09/14](http://www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/214131/2017/09/14)

CAREERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

How to Make a Career Change

Do you feel stuck in a soul-sucking job and long to do something that feels more fulfilling, even if you have no idea what that might be? Do you know you're in the wrong career but feel stuck by fear or self-doubt when you think about trying to make a change? Whether you're going back to work after maternity leave, thinking about returning to the workforce after time as a SAHM, or are currently in a job and just know you're meant to do something more, this workshop is for you. Join GGMG mom and career coach Julie Houghton for this popular career-change workshop and start gaining clarity to take steps toward finding work you love.

DATE: Friday, September 22  
TIME: Noon to 1 p.m.  
PLACE: Mechanic's Institute, 57 Post St., in the "Meeting Room"  
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: [www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/65515/2017/06/21](http://www.ggmg.org/calendar/event/65515/2017/06/21)

Moms Get What They Deserve

In May, the Just for Moms and Careers and Entrepreneurs Committees partnered with Carmel Blue to host the first GGMG Mother's Day Appreciation Event. The successful event featured facials by Neal's Yard Remedies, makeovers by Bobbi Brown, and professional headshots. Mamas shopped at the Stella & Dot pop-up shop, made castings of their babies' hands and feet, and snacked on bites from La Cocina and Tony's Pizza. A guided meditation closed out the day, locking in good vibes for the year ahead. If you have ideas for future events for Just for Moms or Careers and Entrepreneurs, please contact Michelle Tom ([michelle.fown@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.fown@gmail.com)) or Emily Beaven ([emilyabeaven@gmail.com](mailto:emilyabeaven@gmail.com)).





Committee Spotlight: Diversity and Inclusion

**Describe the personality of your committee.**  
Optimistic, determined, and fearless!

**Why do you do what you do? What has been an unexpected benefit of being involved with the Diversity and Inclusion Committee?**  
We want to raise our children to be compassionate, culturally aware citizens of our increasingly diverse, interconnected world. An unexpected benefit has been meeting other passionate volunteers, and forming new friendships.

**What types of activities or projects do you undertake?**  
We provide resources for members with diverse families, as well as practical tips for allies. We aim to foster connections among moms of all backgrounds and to evolve the demographics of GGMG to more closely reflect those of the Bay Area. This year, we hosted a community outreach booth at the Japantown Cherry Blossom Festival, held a discussion with Dr. Allison Briscoe-Smith on “How to Talk to Kids About Race,” and began planning an anti-bias training for the board, the diversity and inclusion team, and the webteam. In addition, we are launching outreach efforts to recruit new members from backgrounds underrepresented within GGMG. We have also sought to increase visibility and awareness of GGMG’s fee scholarships.

**How do you know when you are making a difference?**  
When language supportive of diversity and inclusion is integrated into the GGMG community (e.g., our website, other committees, forum discussions), and becomes part of the everyday fabric of our organization.

**Who are your current volunteers?**  
Molly Agarwal, Krupa Antani, Karen Brein, Cat Bui, Maren Eattock, Sasha Fahimi, Kyra Jablonsky, Annie Petrides, Monique Spyke, Diana Young, Jaysa Kass Zablatzsky.


**What’s next for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee?**  
More educational programs (including Part 2 of “How to Talk to Kids About Race”), social events with cultural components, focused outreach efforts, and a blog!

**How can interested GGMG members get involved?**  
Email us anytime at [diversity@ggmg.org](mailto:diversity@ggmg.org). We are always looking for dedicated, motivated volunteers who share our passion to achieve our goals.

On June 1, 2017, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee proudly held its very first educational event: “How to Talk to Kids About Race.”

This lecture by Dr. Allison Briscoe-Smith addressed current research on racism and its impact on people of all ages, kids’ perceptions and developing understanding of race, and ways in which parents can engage their children in meaningful dialogue about race and diversity.

The event for GGMG members and spouses was held at Recess Urban Recreation and included childcare and dinner. In order to further maximize accessibility, the talk was livestreamed and recorded. To watch the video, visit <http://bit.ly/2ubvdo6>, or email [diversity@ggmg.org](mailto:diversity@ggmg.org).



Save the Date for GGMG’s Annual Fall Festival

Please join other members and their families as we kick off the fall season at Sharon Meadow in Golden Gate Park on Sunday, October 1 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The festival will include live music for kids of all ages, as well as wellness demonstrations for mamas. We’re also introducing a picnic area this year, where several of our partners will be providing picnic essentials. Make sure to bring a blanket!

Back by popular demand is our sports zone, as well as age-appropriate bounce houses, and an even larger pumpkin patch, complete with pumpkin decorating. We’ll also have our photo booth, a diaper changing station, a nursing station, and stroller parking, as well as a new toddler run, where we’ll have a safe place for your little ones to roam. Don’t forget the many activity booths our fantastic partners will be running, as well as our fabulous raffle. So much fun!

We’re always in need of incredible volunteers like yourself to make this amazing event happen. All volunteers will receive a Starbucks gift card, a goodie bag, and a chance to win the volunteer raffle prize. Various shifts and positions are available. Please email [rsvp@ggmg.org](mailto:rsvp@ggmg.org) with questions.



The first 250 members to arrive will receive a jam-packed goodie bag.



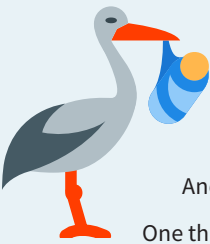
Volunteer with GGMG!

With summer wrapping up and families getting ready for back-to-school, now is a great time to consider volunteering with GGMG. There are over 40 open positions across multiple committees, so there is definitely an opportunity that fits your schedule and interests.

This organization would not be what it is today without the talented women who work so hard to make it a success. Join the team to not only give back but also to make new friends, exercise your “mom brain,” and have fun!

For more information on GGMG’s open volunteer positions, please contact the Recruiting Committee at [volunteer@ggmg.org](mailto:volunteer@ggmg.org).

How to Prepare for Your First Baby



To-do list for first-time moms: Car Seat? Check. Stroller? Check. Hospital bag packed? Check. And on it goes...

One thing new moms can forget when preparing for baby’s arrival is how they will take care of themselves after baby’s arrival. It’s easy to overlook finding support for yourself in the rush to “nest.” GGMG is here to help!

We have a list of new mom resources compiled by our Community Support team: [www.ggmg.org/community-resources/new-mothers](http://www.ggmg.org/community-resources/new-mothers).

Joining a playgroup is also a great way to grow your village. Connect with other moms with similar-aged babies or meet moms in your neighborhood by checking out the GGMG playgroup formation events page at [www.ggmg.org/about-us/playgroups](http://www.ggmg.org/about-us/playgroups).

Taking care of yourself is one of the best ways to take care of your baby. If you suspect you

may be suffering from postpartum depression or anxiety, consult your doctor. GGMG maintains a list of resources here: [www.ggmg.org/community-resources/postpartum-depression](http://www.ggmg.org/community-resources/postpartum-depression).

GGMG is here to help you with meals, locate resources, or provide a listening ear. Contact us at [member.support@ggmg.org](mailto:member.support@ggmg.org).

Congratulations on your new baby and welcome to motherhood!



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# I ♥ Mom

## Thicker Than Blood

By Sandy Woo

The day fiction collided with reality in my world, I should probably have known better. After wandering away from my grandma Nainai at Woolworth's, her royal highness Maleficent convinced me to empty a can of Aqua Net onto a gauzy pink scarf "to see what happens." Nainai stared me down while she paid for the damaged goods. "Who is she? Maleficent isn't real." To my 4-year-old brain, imaginary friends *were* real. It was my reality that was confusing: Nainai technically isn't my real grandma. My relationship with her is what sociologists describe as a form of fictive kinship, where individuals unrelated by blood or marriage develop emotionally significant ties.

Nainai met Grandpa after her marriage ended in a hysterectomy due to an ectopic pregnancy. She chose to be the lesser of two pariahs—better to be the concubine of a married man with two sets of children from two different women than a shunned, single divorcée. She raised my dad and his three siblings, and then me, the baby she never had, all without any marriage papers.

Perhaps you can choose your family, as my grandma did, and manipulate reality to fill the gaps in real kinship networks. Although she doted on me like any grandparent would, Nainai also mothered me. She fed me 2 a.m. bottles, toted me around town, potty trained me, and learned English with me. When my own parents were too distracted to deal with my woes, it was Nainai who stroked my hair, looked at me with pink-rimmed eyes, and told me she loved me.

This mothering was vital to my childhood. In a large, confusing family of real and fictive relatives, where three generations lived under one roof, she was my ally. Virtually every adult was "family"

*Perhaps out of some fear of being alone or unmoored, I collected friends as family throughout adulthood.*

(as a sign of respect in Chinese culture, all adults are called "aunt" or "uncle"). Nainai paid me extra attention, especially after mom left in a fit of sound and fury and a new lady I had to call "auntie" appeared regularly in my life, or rather, my father's life. This auntie was up to no good, I was sure of it. Imaginary friends and Nainai were safe refuge; they were my happy place, my idealized notion of what a family should be.

Fast forward several decades later, and I watch, amused, as my son and his siblings squabble and squeal with joy, teaming up with a menagerie of dragons, puffins, and wolves to wreak havoc on the house. His brother is blond and about three months

younger. His sister actually resembles his coloring, with the distinctive look of a hapa, or mixed race, child.

While not figments of his imagination, neither of these children are actually related to my son, nor are they related to each other.



Unbeknownst to me, at 3 years old my son created a fictive kinship of his own, adopting his friends as his own siblings. He has spoken of these siblings so convincingly at preschool that his teachers have asked if we have more children. We had never previously discussed this family dynamic before, and I wondered where he got this idea of family from. Sure, I've replicated the full house of my childhood with multiple "aunties" and "uncles," but I've never explicitly told him they weren't related to him. Perhaps out of some fear of being alone or unmoored, I collected friends as family throughout adulthood. I consider these relationships to be thicker than blood and magical in their own right.

I asked my son M about his brother and sister, to gauge whether he understood what those words actually meant. "Why do you call N your brother and O your sister? Is it because they're your best friends?" I asked him, putting words into his mouth. Waiting for eloquence from a 3-year-old boy is a fool's errand; looking at me blankly and knowingly at the same time, M replied, "they just are." My heart swelled hearing his response. Since I joined motherhood rather late in life, M will likely remain an only child, but only by strict definition. He will have special friends and family members of his own choosing.

In my world, we substitute and create the family we long for, regardless of the label. My Nainai chose me, and I am eternally grateful. And without knowing my family history, my son somehow understands and embraces his fictive relationships as well. ❖

*Sandy is an only child married to an only child, raising an only child. As a result, she presents her son with an endless supply of aunts and uncles.*





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