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LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR:

Brave Like a Mother

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a Cole Valley resident and mom to three children, two cats, and one dog.

No one told me that part of becoming a mother is learning how to be tougher and more direct. Reminding your boss that you need a pumping break. Yelling at the impatient Muni bus driver to leave the doors open longer so you can load in your stroller. Asking your neighbors to stop smoking joints beneath the nursery window. A thousand necessary if uncomfortable moments as we strive to do what's best

for ourselves and our children. For a conflict-averse person like myself, who doesn't even like to send back the wrong order in a restaurant for fear of upsetting the server, learning to advocate for myself and my children has not been easy. As much as I know the importance of making women's voices heard and modeling strength and confidence for my children, I still often find myself taking the path of least resistance. There have been times I've kicked myself for not questioning a pediatrician's rushed diagnosis, or for not complaining to our school's after-care program when they were negligent with my daughter's injury because I didn't want to be seen as difficult. These personal failures stick with me.

Recently, one of my children received a slew of diagnoses that will require accessing support services and accommodations through the school system, a process that countless friends have warned me will involve a lot of advocacy, follow-ups with challenging bureaucracies, and repeated

requests on my part. As I've absorbed this news, I've not only worried about my child's reaction to the diagnoses, but I've also fretted about my ability to confront my inner discomfort and stand up for my kid. As my own family navigates this new course through life, I am particularly excited to share this latest issue of *GGMG Magazine*, which I am certain I will keep returning to for inspiration and advice. Yuliya Patsay explains the purpose and processes involved in acquiring an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan for your school-aged child, both powerful tools in acquiring accommodations that may be critical to your student's academic success, and more.

“No one told me that part of becoming a mother is learning how to be tougher and more direct.”

H.B. Terrell shares how women in comedy can be powerful advocates for change and boundary-pushing, providing examples of women comedians who have helped push forward societal views on race, gender, and parenthood, and offering advice for women who may want to dip their toe into the world of comedy. And our Stand Up issue is the perfect place to take another look at Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss' exploration of the mama bear concept and the science behind the special strength and instincts that reside in each of us mothers.

Parenthood asks a lot of us. We hope that this issue gives you some tools to harness the best in yourself.

Sonya Abrams

HOUSEKEEPING

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NEXT ISSUE: Discovery

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

LETTER FROM
THE BOARD:

Stand Together

By Connie Lin



Connie has lived and worked in San Francisco for more than two decades and is thrilled that her two kids get to call the city their home.

After becoming a mom, I learned to create a stronger sense of purpose and drive. It was no longer about just my husband and me. I had to become stronger for my kids: to be willing to speak up when something wasn't quite right at daycare or school, and to have more of a voice at work, to make the most of the time I wasn't with them. Each parental decision—from which sleep sack to buy, to whether to make baby food from

scratch, to how long to pump breast milk—seemed so important and impactful. And at work, I wanted to spend my time working on projects and initiatives that really mattered, which meant becoming more comfortable pushing for clearer direction and purpose.

Especially during the baby and toddler years, I rarely slept more than a few hours each night, worked stressful and busy full-time jobs, yet pitched in whenever there was an opportunity to volunteer at school or to serve my community. These were the years when GGMG was such a boon for me, providing kinship, advice, and supportive services that made me feel a part of the mom community in San Francisco. GGMG's online forums and the moms I met at our events helped me to explore options and make choices for my kids,

paving the way for them to be happy and healthy elementary schoolers now.

Our GGMG community is strong and filled with parents like you and me who can help each other in our journeys to and through parenthood. While your children enjoy playing in the bounce house or getting their face painted at our Spring Fling this April, come by and get to know our volunteer team. GGMG is run by volunteers, and our ranks have thinned a lot

“Taking care of our own physical and mental health is critical to give us the energy and stamina to be able to take care of our families, build our careers, and more.”

over the past few years, especially due to the pandemic. We really need your help right now and would love to have you as a volunteer. There are many small and big ways you can help—from helping with socials and events, helping with internal and external communications, as well as leadership roles on our board and committees. Please reach out to us at recruiting@ggm.org to tell us about who you are, and we can find the right opportunity for you.

Looking forward to seeing you at GGMG's spring events!

Connie Lin

COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography
Models: Bradley (8)

Still Standing: Explore San Francisco History

By H.B. Terrell

740 BCE: Ohlone Shellmound, 1993: Oche Wat Te Ou, Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco

From at least 740 BCE, the site of Yerba Buena Gardens was a shellmound made of earth and organic matter built up over thousands of years by people native to the San Francisco Bay Area. Shellmounds were ceremonial spaces, burial sites, and communal workspaces. When colonizers arrived, Native populations were devastated, leaving shellmounds standing as the only markers of once-thriving villages—and even these were later leveled and paved. *Oche Wat Te Ou (Reflections)* is a semicircular wall of wood in the Gardens, patterned with Ohlone basket designs and standing behind a crescent-shaped pool and moss-covered rocks. Artists Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and James Lunain situated this piece near a live oak tree to be used as a performance area for events in the oral tradition as a tribute to the native Ohlone peoples.

1848: Tianhou Temple, Chinatown, San Francisco

San Francisco's Chinatown predates the Gold Rush, and Tianhou (also spelled Tin How) is the oldest Taoist temple in the neighborhood. The only surviving elements of the building after 1906 were its image of the sea goddess, Mazu, the temple bell, and part of the altar. The Temple reopened in 1910 and today, visitors ascend three flights of stairs to encounter calming incense and a phone-free respite. Near Mazu's shrine, ritual items donated by devotees more than a hundred years ago are on display. The balcony is accessible to visitors, providing a stunning view of Chinatown. The temple is open daily and free to visit in respectful contemplation.

1849: Grace Cathedral, Nob Hill, San Francisco

Little Grace Chapel's opening service in 1849 was attended mostly by miners and ended with a collection plate full of gold dust. The first cathedral was built on the site of the chapel in 1862, standing as a picturesque hillside ruin for months after the 1906 earthquake and fire. Today, visitors to Grace Cathedral come to see its striking architecture and stunning stained glass, walk its meditative labyrinths, have a quiet moment of remembrance in its Interfaith AIDS Chapel, attend restorative yoga classes, and



South Park, ca. 1860–1880

examine art by Keith Haring, Ansel Adams, Lorenzo Ghiberti, and more. During Monday to Saturday sightseeing hours, visitors can opt for a self-guided tour, docent-led tours, a children's treasure map, or a combination of the three.

1852: South Park, SoMA, San Francisco

In 1852, industrialist George Gordon built an exclusive residential community modeled after a square in his native London. The first area in San Francisco to feature sidewalks (and at its center a grassy oval—keyed and accessible only to residents), it housed a strolling area with a windmill that pumped water to the mansions. Subsequently, South Park has been a camp for 1906 refugees, a landscape of bonfires where longshoremen kept warm between jobs, a gathering space for addicts, cheap studio space for artists, and a haven for startups. Returning to its posher roots with an egalitarian twist, in 2017 South Park underwent a \$3.8 million renovation featuring the transplantation of old growth trees, geometric benches, and a play structure with undulating forms built atop a mounded grassy surface—open to all. San Francisco Chronicle urban design critic John King has called South Park “one of San Francisco's most satisfying public spaces.”

H.B. loves to learn about the many histories of the San Francisco Bay Area.

1854: Mechanics' Institute, Financial District, San Francisco

In 1854, after the Gold Rush boom went bust, a group of businessmen became concerned with the survival of the newly incorporated city of San Francisco. They opened a member-funded library and educational organization—the Mechanics' Institute—starting with a few books and a reading room upstairs from the Wells Fargo Bank on what was then waterfront property. The chess club was added shortly after, when members demanded space where they could gather and play. Today the Institute feels like a step back in time, but with modern amenities like wi-fi, an online chess club complementing in-person competition, and an eclectic collection of books that includes both bestsellers and hidden gems. Educational programming has evolved from the formal classes of the 1850s to a thriving roster of cultural events, book clubs, reading seminars, writing classes, member parties, and author talks. Catch a Wednesday noon tour to learn more about the Institute's history.

1855: Point Bonita Lighthouse, Marin Headlands, Golden Gate National Recreation Area

As the city's population exploded, a system of lighthouses was built to guide gold-seeking sailors through the dangerous waters between the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay. Point Bonita Lighthouse was completed in 1855 and located north of the Golden Gate Bridge to make the entrance recognizable for ships sailing up the coast from the south. Today, the lighthouse is part of the largest urban national park in the United States and is an active lighthouse. See harbor seals, views of the Pacific, wild landscapes, up-close geology, and fascinating history along the half-mile trail to the entrance to the lighthouse, accessible to visitors Fridays through Mondays.



Photo by Allan J. Cronin

Dance Studios

By Christine Chen

Founded by Ms. Simone, former head of JCCSF's dance program pre-COVID, **CANVAS Dance Arts** in the Richmond District offers ballet and hip-hop classes in an indoor and outdoor space for kids 2.5 to 12 years old.

A legacy program for the now retired Miss Tilly, **Ballet with Miss Ausjoli** hosts ballet, tap, and hip-hop at the Westside Art House on Balboa Street.

ODC Dance Commons in the Mission offers kids aged 3 to 18 years old a variety of dance classes, ranging from contemporary, hip-hop, jazz, and tap, to traditional ballet.

For preschoolers to age 8, **Tutu School** has multiple locations throughout the Bay Area for beginner ballet dancers.

At the **JCCSF Tikvah School of Music & Dance**, kids aged 2 to 17 can learn dance styles like ballroom, contemporary, folk, hip-hop and Israeli; sing songs in English, Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish and each semester culminates in a stage performance.

Steppin' Out Dance Studio in the Mission offers tap, ballet, and jazz for kids and teenagers.

Sunset Academy of Dance offers classes in tap, hip-hop, jazz, and children's combination classes and does an annual show in June. Students can join competitive groups and perform at different venues.

Geary Dance Center in the Richmond District offers a wide variety of classes, from preschool movement to ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop, creative movement, contemporary, funk, jazz funk, musical theater jazz, choreography, character, and modern dance.

Moving Arts Academy of Dance in Mission Terrace provides “the AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE® National Training Curriculum, a breakthrough 9 level program” for ages 3 and up.

For aspiring ballerinas, **San Francisco Ballet School** offers a challenging curriculum, taught by faculty members from the San Francisco Ballet and companies around the world. Select students have the opportunity to perform in the Nutcracker during the holiday season.



Christine's daughter loves ballet and wants to be Clara in the Nutcracker after watching a friend perform the Nutcracker onstage at SF Ballet.

How to Recognize and Counteract Implicit Bias

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

A young patient comes into our clinic visibly in pain with a loosely placed splint around their ankle. The x-ray shows a severely broken ankle. Before entering the room, Nirav knows there must be more to the story. How can a young patient come into the clinic with this severe an injury without being offered surgery at the first hospital where they were seen? He asks the family, who speak limited English, for more information. They voice concerns about not receiving pain medication at discharge, not being told the risks and benefits of various treatment options, and being referred to a community health clinic even though they have private insurance. They state that no one was overtly mean or discriminatory, but they feel that the provider made multiple assumptions based on their language and race/ethnicity.

This story unfolds multiple times across the Bay Area every day. Humans' thought processes are guided by our previous experiences, teaching, and unconscious thoughts. And doctors are human. Implicit bias—our attitudes towards people being shaped by stereotypes at an unconscious level—is exceedingly common in healthcare settings, especially in clinical situations where multiple demands encourage rapid decision-making. Our brains have a dual process for decision-making: one is slow, careful, and controlled, and the other aids in automatic, effortless, and associative choices. In a busy practice, implicit biases can pop up when these associative decision-making paradigms take over, and can lead to worse doctor-patient communication, missed diagnoses, and in some cases, worse outcomes for the patient.

What are a few common biases, and how do they impact kids and parents?

Myth: Black children don't experience pain as much as other children. An assumption that Black adults have less pain and therefore need less analgesic medicine has long plagued Western medicine. Recent studies in emergency rooms show that Black and Latinx kids also receive inadequate doses of opioid-based analgesics. The same pattern of withholding has been demonstrated in children with abdominal pain and appendicitis, as well as those with fractures.

Myth: ADHD is less common in girls and children of color. For more than 15 years, it has been well established that white boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD and receive medication than girls. Similarly, Black and Latinx

children are less likely to be appropriately diagnosed and treated than their white counterparts; often, they are labeled as "disruptive" or "misbehaving." On the flip side, children who are young for their grades are overdiagnosed.

Myth: Asian children are less likely to pursue sports. The "model-minority myth" has seeded a host of assumptions, including that Asian children are more likely to pursue academics over sports and that they are unlikely to be at risk for food deprivation and experiencing homelessness. Approximately 1 in 10 children with Asian ancestry live below the poverty line in San Francisco, and we routinely see phenomenal Asian American athletes.

The tough part about implicit bias is that it is implicit, based not on intent but on years of training within a racially biased healthcare system. Thankfully, efforts are being made, including training and retraining programs with content on the history of racism in medicine, social determinants of health,

"Implicit bias—our attitudes towards people being shaped by stereotypes at an unconscious level—is exceedingly common in healthcare settings, especially in clinical situations where multiple demands encourage rapid decision-making."

and clear evidence of health and healthcare disparities. Though the efficacy of these programs is still an open question, some studies have shown that information on how bias operates in the clinical environment improves healthcare providers' awareness of bias.

The most promising route for counteracting implicit bias is increasing the diversity of the healthcare workforce. While the percentage of women in medicine has continued to increase, the numbers of Black and Latinx physicians are growing at a much slower pace.

As a parent, what can you do when you feel that implicit bias is affecting the care your child receives? Our recommendation is to be as direct as possible. Ask the provider if they would recommend the same treatment for a person from a different background or if the diagnosis would be different for a different gender. When all else fails, hospitals have family and patient relations phone numbers that you can call to help navigate concerns.

Brian Feeley, MD is Chief of the Sports Medicine Service at UCSF and a father of five. Nirav Pandya, MD is Chief of the Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery Service at UCSF and a father of two. You can find them on Twitter or their podcast, "6-8 Weeks: Perspectives on Sports Medicine."

Big Art Weekend!



April 22-23



Bay Area Discovery Museum

Caring for Aging Family Members

With Susan Yokoro, PT, MS, OCS



Susan Yokoro has 23 years of physical therapy (PT) experience working in outpatient and home health settings. She is an Orthopedic Clinical Specialist (OCS). She brings her life experiences as an Asian American mother to writing this article about caring for her aging parents and family members.

What is the role of physical therapy with home safety and fall prevention?
A physical therapist's home safety evaluation can minimize the risk of falls with simple safety modifications. Implementing safety recommendations before they are necessary is really important. Ideally, we would like all recommendations to be implemented, but realistically, our family members may insist on keeping a fluffy rug in the bathroom even though an unsecure rug can be a fall hazard. We learn to compromise. By hearing and discussing safety at home, maybe at a future time, our family members will put away that favorite rug or install those ugly handrails in the bathroom and stairwell. The CDC's "Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults" is an excellent resource.

How can I best advocate for an aging family member's health and safety?
Encouraging preventive care with regular yearly visits to a primary care provider (PCP) is critical to identify health issues before they become a problem. Since the onset of our current pandemic, our PT clinic has seen an influx of aging patients with chronic degenerative musculoskeletal diseases presenting with pain and disability related to a decrease in physical activity. These health issues, such as knee and back pain, were previously maintained with exercise and didn't have a functional impact. A PCP can refer your family member to physical therapy to address the pain and dysfunction, which may contribute to falls.

If your family member is already receiving treatment for a condition, remember that medical appointments can be confusing and overwhelming, for both patients and their caregivers. When my siblings and I attended hospital care plan meetings for our father, we each remembered and interpreted the same conversation differently. We decided to start meeting before appointments to organize our thoughts and questions. By supporting each other, we were able to better understand and advocate for our father's needs.

Aging family members may push back on a relative's recommendations or help. What are some strategies you've seen to foster cooperation and communication?
Although we may have the best intentions to help with our

aging family members, we should be mindful to interact in a respectful way. Having an objective person or professional, such as a physical therapist, social worker, or physician present the information can be more successful and decrease the stress between family members.

How can I involve other family members to assist with caregiving?
Caregivers can easily overextend themselves, especially if we're juggling other responsibilities—raising children, maintaining a home, and growing a career. In my experience, family members really want to help, but don't know how. I suggest tapping into each family member's strengths. We all have different comfort levels when it comes to caregiving—some are comfortable assisting with toileting, bathing, or cutting finger nails, while others may prefer to pick up groceries. When our family was caring for our elderly aunt, my siblings and cousins all helped with her care, taking turns visiting, purchasing food, running errands, and taking her to medical appointments. Because of my physical therapy background, I was the primary person coordinating her care during hospitalizations, home health episodes, and hospice, but I sent out emails to family members updating her status and had family meetings to make decisions regarding her care. I believe this constant connection between family members really provided a sense of assurance that my aunt was receiving the best care possible.

What is the most important thing to remember when caring for an aging family member?
The opportunity to care for an aging family member is a privilege. We all want to age with dignity and respect, so as our family members age, we need to appreciate the situation from their perspective. It's hard to lose independence, feel reliant on others, and reach out for and accept assistance. When our family members ask for help, it is a humbling experience for both them and us. We need to respect the difficulties and recognize the courage required to acknowledge our own limits and seek assistance.

In summary, what are your top recommendations to help aging family members (and those who love them) navigate the golden years?
Discuss home safety and fall prevention. Remain active. Lean on a supportive family and social network. Participate in regular preventive care medical visits with a PCP.

“We all want to age with dignity and respect, so as our family members age, we need to appreciate the situation from their perspective.”

Why a Mother's Voice Matters

By Elizabeth Neal

Thirty-three days ago, after nine grueling hours of utter exhaustion and unbearable pressure and pain, I was initiated into motherhood.

I held my perfect baby girl, Olivia, on my chest and instinctively uttered the words, "I love you," over and over again. She cooed. I cried. I felt overwhelming pride at the incredible feat we both accomplished.

I remember thinking: *That's my baby. I did it. I birthed her. And I did it on my terms. I know now I can do anything.*

I knew how I brought Olivia into this world was equally as important as the act itself. I had my heart set on an unmedicated, vaginal birth. I wanted to surrender, ride the waves of labor, and trust my body and inner strength to guide me—listening to my intuition above any other voice in the room. Most importantly, I wanted both of us to feel held, loved, and supported.

“Sharing your vision with your birth team before labor can ground and guide you so your voice is heard and honored, especially when your stamina is tested.”

And while there were pivots from "the plan," with the help of my support team—my husband and doula—I fulfilled my vision for my birth experience. I chose my labor positions based on what my body needed, accessed extraordinary inner strength, and trusted my body's signals for when to start and stop pushing, all of which resulted in minimal natural tearing and a smooth postpartum recovery.

Why birth preferences matter
No matter whether you are induced, deliver vaginally, or have a cesarean, giving birth is completely unknown territory for first-time mothers and can be equally terrifying, miraculous, vulnerable, and empowering.

My birth experience went by fast—first-time moms typically labor 12 to 19 hours. I woke up after midnight already four centimeters dilated, followed by hours of vomiting and contractions. Within three hours, I was nearly fully dilated and faced unparalleled levels of fatigue.

Dehydrated and drained, there were moments when I was unable to advocate for myself. Over the course of my labor, there were about 10 nurses' and doctors' voices in the room—some with strong opinions about what positions I should labor in, what medications I should take, what routine procedures I should partake in, and when I should start and stop pushing.

It became clear that if I didn't speak up, there would be

little room for choice in my own delivery. I was not prepared for the utter exhaustion I faced and having my support team reaffirm my preferences and advocate for my wishes was the kind of specialized care I needed.

What birth choices to consider
As a first-time mom, it's hard to know what rights and choices you have. Can you choose what positions you labor in? Or does the doctor decide? Can you decline a cervical exam? What decisions can you make so the hospital room does not feel so sterile?

You can use the following as a birth preference framework:

- **Support team** - Who will be present with you? What is their role?
- **Delivery room environment** - What room requests do you have (e.g., dim lighting, music, candles)? Will you wear your own gown? How do you feel about interns attending?
- **Labor and delivery preferences** - How do you feel about mobility, monitoring and IVs, cervical exams, and laboring and/or delivery positions? Episiotomy? Forceps and/or vacuum? Cesarean? Pitocin? Who will cut the umbilical cord?
- **Pain management** - What are your preferences on medications (e.g., epidural, nitrous oxide) and whether they are offered? What alternatives, if any, would you like to use (e.g., acupressure, hypnobirthing, birthing ball)?
- **Baby arrival** - What are your views on skin-to-skin contact, cord clamping, and newborn procedures? If the baby needs to go to the NICU or leave the room for testing, who should accompany them?
- **Postpartum** - What are your preferences for feeding (e.g., exclusively breastfeeding, formula) and bathing baby?
- **Cesarean, if applicable** - Who will be present with you? How would you like the procedure communicated with you? Would you like a transparent drape for visibility? Sedatives? When would you like skin-to-skin?

Documenting birth preferences empowers mothers-to-be to create the birth experience that is right for them. Sharing your vision with your birth team before labor can ground and guide you so your voice is heard and honored, especially when your stamina is tested. Remember, mama...it is your right to have the birth experience you choose.

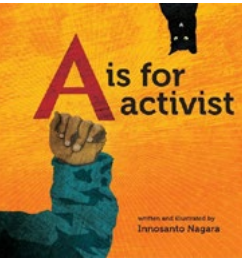
Elizabeth is a free-spirited creative, writer, nature lover, and mother.



Advocacy

By Laure Latham

Changing a community for the better seems like a challenge for famous activists or wealthy philanthropists, but the truth is, anybody can be an activist and change the world. Just look at Greta Thunberg. These books show that from a very young age, anybody can make a difference in areas that matter to them. Whether it’s racism, climate action, or social inequalities, kids can get inspired and start taking action at their level.

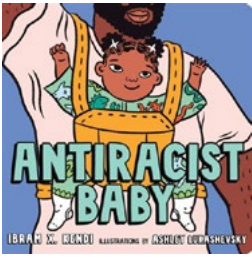


A is for Activist

Written and illustrated by Innosanto Nagara

This alphabet book was created to combine political activism and education in a simple format. It has become a reference book for the next generation of progressives: families who want their kids to grow

up in a space that is unapologetic about activism, environmental justice, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and everything else that activists believe in and fight for. The author has written other books for all ages on political activism. **Ages: 1 to 4 years**



Antiracist Baby

Written by Ibram X. Kendi and illustrated by Ashley Lukashevsky

How can you build a more equitable world in nine easy steps? With an important and timely message, this book shares helpful tips for parents and little ones to discuss race and racism. If you think that it’s too early

to discuss a complex topic, research in child development indicates that from a very young age, children notice when others look different from them. Hence why parents should be prepared to handle questions and comments in words and concepts that young children will understand. **Ages: 1 to 6 years**



Just Help!: How to Build a Better World

Written by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Angela Dominguez

How can you make your community better today? Written by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, this book takes young readers on a journey through a neighborhood where everybody works together to make their community better. Showing that everybody—whatever their age—can make a difference, this book is a great inspiration for young philanthropists. **Ages: 4 to 7 years**



When Things Aren’t Going Right, Go Left

Written by Marc Colagiovanni and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

When a child struggles to find their voice, when they don’t think they are up to the task, all they need is a helpful nudge to

get back on their feet. The young heroine of the book carries the weight of the world on her shoulders and can’t seem to make it work, until she goes left. Using metaphors and powerful illustrations, this book shares a message of motivation and acceptance that will make it easier to deal with frustrations, worries, doubts, and fears. School-age kids need to learn that sometimes, it’s okay to put troubles down for a while and step back. This is a great book to build self-confidence.

Ages: 4 to 8 years



Two Degrees

Written by Alan Gratz

This book discusses the effects of climate change as an action-packed story lived by four middle-schoolers, each individually fighting a different climate disaster in North America. While they are geographically separated, the protagonists’ parallel plots are linked by climate events and the readers can’t help but observe that these

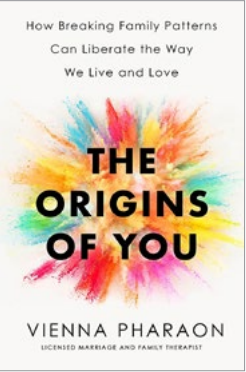
events are all connected on a global level. Gratz writes at the end of the book that he was inspired by Greta Thunberg and other climate protestors and wanted to boost their signal. This intense and fast-paced read will have tweens on their toes as they turn the pages, inspiring them on what actions they can take right now to tackle the climate crisis. **Ages: 8 to 12 years**

Laure blogs on healthy living and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She works in legal marketing and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her two teenage daughters with wild swims, foraging, and cream teas. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Liberating Ourselves

By Gail Cornwall

How can you stand up for yourself if you don’t know exactly what you’re standing against? And what happens when a fictional generation of women stands up—with a supernatural twist?



The Origins of You: How Breaking Family Patterns Can Liberate the Way We Live and Love

Different psychological theories establish a hodgepodge of human needs. At the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy sit physiological needs like food and shelter. Next comes safety. Self-determination theory focuses on three fundamental needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Locus of control...well, you get the idea. In *The Origins of You*, Vienna Pharaon essentially pools needs from across the field into five buckets, renames each resulting conglomeration, and inverts them, creating five “wounds” that impact the way humans experience life. Her framework hasn’t been scientifically validated like the Big Five personality traits, and it’s nowhere near as well-known as the unvalidated-yet-illuminating Five Love Languages. But if my personal experience is any indication, it could one day be considered just as pivotal for understanding ourselves and moving forward with intention, not only in a self-care sense of “ourselves,” but also in a way that bolsters both partnering and parenting.

I didn’t want to like Insta-famous marriage and family therapist Pharaon (@MindfulMFT), but it soon became clear that she’s popular for a reason: she has a distinct talent for rendering the wisdom of academic psychotherapy, primarily family systems theory, accessible. “Your family of origin taught you about yourself, about how to engage with others, and what to expect out of relationships,” she writes, “whether you want to admit it or not, the ‘family stuff and childhood shit’ is at the root of, well, everything.” The good news is, examining your wounds can shift the way you see yourself, as well as the healthiness of how you communicate, fight, and maintain boundaries.

“What did you want most as a child and not get?...[Y]ou might have a worthiness wound. Or a belonging wound. Or a prioritization wound—or a trust wound or a safety wound.” In the chapter on worthiness, Pharaon addresses the underpinnings of perfectionism and eating disorders: a sense of contingent worth, “I’m worthy *if*...I matter *if*....” The prioritization discussion contains excellent guidelines for parents hoping to give children the attention they need without diminishing or depriving themselves in the process. The sections on trust, safety, and belonging also explain a ton about avoidance, clinginess, people-pleasing, criticism, defensiveness, self-sabotage, stonewalling, contempt, aggression, and inconsistency in relationships—and how to deal with those maladaptive behaviors.

And also, how to avoid germinating them in the next generation: “[E]ven though you probably started reading this book for you as the adult child,” Pharaon writes, “you may have noticed yourself reading it as a partner, as a friend, or even as a parent yourself.” I know I did, and I recommend others do too.



When Women Were Dragons

In Kelly Barnhill’s fictional world, spontaneous dragoning occurs when the lives that women live “no longer fit.” After all, “[a] seed may look like a quiet, lifeless thing—just a speck—but that’s just a trick. There is another thing it wants to be. Very soon it will split its skin, sprout out of itself, and become... bigger.” That’s what happened when women in this novel “found their gaze drifting elsewhere—beyond the limits of the house, beyond the limits of the yard, beyond the limits of the daily tasks of washing and straightening and keeping up appearances. They found that their vision had widened to contain the whole sky, and beyond the sky. The more they looked, the more they longed, and the more they longed, the more they planned....” until April 25, 1955, when 642,987 of them became dragons.

In an attempt to avoid spoilers, I’ll say no more, other than calling out some pacing issues: if you find *When Women Were Dragons* to be disjointed and slow, you’re not alone. But I’m glad to have found this feminist thought experiment and stuck with it to the end. Or is it the beginning?

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

Advocating for Your Child: Exploring School Accommodations

Few scenarios require more advocacy than your child's school life, where a 504 plan or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) can help them learn and progress alongside their peers.

By Yuliya Patsay



In our child's journey from preschool through high school (and beyond), we as parents and caregivers wear many hats: from chauffeur and short-order cook to homework helper. But if our child has a special need or a disability, we also wear the hat of advocate—someone who pleads on someone else's behalf. Few scenarios require more advocacy than your child's school life, where a 504 plan or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) can help them learn and progress with their peers.

504 plan vs IEP: What's the difference?

A 504 plan is named after Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which mandates that any organization receiving federal

money—in this case, a public school—cannot discriminate against people with disabilities. It ensures a student who has a disability receives accommodations to promote academic success within a general education classroom. An IEP, a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is a legal document that is regularly updated and includes specific goals and milestones for a student based on their unique needs. It is more comprehensive than a 504 plan and will include a transition plan from school to school.

While a 504 plan ensures a student has equitable access to learning—teachers can modify the existing curriculum to accommodate the student—an IEP is more individualized and can include

services such as speech or occupational therapy.

Typically, 504 plans are available for students with a broad range of disabilities while IEP assessments are only granted to students who meet one or more of 13 specific categories (such as specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD)).

Fundamentally, a 504 plan is for students whose disability hinders their ability to learn in a classroom without accommodations and an IEP is for those who need specialized instruction. A student with a 504 plan, however, is not precluded from an IEP assessment, especially if, even with accommodations, concerns persist or different concerns arise.

The California Department of Education Special Education Division reports that currently, almost 800,000 students in California qualify for an IEP. And according to *EdSource.org*, “each year, a greater percentage of students in California qualify for special education. Last year, (2021) about 13 percent of students in California's K to 12 public schools received individualized services for special needs, up from about 10 percent in the early 2000s.”

The first steps

Qualifying for a 504 plan or an IEP starts when someone notices that the child may have a special need. A caregiver may notice a child's performance is out of alignment with their efforts and abilities. Sometimes the student themselves may realize an area of need, especially if they have access to social media where other students share their experiences with disabilities and accommodations at school.

Most often, a teacher who regularly observes the child's classroom abilities will raise concerns. Lalla Carini, an educator of almost 30 years who currently teaches at The New Village School in Sausalito, shares that she seeks out an educational assessment when she feels “the perspective of a specialist is necessary to better understand the child and to find the strategies that will enable them to thrive.”

Tatiana Guerreiro Ramos, co-director of Classroom Matters, works with families to help them access support and services for

their children at school. She explains that after identifying a child may need extra help, a parent (or teacher) formally requests a 504 or IEP assessment. The school district determines which assessment a student qualifies for. Then an evaluation of all areas of suspected disability is completed by district personnel, such as your child's general education teacher, a special education teacher, a school psychologist, or a speech-language pathologist. This assessment process can vary greatly, from interviews with parents

pretend ailment, but Dane only provides a bandage to each child's finger, regardless of their boo-boo. He reports that most kids walk away understanding that the same solution (a bandage on the finger) doesn't work for every child.

For parents, it's a difficult journey to take with their child, full of uncertainties that often come with grief and a letting go of expectations. Kate Coveny Hood, a personal development coach with three children in high school, has been navigating the world of special needs since her

“Parents who have gone through this process with their kids echo a similar sentiment—if all educators understand how different kids learn, then those differences can be celebrated.”

and teachers (for a 504 plan) to multi-day student observations and testing (for an IEP). If the assessment uncovers substantial learning differences, the school team will present a draft IEP at the initial IEP meeting. If the team determines the student does not have learning differences that impact their ability to access the general education curriculum, they must explain in writing why they have found your child “not eligible.” They may instead suggest specific accommodations through a detailed 504 plan. Under the IDEA, they must provide information about what you can do if you disagree with this decision.

The challenges

There are inherent challenges in this process for all involved—students, parents, teachers, and administrators. For children, being identified as someone who needs extra support can be tough to navigate and they can internalize ableism, especially in their teen years. Stephanie Dulli, a writer, photographer, actor, and mother to three, recounted her experience with her child who had an IEP that they eventually chose to stop because pulling her son out of class made him feel “stupid and self-conscious.” One way to overcome this stigma is to teach children empathy. Dane Fox-McGraw, who has been working in after-school programs at the JCC East Bay for nearly 8 years, helps his participants understand school accommodations with a playful exercise: Each child shares a

oldest was diagnosed with autism at age three. At the beginning of this process, she felt she was not automatically given information by the school, but instead was expected to ask for things. This can be a steep learning curve and Kate says she's “had to learn this new language.” This is especially challenging for parents for whom English is a second language or part of cultures where there is an added layer of stigma around needing help. Sweta Chawla, a Bay Area mom, former professor, and current leadership coach, shared that during this process she felt like she “couldn't ask questions because I didn't know what I didn't know.”

For schools, there are numerous challenges including lack of funding (which varies among districts), accessing resources, and not always knowing the best way to help. Many specialized teachers have retired and many are leaving the profession, particularly after the pandemic. Educators report challenges with getting through to children and ensuring the material is absorbed. Dane suggests relationship building, especially for a child requiring accommodations and special services. He states that when educators know a child deeply, they can meet them on their level and anticipate their needs.

For children in private schools, the challenges may be multiplied. Independent schools have no legal obligation to provide accommodations or special education, whether academic or behavioral challenges

arise for a current student or a new student transitions from public to private school. These children may be kicked out or leave because their school is unwilling or unable to meet their needs. Families in this situation must navigate the social and emotional challenges of transitioning schools while advocating for accommodations.

Advocacy

Because the process of obtaining a 504 plan or IEP can be tense and overwhelming, parents may turn to an educational advocate. One such advocate, Molly Matava, the founder of Bay Area Advocacy, explains that parents hire her for a variety of reasons—they are overwhelmed by a new diagnosis and want guidance; are unsure of their rights; and need assistance communicating with the school because they don't know what to ask for, progress isn't being made, or the relationship has gone badly.

Support from other parents is essential during this process. After Diane Cooper-Gould, a dyslexic mother, first started down the path of advocating for her two neurodiverse children, she found that she craved the support of a community going through a similar experience. She founded an online support group, co-founded the Fairfax County Special Education PTA (a SEPTA), and eventually created a Special Education Advocacy Business.

Moving forward

There are several movements that seek to change the way education works. Caroline Sumners with Empower Academic Coaching is an academic coach who helps students to grasp how to learn and gain the academic and life skills needed to succeed. She hopes that in the future we won't even need 504 plans and IEPs "because we will have started from a place of equity and inclusion."

Lalla Carini is hopeful that schools will move towards an environment in which educators celebrate multiple intelligences. Parents who have gone through this process with their kids echo a similar sentiment—if all educators understand how different kids learn, then those differences can be celebrated. Every child's needs are unique. Every family functions in its own dynamic fashion. And, every educational

Tips for educational advocacy:

- 1. Trust your parental instinct. Ask yourself: *Does the teacher see my child?* If not, share information to fill in those gaps.
- 2. Ask for help from teachers and school administrators.
- 3. Be proactive.
- 4. Educate yourself and know your rights.
- 5. Treat this situation as a partnership between you and the school. Maintaining a positive relationship with teachers means you get access to accurate information about your child.
- 6. Be firm, but kind. Adopt an attitude of curiosity by asking questions, but avoid a litigious mindset that can erode trust. On the flip side, don't be intimidated. This is literally the law.
- 7. Find other parents to connect with, help direct you to resources, and be a support system.
- 8. Stay organized. At the IEP meeting, make a list of what you want to say. Be clear and follow up.
- 9. Don't focus just on academics. Consider functional skills that are also social and emotional.
- 10. Practice self-compassion during this overwhelming process and remember that your child is more than a diagnosis.
- 11. Bring your support team to the IEP meeting to ensure you understand everything that is going on.
- 12. Don't ask for things that are unrealistic in a school setting. Michelle Cody, a mom and SFUSD middle school teacher, puts it succinctly, "dream big but don't be ridiculous." From her perspective, "too many resources stifle your child's abilities to handle adversity." The goal of implementing 504 plans and IEPs is "not to build the bridge for [students] but to provide them with the tools needed to build the bridge themselves."
- 13. Involve your child. Michelle recommends involving a child from 4th grade and up to participate in the IEP meetings or to be informed about all aspects of their plan so they know what to expect and ask for.
- 14. Don't sign anything at the meeting. Take time to assess whether the services offered make sense for your child's situation.
- 15. Don't be discouraged and keep at it.
- 16. Have hope. Stephanie, whose children have needed support since kindergarten and are now in middle school, assures that "given the right support from home and school, the child can thrive."

institution supports learning in its own nuanced way. Once all types of institutions gain the ample resources required to support the intersection of these needs, parents who wear the hat of advocate can loosen that hat just a bit. In the meantime, the best parents can do is learn to navigate the system in a way that works for them and their child.

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

Resources

- A Day in Our Shoes
- Wrightslaw
- SFUSD Special Education Resources for Families
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
- ADHD Understood
- Hummingbird ADHD
- Decoding Dyslexia
- *From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide* by Pam Wright and Pete Wright

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All the World's a Stage



Stand-up comedy can be a form of activism, a way to hold systems accountable, and assert power through incremental social change.

By H.B. Terrell

Intellectually, humor can be described as a distortion of reality, with the comedian bending and flexing the way we experience the world to force us to look at it anew. A well-crafted joke can spur us to apply a different lens to what we take for granted. In this sense, comedy can be a radical act of resistance and reform.

Laughter evolved in humans as a mode of communication—"the glue that kept the group together"—as cognitive psychologist Janet Gibson states. Laughing communally serves a social function. Social-cognitive scientists believe laughter evolved in humans and other animals as a form of bonding and stress relief, signaling to the group that there is no danger present and it's safe to relax.

Arguably, what makes something funny is that we start from a common point of view and move toward one that we hadn't consciously considered—it's often about telling the truth about the absurdity of something society takes for granted, with a surprise twist that elicits the laugh. In this way, humor can serve as a form of activism.

Women in comedy

When comedians like Moms Mabley and Lucille Ball took to the stage, non-conforming women were considered deviant, so female comedians adopted personas that freed them from the "girl next door" framework. Mabley, the first female stand-up comedian, played a "dirty old woman" character. The persona allowed her to explore racism and sexual innuendo. Ball played a zany housewife for much of her career, which allowed her to take on topics such as pregnancy, women in the workforce, and interracial marriage.

In the 1960s, Elayne Boosler was well ahead of her time, blacklisted by Johnny Carson for being "too aggressive" not only for her political jabs, but for openly discussing "raunchy takes on the life of a slovenly single woman," as Jason Zinoman put it in a *New York Times* article on the comedian. By the 1990s, Margaret Cho's outsider critique, Janeane Garofalo's cynicism, and Sarah Silverman's surreal humor had captured the Gen X zeitgeist. Subsequently, female comedians began experimenting with a brand of

blunt humor that at first shocked and then became de rigueur: embracing the good, bad, and ugly parts of women's sex lives.

Women who talk openly about the challenges of parenthood might be considered deviant in many circles today. As Ali Wong has said of parenthood, "The highs are high and the lows are low. But it's corny as fuck to gush about the highs so you'll hear me mostly complain about the lows."

There is more to a woman's life than bad dates and babies, but neither do we have to shy away from these experiences. A revolutionary approach acknowledges women's entire emotional landscapes, no matter the subject. Bay Area comedian Ruby Gill says, "When men talk about anger, it plays into their gender roles to assert themselves in a certain way. I think it would be interesting if more [female comedians] explored legitimate ways of being angry, making it funny in a way that the whole room can engage." In *The Washington Post*, comedian Abby Sher wrote, "Women can be sensitive and astute without being fragile...I get up on that stage and strip down to my most vulnerable because I think it's ridiculously hard and rewarding. But it is as treacherous as cutting open skin and exposing a nerve."

In *"Is Feminist Humor an Oxymoron?"*, Professor Janet Bing references the work of Professor Lisa Merrill, who suggests that it empowers women to examine how we have been fetishized "and to what extent we have been led to perpetuate this objectification," characterizing feminist humor as rebellious and self-affirming in that it recognizes the value of the female experience. Bing argues that the most empowering jokes celebrate the values and perspectives of women—that feminist humor should be self-defining. Rather than framing males as oppressors and females as victims, feminist humor centers around women's experiences. Think "Broad City" or the standup of Ali Wong.

In other words, self-defining humor is by women, for women. From Laurie Kilmartin's single mom-com to Emily Heller's all-women audiences, female comedians are speaking to women, not men. Bay Area native Kilmartin reflects on her experience of taking the stage after a string of male

comics, "...there is often palpable joy from the women in the audience. For a few minutes, they don't have to look at the world through male eyes. It's a relief, an end to dude fatigue."

Kristen Bell "momsplains" in her popular web series that takes a tongue-in-cheek look at parenting. Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson unpack their experience trying to make it in NYC through an absurdist POV in "Broad City." Wanda Sykes regularly discusses her cross-cultural queer parenting experience in her stand-up act. Emily Heller made a no-men-allowed comedy special. Amy Schumer has mined her pregnancy trauma for comedic material. Jenny Zigrino discusses cis-hetero dating, fatness, and the pros and cons of living in

"[T]he most empowering jokes celebrate the values and perspectives of women—that feminist humor should be self-defining... by women, for women."

L.A. Gina Yashere and Sommore have spoken about aging, Blackness, and politics. Jaye McBride brings her trans experiences to the stage. Feminist comedy is at the forefront of deconstructing a host of conflicting societal expectations, to center women's experiences in all of their variegated glory. Feminist comedy is first and foremost comedy.

Social justice

Negin Farsad co-directed the comedy documentary *The Muslims are Coming!*, which follows a group of Muslim-American comedians on tour throughout the American South performing free comedy shows and interacting with communities. Farsad wraps serious content into digestible comic packages; she sees laughing with others as a shared moment of solidarity.

Farsad describes her brand of social justice comedy in a TED Talk titled, "A *Highly Scientific Taxonomy of Haters*:" "...when you're laughing, you enter into a state of openness. And in that moment of openness, a good social justice comedian can stick in a whole bunch of information... you get one person to laugh and then a couple people laugh...you might get a million people chuckling. And those

chuckles add up to some measure of a popular shift in perception. And that is social change. But it takes time. And it takes, like, millions of these chuckles."

Humor can maintain status quo or subvert hierarchy. Inclusive humor targets inequitable systems rather than specific people. Social justice comedy mocks attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and systems that disadvantage women and other threatened communities.

"Why did the woman get into comedy...?"

Developing a stand-up comedy repertoire is mostly about writing jokes and practicing sets at open mic nights. Laurie Kilmartin says, "All new comics need the same thing:

huge amounts of stage time.

There are no shortcuts in standup comedy...You get that performing time in at open mics."

If you've ever wanted to take the stage, there are plenty of ways to stand up in the Bay Area.

You might start by joining the Bay Area Comedy Network, a Facebook group used for booking, finding open mics and shows, and staying on top of developments in the Bay Area comedy community. They host an open mic calendar with around 40 shows listed, including workshops, opportunities "for Women and Queers," lottery mics, incubators, and many flavors of open mics for all comedic sensibilities.

Start by brainstorming things you think are weird, interesting, or funny that you can monologue about. You'll refine the material through an iterative process of writing, performing, reviewing, and editing to build it into a story that gets laughs. After you've developed a few minutes of material to perform at an open mic, it can be useful to go with a partner who will record the set so you can see which parts landed like a brick and those that tapped into the sensibilities, references, and shared experiences of the audience. You'll keep revising and performing until you've got a set of five to ten minutes, which you can record for submission to show producers.

Improv groups can be a good fit for those who want to get used to performing, learn to think on their feet, prefer a group dynamic, or aren't interested in writing

jokes. All Out Comedy Theater, Berkeley Improv, or BATS School of Improv host classes.

Laurie Kilmartin has performed stand-up for more than 20 years. In a 2017 opinion piece in *The New York Times* she says, “My workplace, a comedy club, is unlike any other. A group of strangers is brought to me. They sit at my feet and listen as I talk. All the things I say were made up, by me. If you are skeptical that I can make you laugh, I will find you, and I will get you. If I am interrupted at my workplace (almost always by a man), I am encouraged to insult him, on the spot. I can mock his clothing and speculate on his abilities in the bedroom. I can tell his girlfriend that she can do better. I can smack him down, like an insect. Instead of losing my job...I get applauded. Cheered. Even better, if this man persists in interrupting me, I can signal to a bouncer and have him kicked out.” In other words, it can be one of the most empowering workplaces open to women,

where the stage is incontrovertibly hers and the room is at her command.

Setting the stage

The history of women in comedy is composed of small steps paralleling the advancement of women in business, cultural pursuits, and society. Once upon a time, it was unladylike to be a stand-up comedian, so women developed personas that made them unlike “ordinary women.”

The comedy of the 1960s and '70s acknowledged the revolutionary nature of telling truth by telling jokes, with the rise of queer feminist comedians like Harrison & Tyler. Women began claiming their space via tales from the dating scene from the 1980s through the aughts. Then we began to see the rise of mom-com: women who spoke frankly about the agonies that accompany the joys of parenting, both single and coupled. We are moving into a comedic era that includes a wide variety of experiences—women, trans men and

women, non-binary people, and others—and finding that we can relate to one another through humor, not despite our differences but because our differences aren't actually problematic. This is the social change through a collective chuckle that Negin Farsad aims for in her comedy: laughing together forges a social bond, provides a signal that it's okay to relax, to enjoy one another's unique perspectives.

Laughter can be a balm for what ails us, as well as a stage from which to assert agency. What other medium can unite and challenge us so powerfully? Laughter may not be the best medicine, but it certainly makes it go down easier.

H.B. Terrell loves to laugh but is terrible at extemporaneous speaking so will never be a stand-up comedian. Her comedy stylings mostly revolve around making up songs about bodily functions to entertain her daughter and teaching her new words (“bonkers”) that make her giggle.



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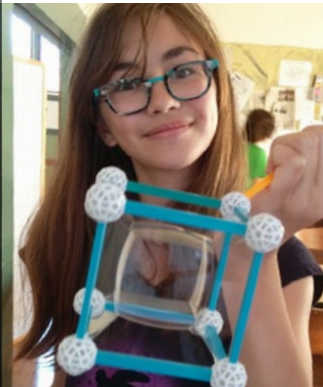
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Hear Me Roar: The Mama Bear in All of Us

How motherhood awakens your inner beast

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

Originally published in the April/May 2019 Wild Things issue



Photo by K. Sienk Photography

My inbox is constantly flooded with emails from mama bears. These are the mothers who are vigilant about checking in and following up on their children's well-being, particularly if a child is from a marginalized group or has special needs. Since becoming a mother myself, my empathic brain has grown exponentially, and I am much more attuned to the needs of the parents who I serve as a school site administrator. While I can never fully understand the individual struggles faced by families dealing with vulnerabili-

ties that I will never know, I still picture my own daughter when families open up about what brings them to my office. It brings about a primal urgency I'd never experienced pre-motherhood. When families come to me with reports and screenshots of cyberbullying, each hurtful meme on Instagram against their child is a hurtful meme railing against my own. When they report that their child is being mistreated or overlooked because of the color of their skin, or that a child's 504 plan isn't being followed, I can't help but picture what it might feel like if they were talking about my own two children.

Well-known are the deeply intense and personal changes that occur when becoming a mother or father for the first time: the crushing power that such a tiny person can have over your most primal emotions, the intense and endless love never fully understood until that moment, the anxiety that conjures up every worst-case scenario happening to the ones you love. Stories abound of amazing feats of strength shown by mothers saving their own children in moments of crisis: lifting cars, prying open the jaws of a wild animal, using

their own bodies as shields in the most dire of accidents and emergencies. Angela Cavallo of Lawrenceville, Georgia, lifted a 1964 Chevy Impala off her teenage son. Chelsi Camp of Alvin, Texas, went as far as biting off the ear of a neighbor's pitbull attacking her small daughter.

Many people attribute the extra special strength, protective urges, and heightened instincts to a quality colloquially known as the "mama bear" instinct. A mama bear is a mom who can be cuddly and lovable but also unleashes a ferocious side when it's necessary to protect her cubs. It can refer to a biological mom, adoptive mom, or the head of a group.

What exactly is the mama bear instinct, and is it a superpower, a curse, or just plain survival instinct? How does the mama bear instinct amplify for mothers of children representing a more vulnerable group? What resources are there to support all the mama bears out there in their advocacy and urgency to fight for their children?

The neuroscience

Journalist Katherine Ellison explores how motherhood can give women special superpowers in her book *The Mommy Brain: How Motherhood Makes Us Smarter*. Ellison argues that mothers are more perceptive and emotionally intelligent, traits that help us care and protect our young to the best of our ability. Citing many different studies exploring how mothers' brains change and develop through pregnancy, childbirth, and beyond, Ellison explains the science demonstrating the many positive cognitive effects of having a child. Researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona scanned the brains of a group of women before and after they gave birth. In their findings, they found the volume of gray matter in the mothers' brains changed dramatically, particularly in regions used for experiencing empathy, which is key in raising children. The more brain change noted in a mother's brain, the higher she scored on measures of empathy. The changes in most brain regions remained two years later.

What about in moments of crisis? There are plenty of stories out there of mothers showing superhuman strength in the event of an emergency, being able to commit rare feats of strength like lifting a car off a



child or fighting off a large animal attack. Donna McNamee and Abigail Sicolo of England are the two superhero moms who allegedly lifted a 1.1 ton car off an 8-year-old neighbor's body. Research into this phenomenon, known as "hysterical strength," is scarce, as subjects often exist in anecdotes and situations impossible to recreate. There are some studies that show the amount of adrenaline cannot reach the muscles required in such a feat of strength

protect and serve other children suffering from the same afflictions. "Last year I saw a scene in a movie where a child was being bullied for his food allergy, and something really stirred in me. The possibility of my son experiencing food allergy bullying is a fear of mine based on dangerous incidents I've heard about in the news," offered Wong-Thomson. Food bullying is where a person knowingly exposes another person with a severe allergy to a food in a

"A mama bear is a mom who can be cuddly and lovable but also unleashes a ferocious side when it's necessary to protect her cubs."

in such a short amount of time. According to Jeff Wise, author of *Extreme Fear: The Science of Your Mind in Danger*, another explanation is the presence of endocannabinoids and opioids in the brain, two chemicals released under acute stress that deaden fear. A mother might be able to commit an act of superhuman and physically dangerous strength because her sense of fear is temporarily halted.

When mama's roar helps other cubs

Laura Wong-Thomson, mother to a 4-year-old, reflected on how having a son with a severe nut and dairy allergy has begun to stir her own advocacy to better

deliberate attempt to incite a severe reaction. Several disturbing, real-life examples include incidents of children smearing a classmate's mouth with peanut butter, waving nuts in their face, or force-feeding another child cheese. "I ended up writing about it for San Francisco Moms Blog to try to raise awareness," said Wong-Thomson. "The article got the attention of a writer for a big Japanese newspaper, and she asked to interview me. Sometimes as moms we don't have the time or energy to take a stand for everything we believe in, but our message often gets amplified when we do."

More widespread advocacy and awareness initiatives exist as well, initiated

by moms just like Laura Wong-Thomson, such as the No Appetite for Bullying Campaign. The organization aims to be a voice for children who experience food allergies and food allergy-related bullying, which affects 1 in 13 children in the United States. The organization states that “when [bullying] is targeted at children and teenagers with food allergies, it can escalate from emotional and physical to life threatening.”

When asked about the mama bear in herself, Laura responded, “I think being a mama bear is less that we feel protective of our own kids, and more so that we see all children everywhere as other cubs. It’s sensing that the snarky kid at the playground probably just wants some attention and someone to play with. It’s stopping another kid from running through the playground gate. It’s telling the kid who is asking for some of your food that you need to ask their mama first. Having a child with serious food allergies has reminded me that all mama bears have their own struggles and stories to tell. There’s so much we can learn from each other to better understand each other, and learn how we can lighten each other’s load.”

Real life self-proclaimed mama bears

There’s a group of moms of LGBTQ youth who refer to themselves as the mama bears. Joined together in a private Facebook group started by Liz Dyer, mother to two sons, the purpose of the group is to connect mothers with deep ties to the church who have children that identify as LGBTQ so they can support one another. They aim to protect their children from some of the anti-gay rhetoric found in some Christian doctrines and circles. They continue to raise awareness and help other families navigate the complexities of faith and family when the identity of one family member may be in conflict with what the family’s chosen faith might be.

When Liz Dyer’s son came out of the closet just one year into college, she was devastated and went on to react in ways she now reflects publicly on her blog that she is embarrassed and ashamed to admit. She shares her story with an openness and authenticity that would bring any fellow



mother to tears. She implores, “My initial reaction could have caused me to lose my son forever. Nick could have decided he didn’t want to have anything to do with me or, worse, he may have been driven to harm himself. Many young people have attempted to take their own life when rejected by a parent because of their sexual orientation—some have sadly succeeded. So, if you are a parent and reading this I urge you to put your relationship with your child and your love for your child above everything else. DO NOT RISK LOSING YOUR CHILD FOREVER.”

With the success of both her blog and the private Facebook group, another spin-off group has formed known as “Serendipitydodah - Home of the Mama Bears.” This group is made up of the self-proclaimed mama bears who are willing and able to do small acts of kindness for LGBTQ people who need connection, care, or assistance. Some of the things the mama bears will do for complete strangers who seek their assistance include typical maternal acts that might be denied to an LGBTQ person from their own biological mothers due to frayed relationships. These mama bears commit to attending weddings, offering their homes up for the holidays, going on hospital visits, and just generally providing

a loving presence where needed.

The other day while I was waiting for my daughter in ballet class, a casual conversation with a fellow ballet mom led the two of us to the discovery that her son was experiencing very similar medical symptoms to the affliction of my own daughter. After an hour of furiously rattling off every resource, book, specialist, and support group I could think of, I returned home with my tiny ballerina, hopped on my email, and immediately sent this mother every link I promised. In my furious and passionate typing, I realized how the information is so readily off the tip of my own tongue and yet has taken the last three years of painstaking Internet searches, cross-country flights, and medical visits to uncover real solutions to a rare and complicated issue where there is very little research. Could it be time to put my passion for writing and my empathetic mama bear super brain to use and help protect and advocate for other cubs? I can feel the inner roar rumbling.

Jennifer is a mama bear to cubs Lilly and James Duke. When she is not roaring on behalf of making educational excellence and equity a reality in school districts as a leadership coach, she is plotting and scheming her next Girl Scout Troop #62718 meeting plan. Find her at jenniferkuhrbutterfoss.com.

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

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

Date, Time, Place: TBD
Cost: FREE for members
Registration: Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

GGMG New Mommies + Babies Meetup May 2023

Our next quarterly playgroup formation event is coming up in May! Are you looking for your own mom village? Sign up to meet other moms! If you have children under 12 months old or are expecting, we would like to invite you to a small, casual gathering where you will meet GGMG moms similar to you.

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

Date: TBD
Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Place: TBD (five locations in different parts of the city). Info will be emailed to participants close to the event date.
Cost: \$5

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

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

Date: The first Wednesday of every month: May 3, June 7
Time: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Place: Bosworth and Diamond side lot by Pono Skincare in Glen Park and we can figure out which coffee shop to stroll to.
Cost: FREE for members

South of Glen Park and Bernal Monthly Moms Night Out

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

Date: The second Thursday of every month: April 13, May 11, June 8
Time: 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Place: TBD (different place each month)
Cost: FREE for members

Little Oceanauts \$7 Playdate

Looking for an afternoon playdate for your kiddos? Little Oceanauts in Ingleside is open and is the perfect place for children to run off their energy before dinner time! Meet fellow GGMG moms and enjoy a fun afternoon together. GGMG members enjoy the special price of \$7 per kid. Sign up now!

Date: The third Friday of every month: April 21, May 19, June 16
Time: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Place: 1917 Ocean Ave.
Cost: GGMG members pay a special rate of \$7 per child. Infants 6 months and under are free. Parents/caretakers are free. Must RSVP and PREPAY. Limited spots available.

Noe/Mission/SoMa Mom's Monthly Happy Hour

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

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

Date: The third Thursday of every month: April 20, May 18, June 15
Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Place: TBD (a different venue in a different SF neighborhood each month). Info will be announced two weeks before the event.
Cost: \$5
Contact: Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Kids Playdate Monthly

Do you want your kids to run off their energy on the second Sunday of the month between 10:30 a.m. and noon? Meet fellow GGMG moms and kids. Sign up now!

Date: The second Sunday of every month: May 14, June 11, July 9
Time: 10 a.m. to noon
Place: The Panhandle Playground (unless noted otherwise). Info will be announced two weeks before the event.
Cost: \$5
Contact: Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Pac Heights/Marina Spring Stroller Walks

Get together with other moms in the neighborhood for fresh air and (optional) caffeine with spring stroller walks on Fridays once per month.

Date: Fridays once per month: May 5
Time: 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Place: Peet's on Fillmore (grab coffee there, Starbucks, or Blue Bottle) and then we'll head over to Alta Plaza or Lafayette Park for a walk.
Cost: FREE for members

Happy Hour in the Richmond

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

Date: First Tuesday every month: May 2, June 6
Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Place: Violet's, 2301 Clement St.
Cost: \$5

Family playdate in the Richmond, Last Sunday Monthly (starting April 30)

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

Date: Last Sunday every month: April 30
Time: TBD
Place: Cabrillo Playground (853 38th Ave.), but we will alternate different playgrounds going forward.
Cost: FREE for members

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

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

National Minority Health Month

April is recognized in the United States as National Minority Health Month—a month-long initiative to advance health equity across the country on behalf of all racial and ethnic minorities. Black Maternal Health Week (BMHW) takes place every year from April 11 to 17. BMHW highlights the struggle of Black mothers and their infants just to gain quality health care. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.” All women deserve to have safe and healthy pregnancies and births.

For a more intimate account, check out the podcast series *NATAL*. This narrative podcast explores the experience of having a baby while Black in the United States. Beyond the soundbites and statistics about Black maternal health are real people sharing stories about their pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care. *NATAL* passes the microphone to Black parents to tell their stories in their own words. The docuseries also highlights the birth workers, medical professionals, and advocates fighting daily for better care and outcomes for Black families around the country.

Want to get involved?

SisterWeb is a San Francisco community doula network, committed to “building a community where Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander pregnant women, their partners, and their families benefit from the expertise, support, and advocacy of a birth companion (doula) to have a satisfying and dignified birth experience.” This

organization’s work is multifaceted: providing prenatal, birth, and postpartum care to low-income women of color and providing continuing education to labor and delivery centers and to the medical and birth community in San Francisco. In 2020, GGMG members and the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee raised a combined \$5,122 to help aid this organization to support their mission and goals.

Roots of Labor Birth Collective (RLBC) is committed to providing support and care for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. RLBC consists of birth workers of color. They strive to reflect the communities they serve, while uplifting and caring for themselves.

Mothers to Mothers’ mission is “to share cross cultural postpartum recipes, traditions, and wisdom, to expose current postpartum realities, and promote Postpartum Justice in Black and Indigenous communities.”

Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA) is a national Black women-led cross-sectoral alliance that centers on Black mamas to advocate, drive research, build power, and shift culture for Black maternal health, rights, and justice. BMMA envisions a world where Black mamas have the rights, respect, and resources to thrive before, during, and after pregnancy.

NEW ARRIVALS



Kim Knievel
Stephanie D.
Marie H.

Baby Cameron Grant
Baby Kiera M.
Baby Daphné Albane

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

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at ggmg.org/about-us/ggmg-magazine.



MEMBER SUPPORT

Seeking New Co-Chairs!

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

Examples of committee duties include:

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

PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

Committee duties in Friends:

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

Committee duties in Partners:

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

Open Roles:

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

To volunteer, email partnerships@ggmg.org.

Volunteer Benefits

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

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

Please contact us at member.support@ggmg.org if you are interested in volunteering.

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The Power of a Coach

By Kim Knievel

I've always had coaches. From the soccer field to the corporate world to my spiritual studies, I've been lucky to find people to guide me with their knowledge and expertise. People who brought encouragement, accountability, or in the toughest moments, believed in me when I couldn't do it myself.

The people we trust with life's important moments and events are not only supporters of our vision, but shape how we'll later relate to those moments and events. Our perception of these experiences have the possibility to shape and transform us. Which means, the people we choose to surround ourselves with during them play an invaluable role in how they will impact our lives to come.

Which is why, when we found out we were pregnant, we knew we wanted someone in this coach role. In the realm of pregnancy and birth, this was a doula, and we found the perfect fit in Felicia Roche. From our first interview, I felt a warmth, strength and comfort in Felicia. She personifies the



didn't have to be worried about what it looked or sounded like. The connection, and reverence I felt from my husband while in labor was about as romantic as it gets in my book.

By offering a new perspective, and supporting me in having it, Felicia helped me surrender to the process of pregnancy and birth, and in turn, be transformed by it. Every step of the way she reminded me of my power—be it the power I have inside or the strength I could find in my community. When my mind crept toward fear, she gracefully ushered me back to trust in my body. She honored my vulnerability and met me with encouragement, which helped me continue to build self-trust, and prepare for labor.

When our day came, my husband guided me with a steadiness and constant encouragement that helped me ride the gut-wrenching contractions. The moment it felt like things were spinning out of control, and the pain was unbearable, Felicia arrived. She came in like a force, calming me and the entire care team in the process. She took my hands, looked me directly in the eye, and as she calls it, we "locked horns." By guiding me with her breathing cues, she commanded my body and mind to calm, which ultimately got me back into the driver's seat of my labor. This is the power of a coach. Someone who takes charge and reminds you of what you're capable of, especially when it feels like you can't keep going. The love and support of my husband and Felicia made me feel seen and held, enabling me to have the birth experience I needed.

These big moments and life experiences deserve special care and intention. My son's birth, and the other life-shaping events before it, have shown me the possibility a coach provides. The encouragement and tough love they provide help us cross our big life portals, and shatter our limiting beliefs in the process. By having your back and heart accounted for, coaches give us the chance to step closer to the people we're meant to be, by helping you realize what you're made of.

Kim is a new momma, business owner, and communications leader. She uses her life experience and namesake business, www.kimknievel.com, to help people connect to their power, and how they want to spend their one precious life.

"This is the power of a coach. Someone who takes charge and reminds you of what you're capable of, especially when it feels like you can't keep going."

true power of a momma—the delicate dance between grit and grace, warmth and strength, all wrapped into one. I knew she would be the ultimate advocate and protector of our journey.

From the beginning, Felicia was steadfast in her commitment to the experience a woman has through her pregnancy and childbirth. She wants her clients to be "fully in" the birth of their child, an event she said "has the possibility to be one of the most romantic moments with your partner." At the time, this idea seemed totally out there—I didn't associate birth with romance. But on the other side of things, I'm now a believer. Our birth was the most intense experience of my life, and it brought me to the edge of my limits. The support and pure love I felt around me through it allowed me to be uninhibited—it was raw, it was messy, and it was wild. I was able to be fully present in bringing our son into the world, because I



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Week 6  Music & Dance Jul 3 - 7	Week 7  Community Superheroes Jul 10 - 14	Week 8  Animal Kingdom Jul 17 - 21
Week 9  Renewable Energy Crafts Jul 24 - 28	Week 10  Cooking Around the World Jul 31 - Aug 4	Week 11  Clowning & Carnival Aug 7 - 11

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