
Lori Leibovich

Maybe Baby
ISBN13: 9780060737825

Q: You've described the focus of this anthology as "the question of whether or not to parent." How difficult was it for you, as *Maybe Baby's* editor, to achieve a balance of voices and viewpoints on this controversial subject?

A: It wasn't difficult at all to find people who were passionately against having children. In fact the writers in the first portion of the book, "No thanks, not for me" were all very grateful for the opportunity to express their viewpoint. People assume they are selfish or cold or don't possess a "maternal instinct" simply because they have decided to remain childless. What I found interesting was that even for people who always knew they wanted children, there was a lot of soul-searching. Some of the writers in the collection—Shapiro and Joe Loya, for example—found that their decisions about parenthood were intimately connected to their negative experiences as sons and daughters. By far the most difficult viewpoint to capture was the "on the fence" perspective. Most people come to adulthood knowing whether or not they see parenthood in their future, so finding writers who were truly debating the question was challenging. One of the reasons I love Larry Smith's piece is because he is truly trying to figure it out. The almost stream of consciousness tone of his essay really invites the reader into his thought process as he weighs the pros and cons.

Q: Why do you think the choice to remain childless is so controversial in our society?

A: We revere parenthood and idealize children in American culture. We're in a particularly child-centered moment right now with parents—particularly Gen X parents—devoting unprecedented amounts of time and energy and anxiety to the task. When you're that committed to something, it's sometimes difficult to understand why others wouldn't want that experience, too.

Q: To what extent are some of the less conventional methods for starting a family (fertility drugs, in vitro fertilization, adoption, surrogacy, etc.) responsible for making parenting the subject of increased public debate and discussion?

A: The whole landscape of parenting is changing right now with the increased use of reproductive technologies, the prevalence of gay and lesbian parents, the fact that women are having children later in life. People who previously didn't have a shot at parenthood are now entering the game and with that comes increased political and cultural dialogue about what it means to be a parent.

Q: You became pregnant with your first child in the course of editing *Maybe Baby*. To what extent did becoming a parent enable you to read these essays with a renewed respect for the authors' choices and decisions?

A: Going through pregnancy and the first year of my son's life while working on this book gave me a great respect for all of the authors' viewpoints. I was able to relate to the many contributors who wrote about the unique and nearly indescribable love they felt for their children. Peter Nichols' essay in particular resonated with me in a completely new way after my son was born. He writes very honestly about the freedoms you lose when you become a parent. But he also beautifully expresses what you gain: "I have grown another part of myself: another whole heart that dwarfs my pre-existing organ . . . a brand-new, gargantuan muscle . . . It will beat inside me until I die. The earth has tilted on its axis and it is a different place." Once I was in the throes of parenthood myself, and truly understood firsthand how difficult it was, I was much more sympathetic and respectful of the authors who choose not to have children. It's the hardest job in the world and no one should enter into without a lot of deliberate thought.