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# ZUZU and the BABY CATCHER

hellas



and  
goodbyes

midwife • meets • her • children

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AAAAHH... at last... number 6. Hello!!

So.. yeah.. I skipped an issue. But I have REALLY good excuses, I do!! Firstly, after 10 (that's TEN) years of on-and-off and then ON-ON-ON work, I have FINISHED the illustrations for the midwifery textbook Holistic Midwifery Vol. II by Anne Frye. It's a long-awaited and heavily-illustrated text. I was looming large with pregnancy and decided that getting the drawings done before Josie came was my highest priority. Secondly, our beloved babysitter Riri ended her employment with us, so between that and near-constant illness all winter, I just didn't have much extra time. Well, and thirdly, I had a baby. Right smack in the middle of when #6 was supposed to come out. The nerve some babies have! You can read all about her birth right here in this issue... among other stories of hellos and goodbyes. That's what it's all about... not the long-suspected Hokey Pokey.

So listen - I was really crunched for time & space for this humongous (48 pages - ZOIKS!) issue, so a couple of these stories are (GASP) typed & printed. I apologize that you won't be reading them in my own lovely hand. Next issue, I promise.

Let me say thank you to all you gentle readers, for your patience. Also thanks to my midwives, Pat, Anne, and Gail; Nephyr and Michelle for attending my birth and being so helpful; Tyler for being amazing; Nana - big huge thank yous - you make my life so much better in so many ways. Thank you Randy & Zuzu - you are both perfect - and Josie, too! God, I love my family so much. Much love to my LJ and IRL pals. And Kate - who made me moon cookies. ♥ Love and enjoy... Rlwn March '04

# BECOMING A MIDWIFE IN 10 EASY YEARS

## PART 6: MEETING ANNE... TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE

Neither of us remember much about when we met.

I remember it as a total fluke. Tara & I were having a barbeque, and our housemates had invited a few people. One of them, one housemate said, was into midwifery - was writing a book or something. I wasn't in midwifery school yet, but I was on my way. I was definitely attending meetings and was starting to get to know Portland area midwives. I had never heard of Anne Frye... So I just sort of blew it off. When Anne arrived I was altogether unmoved, as was she. I don't remember even discussing midwifery... we all ate and then sat around in the living room. Somehow the subject of my artwork came up, and I brought my portfolio out to show people. I was always proud of my artwork, despite the fact it was mostly pencil portraits of rock stars. As I flipped through the drawings, (Eddie Van Halen, David Lee Roth, Pat Benetar) explaining that I had done all these in high school, Anne began to take notice, ask questions. Then we put the drawings away and popped in a movie. The last thing I recall about that night was having wicked stinky gas, and apologizing to our guests as Tara gleefully told the tales of my killer farts of the past. Thankfully,

Anne remembers nothing of that evening except seeing my artwork.

An altogether unremarkable event. Stinky, but unremarkable.



The next time I can recall seeing Anne was at some midwife type meeting or other. By then I had procured her book Understanding LabWork in the Childbearing Year and was utterly mind-boggled by the sheer Density of the thing. Oh, wait, it was at the "So You Want to be a Midwife?" meeting given by the School for any aspiring applicants. It was designed, I'm sure, to weed out the Faint of heart: midwives and their spouses and children talked candidly about the life of a midwife: the interrupted movies/birthday parties/sex. The holidays you miss, the vacations you can't take, the long hot baths you'll never get... because being a midwife means you're ALWAYS ON CALL. Scary stuff, to be sure. Not for the faint of heart...or the partier at heart! Anne was there to discuss CNMs vs. CMs. After the meeting I approached her. "So, I've been trying to get through your Labwork book," I said, bright and proud. "There is so much information in there, so much medical language!" She stared at me blankly for a moment, then snapped, "Well, you'll just have to go get yourself a 'Taber's'!" and she turned away. Too afraid to ask what the heck a "Taber's" was, I, too, turned away, tail between my legs. Don't know what I'd expected her to say, but I guess I was hoping for some verbal pat-on-the-head, what-a-big-girl-you-are. Not sure. But once again, it was a rather disappointing encounter. Here was this woman who was, as I was discovering, revered and respected in the midwifery world. Short, Southern, and serious, Anne Frye was not a woman whose time you wasted. I had mistakenly thought that since I had originally met her in a social setting, that we had a connection; that I had an "in". But here, in her midwifery element, I was just a starry-eyed wanna-be midwife, and her rebuff made my place clear. How embarrassing. I did, however, do my research, and was soon the owner of a Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary.

And, despite the scare tactics, I decided to continue

④ my pursuit of midwifery. Baths be damned.



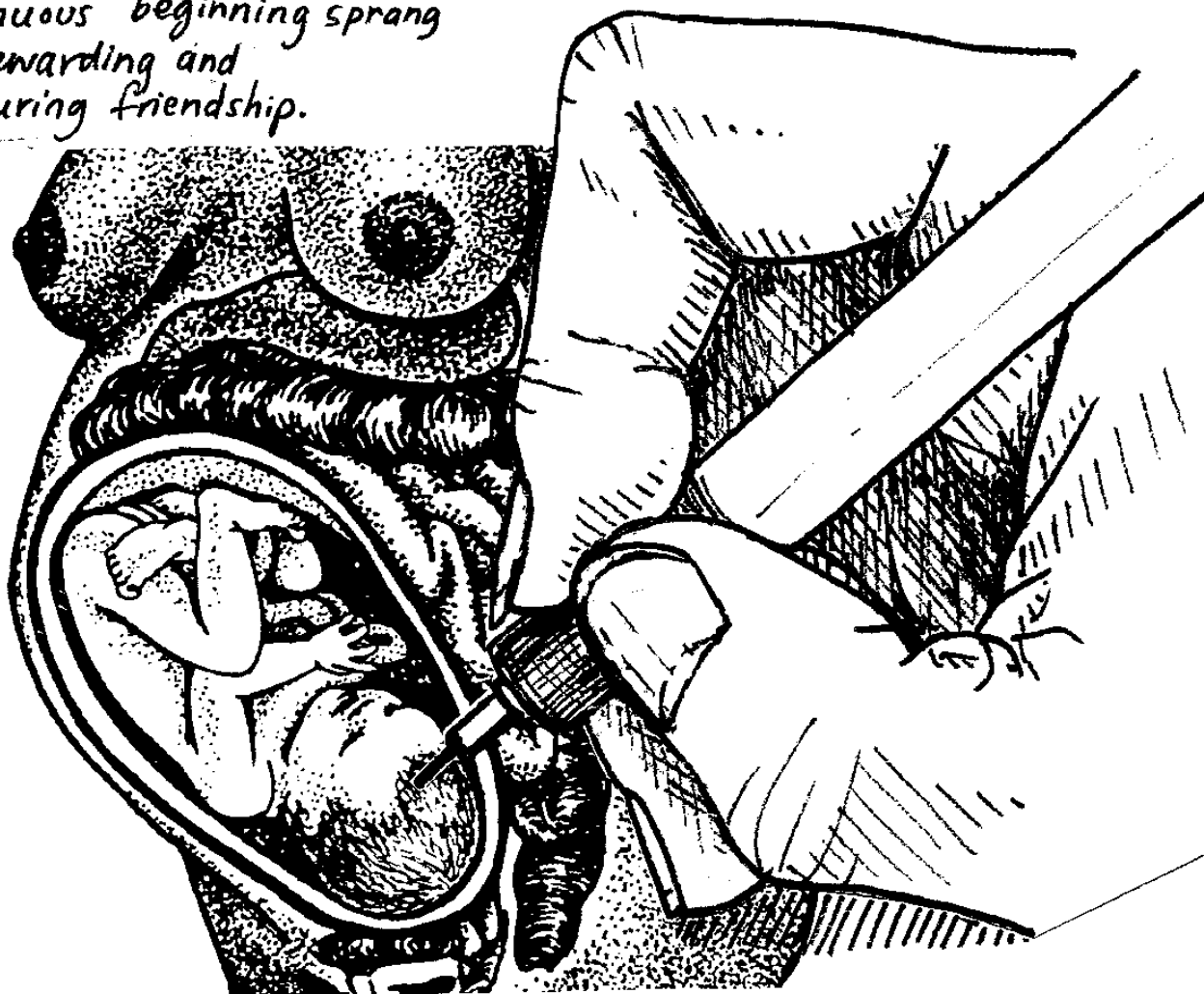
But I can't leave the story there. Anne might not have made a good impression on me, (or me on her, I'd venture to say) but like many lasting friendships the rocky start would be long forgotten.

I don't remember how it happened, and Anne doesn't either, but somehow I ended up working long frantic and happy hours on artwork for the upcoming book. She was nearly done with the final edits when through some mishap her out-of-state artist lost all the work she'd done to that point. Holistic Midwifery Volume I was a long-awaited book, designed to be both textbook and reference manual for homebirth practitioners around the world. There was nothing like it out there (I was to discover that Anne prides herself on putting out work that hasn't been done for generations, if ever) and it needed hundreds of drawings, from medical equipment to basic anatomy to fetal development and pregnancy. And though most of the illustrations were pretty standard, it was imperative to both of us that these be pictures of women, not headless torsos. Whenever possible, I put heads on the women whose bodies I was detailing... heads of women who were of all races and body types. I had three months to do hundreds of detailed drawings... and I was in heaven. My dining room table, with the best light in the house, became permanently off-limits to roommates and cat alike. I worked from 4 or 5am 'til I left for my full-time job (a temp secretary at a mental health agency for mentally ill homeless folks - a whole nother story!) and then again when I got home at night. I worked all day each weekend, I took days off work. I was inspired and excited.

I had wanted to be a medical illustrator back in high school... but decided against it after I saw my first autopsy movie. The guy was pulling apart some poor dead guy's brain, showing how a bullet had ricocheted from temple to occiput before coming ⑤

out the guy's eyeball. Yuck. I did not want to draw such things. I let that idea fly like a party balloon out the window, knew it would never happen. And although my medium of choice had always been pencil, I found myself struggling along now in pen and ink; learning how to add shade and texture without making everything look like it was suffering from measles. Have I said it was exhilarating? It was exhilarating! I was an artist - no - an ILLUSTRATOR. For a MIDWIFERY TEXTBOOK. Wow.

And Anne? Curt, sassy, no-nonsense Anne? A joy to work for. Really. Grateful, open to suggestion, easy to please and generous - the perfect boss. From a very tenuous beginning sprang a rewarding and enduring friendship.



⑥ Thanks for everything, Anne... x0



# Hello and Goodbye...

Back in issue #1, I talked about the son I gave birth to in March of 1984. Actually, I only talked about the birth; I didn't really talk about my son. It's time to tell the story.

Placing my son for adoption was not my first choice upon discovery of my pregnancy. I was sixteen, it was the summer before my senior year. I was going to graduate and head off to NYC to become a fashion designer. Pregnancy was NOT part of the plan. I scheduled an abortion, but through a long chain of unpleasant events, it did not come to pass. Thus I found myself as described in ZBC #1: a pregnant high school senior.

I made a deal with god: I would have this baby and give it up, but ONLY as long as it was a boy. Boys were foreign to me, and I certainly couldn't raise a boy without a father. So, god very kindly agreed that I would give up a son, and that someday I would be the happy mama of a daughter or two. The Catholic priest my mother worked for stepped in and arranged the adoption with a couple he knew in Louisiana. (He had also 'arranged' the mess-up of the abortion appointment, which I wouldn't find out for years). The couple he knew lived next door to his niece; he'd met them, they were nice and well off. So it wasn't like my baby was going to complete strangers. I'd maybe even get news of him now and again. It was settled.

The birth was dreadful - well, the LABOR was dreadful - I was in awe of the actual birth, which I witnessed in the mirror above my spread-eagled body. My body gave birth, and they cleaned him up and handed him to me. I was wheeled out of the delivery room with my black-haired, black-eyed gorgeous baby boy tucked in one arm, and my teddy bear (the only stand-in for the father that the hospital would allow) tucked under the other.

I must have looked like such a baby myself.



Back then, mamas stayed in the hospital for three days, even after a normal delivery. I intended to make use of every moment to be with my son. Jonathan, my son.

I knew he was not mine - my heart and soul knew that keeping him would be the wrong wrong **WRONG** thing to do, and I knew I would not waver. But my son... he was so beautiful - his eyes so dark, promising to be chocolate brown, and thick black hair, olive skin. He was magical - staring so intently about him, never crying, just seeking answers everywhere. He was familiar - I could see my nose, my mouth, my chin in that tiny face. I fell in love as every new mother is programmed to do - but even as I knew he was not mine, my heart was tearing, shredding. "And a sword shall pierce her heart," says one version of the bible about Mary's agony. I knew that agony.

I held him as much as I could, fed him a bottle while my breasts ached to nurse him. There was no such thing as 'rooming-in'; and only one designated person could hold him or even be in my room when he was there. Had I been a little braver, a little wiser, I'd have broken those rules all over the place... what were they gonna do, take him away? But I followed the rules - so only my mom and I held him. If anyone came to visit I had to bring him back to the nursery. As you can imagine I hated all visitors, robbers of my time with my baby.



The days passed in a blur. Got yelled at by Nazi Nurse who found me asleep with Jonathan. Lying alone with a heat lamp between my legs as my episiotomy itched and stung. Getting reprimanded for pushing the help button in the bathroom when I thought I was going to pass out. Wondering

over and over again how I could reconcile my longing for my baby and my lack of longing for motherhood. My daddy showing up to visit after ignoring me the entire pregnancy, then weeping with pride and sorrow in my room. Sitting with my son on my lap as I wept and wrote the final pages of a letter to him. A letter that started as a 16-year-old's foolish penpal meanderings and ended in utter despair, begging forgiveness, praying for understanding. Weeping.

On our last day we borrowed the priest's 35mm camera and took pictures. They are all taken in natural light - they show a lovely alert baby boy and a sad young girl who is already showing her lifelong mask of grief. The last picture was taken moments before 4pm that day. At 4pm the circuit clerk was coming with papers, relinquishment papers. At 4pm, my time was up.



At 3:59pm I kissed my son's impossibly soft feet, nuzzled him, inhaling his sweet newborn scent, stroked his hair and put him in his bassinet. Slowly I wheeled him to the nursery, my heart pounding and empty. Marching to a death knell, a nightmare of tile and fluorescent light and sore body and agonizing slow steps. My mom was beside me but I don't remember it. I just remember feeling terribly, finally, alone.

I knocked on the nursery door, and asked the nurse who answered to please put him right by the window so I could look at him as long as possible. I pushed him through the door and as it closed a wail of pure grief rose from my soul. I cried as a child cries, as a mother cries. The anguish ripped through me, devoured me, and I let it. I'll never forget the startled faces of the excited new mamas and daddies, their reveries so rudely and bewilderingly interrupted by a distraught teenager. I turned my eyes to my son as my mother held me up. We wept together, but after a moment she could not bear it and moved away. I stood there, my eyes locked on my baby, memorizing his face. At that moment he stirred and for the first time since he was born, I saw him cry. We cried together, my son and I, as if he felt it, too. We were being torn apart, and I was doing the tearing. We cried.

At 5pm, I was still standing there. My mother paced the halls, fuming at the circuit clerk, coming to stand with me, pacing again. I was not about to budge - I was taking every second I could get. My eyes did not leave his face. I waited. Like the condemned wait for death - part of me dying already. I thought... I still have time... I could be holding him. I thought... if I touch him again, I'll never let him go. I thought... I will not wreck both of our lives... I will wreck only my own. I realized that all I could do was to stand there, and stare, and weep, and wait.

At something like 6pm, the man showed up, no apologies, no clue. By then my tears had stopped and I was holding the fragile strands of my soul together by sheer willpower. I had to be alone in the room when I signed the papers, so no one could say I was influenced in any way. My mother hugged me, whispering, "It's okay if you change your mind..." which only strengthened my resolve. I signed the damned papers, the word "irrevocable" standing out neon bright. I hated the word, hated the man, hated the people who were taking my baby. Loving my baby, tears scalding my cheeks, barely breathing, I signed the damned papers.

At that moment, I became a new person.  
I became a birthmother.

I was wheeled out of that hospital empty handed, empty bellied. I was leaving behind my only child. He would remain there for two more days, until Louisiana law took effect and I signed yet another set of papers that gave him to his new parents. For two days he would belong to no one, have no one. The thought of this nearly killed me. I went home to lay in bed and sob. My poor little sisters, so young at the time, did not know what to do. I slept in my mom's bed, comforted for a few moments at a time before grief would wash over me anew.

I found out what they named him - Tyler - and I flew into a rage. Their act of naming him meant he really really was gone. Grief became my best friend who never left my side. The only way to survive it was to embrace it.

I never got counseling - I just went back to my life as much as I could. Everything was tainted. Nothing seemed as worthwhile as it did before. Elsa Klensch, a fashion person with a show on TV called "Style" made her observation that "yellow is so important this season," and I realized that Elsa had no idea what was important. Yellow was certainly not it. Fashion was not it. I didn't know what to do, thrust so into a sobering adult world of real loss. I didn't know where to go. I was lost. But I survived.

The years passed. His birthday was the worst... a day to cry, bake a cake, take the day off work, and remember. Mother's Day sucked. I was an unrecognizable mother. I cannot begin to describe the many phases and faces my grief took on. It was my crutch, my shield, my excuse, and, in very bad times, my reason to keep on living.

I kept meeting adoptees, dating adoptees. I learned to accept the grim reality that while female adoptees nearly always search for their birthmothers, male adoptees rarely do. I knew that it would be a long wait until I could contact him with any hope of acceptance. I settled in to wait.

I turned thirty in 1996, and that same year my sister had a baby, the first grandchild since my son. At the time I was a live-in nanny and my eyes were opened to the reality of parenting. These things inspired me to write a letter to Tyler's adoptive mother, thanking her, asking her very humbly to let me know how he was doing. I knew from the priest and from my attorney that his parents had been very reluctant to have any information about me - despite it being an open adoption they were not interested in exchange of info. They had seemed very protective and afraid, as if they wanted me to simply not exist. I knew I had to tread carefully, and my letter was



a loving and humble request. I sent it to my attorney, who then forwarded it to the adoptive mother's attorney. I waited. I heard nothing.

Later that year I got access to the internet—still a rather new media for the masses. Of course I did a search on his name... and up came his name on a role playing gamer site! He was online! He played computer games! He wasn't a baby anymore... he was a kid. A smart kid. Wow.

I was excited. I was scared. I had information now—an address, a phone number that I couldn't do a damn thing with. Nor was I about to. But having that information was powerful. He was alive. He was out there. And someday, when I thought he was ready... I would reach out. Someday.



Top: Me with my son, moments before letting him go.  
Bottom: the couple who adopted my son on the day they got him. Having this picture made it both better and worse. ⑪



# my friend Martin

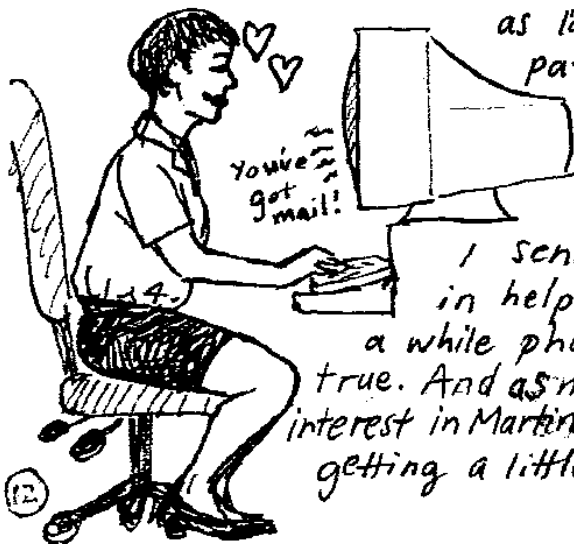
In March of 1998 (yes, all these things happen in March) I was inspired to do a portrait of Lea Krueger, an amazing singer/songwriter I had been following around worshipfully. ([www.cdbaby.com/cd/leakrueger](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/leakrueger) - go listen & worship). Anyway, it was great to be inspired again after many artless years. I needed to snap some photos of Lea to work from, but I had no camera. I'd always been interested in learning photography, so now seemed like the time. I didn't want some quickie auto-focus auto-everything camera; I wanted a real camera. A trip to the pawn shop and I had an old Konica 35mm SLR camera in my hands - and absolutely no idea how it worked.

At the library I got a couple of beginning photography books, hoping they would give me step-by-step instructions on setting all the knobs and dials and switches to take pictures of Lea in action. Trouble was, Lea's 'action' was under dim colored spotlights at a smoky Irish brewpub. Trouble was, none of the books had any information on low-light photography. I had unlimited internet access at my job, and a search on the topic led me to a message-board exchange on just that topic. The guy who answered the questions seemed knowledgeable and kind. The message itself was a few years old, but with nothing to lose I emailed the guy named Martin.

Martin emailed me back, and a correspondence began. He was, as I'd thought, very knowledgeable, and very patient with the stupidest of my questions.

I started taking pictures under his tutelage, playing around with F-stops and shutter speeds, color and b/w film.

I sent my photos to him and he commented in helpful detail. He kept saying that after a while photography would become intuitive. It was true. And as my intuition was awakened, so was my interest in Martin. He was funny and sharp. I started getting a little crush on him, wishing we could meet.





Martin was a programmer at the NY Merchantile Exchange. He kayaked, biked, cross-country skied. Founding member of ASH ([www.ash.org](http://www.ash.org)) (but never harrassed me about my smoking) Jewish. Little bits of ourselves appeared in every email.

Then one day civil rights came up, and he remarked how he was in the throng at Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech. I was impressed, but then I asked, "Just how old ARE you, anyway?" I'm sure he was laughing as he typed his answer. **62!** I know I laughed when I read it! Suddenly the friendship became easier & more relaxed, on my part, anyway, now that I wasn't trying to flirt online. Besides, he was happily married. 😊

Nearly a month after I got that camera, it suddenly just stopped working. The shutter simply would not trip. I actually had the damn thing at work with me at the time, and I emailed Martin immediately, HELP! He walked me through the problem: the mirror was stuck. He helped me un-stick it. It stuck again. It was clear it needed repair, but Konica had long since ceased making SLR cameras. A few frantic phone calls later, I was in despair. Only one place in the States repaired Konicas, and it would cost twice what I'd paid for the camera. "Can you return it?" Martin asked. I dug the receipt out of my wallet. The camera was on day 29 of a 30-day guarantee! Of all the luck! I could exchange it. I told Martin I'd be going to the pawn shop during my lunch, and asked if I could call him to get his opinion once I was there. He shot back his phone number and off I went.

At the pawn shop I had three choices, and I called him. It was the first time I had spoken to him, and he answered "This is Mawtin" - just like I'd expect an old Jewish guy from New Jersey to sound. I laughed. "Hi Martin, it's Rhonda... Well, I'm here at the pawn shop looking at three cameras..."

"Didn't you get the last email I sent you? Telling you to never mind getting another camera - just get a credit. I'm sending you my old camera."

Despite my protests and brushing aside my offers to pay, send me his old camera he did. His old Pentax arrived a few days later - much-loved, well-travelled, and feeling familiar from the first moment I held it. I named it Jake.



It was only the first of many times Martin would show his generosity. I treasured it. The years passed.

I took lots of great pictures of Lea (never got around to doing the portrait, though. Funny how that works), and lots of pictures of other stuff. I changed jobs several times, went through several confusing and wearying heartbreaks, and my interests shifted from Lea to Lindy Hop to Love. Martin changed bosses several times, helped the NYMEX survive the big bad Y2K (non) disaster, got two daughters-in-law, two grandkids, and as he says "more arthritis".

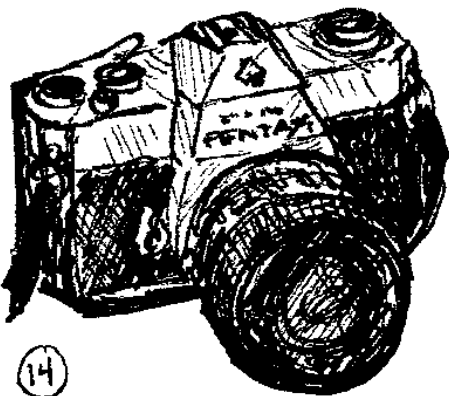
When the World Trade Center Fell, I called Martin the first moment I could. He was on the ferry, just arriving at the shore when he saw the planes slice into the towers. Martin and his loved ones were okay.

When my babies were born, Martin was on the call list. In fact had Zuzu been a boy, I was going to use the name Martin - okay for a shiksa, he explained, but if I were Jewish it would be like telling him to drop dead!

We still email each other regularly, just not as often. If too much time passes, a phone call is made. Having Martin as a friend is an unexpected joy. He's an old dog, so he knows how to survive - and remembers in detail - marriage, parenthood, and life in general. I have benefited from his wisdom time and time again. His advice to threaten Zuzu with throwing her in a dumpster if she didn't let me sleep didn't work quite as well for me as it did for him - but it was still a great piece of advice. And though I rarely need camera help anymore, I think about Martin every time I use Jake to snap my kids.

He's been there for great sorrows and great joys, with kindness, encouragement, humor, and truth. Someday I hope to meet him - to squeeze his hand over coffee, to introduce him to my family.

Til then, Martin... I'll see you online.



see Martin's photos at  
[www.decoast.com/martin/](http://www.decoast.com/martin/)

## *...and Hello again...*

It was November 28, Thanksgiving just over. Usually 'round the holidays I did my semi-annual internet search for my son. For eight or nine years I had always gotten the same thing; old posts he had done on a role-playing game website, nothing more. I had stopped really hoping to find anything new. I typed in "Tyler Himel", hit enter, and up came something I'd never seen before. A website for poets, his poetry library. With tons of poems, and a journal by him. His most intimate thoughts and feelings, laid bare and open for the world – for me – to see. I had found my son.

I wish I could describe my feelings when I landed on that site, and started reading his poetry. I was exhilarated, terrified, amazed and dazed. I wept. I read poems about his girlfriend – there were lots of those – and others about the everyday confusing angsty life of a teenager. I read one that was a letter to his dead father; it was touching, very poignant and emotional – I had no idea that his adoptive father had died. I was searching, though, for any mention of me, of his adoption. I had to know if he knew, if he cared. And then I found it. It was a poem full of anger, directed at a rapist. Right at the heart of the poem was this:

*My mother at fifteen didn't know the names of the fifteen that raped  
her,  
But she let me live.  
She bore me for nine months,  
Gave me away in hopes that I had a better chance.  
Gave me away because she couldn't face me herself,  
So now I am faceless.*

---

My heart stopped. Not only did he know, but he thought he was the product of a rape. How utterly horrible. I sobbed, thinking my poor son believed this about himself. Who told him such a thing? His parents? I read on, needing to understand him better. I realized, gratefully, that his anger was not directed at me. I realized that he was intelligent, passionate, knew himself well, and did not break easily. I was relieved. My son was okay. I wrote a poem that night, a response to his beliefs:

***Something you need to know***

*The mother you never knew  
Was not raped by one, or five, or fifteen boys  
She was young, full of lust and fire  
Wet and willing  
Just like you  
She was a dreamer  
A lover  
A risk-taker  
And thus were you conceived  
In a moment of teenage passion  
She thought was love  
On a pouring-down-rainy night  
In the back of her boyfriend's mother's car*

*The mother you never knew  
Made the choice to carry you  
Made the choice to give you a better chance  
Not because she couldn't face you  
But because she knew she was not ready to raise you  
Not ready to be a parent*

*The mother you never knew  
Suffered a dreadful labor and birth  
Barbaric to her now*



And watched you emerge, wet and sticky  
And longed for you  
And loved you  
And let you go

The mother you never knew  
Wept  
For hours  
For days  
for years and years  
not with regret  
but with sorrow  
you were beautiful beyond belief  
and she let you go

The mother you never knew  
Grew up, somehow,  
In hazes of grief splintered with  
Laughter and inspiration  
And made sense of her choices  
Made sense of her life

The mother you never knew  
Left you alone  
To grow, to learn, to be  
Left your parents alone  
Because she didn't want to intrude  
But she looked for you  
Online one year  
Found that you played "Street Samurai"  
Found that you played "Diablo"  
But didn't find any more  
All she knew was that you were alive, nothing more  
Until today

The mother you never knew  
Just turned 37 years old  
Is mother to your little sister  
Is heavily pregnant with another baby sister  
Is finally married to her soulmate  
Is finally married to her soul

The mother you never knew  
Is a midwife  
Has helped women through birth,  
And letting go of their children  
Has helped women give birth,  
Had her hands on their babies as they  
Emerged, wet and sticky  
Guided them to their mother's breast  
Thought of you  
Over and over  
Over the years  
With each baby  
With each Mother's Day  
With each March 25

The mother you never knew  
Reads your poetry now  
In awe of your raw emotion,  
Your honesty,  
Your passion  
And knows exactly where it came from

The mother you never knew  
Wants you to know.

---

I didn't sleep much that night, and was very washed out the next day. I could not stop thinking about him, about all that I had learned about him, so suddenly. It was like a train wreck; I couldn't stop looking. I realized that I wanted him to know me. But how?

The website allowed only members to comment on poetry. There was no way to get an email address from it. Even so, I wasn't sure if contacting him was the right thing to do. A battle began inside me. I desperately wanted to contact him, to let him know I was out there. At the same time I was desperately afraid. I felt as isolated and alone as I did the first year after his birth, like there wasn't a soul who would understand this. I wanted someone to just understand, and help me. Randy was right there, and we talked late into the night.

November 30, from my LiveJournal:

*So, after all was said and done, I decided that it felt wrong to me to just lurk around on the poetry site, reading his journals and poetry until I was ready to quit being a chickenshit. My midwife, Pat, who also placed her first child for adoption, has had her son's information for years, and is too frightened to do anything with it. Finally I understand why. When you are a birthmother, you don't know how your child is going to react when you contact them. Will they hate you, because their life was not perfect and rosy? Will they figure since you didn't keep them, you must not care about them, so fuck off? There are a million variables, and every reason to just keep silent.*

*But it is not my nature to be silent. It is not my nature to hang back. Granted, the past twenty years, and being a midwife, have taught me patience... but there is a time for patience, and I don't feel this is one of those times. There is a reason for everything. He has appeared before me - and now I know more than I ever dreamed of knowing. And maybe that should be good enough. But I don't want to feel like a spy.*

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So, I am now a member of the poetry website. I have a page. I posted the poem I just wrote the other day, with an author's note apologizing for the shock, and inviting him to come read my LJ, and inviting him to tell me to fuck off if he needs to. Then I went to his poem that referenced his being placed for adoption and commented on it, telling him to please go read my poetry.

Now, all I have to do is wait. My favorite thing. (weak laugh)

A half-hour later, I got an email from my son:

*I was not born in portland. Where was I born? Why does your daughter look almost exactly like me? I don't know, I don't know who you are, or your motivation for this. What year was I born? I want proof that YOU are who you say you are before I tell you a damned thing.*

My heart pounded and my eyes filled with tears and I laughed with delight! I was hoping and ready for just such a response. I immediately scanned in the photo of me with him, and his parents with him the day they got him, and sent this message:

*I live in Portland now. You were born March 25, 1984 in Kankakee, Illinois - where I was born and raised.*

*I never met your parents... but this is a photo of me with you just moments before I had to let you go and sign the papers. And this is a photo of your parents the day they got you.*

*I'm sorry your dad died. I didn't know until I read your poem. My dad died when I was 25.*

*I don't know what else to say... I want you to be okay with this. If these are not your parents, and I am wrong, I am sorry.*



I hit send and waited, breathless. Randy, who I'd been talking with this whole time, waited with me. I was very glad for his calm presence. A long moment later, this reply:

Yeah..you're right..Alright, I know now, I believe you..What am I supposed to say? What do you want to know about me? Why did you wait so long? How did you find me now?

My response:

Wow. Whew.

You know, Tyler, you're not 'supposed to' say anything. And after 20 years, what do I \*not\* want to know about you?

Why did I wait so long? You know, from what little I did know of your folks, it did not seem prudent to contact you any sooner.

I wrote you a letter when you were born, that your mom and dad agreed to give you between the ages of 14-18. I also wrote your mom a letter when I turned 30, just letting her know where I was at in my life- but I mailed it to her attorney to give to her. I never heard anything, so I decided I needed to just let it go for a while.

I've had your address and name all your life. I did not want to intrude. And I've talked to dozens of adoptees over the years, both male and female. The men never search. Never. They are not interested in knowing their birthmothers. I -perhaps incorrectly- assumed you would be the same. I figured I would wait until you were 25 or so, until it seemed you might have kids of your own. But then I found your poetry during one of my random searches of your name, and I thought, well, hell. Here he is. And I didn't feel right just lurking around reading your poetry and journal and stuff without you

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knowing. I'm a very straightforward person and I decided that now was as good a time as any.

Again, I'm sorry if I'm intruding, or freaking you out, or whatever. You are an adult, you have your own life, and it is up to you.

Tyler: I'm not like any other man you've known. Nobody that gets to know me can say that I am, so maybe that's why I searched. Statistics cannot map out human emotion. I am a college student, I'm 19 now, going to be 20 in march. I'm a print journalism student at Nicholls State University. That's the brunt of my poetry, so you know how I think about a lot of things. I always knew I was adopted, but he wanted me to know you, wanted me to know about the letter. My mother doesn't think I need to know. She thinks that you're going to steal me away from her, and she's overprotective..since my parents got divorced when I was only three or four years old, my dad had no choice but to keep the fact that he knew where you were from me.

I checked all the agencies I could find in Kankakee about a year ago..I am ready to know..It was my father's dying wish that I knew and now that I do it's an extremely emotional situation for me. I hope that you understand why.

The emails started flying thick and fast at that point, three or four simultaneous conversations. I read the choice bits to Randy, who said, "You are in a lot of trouble - he is a lot like you. He does not communicate provisionally... he's like bam bam bam!"

For two hours we talked that night, through email. We talked about his biological father; the last time I spoke to Teddy he was on parole. I apologized for not having more info, but Tyler was just happy to know that his b-dad 'had a face'. We talked about family diseases.

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We talked about my family, the circumstances of his birth... there was so much to talk about, so many questions on both sides. "I am an open book to you," he said. He wanted to meet me. And then he emailed me a picture. My son is beautiful. He looks like me, he looks like his b-dad.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, we had a very emotional conversation that ended with me in tears.

"Goodnight, my only son. Sweet dreams," I wrote.

"Goodnight mother. Sleep well."

My heart sang.

I could talk about this forever, keep telling all the things we talked about enough to fill up twenty zines. How could I ever describe the joy I felt? My heart is too full. I now have a loving relationship with my son. For the first time in his life, I was able to give him a Christmas gift, a birthday gift. We chat online several times a week, we joke and tease, are serious and sometimes irritating to each other. He and Randy are two peas in a pod, both geekboys, and have their own conversations. He is forming a relationship with his aunt Wendy. We've spoken on the phone a couple of times, and I'll be flying him up here this summer. I have to laugh at my pathetic attempt to condense this tale into these pages, but there you have it. I will say this. For nearly twenty years, there has been a hole in my soul; a part of me that wasn't complete – as if I was missing just a part of a lung. Everytime I thought of him it was an incomplete breath. But now, when I think of him, I can breathe. My soul is full, my spirit at peace. My child is with me.



# THE GALLERY OF WONDER

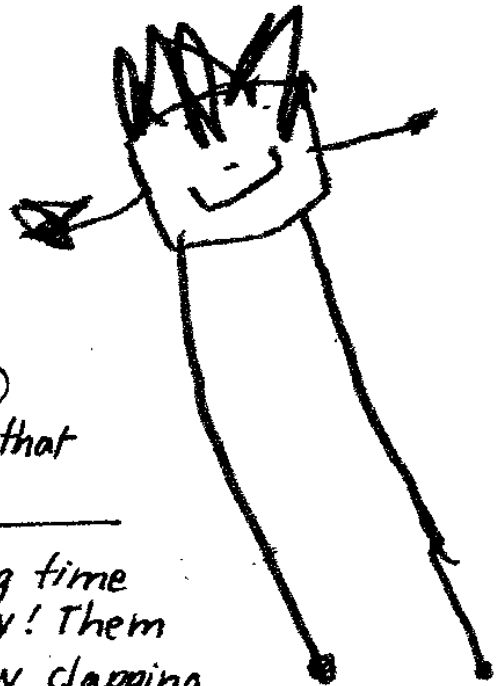
MOSTLY BY ZUZU

Zuzu sat in the bathtub, a bowlful of toys in her lap, singing

"Won't let anyone get out... my gonna let it shine... won't let anyone get out..."

Um... that's "Won't let anyone spoof (blowing noise) it out, I'm gonna let it shine." (From "This Little Light of Mine")

I can only wonder what she thinks that song is about...



"A TV walking"

The windshield wipers were keeping time to the music, and Zuzu said, "Hey! Them wipers look like they dancin'! They clapping they hands!"

Listening to "Five Little Pumpkins" - Zuzu holding her fingers up so they are peeking over her car seat tray. "These the five little pumpkins, daddy."

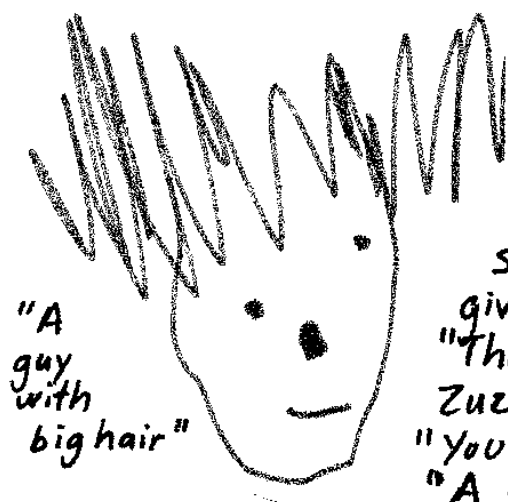
"Oh... are those five little pumpkins going to roll out of right?" Zuzu sighs, "My don't think so. These are not real pumpkins. These are only my fingers."



"A Lion"

For the first month after Josie's birth, Zuzu's comfort habit of "playing with mama's boobies" often led, to her dismay, to leaking milk. One recent night she hurt herself and I was naked, holding her on her bed while she cried. Then she said sadly, "We gonna have to change my sheets in a minute." She was looking at my nipples, waiting for the inevitable dripping mess...





"A  
guy  
with  
big hair"

Driving past a retro furniture shop, we saw a hideous couch made up of round orange pieces. I remarked to Randy how uncomfortable it must be. "Oh no," he said, "I'm sure it's a surprisingly comfortable couch." Zuzu gives a forced laugh at his sarcasm. "Thanks for the obligatory laugh, there, Zuzu" says Randy. "You know what we call that?" she says. "A fake laugh."

Zuzu is very interested in penises right now. Every animal or person she draws is first evaluated, "This guy is a BOY." And then, giving me a slightly mischievous look, she will draw a penis - one line - dangling down. When her daddy went in for his vasectomy, we had to explain why he would not be able to carry her for a while... well she went hog wild with that. "My daddy is going to the hospital to get his penis fixed!" she told Melissa. In the coffee shop she informed me that they were going to "cut his penis right off!" Well, happily they did no such thing...

Pat came over to check me for a cervical tear a few weeks after Josie's birth. She put the speculum in place and Zuzu immediately sat right down, front and center, peering down my buki. "Shine that light down in there!" she told Pat impatiently. No doubt my daughter will be well-versed in anatomy.



Josie  
drawn by  
Melissa

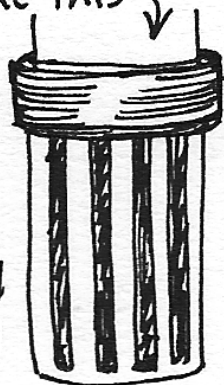
# Belly UP

A FROG STORY

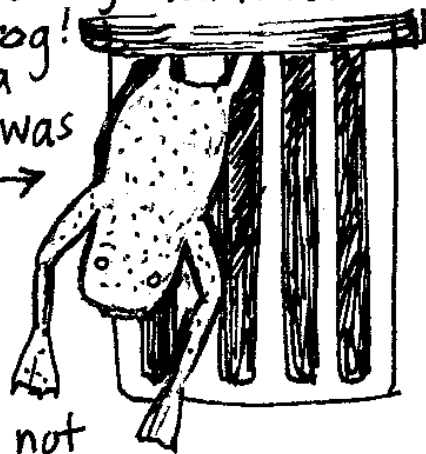


Once upon a time, a little girl named Zuzu got a fish tank for her first birthday, because she was really into the goldfish at the store. The goldfish were mean to each other, though, and started picking on each other. Soon it was giving Zuzu's mama nightmares, and way too much stress. So, Zuzu's parents returned the goldfish and got tropical fish instead. Nice ones. Orange ones, neon ones, silvery ones and white ones. Best of all, though, was the teeny little frog that lived with the fishes. He was quite entertaining in his little froggy way. He would sit very still on the bottom for a long time, then he would suddenly swimswimswim to the top to get a breath of air, then swimswimswim back down, trailing bubbles. Sometimes he would swim to the top and then hang there in the water, letting the current of the filter push him along. He looked like he was flying, and Zuzu laughed and laughed at him.

Zuzu's fish tank was full of friendly fish, but there was one bad thing. The filter. It had slits, and looked like this ↓  
The water was continually sucked in through the slits before flowing through the filter and coming out the top. The slits were very very dangerous and hungry. Every once in a while a little fish who did not listen to his mama would swim too close, and get his tail sucked into the slit, and it would suck on him so hard that he would have to die and leave his little fish body. This had happened to several of Zuzu's little fish, but Zuzu's mama and daddy had not mentioned it, and Zuzu had not noticed.



One day Zuzu's mama fed the fish and noticed that the little frog was nowhere in sight. She peeked down and around and then gave a little gasp of despair. The big bad filter of doom had captured the poor little frog! He was just hanging there, swaying a little in the current but otherwise he was very pale and still. He looked like this → Zuzu's mama was very sad, and she knew little Zuzu would be sad too. She decided to go right away to the nearby fish store and get a new froggy for Zuzu. Luckily, Zuzu was not home at the time, so her mama could switch the frogs and Zuzu would not know. She left right away.

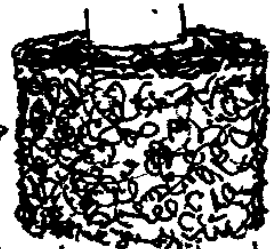


Zuzu's mama got home with the new frog and then realized she would need to turn off the filter to get poor dead froggy out. She switched off the filter and then stifled a scream as poor dead froggy began to wriggle and feebly kick, trying to swim free! He had been stuck under the water for so long, and had not had air to breathe for all that time, and he was weak. Mama got a fishnet and scooped it under him, helping him get to the surface. "Come on, little frog! You can do it!" she told him. Little frog made it to the top and took a breath. Mama was relieved but also sick with guilt. If she had turned off the ~~dammed~~ darned filter in the first place, maybe froggy would have been better able to swim. There was no way to know how long he'd been trapped. But poor formerly-dead froggy swam back to the bottom and sat, just like he'd always done, so maybe he was okay! And now there were TWO little frogs in Zuzu's tank.

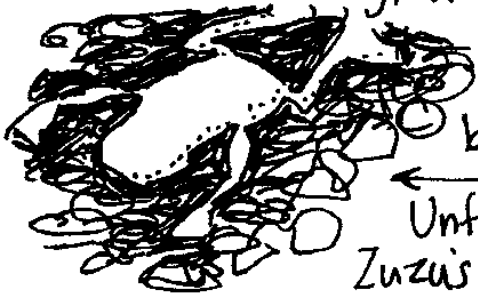
But, alas. Poor formerly dead froggy was not long for this world. He died the next day, and was removed.

New froggy was bigger and older, but then again so was Zuzu. She no longer paid much attention to her fishies, so she didn't really notice that new frog did not play superfrog like poor dead frog used to. It was okay, though, because he was still very cute and Mama liked him. New frog lived happily among the fishies, and no one else died a horrible sucking filter death... because Mama had also bought a big spongy filter cover! (Mama wished that the people at the fish store had simply sold them one when they first bought the tank. But, oh well.)

She put it over the vicious slits, and no more fishies died. It looked like this →



One day not long ago, Zuzu's mama looked in the tank, because something white and still and shaped like a flying frog was lying in the bottom of the tank. It was new frog, and he was belly-up. Zuzu's mama is not very good at drawing frogs, especially frogs that are belly-up, but he looked kind of like this.



Unfortunately Zuzu was home at the time. Zuzu's mama did not know how Zuzu, now two-and-a-half, would handle the death of the frog. She called daddy, who happened to be out running errands. "The F.R.O.G is D.E.A.D," she spelled. She told him to go to the fish store and get a new one, so that the dead new frog could be replaced by the new new frog when Zuzu wasn't around. Daddy was unmoved, and in fact did not share Mama's certainty that dead new frog needed replacing. Zuzu's mama insisted, however, and Daddy brought home new new frog.



New new frog was much younger and smaller than dead new frog, Daddy told Mama in so many words, as Zuzu sat just a few feet from where dead new frog lay belly up in the bottom of the tank. And Zuzu was not interested in leaving the room. What were Mama and Daddy to do? Newnew frog needed to get in the tank, soon. Mama sighed.

"Zuzu," she said, "Your froggy is dead."

Zuzu looked up. "Where?" she asked.

"In the bottom of the tank. He's belly up."

Zuzu went to the tank. "My want to see!"

she said. Daddy got the fishnet and Zuzu watched quietly as Daddy fished dead new frog out. "We got you a

NEW frog" we told her. Zuzu wanted to touch poor dead new frog. Daddy held him in the net so she could say her farewell to her beloved froggy. Reverently mama wrapped froggy in some soft kleenex, so froggy would be warm and cozy in the afterlife.

Mama put frog in the garbage can while Daddy explained.

"Your froggy was very old, that's why he didn't live."

"Yes," mama said to Zuzu, not wanting Zuzu to think getting older meant you died, "He was very VERY old... and maybe he was very sick. But it was his time to die."

Zuzu watched as Daddy put newnew froggy into the tank, and watched new new frog swim around.

"Sometimes things just die," we told Zuzu.

Zuzu's face lit up with an idea.

"Maybe the fish killed him!" she said.

Then Zuzu went back to playing with her toys.



# Josie

I was ten days overdue with Josie, and in no mood to deal with it.

This was a hard pregnancy. Not as hard as some: if I were my midwife I'd say it was an easy pregnancy. My worst complaint was heartburn (which was bad - even water gave me heartburn) and pelvic pain. Otherwise it was pretty uneventful. That is, except for the events.

Well, there was Ashland with the flu. And Disneyland. A long hot summer, then a fall plagued with illnesses. Zuzu was in a phase of nightly raging screaming fits having to do with the need to pee. It was horrible and exhausting, every night. Christmas came and went, and with it went Riri, our babysitter (long story). Meanwhile I had book illustrations that I was determined to finish before Josie came. How I was going to accomplish that with no babysitter was anyone's guess. To say the least, it was stressful.

We found a new sitter. Readers, Melissa; Melissa, readers. Zuzu took to her right away. Her first week was a little rough, what with the ice storm that trapped us in the house for a week, everything under an inch of solid ice! Then things began to ease.

January 11, my 'due date', came and went, as I expected. My friend Nephyr gave me a Blessingway on that day... a lovely and very small event. I was so happy to have a Blessingway, and very grateful to the women who braved the weather to come give me good wishes and blessings, wash my feet, and eat amazing food (a cake in the shape of breasts and big round belly-gorgeous and scrumptious). The Blessingway would surely be the trigger for labor. I thought, okay, NOW Josie will come.

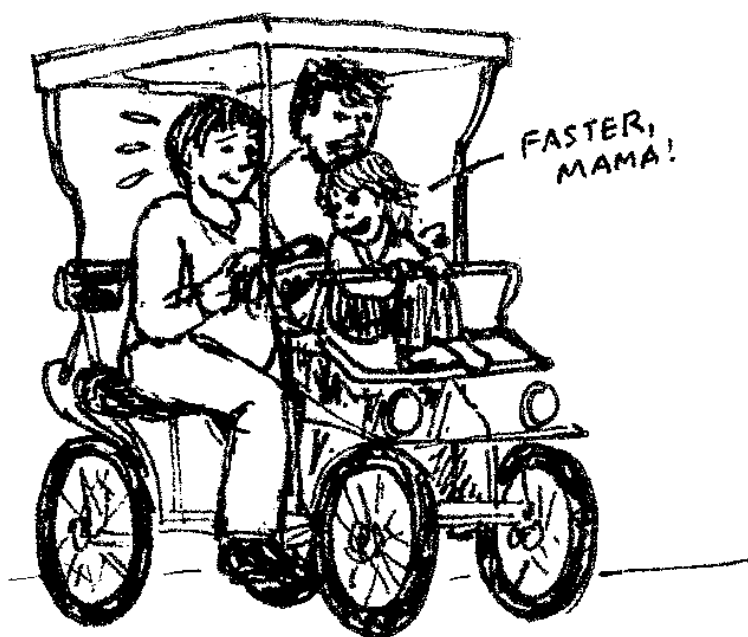


"the boobie cake" by Nephyr 

January 13: I worked like a maniac and finished the illustrations that I'd been working on for ten years, the final drawing being, somehow fittingly, a herniated infant scrotum. I was ecstatic and a bit weepy after all this time. And I thought, okay, NOW Josie will come.

January 17: We went to the zoo. I was in constant pain by this point, but walking was better than sitting. And walk we did! A lovely day. It was very poignant for me, possibly our last trip to the zoo with just Zuzu. And I thought, okay, NOW Josie will come.

January 18<sup>th</sup>, daring labor to begin, we took a trip to the beach, an hour away. I waddled around our favorite family haunt, watching Zuzu on the carousel with her daddy, eating a yummy lunch, and then renting a surrey.



It must have been quite the sight, me and my big huge belly huffing and puffing on that thing. But the day did something... I lost my mucous plug! Whoo-hoo! And I thought, okay NOW Josie REALLY will come!

January 19<sup>th</sup>, still pregnant, I was tired of answering the (well-meaning) phone callers. I recorded an answering machine message with Zuzu, interviewing her: "Zuzu, is Josie here yet?" "No."

"When is Josie going to come out?"

"Sree more days!" (the 22<sup>nd</sup>... okay, I can live with that... I hope!)

"Okay, you heard it – Josie will be here in three more days! Thanks for calling!"

We did a belly cast that day too, messy and fun, with Zuzu helping. Once it was done, I thought, okay, NOW Josie will come.

January 21 – Bob Bresny's horoscope dares to tell me "Your word of power is 'incubate'". Oh, ha ha. I started having bloody show, and lots of it. I thought, okay, this is it, NOW Josie will come.

My son was ten days overdue. Zuzu was two weeks overdue. At ten days overdue with Josie, I had pretty much had it. I'd been having regular contractions for days. They hurt, they were annoying, but I knew they weren't the real thing. I was stressing out mostly about Zuzu – I wanted her to be there for the birth, and I felt like we had prepared her well (hell, she'd been playing "birth" with her daddy in the birth pool all week!), but I was worried about who would care for her. We had planned on having Riri there for her, but that wasn't going to happen. I liked Melissa, but she'd never been to a birth and she'd only been with us for a few weeks – it just didn't feel right. The plan was for my mother-in-law to come down when I went into labor, but she didn't have a ride down from an hour north where she lived. That left Randy or my midwives to take care of Zuzu, and I didn't want that. My sister Amy would be arriving on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, maybe that was what Josie was waiting for. But still – who would care for Zuzu?

I just didn't know. I was sick and tired of worrying. And tired of being in pain. And tired of having contractions and no baby. It had to be soon. SOMETHING had to be the thing that Josie was waiting for. I begged the universe, a star, something, please. I wanted to be in labor.

January 22 – a Thursday. I decide to do something a little proactive for once. I call my mother-in-law and ask if she would be willing to come down and stay until the baby was born. I just have a feeling it would be soon, and I don't want to worry about it any more. Turns out she was worried about making it down on time, too. So, Zuzu and I go get Nana.

I also call Pat and ask her if she will come by in the early evening to just check me and see what is going on. All the contractions, the bloody show, I mean, SOMETHING had to be happening. She was happy to do so. I didn't really want a 'prenatal', I just needed bucking up.



It was a school day for Zuzu, and I had wanted Randy and Melissa to go with me to drop Zuzu off, so that her teachers could meet them. Randy gets off work early, and we all go

take Zuzu to school. Then Nana and I leave Randy and Mel to get acquainted, and we go to the book store. I'm having very regular contractions, but I'm thinking, yeah, yeah, whatever. While Nana is browsing I call my best friend Kim, who is a midwife in Montana, and I talk to her about what is going on. Short but regular contractions, lots of bloody show. She says it sounds like Josie's head is asynclitic, meaning it is tipped a bit to

one side, so it's not pushing on the cervix ideally. She recommends deep lunges and stair-climbing. I lunge and lunge on the stepstool at the store, chatting with Kim and laughing about how much we hate waiting, and how nicely that dovetails with the career we've chosen!

Nana is done shopping and we go to meet up with Randy and Mel at Zuzu's school. I am achy from contractions, it is uncomfortable to sit down, so I pace, waiting for Zuzu to be out. I laughingly tell one of the parents that I think I must be in early labor, and I tell the school's program director that I am having the baby TONIGHT. Of course I don't believe any of it, but I am ever hopeful...

Back to past tense now. I dropped Randy and Nana and Zuzu off at Gustav's (where my midwife Desiree was dining the night I labored with Zuzu – coincidence?) to get some dinner for themselves. I was way too antsy and uncomfortable (have I mentioned that I was uncomfortable?) to think of sitting for a meal, and besides I was meeting Pat at 5:30.



Mel took off for home, and Pat arrived. I was so happy to see her... it just felt better to have her there. Even if she checked me and said, Rhon, you're not even dilated in the slightest, your cervix is long and thick, at least I would know.

I was 5cm dilated, and 80% effaced. She said, "Rhonda, you're in labor." I said, "No, I'm not! These contractions are only 30 seconds long! They don't even hurt, not like REAL labor contractions." She said, "Rhonda, you're in labor, and I'm staying."

She also confirmed that Josie's head was not quite tucked, so despite the fact that I was not in labor, I went to work doing an exaggerated duck waddle up and down our stairs while she got things ready. I decided, what could it hurt to humor the poor disillusioned midwife? Besides, it was fun to hang out with her and have company. Oh, and I called Randy and laughingly told him, "Well, Pat says I'm in labor, so best not dawdle over dinner.... but take your time." Meanwhile Pat called Gail and Anne and Michelle and Nephyr, and put them on alert for the labor that wasn't really labor.

Thing was, the more I waddled up the stairs, squatting with every step, the more intense the contractions got. Still, they were very short. I got to the top of the steps and Pat smiled. "That last one was a good one," she said. "Pat!" I was getting impatient, "I'm NOT IN LABOR! These contractions are 30 seconds long!" "Oh, no, they have been a minute or more! I've been timing them," she assured me in her patient good-humored way. Just then I had another, intense, but about 30 seconds. I glared at her. "That was NOT a minute!" "Well, no," she admitted, "THAT one wasn't, but the others have been."

I just shook my head with disgust and laughed, and went on waddling.

At around 6:15, Randy came home and installed Nana and Zuzu in the basement with a movie. Unbeknownst to me, he looked at pat and said, "So, you think Rhon's in labor?" Pat SHRUGGED and said, "Beats me. But if she's not, I'M not going to be the one to tell her." (!!!!) What brats midwives can be. So then Randy thinks that I'M the one who believes this is labor, and Pat does not. Everyone is in a good mood as a result, each of us thinking we're humoring the other. (oops, change of tense again...)

I put on my labor music, Dean Everson's "Forest Rain". I didn't really get to hear it with Zuzu's birth, but by golly I'm going to listen to it this time. Then I hop online and send out the "I'm in labor" email, update my Live Journal, and get on ICQ with Tyler. "I'm in labor," I type, and he says, "So what the heck are you doing online? Love you, mom. Now go have my sister."



The contractions get more intense, and a little longer. Now I'm starting to believe that perhaps I really *am* in labor. I am still walking around chatting, but when those puppies come I am wanting Randy with me. As with Zuzu's birth, just having him near, for me to touch and hold on to, is enough.

At 7:12, I ask Pat to check and see if that baby's head is tucked. Oh, it's tucked all right. And I'm 100% effaced. 8cm dilated. With a bulging bag of water. I look at Pat over my belly and say, "No I'm NOT." She laughs. Okay, okay, better call the other midwives in. This was all so easy.... too easy.

But then, things change. Everybody starts arriving and waiting downstairs. The contractions are hard. Really, really hard. And nothing at all like with Zuzu. This takes me by surprise; I expected the same intense pressure. These new and improved transition contractions were worse. Instead of pressure, it was a sensation like giant hands were twisting my pelvis and splitting it apart at the seams. It was excruciating. It felt wrong. And I did not like it, not one little bit.

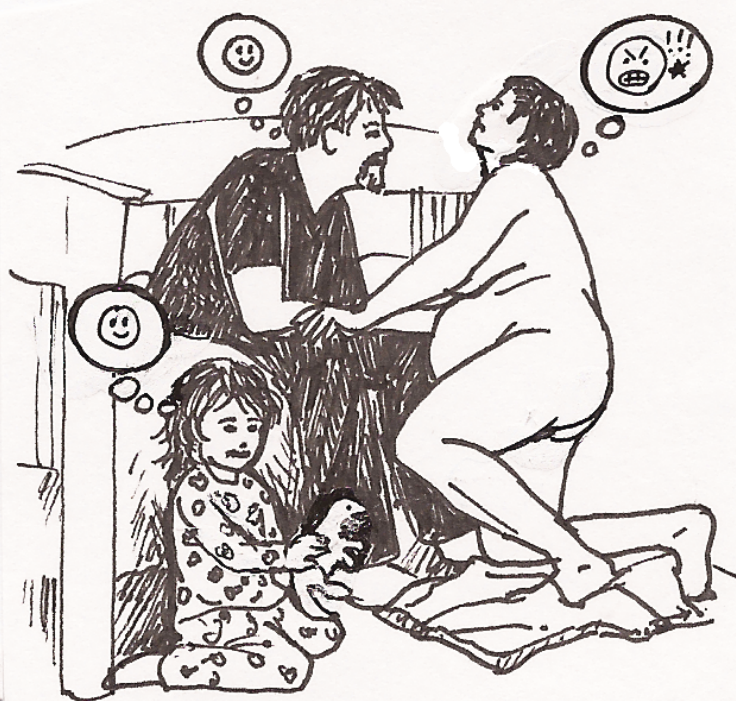
I was making a lot of noise. It was just me and Randy in our bedroom, with the midwives in the next room attempting to get the water in the birth pool warm enough (we had lost track of temperature and let too much cold water in, and it seemed there was no turning back... but, as Randy said, at least it was giving the midwives something to do.).



Michelle and Nephyr were upstairs, too, in the room with the cool pool and the midwives. Something was not right, though. I felt lonely and very emotional. My family was not complete. I wanted Zuzu. I started weeping. "I want my Zuzio up here," I told Randy, "But I'm afraid I'll scare her with all my noise...I don't know what to do." Calm as ever, he said, "Why don't I go get her and we'll just see."

Randy went downstairs and brought Zuzu and Nana up. Zuzu darted right past the adults, practically pushing aside the midwives. I was kneeling on the floor, with my elbows on the bed (which is rather low and just the right height). She climbed up on the bed, crawled around the front of me and down to the other side where there was room, and crouched on the floor. She lowered her head so that it was practically touching the ground, peering up into my buki intensely. "My not see the baby's head, mama! Where the baby?" she said. We all laughed and my heart lifted. From then on no matter how intense the contractions got, no matter how much I wanted to escape that pain, in between each one was my little girl, wanting me, needing something, being there.

Of course her wanting to touch my boobies while I was having a contraction was not at all helpful, but I wouldn't have traded it for the world. It was more irritating to have the adults telling her to hush or to leave me alone than it was to just have her there, in my face. And scared of my noises? Ha! She was completely unmoved, sitting there playing with her T-Rex skeleton while I am arching and swaying in pain, moaning and begging Randy to "Make it stop!"





A funny moment: my lovely quiet birth CD ended, and the next CD in the player started up. The Fine Young Cannibals started thumping away: "She DRIVES me CRAZY! Uh-uhuh!" Everyone laughed as I grimaced, "Uh, NO."

My favorite moment was, during a contraction, my Zuzu came waddling in, her pants around her ankles, and adults lunging for her like football players at the guy with the ball. "Mama," she says, leaning on the bed next to me, "will you please wipe my booty mama?" Of course I wiped her booty, while my pelvis was twisting apart. It was so right, being mama first to Josie, then to Zuzu.

And what was Josie up to, that my pelvis was hurting so? Well, just as in her 20-week ultrasound, Josie was holding her hands up next to her face, making that normally nice compact diameter of the flexed head quite a bit bigger and more rigid. My sacrum was making bubbles out my back, plate tectonics on planet mama. It was nearly more than I could bear, and it would have been easy to get sucked into the swirling vortex of that pain, were it not for Zuzu.

I had a few moments of panic... I remember Gail climbing up on the bed and reassuring me, "It's almost over, Rhon, you're doing great."

At 8:54 the amniotic sack finally burst, offering a relief from that unpleasant pressure.

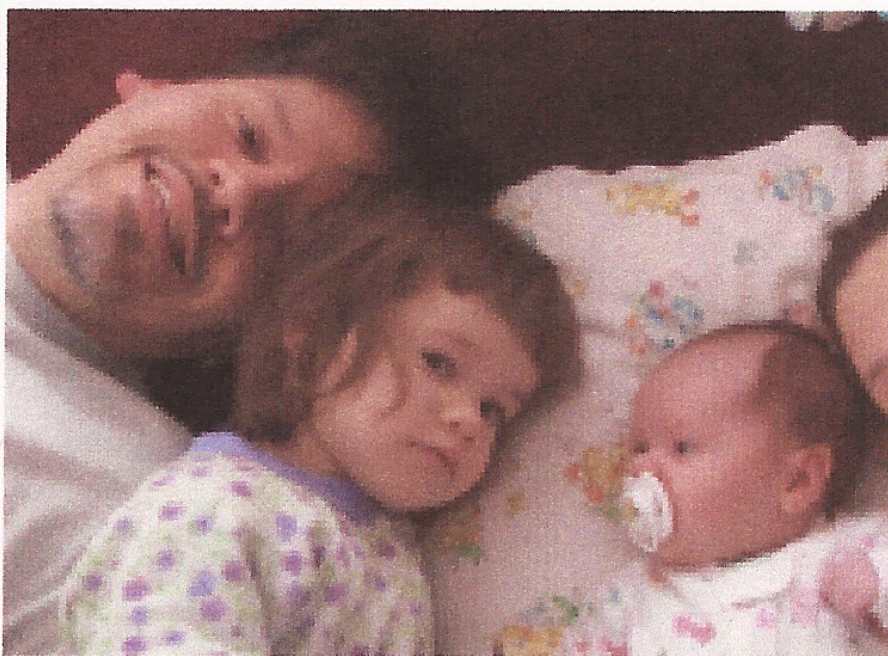
At 9:05pm my body started pushing. Pat held warm compresses to my bottom. I couldn't decide if it felt good or was distracting.

At 9:11 I could feel Josie's head as it pressed down and through my vagina. I welcomed it, and I pushed with it. I hadn't had to push at all with Zuzu, and hadn't expected to have to actually work. This was all new stuff. "Here she comes," I grunted out, holding my hand to my buki to receive her. My head was buried on Randy's lap. Zuzu was sitting about a foot from my left elbow, on Nephyr's lap, quiet as a mouse, brown eyes open wide.

Josie's head came down, intense pressure to the front. I guarded fore while Pat's hands protected aft, and out and through her head came. Ahhh.... I have to say I really love that moment, head out, body waiting. It is peaceful, as crazy as that sounds. There is a stillness in that moment, you can feel the baby's presence, the soul hovering, waiting.

At 9:12 her body started coming and it felt like something was going to slice right up through my delicate sex parts... I pushed back, hard, and felt Josie's hand under my tissues. I pushed on that hand until I felt it move down, damned if I was going to let her tear me, and then I pushed her body out. She fell to the floor with Pat's hands scrambling to get under her, and immediately started crying.

I sat back on my heels and looked at my gooey screaming baby, double-checked that she was indeed a girl, and looked up at Zuzu. Her eyes met mine, curious, then doubtful, then they started to fill with tears as the baby screamed. "She's pretty oogy, huh?" I said to Zuzu. She said, tearfully, "My not like that... my not want to be in here..." Poor baby, I couldn't blame her — Josie was quite a spectacle. Daddy got up and took Zuzu in his arms, and I cradled my newborn. Josie had arrived, in 'sree more days', just as her big sister had said.





## Aftermath

Her face was puffy and swollen, with bruises in stripes on her cheeks from where her fingers had pressed. She was the baldest of my three babies, although she did have a good head of hair. She did not look familiar. She screamed for a long time. I felt removed, a bit distant. The whole pregnancy had been different, more difficult, and now that she was out that feeling persisted. She was not exquisitely beautiful like her brother and sister had been, and I was having trouble bonding with her. It was altogether strange.

Another thing that was strange was how disconnected I felt from Randy. With Zuzu, it seemed our spirits worked in tandem, I felt more connected to him than any other person ever. But with Josie both Randy and I were divided in our attention. I watched the video (brilliantly filmed by Michelle) and noticed that once Josie was born I did not look at Randy, not once. I wept when I noticed that – how could I not look at my husband, with whom I had created this baby? Where was the shared smile of triumph, the tender kiss? I was ashamed that I had paid no attention to him – it still makes me upset to think of it.

It was going to be a while before we were all back together again, heart and soul, incorporating this new little one into our family. For a long while it felt like it was {me and Josie}, and {Randy and Zuzu}. I didn't like it. I felt resentful of Josie. It was a hard postpartum. I worried that I could not love this irritable little baby, who was rather homely compared to my other two. I worried that Zuzu would sense my lack of love for Josie and treat Josie with disdain.

But, as miracles and healing happen, Zuzu fell in love with her oogy, fussy, funny-looking baby sister. She was and is absolutely loving and sweet, the perfect big sister. And Randy has adapted far better and more quickly than I to our two daughters. For me, it has been a real struggle to love them both; to not belittle Josie in an attempt to keep Zuzu from feeling ousted (which is completely unnecessary most of the time). It is only now, as Josie nears two months old, that I am beginning to fall in love with her, and to long for her squirming, snorting, milky-smelling head next to mine; to look at her round little face with her pointed chin and see someone familiar. As a Live Journal friend said, with the first child you discover the depth of your love; with the second you discover the breadth. The discovery continues.

## MORE SUGGESTIONS can you dig it?

FIGURE 8 by Krissy. "Know Fat Chicks" is the theme of this zine, and by the end of it I knew more than I imagined. Some eye-opening info and statistics about gastric bypass surgery, great fat-positive articles, links, and feel good stuff for Fat Chicks and the people who love them. \$2 to Krissy - PonyBoy Press c/o IPRC 917 SW Oak St. #218 Portland, OR 97205 [www.geocities.com/ponyboypress/](http://www.geocities.com/ponyboypress/)

STILL LIFE WITH PEAR and STILL LIFE WITH SQUASH by Larissa

So far I'm loving this zine - a mama zine that isn't ALL about being a mama. "Storytime" - a regular feature, is great stories from real life, and "Alphabetical Motherhood" is sweet. Just good stuff, good writing. Made me laugh - always good - and made me think, too. Good zines always should, in my opinion. \$2 each to Larissa, 2846 N. Killingsworth St., Portland, OR 97217

(THE BIRTH OF) HATHOR THE COWGODDESS by Heather Cushman-Dowdee

Wow! This is one prolific mama! Never heard of her? Think I activist with attitude (hmm... that may be a bit redundant) and a talent for expression. Her cartoons are great, her story is inspiring and funny, and you'll want to run out and get yourself a cow mask. Issue #2 has great compare/contrast hospital vs. home birth. She does a free e-zine, too. Really great stuff. [www.hathorthe.cowgoddess.com](http://www.hathorthe.cowgoddess.com) [izzylove@usa.net](mailto:izzylove@usa.net)

A HUMAN/NATURE ABC by /s/s Feral

I was made gift of this beautiful, sweet little booklet and I want to give one to everybody. Great illustrations ready-to-color. "C is for CITY where a lot of people live together so life is easier and more interesting... except sometimes it's too crowded and it doesn't always smell so good." A very loving funny book of ABC's for kids and grownups. She made one up special for me and maybe she'll make one for you, too. \$2.50... email her! [isisferal@yahoo.com](mailto:isisferal@yahoo.com)



## SUGGESTION BOX just for you...

I haven't had a whole lot of time to read lately, much less zine-shop! However, a few treasures have crossed the old desk ... and here they are.

### EXPECTATIONS - A SPLIT ZINE ABOUT LESBIAN FERTILITY, CONCEPTION, AND PREGNANCY By Kirstin T. McAuley &

Elizabeth Howell. I swapped for this amazing zine at the PDX zine symposium, and wept right there as I read it. Beautifully done, thorough and heart-wrenching. First half by hopeful-to-be mama Kirstin, telling her very painful story of the procedures, processes, and problems involved in "simply" getting pregnant. Her grief and anger are real and blunt, as is the information provided in the tiny dictionary of terms tucked in the cover. She makes no apologies for her feelings, nor should she... and I fervently hope she someday gets her wish & holds a wee one of her own.

The second part is a funny and thoughtful "butch lament" as the pregnant Lesbian couple confronts the oh-so-feminine world of maternity. Complete with a Butch Maternity Fashion pull-out. This is a good one. Send \$3 or so to: Kirstin McAuley, 8502 SE 13th Ave. Portland OR 97219

### THE LAST DAYS. REAL LIFE ADVENTURES OF A REALLY PREGNANT GIRL and TWO UNDER TWO. A SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT

Fabulous teeny little comix by Laurel Dykstra - another lesbian baby story - only she has twins! Also the maker of the Radical parenting zine "BABY BLOC", this gal has lotsa spirit and a fun writing style. I'm not as radical as "Baby Bloc" but I loved her mini zines. Email for info loraldyk@hotmail.com or babybloc@yahoo.com

# Geek Daddy says: UNCLE DOUG ROCKS!

Do geek-boys have friends? Who is Uncle Doug? Just what is a merkin? Who is this God person, anyway? (credit due: Douglas Adams)

For answers to these questions and more, read on.

This is the issue about meeting people, and in service to that cause I'm going to tell the epic tale of meeting two of the most important beings in my life: Doug and God.

I didn't meet Doug until High School, but I feel the connection was set much earlier. Being a geek-boy with a chip on my shoulder, I sliced through school from Kindergarten to 9th grade refusing to do homework. I would get A's on the exams, but B's or C's out of the class. I had UNDERACHIEVER stamped across my butt. I once told a very concerned counselor that 'grades mean nothing until High School anyway because no one ever, EVER goes back to look at what you got in Junior High'. A look of helpless sadness crossed his face. Truth hurts.

Here's how it worked in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade: on Monday you brought in your homework and took the vocabulary test. You go home with the same homework again and on Wednesday you turn it in and take the test again. On Friday, rinse, repeat. No kiddin'. Three flippin' times! And then you keep the best score. That particular teacher trained me to despise homework and to take great satisfaction in acing exams on Mondays. After that the rest of the week is an in-class vacation.

This explains what I was doing in Choir in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, where I finally met Uncle Doug. Choir = no homework!

I liked to sing, still do. But egad, the impoverished wasteland of tunes we were forced to choke down! They were usually either politically neutered outdated drivel ("Close to You", The Carpenters) or unveiled biblical tunes ("Send Down the Rain", Joyce Eilers). I was a freshman sitting in the back with the other cracked-voice altos while Doug sat a little further down with the low-voiced marvels (I'm pretty sure he can go from soprano to baritone).

Next to him was a primeval specimen named Scott, who I'm fairly certain had reduced brain mass and probably a third ear hidden beneath his mop. I suspect that Doug hung out with this clown for the same reason I wanted to hang out with Doug. He was having fun.

No one in this class was having any fun at all except for Doug and his goofball buddy. They wise-cracked, they told jokes, they were irreverent as hell. And Doug could sing like the King.

While the class was belching out the cloying stench of “I Lift my Lamp Beside the Golden Door”, the teacher was usually not in the room and was instead doinking around in his office with his assistant. (doink (doingk) v. Slang 1. secretive, socially unacceptable activity, but not necessarily boinking.)

I gradually moved to sit closer and closer to the fun duo, attempting to alter my voice to tenor as I did so. When I actually sat down next to them I quickly discovered that Scott was a classist. That is to say that since he was a year ahead of me he thought it appropriate to call me names and punch me in the arm at erratic intervals. This behavior was accompanied by such verbal plums as, “Get lost, butt-face!” If you happened to read the previous Geek Daddy column you’ll recognize that this poor fellow was a piker with no clue as to how un-a’feared I was. I stayed with it until he stopped punching me.

Doug’s reaction to me was subdued at first, but he never approached my arm with his fist and he had a clever wit. I think Scott’s incessant noise overshadowed any desire Doug may have had to say “hello”.

I don’t recall Doug and I becoming any closer than that mutual goof-off fest until we both showed up in Debate class. (By that time Scott was smiling and saying “howdy, Bakes” when I passed him in the breezeways.) Debate was primarily a volunteer extra-curricular activity involving the geekiest activities you might imagine. There was debate, poetry reading and all manner of verbal masturbation to be had. Doug and I bonded as outcasts in a class of outcasts and gradually worked ourselves into the following array of activities:

- Drive around listening to/singing Tom Lehrer songs
- Drive around listening to/singing Superman soundtrack
- Drive around making fun of High School (as well as religion, television, people, people on television, stupid people, etc).
- Did I mention the driving and stupid people? (Yes, we were bitter)
- Introduced Doug to pen-and-paper role-playing games, which we still play. In our first game I actually tried to discourage him a little because I was worried that my other geek friends wouldn’t like him. (Embarrassing).
- Speech tournaments.

In our world, driving was amazingly cheap. Five bucks and you could go for hours. Cheaper than a movie for two, and you didn't need a membership card or an escort. Sure, it was pathetic. Sure, we were losers. On the other hand we were both headed to college with amazing SAT scores, we were well-liked for the most-part, we had scads of speech trophies between us, both owned computers (fairly unusual in the early 80's), and had a hell of a lot of fun. Meanwhile the really "cool" people in our hometown seemed to do only two things:

- 1) "Cruise Commerce". Commerce was our main drag. Doug and I and some other misfits actually did this once, but we blasted out Barry Manilow music and blew bubbles out the window (as an alternative to the usual, "Whoooo! Hey baby!").
- 2) Hang out in the expanded McDonald's parking lot (built right over the top of an old funeral home - coincidence? You be the judge). Better dead than cool, eh?

### **Do Geek-Boys have Friends?**

So far anyway. We hooked up about 23 years ago, and at that time joined a small cabal of other misfits (and I mean that affectionately) who have been living in close proximity for all that time. We see each other about once a week on average, and usually go on a vacation or two together every year. Three of my pals have never been married, one has been twice, whereas I'm apparently a serial monogamist. Ah, the unanticipated joy of being a nostalgic geezer. I'm sure you'll read more about the rest of the boys on some other occasion.

### **Who is Uncle Doug?**

He's the guy who taught me that "no matter how big the mountain, it never makes the mole hill flat". Or, no matter how many people are starving in other countries, it will never stop your own hunger.

He's a master librarian, computer/webmaster, editor and English expert, and just plain *thinks* better than anyone I know. Not that he always thinks the right thoughts, mind you; he's just very good at thinking. He's one of those rare fellows with natural organic intuition (as opposed to the artificial deductive variety). He's a walking dictionary and he can spell. If he disagrees with the dictionary or thesaurus, it's Doug you tend to believe. (And for old times' sake, I'd have to add that he's a "music hall entertainer and master mariner").

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See [www.uncledougrocks.com](http://www.uncledougrocks.com) if you haven't already. There a cute pic of Zuzu in there.

### **Just what is a merkin?**

**merkin** (mûr k<sup>1</sup>ĩn) n. A pubic wig for women.

### **Who is this God person, anyway?**

My second tale is about meeting God. Please don't panic. It's NOT a "how I came to accept God into my life" story. No, Really! I want you to know going in that this little tale is to the best of my recollection, the exact and literal truth.

I was too young to remember our actual meeting, but by the time I was four or five God was talking to me all the time. We carried on regular conversations. When I was lying in bed awake for the two hours between bedtime and when I could actually manage to fall asleep, we'd chat, play games, watch "movies" -- all in my head. There was a movie screen on a stage, and that's where God hung out.

God frequently advised me on issues of right and wrong, but even more often on matters of strategy. How can I get a later bedtime? What should I do if that kid at school tries to push me down the stairs again? We were friends, we were in it together.

Oh, and by the way, God looked EXACTLY like the smiling sunshine figure on the box of Post Raisin Bran. He was flat and yellow, with orange triangles of sunshine beaming out in all directions.

I was utterly convinced that this was God. I thought this was the God people meant when they talked about God. I had no reason to even remotely question it. I thought that when people prayed to God, they saw this guy on this stage, just like me. I took God for granted, the way you do the existence and appearance of hot dogs or Pepsi cans or Grass.

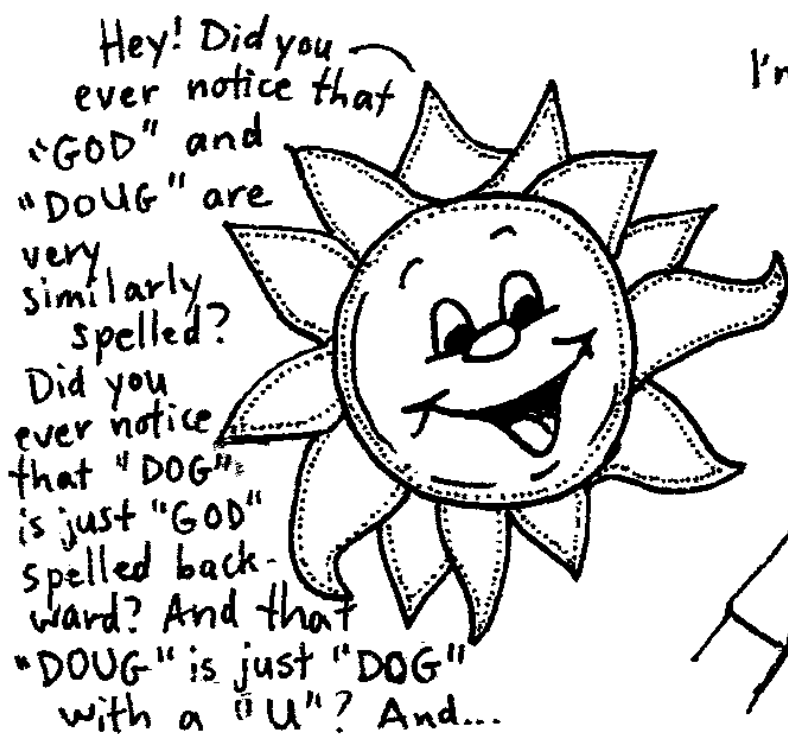
When I was about seven, God turned on me. Big time. His language became nasty, He started showing "movies" in my head that were grotesque, and He would not cooperate with anything I said or wanted for more than an instant before twisting it and messing it up. It was like that kid you hated to play with because he had no attention span, broke everything you were trying to build and enjoyed nothing so much as distracting and disturbing you for his own pleasure.

One night we had it out. I laid there in bed having a shouting match inside my head with God, who was up on stage doing such things as showing me images of road-kill while tossing shit everywhere. At one point I screamed at Him, and told Him to leave. He refused. Duh.

Finally I told Him I was going to ignore Him, forever, no matter what He did. He left a few days after that and has never come back. I hope He never does, although I find Him more comical and less sinister now than I once did.

In case you're wondering if I'm crazy, I should also tell you that I've seen the ghost of my Great Uncle Charlie a half dozen times, once saw 15 UFO's in one night (Yes, fifteen!), and once had a vision of the future that still gives me chills. And I have dreams that I've been told are astral projections. Right. I don't find any of this to be very compelling, however. Why? Because "it toils not, neither does it spin." In other words, what's the point? If my GU Charlie wants to relate an important message from beyond the grave he's going to have to make it a LOT clearer than just showing up as a skeletal limb wrapped around a doorway on occasion. And those UFO's, sheesh! What a disappointment. Fun, yeah, maybe even interesting. But useful? Naaah. Just the same I like to believe I'll be open minded if some other God pops into my head with an armload of DVDs.

So now you know that Doug and God are nothing alike. Except for the triangles of sunshine radiating from their heads. Amen.



I'm strangely disinterested.



## A Note on the Type

(and thank you Kate, for the inspiration)

My daddy was a typesetter when I was wee small. A real, old-fashioned type setter. He stood in front of a tilted compartmentalized table full of little inky metal bits of type and set them – in reverse – into a tray from which a printed page would be made. His fingers were always blackened from ink.

I loved visiting the print shop where my dad worked. The smell of the ink and the padding compound, the chunk and whirr of the presses, the bits of paper absolutely everywhere, the templates and t-squares that hung over his work area. This was art, for me.

My daddy was a perfectionist, and lived by 'a place for everything, and everything in its place'. I worshiped that. His calligraphy and drawing were detailed and perfect, clean lines, no erroneous marks. Luckily, I inherited nearly all of his good qualities (and a few of his bad, but, hey).

Of course he taught me a lot about fonts and typefaces. I've always had an eye for design, and a love of fonts. I still love browsing font websites, looking for something extraordinary and beautiful. The font I've used in this issue has long been a favorite: Futura. In her most recent issue of *Miranda*, Kate Haas confessed her secret love of the "Note on the Type" at the end of books, and here I confess to the same.

I did a little research on Futura, and it turns out that Futura was created in 1928 by a man named Paul Renner, and was one of the very first *sans serif* (that means without all the little sticky-outy bits) type ever created. In a world that had until then been full of sticky-outy bits, sans serif fonts were actually controversial, and called "grotesque". So much for taste. I admire Futura for its beautiful clean geometry, its implied innocence, and its readability. So, there you have it. I used 8 pt Futura Light. It's good stuff.

## A Note on the Paper

The cover paper this issue was originally intended for another zine. Last summer I wanted to do a one-shot zine about my son, called "Searching for Tyler Himel". I was going to put it out there, attempt to find a bookstore in his town that would carry it, and hope somehow it found him. I saw the crumpled-paper paper and thought it perfect for a zine that was full of heartache. As it turns out, I didn't have to do the zine. But I still had the paper, and this seemed like just the right issue. (not all copies have this paper)

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What!?! No anatomical illustration on the back cover!? What gives!?

Well, you see, this huge issue is so text-dense that I didn't have much room for drawings of my kids. So, I have to put them on the back cover, is all. Next time I'll put a really good medical thing back here, okay?



This issue is for

Tyler and Josie. You two will just have to share.

Zuzu and the Baby Catcher is a zine by me, Rhonda Baker... with a 'il help from Geek Daddy. You can subscribe, if you like it! Issues are TWO dollars each. I only have back issues of #4 and #5. Get some! Cash or check to Rhonda Baker, 2000 NE 42nd #183, Portland, OR 97213.  
rhonmama@msn.com www.emeraldgiant.com/babycatcher