

BlogHer 15, Blog to Book: **Sample book proposal from panelist Louise Sloan**

This was my May 2006 proposal for *Knock Yourself Up*. It got bids from multiple publishers and has been used to teach nonfiction book proposal writing.

LOUISE'S TOP 5 TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR BOOK PUBLISHED

1. DON'T BE BORING. Cut to the exciting stuff. Write like you're telling the story to someone at a cocktail party. That includes your proposal: Just because it needs to conform to a formula doesn't mean it needs to sound formal.

2. CREATE AN EMOTIONAL ARC. You can string together disparate stories in a book if you create a strong underlying narrative arc to tie them together. You start at emotional/life point A at the book's beginning and move to point B at the end, having learned something or gained insight in the process. Ideally, every chapter also does this. If there's no arc, there's no point: It's just a laundry list of things that happened.

3. WIN THEM OVER. If you have a blog, your readers know you and care, at least a little, about your kids and your tooth-brushing ritual and what you made for dinner Thursday. Your book readers, starting with the agent and editor you're trying to sell to, won't give a shit, at first. You have to win them over. Use your best stories. Be funny. Manipulate their emotions. Omit the random tangents.

4. WORK YOUR NETWORK. Do you know anyone, or know anyone who knows anyone who's an agent or editor? Use your connections. If you don't have any (and even if you do), go out and make some. Take a class with a well-connected writer or editor. One suggestion: Author and teacher Susan Shapiro, susanshapiro.net or follow her on Twitter @susanshapiro for great advice. She's how I got my book deal! Go to networking events and follow up with the people you meet. If your book sucks, connections won't help. But if it's good, knowing the right people may help it get published faster.

5. WORKSHOP YOUR DRAFT. Don't let an editor or agent be the first eyes on your work. Get feedback from a writer's group and, if you can afford it, consider hiring a ghost editor before submitting your manuscript. Do this also because, as I learned the hard way, many book editors don't actually do line editing anymore. Do you really want your first draft going out into the world?

START WITH AN ESSAY. An essay I wrote that the NYT's "Modern Love" column rejected became a book deal when I shared it with a book editor. A published essay not only might pay, but might pay off by getting an agent's or editor's attention. Many writers have gotten book deals this way. I'm trying it now, by publishing an excerpt from my brain-injury memoir *Losing My Mind* as an essay in the forthcoming anthology *Soul Mate 101 and Other Essays on Love and Sex*, from the website Full Grown People.

GOOD LUCK!! And, shameless plug: If you're a talented single mom or dad writer or know one, tell them to submit to Singlewith.com. What a great way to start writing your memoir in installments. ;) I'm especially looking for single dads and parents of color, but all great essays and advice and humor welcome. And we pay! info@singlewith.com

LOUISE'S BIO: Louise Sloan is the founder and content director of Singlewith, a new digital media company offering content and community to single moms and dads. Singlewith.com is the first comprehensive content website for single parents and the only parenting website with a mission to fully include fathers. A longtime mass-market editor and writer, Louise is the single mom of a 9-year-old boy and the author of *Knock Yourself Up*, a memoir and report on choosing single motherhood. (Soon to be available again on Amazon.com.)

Louise has been editor-in-chief of the custom content divisions at major magazine publishers including Gruner + Jahr USA Publishing and American Express Publishing. She has produced original content for clients like Target, Nordstrom, GlaxoSmithKline and Dr. Phil. For a portfolio of her earlier writing and custom content work, check out <http://www.louisesloan.com/> .

As a writer and editor, Louise Sloan has specialized in health, psychology, social issues, op-eds and essays at publications like *Glamour*, *The New York Times*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Ms.*, *Out*, The Huffington Post and Health.com. But she's done her share of fashion, home decorating and entertaining copywriting, silly quizzes and snarky web posts. You can find her most recent writing online at Motherlode and Salon.

Knock Yourself Up received international media attention (*Newsweek*, Fox morning show, *Nightline*, *London Times*, *60 Minutes*, *Cosmo*, *Redbook*, Salon.com, Jezebel, radio stations in Ireland and more), suddenly turning Louise into an international expert on single motherhood. Her book proposal has been used as part of the curriculum for Mediabistro's Nonfiction Book Proposal class.

Louise's editorial work has won national awards, including the 2010 James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism, the 2011 Clarion Award from the Association for Women in Communications, 2011 and 2012 Eddie Bronze awards from Folio Magazine.

Other random credits: Nightclub singer in Florence, Italy. Salsa performer. Theater lighting technician. Country-Western backup dancer for Joan Rivers. (No, really. She has pictures.) These days, however, she spends most of her time at youth sports events, as your basic soccer mom. She and her little athlete live in Brooklyn, New York.

Knock Yourself Up

No man? No problem.
An opinionated guide to having that baby
before your bio-clock runs out

By Louise Sloan

What if Prince Charming had never shown up? Would Snow White have slept in that glass coffin forever? Or would she have eventually woken up, spit out the apple, gotten a job, a health care package and a baby from her local neighborhood sperm bank?

—Carrie Bradshaw
from *Sex in the City* episode 31 “Where there’s Smoke...”

Knock Yourself Up

In a nutshell

In this brutally honest and often hilarious guide, writer Louise Sloan shares her experiences and those of many others who've decided not to let being single stand in the way of being a mom.

Knock Yourself Up has answers you won't find anywhere else, to questions like:

When do I decide it's time to do it alone?

How do I choose the right sperm?

Is this fair to the kid?

Can I afford to do it?

How do I tell my parents?

How do I tell my dates?

Have I gone totally crazy?

and, of course:

If I do this, will I ever have sex—or a life—again?

Sloan offers wisdom and humor in the first definitive guide to momming without a man.

Overview

Veteran journalist and editor Louise Sloan was ready to have kids at age 28—but her partner wasn't. Ten years later, after yet another birthday and yet another breakup, she realized she'd better get serious about single motherhood, before her fertility ran out. So began a crazy, heartbreaking and hilarious journey that led her to cyberstalking an anonymous sperm donor, running around town with liquid nitrogen tanks full of semen, being mistaken for a horse breeder, nearly getting another girl pregnant—and finally, to being called Mom.

In *Knock Yourself Up*, you'll learn what it's *really* like to go through the process of becoming a single mother by choice, from the women who've done it. It's hard, lonely and weird at times, but also funny and wonderful. From exploding semen vials to shocked parents to sex and dating while artificially inseminating, Sloan candidly shares her experiences and those of many others like her who chose not to let being single stand in the way of creating a family.

Knock Yourself Up delivers the basic facts and important information about the logistical and legal process of becoming a single mother by choice, but the primary focus is on how it actually plays out in the lives and emotions of a wide variety of real women, from New York City to Idaho. The book touches on the realities of being a single mom—dealing with loneliness, financial struggles, and getting negative reactions from family members. But it also focuses on women who have done it happily, despite the challenges, revealing how they made it work, and the funny/crazy/hard/wonderful things that have happened

along the way.

Structurally, *Knock Yourself Up* describes the process of thinking about becoming a single mother, deciding to do it, and trying to get pregnant. It also touches on the experience of being single and pregnant, and on what it's like to finally have that baby. The book's focus is on becoming a biological mother (thus the title), though it will deal briefly with adoption—an equally valid choice, but one that is different in significant ways and beyond the scope of this book. In the end, the reader will see examples of women who are making single motherhood work for them, and who, with their children, are leading happy, satisfying lives, whether they go on to find partners or whether they remain happily solo.

Market analysis and competition

Fourteen years after the Dan Quayle/Murphy Brown firestorm about single motherhood, professional women choosing to have children on their own has become an increasing trend—and a big business. One sperm bank sold over \$3 million in semen to single women last year. And the numbers are poised to skyrocket: A March 2006 Lifetime TV poll found that 35 percent of women ages 18-29 would consider having a child on their own. Yet there's only one readily available book out on the subject—*Single Mothers by Choice*, a sober overview and guidebook written more than a decade ago. *Knock Yourself Up* will capitalize on this largely untapped trend.

Other than *Single Mothers by Choice*, single women choosing motherhood must turn to books that are not specific to their concerns—books on artificial insemination written for lesbian couples, or books on single motherhood written for women who are divorced or widowed. And all of the books out there have a psychological, instructional or academic focus. None take the conversational, tell-it-like-it-is “girlfriends’ guide” approach of *Knock Yourself Up*. And none could be described as a fun read!

Single women looking to get pregnant on their own say they can find a lot of the technical information they need by searching the web, or by talking to their doctor. What they can't get is what *Knock Yourself Up* provides: a sense of community, first-person reports on what it's really like from women who have been there—and a good dose of humor. Based on the huge success of *The Girlfriend's Guide to Pregnancy*, which has become a publishing franchise, the personal, anecdotal approach of *Knock Yourself Up*

will also be a huge hit. Unlike the *Girlfriends' Guide*, though, *Knock Yourself Up* will appeal to the many women who are simply considering single motherhood as an option—not just to women who have already taken the plunge.

According to the National Center for Human Statistics, the number of babies born to single women ages 30-44 jumped almost 17 percent between 1999 and 2003. In 2005, the national support group Single Mothers by Choice took in nearly double the number of new members as it did a decade ago. And the largest sperm bank in the country, California Cryobank, reports that 32 percent of its business came from single women last year. There's a lot of money involved—these single women are paying between \$200 and \$500 for small vials of sperm, usually using two vials per month to try to get pregnant. Most also seek the help of a reproductive endocrinologist (a doctor specializing in fertility), which can cost between \$1,000 and \$20,000 a month, depending on the procedures used—a cost that insurance plans often do not cover. These are clearly educated, affluent women who are willing to open up their bank accounts in their quest for motherhood—and who are likely to buy books to guide and inform them throughout the process.

Perhaps the most compelling numbers, however, come from younger women—the ones who haven't yet started on the path to single motherhood. The March 2006 Lifetime television poll "Generation Why?" found that 35 percent of women between the ages of 18-29 would consider having a child on their own. And younger women are learning from the mistakes of older ones, realizing that the biological clock is a real concern. The

Lifetime poll found that three-quarters of women in the 18-29 age group felt that the best time to have a baby is before age 30. These are women who are starting to see single motherhood not as a last resort, but as a practical life choice.

Meanwhile, what books do they have to buy? Again, there's only one widely available book specifically written for women who have chosen single motherhood: *Single Mothers By Choice*, the informative but musty guide written by a psychotherapist in 1993. Other than that, there are a couple of self-published books for single moms by choice, available through the authors' websites, but not from booksellers. One of them, *Choosing Single Motherhood: The Thinking Woman's Guide*, apparently self-published in 2005, has just started to become more widely available. Then there are the many books aimed at divorced mothers. But these books address many issues (such as custody disputes) that are irrelevant to women who start out alone, and they do not address the specific needs of the single mother by choice. They include: *The Single Mother's Survival Guide*; *The Courage to Be a Single Mother: Becoming Whole Again After the Divorce*; *Going It Alone: Meeting the Challenges of Being a Single Mom*; *The Complete Single Mother*; *The Single Mother's Book: A Practical Guide to Managing Your Children, Career, Home, Finances, and Everything Else*; *From One Single Mother to Another*; and *On Our Own: Unmarried Motherhood in America*.

For information on artificial insemination, wannabe single moms can choose from books written primarily for infertile married couples, like *Helping the Stork*, or books written primarily for lesbian couples, like *The Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception*,

Pregnancy & Birth. By contrast, *Knock Yourself Up* is for single women of any sexual orientation. There is a memoir about getting pregnant through donor insemination, *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor*, written by a lesbian who had a child with her partner in the same year that her mother died of cancer. It is not the story of a single woman, and it's only one woman's story, lacking the practical information and girlfriends' guide approach of *Knock Yourself Up*.

Meanwhile, book aside, single motherhood by choice has become a hot topic in mass media, with a recent *New York Times Magazine* cover story, "Searching For Mr. Good Sperm," as a prime example. Yet SMCs don't often see themselves portrayed in the media in a relatable way. You get the sensational weirdos, like the white woman in the *Times* article who talked about how canine "mutts" are smarter and healthier so that's why she wanted the sperm of a man of color, and you get the stereotypical desperate career woman, but not real women struggling with real decisions. *Knock Yourself Up* has plenty of humor and edge to it, but ultimately it is a real and respectful look at the issue, through the eyes of the women who are dealing with it, rather than filtered through the perspective of an outsider journalist covering a crazy new trend.

About the author

Louise Sloan—the single mom-to-be of a son due June 23, 2006—has been a professional writer and editor for almost 20 years. Early in her career, she was a regular columnist for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, and her op-eds were published in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Sacramento Bee*. She went on to write features on social and political issues for national women’s magazines. Her first magazine article, “Do Ask, Do Tell: Lesbians Come Out at Work,” in *Glamour*, won a 1994 award from the National Lesbian Gay Journalists Association. Sloan has also written for publications including *Good Housekeeping*, *Self*, *Ms.*, *Out*, *AARP* and *The Women’s Review of Books*, and she has been an invited speaker at events sponsored by Yale Business School, GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and the feminist newspaper *Sojourner: The Women’s Forum*.

As an editor, Sloan has created and produced many custom magazines and special issues for mass-market readerships, in genres ranging from fashion to health, for clients as diverse as Dr. Phil, Target Stores, Nordstrom, and *POZ*, the HIV/AIDS monthly. She has also worked in various capacities as a freelance editor for magazines including *In Style* and *Ms.*

An online portfolio of Sloan’s writing and editing work is available at www.louisesloan.com.

Chapter outline

PREFACE:

Holidays on Ice

At age 28, I was in a stable, happy relationship and ready to have kids—as close to the old-fashioned way as I could. But one roadblock led to another, and it wasn't until 13 years later that I actually started trying to get pregnant. Age 41. Single. With anonymous donor sperm. At the doctor's office. The inverse of my dream, but by then my bio clock sounded more like a car alarm. A summary of my hilarious and heartbreaking “Year of Sperm-centered Holidays”—including having semen tanks shipped to my mom's house, being mistaken for a horse breeder, and nearly getting another girl pregnant—and why this book came to be.

[see sample text for complete excerpt]

CHAPTER ONE

Oops! I Forgot to Have a Baby!

Why and when women decide that single motherhood is the path for them. Accounts from women who have agonized, and from women for whom the decision is easy.

Includes a look at fertility statistics and childbearing trends.

Having a kid, especially as a single mom, is like jumping off a cliff. One SMC told me: “You never wake up and say, I'm ready. I'm ready to give up my night's sleep, I'm ready to give up my privacy in the bathroom, all my free time... It's just never going to happen!” The tick-tock of the bio-clock is what drives most of us to take the leap. “I was

married for ten and a half years and you always kind of think, ‘there’s plenty of time to have kids!’” says Michele, who is now trying to conceive on her own at age 36. “After my divorce, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I’m 34 years old and if I want to have kids, I have to start from scratch.” Shannon, 37, the single mom of a 2-year-old, had “maternal longings” at age 25 but spent years looking for Mr. Right: “I kept putting it off, hoping that Plan A would work. Around my 34th birthday I realized I was reaching the point of now or never.” Some of us get to age 40 or older before we give up and go it alone, often facing fertility problems as a result. Meanwhile, more and more women are ready to go solo at a younger age. For some, it’s just the practical choice. Others need time to mourn their dreams. And a few are actually thrilled to be single moms: “I feel like the cat who swallowed the canary,” says Marcy. “I got to have the baby without having to find the man first!”

CHAPTER TWO:

The Most Natural Thing in the World (How to Make It Unnatural)

Most single mothers by choice end up using a sperm bank. What it’s like to pick Dad from a catalog and how women feel about it. A look at anonymous vs. willing-to-be-known donors, race, ethnicity and other issues.

As wannabe single mothers, many of us find ourselves practically signing over our paychecks to the infertility industry—when often the only reason we’re “infertile” is because we don’t have a man. In addition to doctor’s fees, we pay up to \$500 a vial for a tiny amount of semen from some guy we’ve never laid eyes on—who our kid may end up looking and acting like. “Doesn’t that all seem a little dehumanizing?” a reporter once

asked me. Uh, *yeah*. And a little crazy to be paying for something so widely available for free. After throwing a couple thousand bucks into artificial insemination, even the most hard-core lesbians start to notice that cute waiter at the corner bistro. Yet the sperm-bank route is often the best and most responsible choice. Some of us find it easier to swallow than others. I had a hard time with it, trying to read the guys' personalities in the tea leaves of their handwritten questionnaires. At one point I succumbed to temptation and successfully sleuthed out an anonymous donor's identity, through Google (he was a performer with a very unusual career and physical description). I found his website, complete with pictures, many of them showing him smoking—which he'd assured the sperm bank he doesn't. White lies aside, I found the extra information immensely reassuring, but fate prevented me from reaping the benefits of cheating: When I called to order him up, his semen was no longer available. I've talked to another SMC who searched for her donor for the same reasons, even tossing around the idea of hiring a private investigator when she was unsuccessful. (She eventually decided that was taking her curiosity way too far.) Meanwhile, to other SMCs, sperm is sperm is sperm. "It's going to be *my* kid," says Michele. "What do I really care what the other person is like?"

It's different for everyone. One woman found herself very emotional while listening to an audio interview with a donor: "I remember tears coming down my face—just this connection with this person who could make my dreams come true." Another felt such additional information unnecessary, even intrusive: "I'm glad I don't have a photo of the donor," she says, "because I'm thrilled with my son, and what if I had seen the photo and not liked what I saw?" Then there's a bit of eugenics, which can get really weird—but is almost unavoidable. With many banks' online donor catalogs, set up so a

married woman can physically approximate her infertile husband, you have to select eye color, hair color and skin color—sometimes ethnicity and religion, too—before you get any information at all. “Since I’m Jewish,” one SMC says, “I decided not to go with a German donor, because what if his grandparents had killed my grandparents?” Yet depending on what you’re looking for, your options can be limited. Laura, who’s African American, wanted an African American donor. “My [white] lesbian friends who were choosing donors were looking for things like music appreciation. They could choose between a blond who likes music versus a blond who did really well on the SATs. With an African American donor, the pickings are so slim you don’t get to engage in that kind of thing.”

CHAPTER THREE:

Trysts With the Turkey Baster

How the artificial deed is done (at home, in the stirrups, or in a petri dish). Plus, coping with fertility issues and considering adoption.

I went out swing-dancing one night when I was about to start trying to conceive, and there at the dance was a woman who was nine months pregnant. I told her she was my role model—that I was trying to get pregnant and hoped that I’d be dancing till the last minute, too. She immediately dispensed some well-meant advice: “Oh, don’t worry about getting pregnant, it’ll happen. Just go at it like a couple of irresponsible college kids, and have fun!” I smiled and just kept my mouth shut, while thinking, “I wish.” It wasn’t going to be anything like that for me. The day my baby was conceived, I lay flat on my back on crinkly paper, my feet in stirrups, while the doctor wrestled my

recalcitrant cervix into view of the speculum and poked a thin plastic tube through, causing a small twinge of pain. “Have fun!” Yeah, right.

Some women do opt for the closest thing to romance, and they inseminate at home, with soft music and candlelight, making themselves come for good measure (some say that helps conception). But most look at the statistics (it can take young, fertile couples a year of well-timed sex to get pregnant) and decide to get medical assistance, as I did. However you go about it, getting pregnant with frozen sperm (which doesn't work as well as fresh) can be a challenge, and a doctor's help doesn't always make it easier. “Sometimes I think I need to hire a secretary to keep track of all my appointments,” says one woman who is trying to conceive through intrauterine insemination. “And I feel like I'm being siphoned for blood every other day.” Meanwhile, actual fertility problems (other than simple lack of a male partner) can become stunningly expensive. “My insurance coverage for this stuff ran out very quickly, which was a big shock,” says one tryer who's been at it for 15 months and has suffered three miscarriages. “I've put about fifteen thousand dollars into this so far.”

CHAPTER FOUR

When You Know the Dad

Getting sperm from someone you know can be cheaper and easier, but the long-run legal and emotional ramifications can get hairy. Women dish about getting pregnant “by accident,” or asking a pal to come in a cup, or getting a casual date to agree to stud duty.

My first choice was to have a baby with a man I knew and loved, even if he wasn't my partner. First, I asked a gay ex-boyfriend, and envisioned the tall, dark, handsome

half-Latin children he'd give me. He said no. Then I asked a close friend, picturing the short, cute, blond-haired blue-eyed Irish brood that would result. No again. I wasn't in love with either of them at the time, but I was heartbroken nonetheless—and emotionally exhausted from gaining and then losing such a diverse group of imaginary kids. That's the thing about using a known donor to become a single mom. It's an intimate relationship, almost any way you slice it, and your emotions—and his emotions—can run as high as they might in any marriage or divorce. “A very good friend approached her brother for me,” says one SMC. “I remember thinking at the time that this was a Lifetime movie in the making. If something went wrong, what would it do to our friendship?” In this chapter, I talk to women who have done it this way, how it's working for them (or not), and what kind of legal paperwork they did to protect themselves and their kids.

CHAPTER FIVE

Coming Out About Single Motherhood

Your desire for a child may be totally traditional, but as a single mom by choice, suddenly you're living an alternative lifestyle. What it's like telling family, friends and coworkers—and dealing with questions from strangers.

First the good news: most SMCs find parents, and particularly grandparents, much more supportive than they would have expected. “I told my grandmother I was pregnant, and how I got pregnant,” says Cheri. “She was thrilled about the grandchild, but asked why I hadn't told her I was planning this. I said I was concerned about what she might think.” Grandma's response? “I don't know how you got pregnant, but I'm not really sure how I got pregnant, either!” And from another great-grandmother: “I don't care whether

you girls get married; I just want a great-grandchild!” Sometimes a SMC’s parents realize that they even prefer it this way. “Before I gave birth to my first daughter, my parents went on a hospital tour for grandparents,” says Laura, who has had 2 kids as an SMC. “They explained my single-mother situation, and the other grandparents said, ‘you’re so lucky! There’s no competing grandparents, no difficult son-in law—just a direct line to the grandkids!” Then, some bad news: Sometimes single girlfriends turn hostile, feeling as if your pursuing a baby without a man is an assault on their decision to continue to wait for Prince Charming. In general, most SMCs find that upbeat and honest is the way to go, and that secrecy backfires. “At first I didn’t go into detail about how I’d gotten pregnant,” says one SMC who works in a conservative industry. “One office mate was really uncomfortable, so finally I explained, and showed him the donor profile. I asked him, ‘Does that freak you out?’ He said, ‘No, now everything makes sense.’ After that it was no big deal at all—he even turned out to be one of the few coworkers who visited me in the hospital.” And kids almost force you to “come out,” rather than teach them secrecy and lying. “Since the baby was born, I’ve become a lot more comfortable talking about it,” says one SMC. “I don’t want my son to ever feel ashamed or think I’m ashamed of how he was conceived.”

CHAPTER SIX

Can I Afford This?

For most women, choosing single motherhood is a big financial risk. But for those determined to make it work, it usually does. “The universe will provide” is a common philosophy. Perspectives from women from a variety of financial backgrounds, and a

look at some of the planning—like buying life insurance or making a will—that becomes even more important when you’re single.

Most women agree that it’s important to have some way of supporting the children you bear. But how much money does it take? That often depends more on your attitude than on your bank account.

“You realize you have the ability to make more money, or to prioritize,” says Navah, a social worker who went to a few sessions of Debtors Anonymous as a way to get a low-cost financial-life overhaul before trying to conceive. “A friend wanted me to go to Costa Rica with her on vacation. I didn’t go, but I didn’t feel deprived, because I knew that having a child would make me happier in the long run.”

“I wasn’t sure I could handle it financially,” says Anne, a writer who is now the single mom of two. “But I knew if I didn’t have a kid because of money, I would be so mad at myself for my whole life. It always works out.”

“I wasn’t financially secure,” says Julie, a personal trainer with a young daughter. “I was scared to death. But I thought to myself, I can’t afford *not* to do it. I wasn’t going to let the fear stop me. And it’s the best thing that I ever did in my life. Somehow the universe provides.”

“It’s hard financially, because I’ve chosen a career that I think is noble but that doesn’t pay very well,” says Shannon, a veterinary technician and single mom. “I had a lot of fears about the financial part, but I decided to hope everything would work out—and I haven’t been evicted yet!

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Daddy Question

Are dads necessary? How single moms answer that question. The fears we have about it before conceiving, how moms and their kids have dealt with the issue after the fact—and what the research indicates.

In a 2006 essay entitled “Deleting Dad,” syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker asserts that women choosing single motherhood are narcissists who think of children as accessories and believe that “men are only as good as their sperm count.” I have yet to meet such an SMC. Some do feel that one good parent can be even better than two. But most struggle with the idea of creating a fatherless child. “I was Daddy’s Little Girl,” says one SMC. “I had this really special relationship with my dad, and my daughter is never going to have that.” Many SMCs experience this as a loss—but they put it in perspective. “How many single moms are single *not* by choice?” says Jamie. “My kid will not have a father who left him.” And not having a dad doesn’t mean not having a full family—or significant male role models. In some cases, says Michelle, it can expand a child’s circle of loved ones. “When my four-year-old daughter says her prayers at night, she doesn’t just bless me and her grandparents. She has a whole long list of loving adults in her life.”

Research indicates that most kids of anonymous donor insemination grow up happy and secure in families without a father present. Often their mothers’ fears don’t play out—having never had a dad, the kids don’t feel the loss of one. Their alternative family structure is just a matter of fact to them. “Last year, my five-year-old daughter and I went to a magic show at the Jewish Community Center,” says Janet, an SMC who lives in the

Midwest. The magician said he'd call on an audience member, and if they could answer his question correctly, they'd win a prize. Janet's daughter was picked, and came up to the front of the auditorium. "To win the prize, the question was: 'What is your father's name?'" says Janet. "My daughter was onstage, in front of 100 people, microphone in hand. My heart stopped." But to Janet's daughter, there was no crisis. "She just looks at him matter-of-factly and says, 'I don't have a dad.' To his credit, the clown said, 'Well, what do you know, I don't either. You win the prize!'"

"I was so proud of both of us," Janet says. "On a stage, with a microphone—it's not going to get any worse than that. If she could tell her story confidently in that situation, I knew we were doing OK."

CHAPTER EIGHT

What About Sex? (Will I ever have any again?)

Dating while trying to conceive, dating while pregnant, and dating once the child has arrived.

[see sample text for complete excerpt]

CHAPTER NINE

Being Single and Pregnant

What it's like, good and bad, and how to make it easier.

"You did this to me, you bastard!" These are words that many pregnant women regard as their birthright to utter, if not sometime in the ninth month, then definitely during labor. Guess what? You won't be shouting them if you're an SMC. There's no

way around it—you did this to yourself.

Being pregnant is really cool—watching the amazing changes in your body, and seeing your child grow inside you. But, truth be told, being alone and pregnant can really suck—although after a few months you do have a kicking little creature to keep you company. Many SMCs find pregnancy to be the hardest part of the process. “It was scary and lonely,” says Shannon, now the happy mom of a 2-year-old girl. “I didn’t enjoy my pregnancy as much as I hoped I would. It was depressing not to have anyone to share it with.” Pregnancy can be grueling, both physically and emotionally, and as an SMC, there’s no partner to turn to (or turn on) in a moment of frustration.

“It’s harder to get sympathy,” says one SMC. “It’s partly my own reticence, but it feels like since I made the decision to do this, then I can’t really complain about it.”

But there are definitely good points. For one thing, when you take up the entire bed, no one complains about it. “By the time I was nine months pregnant, my ankles were gigantic and I looked terrible, I really did,” says Marcy, who has a two-year-old son. “I was grateful I didn’t have to worry about what a guy thought of me!!” Being single, you have no one to disappoint, and even better, no one to disappoint you: “I remember being in the childbirth class,” another SMC reports, “and there were 10 or 12 married couples. The guys looked so uncomfortable, and I was reveling in the fact that I didn’t have to deal with that.” And while you may not have a partner, you’ll find yourself getting support from the community at large, with strangers beaming as your belly gets bigger.

CHAPTER TEN

And Baby Makes Two

Stories of happiness and hardship, and why it's all worth it in the end.

Many parents will tell you that raising kids was the hardest thing they've ever done, so for single moms, it's bound to be even more so. But "when you enjoy it, is it ever really that hard?" asks Melissa, who I spoke to after she'd been up all night with two-month-old twin boys. "Weren't your favorite college classes the ones that were the most challenging?" One guarantee with kids is that your life won't go exactly the way you planned. "Whatever expectations I had, everything's been different," says Cheri. She thought she'd have a girl, and had a boy. She thought the first year would be hard, but it was easy—it was the second year that became grueling, as her son went through illness after illness. "I don't have a lot of time to myself," says one SMC of a 2-year-old son, "and sometimes that's hard. But I've gotten used to it, and, honestly, a lot of times I like it, 'cause he's fun!" Your child is there to keep you company, but it can be hard not having a partner to share the joy: "Most times, I don't feel like there's anything missing in my life," says Marcy. "But the first time my son peed in the toilet, I kind of missed having someone to share it with." Another SMC agrees: "You really don't have anyone else who is as excited about the little things." Yet there's satisfaction in knowing that you didn't let being single stand in the way of creating a family. "I am so happy," says one single mother of two, "and I feel empowered, that I went ahead and did the one thing I really wanted to do."

There's also simplicity and clarity in knowing that you're on your own, many SMCs report. "When I was with my boyfriend, I did all the work of raising our child,"

says Anne, who had a second child as an SMC. “After the breakup, I was still doing all the work—but I was doing it without the bitterness that was driving me crazy. I can tell you how hard it is to be a single mom, but I don’t think I would trade it for the other.”

As for whether they’re happy they did it, all the SMCs I talked to said the same thing, though one single mom of two said it best: “If you know you want to have a child, you won’t regret it. Even though it’ll be a huge lifestyle change and you’ll make limitless sacrifices, you will have a love that’s like no other love you have ever experienced. I can’t even put it into words.”

Sample Text:

Preface

Holidays on Ice

It was Labor Day weekend. I'd had the semen tank delivered to my mom's summer house in Kennebunkport, down the road from the Bushes. The ovulation test stick said it was time. So, after breakfast, I collected what I needed from the kitchen—mixing bowl and zip-loc bag for thawing the vials, bright yellow dishwashing gloves as protection against the subzero liquid nitrogen—and told my mother it was time to “baste” (as in turkey). She looked at me as if I'd just told her I was going to run upstairs to give myself an enema. Clearly I'd lost perspective, expecting my 70-year-old conservative Republican southern mama to be totally cool with having a stranger's frozen sperm Fedexed to her front porch, for the purpose of knocking up her single, 41-year-old lesbian daughter.

How did I get to this point? It started 13 years earlier, when I dragged my then-partner, Joan, to a six-week gay and lesbian parenting seminar in San Francisco, where we lived at the time. We learned about the legal, medical and logistical issues, then joined a monthly brunch group of gays considering parenthood. Twenty men and women would gather in someone's living room in Berkeley or Bernal Heights and, over coffee and a potluck, discuss their various childrearing dreams. Mine was to find a friend willing to be both the donor and an uncle figure to the kid. Joan and I would then each bear a child, performing the inseminations at home, by candlelight, and we'd all live happily ever after. Right.

Ten years and three breakups later, I was 38, single, living in Manhattan and no closer to motherhood. I joined another group: Single Lesbians Considering Parenthood. We were *all* 38. This being the big city, there was neither potluck nor living room. Twelve of us sat around a grim conference table at the gay center and talked about the terrors of single motherhood, and the logistics, too: adoption vs. pregnancy, known donors vs. sperm banks. Having grown up without a dad (he died before I was 2), I really wanted a known donor—a friend. Three years later, after agonizing and asking male friends and various other delays, I was all set to start. Age 41. Single. Anonymous donor sperm. At the doctor’s office. The inverse of my dream, but my bio clock was sounding more like a car alarm.

The first intrauterine insemination didn’t take. And my doctor’s office was closed for the Labor Day holiday, when I’d next be ripe. I’d have to skip a month or do it the old-fashioned turkey-baster way. I chose the baster. Or, more accurately, the 1-milliliter tuberculin syringe, which is the way women are basted these days.

Up in the attic of my mother’s K’port summer cottage, in a little blue-and-white bedroom overlooking the ocean, I prepared to do the deed. When I carefully unscrewed the two little plastic vials (they were 2-for-1, since the donor’s sperm count was low on that deposit day—“sweetie, your Dad was on sale!”), the excited little containers, pressurized from their plane ride from California, exploded all over my fingers. This was *way* more like the real thing than what happened in the doctor’s office.

I lay flat for the prescribed two hours, flipping myself around like a rotisserie chicken (also suggested for best results), looking out the window at the ocean and reading my sister's latest Danielle Steel novel. My cell phone rang and it was, ironically, one of my male friends who'd said no to donorhood. We chatted while I basted. I did the whole thing again the next morning. Like good WASPs, my family did not speak of it.

When it didn't take, it was back to the doctor's office. Three months later, still no dice. My next fertile holiday was Christmas—I was due to ovulate on Boxing Day. I called the sperm bank in California and ordered a tank to go to my Mom's again, this time to her home in Richmond, Virginia. It would arrive, via second day air, on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve morning broke and my test stick turned, early. I wrapped presents. I paced. I waited. I refused to leave the house to run helpful errands for my mom. We fought about the 5 o'clock church service—I said I had to wait for Fedex. Never came. My sister said she'd heard they were doing some deliveries Christmas Day. So I stayed home again, my egg's time clock about to sound its final alarm, missing Christmas Day service, too, for the first time ever. At last on Saturday I got some answers from Fedex. Snowstorms in the Midwest. The tank was in the holding area in the Oakland airport. It would arrive Tuesday. I said it actually now had to go back to San Francisco. "Sorry," the agent said. "It's already staged for delivery." Loverboy had to travel 6,000 miles round-trip just to get back across the San Francisco Bay. Worse, he would arrive on the East Coast on his last breath of liquid nitrogen.

I sprang into gear, arranging to have the tank held at Fedex so I could pick it up first thing, and finding a welding supply store that would refill it with nitrogen. Tuesday morning I drove out to Fedex, located on Studley Road, no lie. I gave my name, mentioning that my package had been delayed, and the clerk went back to find it. As she lugged the tank up to the counter, she said, loudly, in a thick, chirpy southern accent, “Ah swear, it’s always you semen people who get the late deliveries!” Then she launched into a funny story about a veterinarian. Right. I’m breeding champion chihuahuas. I guess not much else arrives in tanks like that. I smiled and hurried out the door, sticking my semen into the huge backseat of my mother’s wood-grained station wagon. The welding guys filled the tank, twice (first time it wasn’t closed properly and started hissing in the backseat like a bomb), and it was back to the San Fran deep freeze for my little swimmers.

Obviously that try yielded nothing. Meanwhile, I called the sperm bank to get Don Juan’s pregnancy stats, and they were grim. He was tall, dark-haired, blue-eyed and handsome, but he wasn’t getting anyone pregnant. I started to suspect I was using blanks. My next window would open on Groundhog’s Day. I decided to do it both at home and at the doc’s, for extra luck. I was seeing someone, so I asked her if she would help. Science experiment complete, we forgot ourselves, and, well—afterwards, I was worried that I may have knocked *her* up (but more on that later). Crazy in love, I was secretly excited. Aloud, I apologized profusely and pledged full child support. Alas, Mr. Blanks didn’t do it for either of us. I gave up on the guy. Then the girl ditched me.

In April, Donor Number 2, a tall, handsome, green-eyed actor (“Favorite color: blue. Favorite pet: dogs”), got me pregnant on his second try. Sadly, on Memorial Day weekend, back in K’port again, I miscarried. It was my littlest niece’s first birthday. Leah and Tyler, ages 6 and 8, didn’t understand why Aunt Weeze didn’t want to jump on the trampoline. At least there was no pain, and it was nice to be surrounded by family.

Two failed tries later, and it was Labor Day again. Time for my annual “inseminate at Mom’s summer house” tradition. My tank arrived a day late due to Hurricane Katrina, but the test stick kept not turning. By Friday I wondered if I was just not going to ovulate that month, and I realized the tank was going to run out of nitrogen by Sunday. It was off to Advantage Gases and Tools, welding suppliers for southernmost Maine.

The burly middle-aged guys behind the counter were nice, though my request was an unusual one for them. “This medical?” the shorter one asked. “Yeah,” I said, without elaboration. He took it into the back to fill it up while his tall, equally burly colleague futzed with the computer, trying to figure out how to code the sale of a small amount of nitrogen.

We waited and finally the guy at the computer asked, “So—what you using it for?” I figured why not tell the truth, but I wanted to word it delicately. “I’m, uh, trying to get pregnant.” The big guy got flustered at first, then confided: “My wife and I didn’t have to go the fertility route,” he said, “but we lost 3 before we had our first son.” This huge

welding supply salesman and I then had a sweet conversation about the kids in our lives.

At last, Short Guy came out from the back, carrying the tank, with a funny expression on his face. “So—you got horses or something?” His colleague and I cracked up. “You *don’t* wanna know!” said Tall Guy in his thick Maine accent.

By the Sunday before Labor Day, I was finally ripe. Green Eyes and I did it the tuberculin way in my sweet attic bedroom overlooking the sea. This time, as I was stretched out in my nightgown on the bed, basting—actually I was flat my stomach with my chin on my laptop, typing a work email—my mom came up with some Concord grapes, to chat. The empty inch-long plastic vial was next to me on the sheet I’d laid over the bedspread, so I held it up and said, “I should introduce you to Dad.” My mom laughed. “Nice to meet ya, Dad,” she said. Then my youngest sister yelled, “Knock knock,” and came in, wanting to talk about her new house. Mom interrupted: “Louise, you should introduce Caroline to Dad.” I picked up the vial again. “Caroline, this is Dad. Dad, Caroline.” My insemination was turning out to be a family-values event.

That afternoon, I had a three-and-a-half hour drive to “The Forks” Maine (population 35), to meet a couple of friends for a whitewater rafting trip. I had Mom take a picture of me strapping “Dad” in his nitrogen tank into the backseat, with the seatbelt. “Louise and Dad go rafting.” The next insemination (the standard is to do two in a row, each month) was a group effort. I’d forgotten the syringe, so we three lesbians went into Girl Scout mode, crafting a substitute using available objects in our small log cabin in the woods. Rustic—

but it worked. Next morning, as I floated in my life preserver in the cold water of the Kennebec River's "swimmer's rapids," it occurred to me that I may not be optimizing conception. But it sure was fun.

I would love to say that was the time Green Eyes got me pregnant again. In fact, conception happened the next month, September, at the doctor's office. "Accomplished easily with a long Peterson and a Tomcat," my patient chart says. Sounds like WWII artillery. But in my heart, my son was conceived on Labor Day in Kennebunkport and The Forks, surrounded by my lesbian friends and my loving Republican family.

Many single moms by choice find, as I did, that most people—even conservative parents and small-town strangers—turn out to be surprisingly supportive once you give them a chance. And while not everyone has as many crazy capers on the way to single motherhood as I did, most women do find something to chuckle about as they go to absurd lengths and often great expense to do something that's supposed to be so natural and come so easily. But as heartwarming or funny as it can sometimes be, the process of becoming a single mom by choice can be also hard, heartbreaking and desperately lonely. When I was going through it, I found that there were how-to books that covered the legal and medical issues involved, and self-help books that told me what I should be asking myself, emotionally, before setting out to be a single mom. But there wasn't anything out there to give me the real dirt on what it's like, physically and emotionally, to go through this process as a single woman. It's different for everyone, to be sure. But it's my hope that by sharing my experience and the experience of many others, you'll get a clearer

picture of what might lie ahead, both good and bad. Most of all, I hope reading this book will feel like talking to a group of friends who have been there before you—helping you feel that, even though you may be going it alone, you're in good company.

Sample Text:

Chapter Eight:

What About Sex? (Will I ever have any again?)

OK, I'm not going to lie to you. In a single mothers' support group I sat in on when I was pregnant, there was a whole loooooong discussion of "buzzy friends." I don't think I've ever seen or heard such detailed discussion of vibrators—not even on the sex-toy websites that sell the damn things! These single moms got into where to buy them, where to hide them, how to deal with it if the kids find them, even recommendations regarding the best models to have on hand (the non-anatomical ones, natch) if your kids are old enough to be snooping. Sure, many single moms and moms-to-be still manage to hook up with warm-blooded partners. But for most SMCs whose libidos remain intact, looking for love or sex becomes too logistically or emotionally complicated to deal with on a frequent basis. The solution? BZZZZZZZZZZ.

That said, choosing single motherhood doesn't necessarily mean an end to your sex life. It just makes things more challenging—and maybe even a little more interesting.

Sex While Trying to Conceive

There are still hard-core religious conservatives out there who would argue that sex should *only* be about trying to conceive. The rest of us admit that, most of the time, it's about love or pleasure—preferably both. Advances in birth control—and the realization that intercourse is not the only way to achieve orgasm—have helped us create and

maintain the separation of sex from conception. Usually that's a good thing. But for single women who are trying to conceive with anonymous donor sperm, sex and conception can become separate to the point of absurdity—and confusion.

Take Michele. At age 35, about a year after her decade-long marriage ended in divorce, Michele got pregnant by accident.

By accident? “Well, maybe it was a subconscious thing,” she admits. “When I saw the positive home pregnancy test, I thought, ‘That’s it! This is what I want.’”

Michele decided to keep the baby, but not necessarily the boyfriend. “This was not by any means a serious relationship,” she says. “I told him I didn’t want involvement, and he was fine with that.”

Unfortunately, that pregnancy ended in miscarriage. But it solidified Michele’s desire to have a child before she got too old, and she figured “accidental” pregnancy was not the most responsible way to go. So she decided to become a single mom, looked into artificial insemination with an anonymous donor, and got started. On the weekend of her third intrauterine insemination attempt she ended up on a date with the same guy who’d gotten her pregnant before. She hadn’t seen him in a long time. “It was basically just a sexual relationship,” she explains.

So, Saturday night, Michele used a condom with Mr. Booty Call. “He didn’t stay over.” First thing Sunday morning, she went to her doctor’s office for an insemination.

“It was kind of funny,” she says. And more than a little weird. Michele had decided that anonymous-donor insemination was the best way for her to go, and it was clear that her recreational relationship with Booty Call was not an appropriate foundation from which to create a child. Still, on a gut level, “it was kind of hard, because really my preference would be getting pregnant with him—being able to say, as the child grows up, ‘That’s where you got this characteristic from,’ or if there’s a health condition, being able to go to the guy and ask him if it’s in his family.”

Much like Michele, most women I’ve spoken to who were dating while trying to conceive kept their single-motherhood plans to themselves, unless the relationship became more serious. But even though it all makes perfect sense intellectually, sex is not an intellectual pursuit. And it can feel pretty bizarre, and emotionally confusing, to use a condom to protect yourself from the sperm of a flesh-and-blood man while paying through the nose to buy the same stuff from a stranger and have a doctor shoot it into your uterus.

Meanwhile, in another corner of SMC Bizarro World, for me as a lesbian, sex and conception came a lot closer than I ever thought they would!

When I started trying to conceive in July 2004, I'd just separated from my 4-year on-again, off-again girlfriend. Our relationship had been on the skids for a long while, but I loved her, she loved me, and I didn't want to face the reality that we'd tried and tried and it just wasn't going to work. In fact, as I lay for the prescribed 15 minutes on the exam table after my first intrauterine insemination, I imagined her lying next to me, an infant nestled between us. It was a beautiful fantasy, and she would have made a great coparent—but the relationship wasn't quite right. The separation turned into a breakup about six weeks later.

By the end of September, I began dating someone new—let's call her Jackie. I was completely open about my single-motherhood process, and she was supportive, but we didn't talk that much about it. It seemed way too heavy a topic to seriously introduce into a new relationship. Four months and four failed inseminations later, I called the sperm bank and asked for my donor's pregnancy stats. They were terrible. Looked like he was pretty much shooting blanks. I started looking for a new donor, and in the meantime decided that I'd try to up my chances by adding a third insemination at home to the two I'd scheduled at the doctor's office.

When ovulation day rolled around, I was due to spend the night at Jackie's apartment. Some people will freak out if you bring your toothbrush over to their house too early in a relationship. Meanwhile, Date from Hell, I asked her if it was OK for me to bring my nitrogen tank full of semen—and if she'd be willing to help with the insemination. After so many sterile medical procedures, I was aching to have this conception attempt be a

shared human experience. Jackie was nervous about it—we'd already had our ups and downs, and she worried she'd feel responsible if I didn't get pregnant, or worse, responsible if I did—but I reassured her that I just wanted company, and she ended up agreeing.

As always, it was a messy procedure, with some of the semen spewing out of the airplane-pressurized vial onto my fingertips as I unscrewed the cap. I drew the remainder into the syringe (Jackie snapped a souvenir photo), handed it to her, and lay back against her pillows. After the deed was done, we lay together on the bed and things started heating up. One thing led to another, and we ended up having some pretty spectacular sex.

It felt perfect. I was more in love than I'd ever been in my life, and despite some challenges I was really hopeful about our relationship. The sex was amazing, everything about her was amazing, and here I'd just had a shot at conception the way I'd always wanted it—at home, in love, in bed, through sex. Then I remembered what had just been on my fingertips. Oh shit.

I was scared and horrified as I told Jackie what we'd just risked: the first-ever bona fide accidental pregnancy from lesbian sex. Absurd—but eminently possible, given the circumstances. I apologized profusely and pledged full child support. She took it pretty well, considering how hugely irresponsible I'd been. Meanwhile, I was secretly delighted and hopeful. I'd been kidding myself when I'd told her the insemination was not going to

be a Significant Relationship Moment. I was so in love, and I imagined how beautiful Jackie would be, pregnant with what could only be construed as our child. Her slim body became ripe and rounded in the soft-focus video in my mind. There was probably a sunset and a field of flowers in there as well. (No, being gay does not exempt you from romance-novel fantasies, though it does perhaps highlight their ridiculousness!)

That was Saturday night. Like Michele, I got up early Sunday morning to go to the doctor's to be inseminated again—first kissing my possibly pregnant girlfriend goodbye and leaving her to sleep in.

Alas, Mr. Shooting Blanks didn't do it for either of us. After one more cycle, I gave up on the guy. Then the girl dumped me.

“Honey, I'm Pregnant!” (And it's not yours...)

Men can get a little weirded out when they find out the woman they are dating is trying to get pregnant with another man's sperm. When they find out she *is* pregnant, it can get even weirder.

Cheri, an ad exec from Kansas, met a new guy right after her third failed intrauterine insemination as a wannabe single mom. She took a month-long break from trying to conceive, mostly to take stock of the failure, but “I considered tabling the whole thing, since the relationship had possibilities.” Instead, after her break, she started up again—and wound up pregnant.

“It was awful!” says Cheri. “My boyfriend and I had been dating three months, and I had not told him about my SMC pursuits. We were having sex, which made it more complicated because when I told him I was pregnant, he thought, ‘oh my gosh, I am the father of this child.’” He wasn’t. “To make things worse,” Cheri says, “I told him over the phone!”

“I remember a friend being pretty rough on me at the time, when I told her I hadn’t told the man I was dating that I was trying to conceive. She said ‘You’re playing with fire.’ But in my head, I felt OK not telling him earlier,” Cheri says. “The insemination process really zapped a lot out of me. My body really craved that physical comfort [of sex]. If anything, I was using him for the comfort and closeness, not to get pregnant.” But in retrospect, Cheri wishes she’d been more honest. “I was justifying that I wasn’t lying, but I wasn’t being truthful either,” she admits. “I regret that.”

Cheri’s boyfriend took it pretty well at first. “The next time we saw each other and he was kissing me goodbye, he said, ‘I’ve never kissed a mama before.’”

But then Cheri’s hormonally charged first trimester took its toll on the relationship. “I was insane,” she says. “I was crying all the time. Everything seemed traumatic and big. It was a cold winter, and even the cold would make me cry. It was a rollercoaster—and a couple of times I took it out on him.”

The abrupt swings into sadness lasted three months, and then “I hit the second trimester and I felt like Mary Freaking Poppins—I just wanted to dance and sing, I was so happy,” Cheri remembers. But it had all been a bit too much for her boyfriend, who hit the road at about the same time that the show tunes commenced.

For some men, however, a woman’s choice to have a child on her own works out just great. How often does a guy get to have a purely recreational sexual relationship with a woman in her 30s who wants to have a kid?

That’s what happened to Melissa. At 34, she left her marriage to a man she’d been with for 10 years because of the childbearing issue. “I thought we’d agreed to have children,” she explains. “I was willing to compromise on a lot of thing but not that.” By 38, she’d started on “Plan B”—in vitro fertilization with anonymous donor sperm. All systems were go, but then Melissa got a job offer and started dating a new guy who lived a couple of hours away—and it was going well. She thought about putting Plan B on hold for a few months, but then saw a news report on embryo freezing. “I decided to go through half an IVF cycle and freeze the embryos,” she says. That way, she figured, she’d take the pressure off the relationship and buy some time to settle into the new job. Then, at the last minute, she decided to implant a few of the embryos after all—the ones that were supposedly not-so-good. “I was so sure it wasn’t going to work,” she says. “I was sure it was going to be like one of those dating schemes where you pay a zillion dollars and end up meeting no one.” Instead, Melissa ended up pregnant—with twins.

“When he heard I was pregnant, he thought it was by him,” Melissa says. “I was so surprised when he stuck around!” But he did, and the two of them were “having fun” up until about 2 weeks before she gave birth. There wasn’t even much talk about her pregnancy: “It was the elephant in the room,” she says. “It didn’t come up.” Turns out he wasn’t really interested in marriage, “but sex, definitely.” And that suited Melissa just fine. “This guy, I like him a lot, but he isn’t my focus. And that’s made for a better relationship.” Before she got pregnant, Melissa says, “I’d be thinking, how can I get this man to fall in love with me and marry me and have children with me? That was all I cared about.” Now, Melissa says she’d love to get married again someday, but “it’s not all-important anymore.”

And the sex? During pregnancy it was great—just what she needed. But when I talked to Melissa, the twins were 11 weeks old, and though sex was still on her boyfriend’s mind, it wasn’t on hers anymore. “Mostly he just wants phone sex and I just can’t deal,” she says. “I’m living temporarily with my mother, there are two screaming babies in the next room, and I haven’t slept. To his credit, he’s calling me—I just don’t have time to call him back.”

Sex & the Single Pregnancy

Melissa was one of the lucky ones. While some women keep dating, especially in the first trimester, dating after that test-stick turns can get awkward. “You have to do all this disclosure right off the bat, which was weird,” says Anne, a single mom from California who went on a few dates at the beginning of her pregnancy. “I was having dinner with

one guy in an Italian restaurant, and he nearly spit out his wine he was so shocked!” Most pregnant SMCs end up staying home alone (with their buzzy friends).

Pregnancy causes a big drop in sex drive for some women, and there are many who just feel too fat, awkward, nauseated or uncomfortable to want sex. For these women, being single can be a godsend! But for many others, sex drive increases dramatically, due to the surge of hormones, and being single can be pretty frustrating.

“It was horrible!” says Marcy, now the mother of a 2-year-old. “When I was pregnant, all I could think about was sex.” This, after a lifetime of low sex drive. “It just seemed like such a waste,” she says, adding, perhaps only half-jokingly: “If I had felt this way earlier, maybe I would have gotten a husband!”

On the upside, orgasms in pregnancy can often be more intense—and that’s true no matter who gives ’em to you. “Let’s just say I went through a lot of batteries in those 9 months,” says one single mom.

One pregnant SMC actually came up with a medical excuse for buying—and playing with—sex toys in her third trimester. There’s a midwifery technique called perineal massage that, if done consistently in the last month of pregnancy, is supposed to help make delivery easier, lowering the risk of tearing the perineum (the tissue between the vagina and the anus) and avoiding the need for an episiotomy.

“You’re supposed to put your thumbs in your vagina and press down towards your anus, stretching the tissue until it burns,” Ginny explains. “First of all, that’s hard to do to yourself, especially when you have a giant belly to reach around. And secondly, what fun is it?”

Instead, figuring she could add some pleasure to the pain, Ginny paid a visit to her local sex-toy emporium and bought herself a few different sizes of dildos—including the absolute biggest, thickest one they carried—and a big bottle of lube. Night after night, she eased her way up in girth. “It was uncomfortable, sometimes painful at first,” she confides, “but using a vibrator at the same time helped, and once I got it in, it felt amazing!” She was able to stretch her perineum and have one of those intense pregnancy orgasms as a reward every time. (One plus to being single: A standard-sized male partner might have felt more than a little threatened by Ginny’s outsized silicone playmates.)

Sex aside, pregnancy is a profoundly physical experience, and it can be hard to go through it in a vacuum of touch. In addition to a possible increased sex drive, pregnancy brings on physical changes that many SMCs would love to share with an intimate partner. For example, like many women, the minute I was pregnant my breasts became unrecognizably large. In the course of a month, I went from a barely-B to a full-on D-cup. While I wasn’t so thrilled about the hard-core support I now needed (my well-endowed friend Sally had to teach me the “wear two bras at once” trick), I knew the change would likely appeal to a partner. It was sad not to have someone to appreciate the changes the “Titty Fairy” had wrought. (Though once I had a guy literally hold an entire

conversation with me while staring at my new cleavage. Since this had never come even close to happening to me my entire life, I found it more amusing than insulting.)

It's not just breasts—as my belly expanded and the baby started to kick, there was also no one to marvel and enjoy it with me. Most people either didn't feel comfortable touching my belly, or they just weren't all that interested in whether or not the baby was kicking. There was one guy I'd swing-dance with who would occasionally lead a move by placing his hands on my hips or belly—a perfectly acceptable but somewhat uncommon type of dance lead. Every time he did it, I was thrilled. Something about having someone else touch my changing belly made the pregnancy experience more real, more complete. It wasn't sexual at all, but it was a sensual relief to finally be touched there. For a long, long time, he was the only person who ever did. He was someone I barely knew, but in an odd way he turned out to be an important relationship for me as an SMC.

Later in my pregnancy, I was lucky to have an old friend take an interest in the baby. Each time she came over she'd insist on trying to feel him kick, and, unlike most others, would wait patiently with her hand on my belly until he actually did. She was the only person in my life that did this, and it meant so much to me to be able to share the baby's movements with someone.

For me, these little things were significant, and helped me through the sadness of being alone. But there were other sensual needs that just plain went unmet. In my third trimester, as my shirts got hiked up higher and my pants got belted even lower, I'd

sometimes find myself absently touching the exposed soft curve of skin under my firm pregnant belly, right above the bikini line. It was a really sexy little spot, like the nape of the neck or the small of the back—but I was the only one to discover it.

Personally, my sex drive didn't decrease due to pregnancy (I wish it had!), but it didn't get stronger, either—thank god. And I was fortunate to have a number of women interested in dating me, despite (or perhaps because of) my pregnancy. I suspect that gay SMCs have it easier in this regard. I don't know if lesbians find the pregnant body sexier than straight men do, but at the very least they don't have paternity and child-support fears to contend with. Plus, being women, some may actually be attracted by the possibility of an insta-family.

Unfortunately, despite an aggravatingly intact sex drive, I did not respond to any of the opportunities I was presented with—I was still in love with my ex, Jackie, who'd dumped me 5 months before I got pregnant. (Don't do this to yourself.) The result of my idiotic faithfulness was a lonely and nearly sex-free pregnancy. The only time I had sex was at about 6 weeks, with Jackie, during what was for her an isolated afternoon of backsliding. It was both wonderful and heartbreaking for me, since I wanted her back as my girlfriend, not just for a roll in the hay. Can't speak for how she processed it emotionally, but I can tell you that she did indeed enjoy my new “implants.” Hey, at least they got a few minutes of saucy X-rated action in the 9 months before they became a G-rated food source.

Happily Ever After?

Even if they didn't lose their libido during pregnancy, many women lose it in the aftermath of birth, or simply lose interest because they are so in love with their babies. For a single mom, this can be good news. Bad news is, this might not turn out to be you.

“Since I had my son (now age 2), I don't really think about sex anymore,” says Marcy, one of the lucky ones, a Navy officer stationed in the deep South. “I don't feel like there's anything missing in my life. Relationships are a lot of work, even if it's with a good guy. Then if he has issues, it's even more work!”

“I'm not a man-hater by any standard,” Marcy continues, “but I really feel completely fulfilled by having a child. I kind of feel like I cheated, in a good way, because I got to have the baby without having to find the man first. I feel like the cat who swallowed the canary.”

On the opposite end of the sex-drive spectrum, “I was climbing the walls in the hospital, four days after giving birth!” one supercharged SMC admitted. She was tempted to take matters into her own hands, she says, but she was afraid someone would “know,” or worse, that she'd be caught. So she waited until she got home to become “master of her own domain,” as she delicately put it.

Most women probably find themselves somewhere in the middle ground between celibate and sex-obsessed. But, according to many single moms (married ones, too, for that matter), the loving, cuddling, constant physical attention they get from and give to their kids really does take the edge off.

“It’s hard to describe the intensity of the tactile pleasure you get from a baby or a child,” says Anne, whose daughters are now 9 and 4. “I just love touching my children. It’s not sexual at all, but it’s something you don’t experience with your friends. It’s a type of touch you otherwise only experience with an intimate partner. It’s really taught me how deprived we are in our touch-phobic society!”

Baby love only takes most gals so far, though. “I very rarely sit around and think, ‘Oh, I wish someone were here to help me make bottles or do laundry,’” one single mom of an infant reports. “But I do sit around often and think, ‘I wish I could fall asleep in someone’s arms tonight’ or ‘I wish I had someone to make out with.’”

Finding someone to make out with after having a kid can take some doing. Suddenly, you can’t be as spontaneous—an evening out takes careful planning and scheduling, and might have to be scrapped at the last minute due to your kid’s ear infection or stomach flu. Many SMCs go the online dating route, since meeting people that way can be done at home, after the children are asleep, and you can screen out the really bad matches before even leaving the house—or so it goes in theory. Others get by through maintaining “friends with benefits.” As one mom told me, about dating and sex: “I think it’s really

easy to just slip out of it. It's a choice of mine to not be as sexually active as I could be. For me it's easier to just sleep with old friends once in a while, or to get more out of masturbation."

But for single moms who really still want to find love or sex or both, it's out there, and it's possible. Of the four single moms I know best, not one of them stayed single for long. And three of them found what appear to be happy, stable life partnerships.

And though the path to single motherhood can prove too challenging for many new relationships, there are those that do weather the storm. Jill, a professor based in the Midwest, was the single mother of a 2-year-old and was about to try for a sibling when she met a new man through the internet. At first, she put her pregnancy attempts on hold. Her new guy "wasn't resistant to the idea of having kids," but since he already had two of his own from a previous marriage, he didn't necessarily feel the need for more, either. "He considered being the bio dad" to her second child, Jill says, "but he wanted to be married and living together first, and I wasn't ready for either of those things. We weren't at that stage in the relationship."

Mindful of her advancing age, Jill ended up deciding to go forward with her plans, and started trying to conceive with anonymous-donor sperm. "I wasn't sure if he would want to stay in the relationship or not," she says. "It was a pretty low period for us." Jill didn't really talk to him about it during the insemination process. He would have wanted to be

involved, she explains, but as her husband, or at least as the man sharing her home. “It was hard for him to see himself as a valued partner without those things,” she says.

Jill did conceive, and the cloud lifted. “Once I was pregnant and it was a fact on the ground,” she says, “then he reconciled himself to the circumstances and decided that, regardless of the circumstances, he wanted to be part of this.” Her boyfriend was at her side when Jill’s second baby was born a year ago, and the relationship has deepened to the point that they plan to be married this summer. “He’s an amazing father—he’s very enthusiastic—and he’s really great with my kids,” Jill says. So far, happily ever after.