

Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood



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Making Babies is a delightful book about mothering--not all flowers and grace--but a truthful and somewhat sardonic account about the joys and frustrations of new parenthood. Irish novelist Enright and her husband, Martin, a playwright, had been married eighteen years before having a child. In this book, she details the whole process, from the week she decided that they should try to have a child soon (when she was already pregnant) to the period after her second child was born.

Enright describes a photo of herself taking immediately after the birth. She looked "pragmatic and unsurprised," but then later when they moved the baby to their room down the hall, she noticed that, "The child looks at the passing scene with alert pleasure...She is saturated with life, she is intensely alive. Her face is a little triangle and her eyes are shaped like leaves, and she looks out of them, liking the world."

Contrast this with the chapter titled "Milk" where Enright discusses the absurdity of starting a new biological function in her late thirties. She also remarks that there's no quicker way to clear a room than to begin breastfeeding there. It's not the sight of the breast so much, as the loud raucous sounds coming from the infant.

The chapter titles give an idea of both Enright's creativity and edgy humor. A few of the good ones are: "Breeding," "The Killing Cup," "Wriggles," "Burps," "What's Wrong with Velcro," "Giving Birth to a Genius," and my favorite, "oh, Mortality."

There's no wrath like that of a mother when her child is threatened. When a driver pulls out from a kerb in front of Enright's bicycle where she has baby in the seat, she screams at the driver, "That's right. Kill the child, why don't you?"

What I like most about the book is Enright's honesty. She offers advice that you never see in other books about mothering including the unsayable. For instance, she says that at some point you will seriously consider leaving your child. Not for an afternoon or evening but for good. And when you do, you will find out how "short the piece of the elastic is that holds you." But she goes on to report that some people do leave. "It is important not to forget this. Leaving is possible. There are such things as amputees--they walk around with their sleeves pinned to the fronts of their jackets..."

Not sentimental at all, this book packs a deep emotional punch, and you don't have to be a new mother awash in hormones to feel changed by her wonderful prose and her unique view of this life stage. Two other books that cover a baby's first year are: Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions: a Journal of My Son's First Year* and from a dad's perspective (he stayed with little Zo) try Elisha Cooper's *Crawling: a Father's First Year*.

Posted by Dory L. on July 26, 2012

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