



COLUMNIST

# AUTHOR LOTTE JEFFS REFLECTS ON HER FIRST YEAR OF MOTHERHOOD: ‘BEING A GAY PARENT IS EXACTLY AS JOYFUL, RESTLESS, MESSY AND PROFOUND AS BEING ANY PARENT’

Our guest columnist wonders what she did with all the love before her baby arrived

Lotte Jeffs | Sunday August 18 2019, 12.01am, The Sunday Times



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When I heard my wife singing “Happy birthday to Daaaaddy” with our daughter from the kitchen once, I was confused. She has two mums, my wife knows that. She is one! But, on further investigation, it was Spot the Dog’s dad’s birthday in the story they were reading, and my wife had gone “off book” by singing the entire song with gusto as she got to the final page. Anyway, it meant that when my daughter turned one last week, she had this special day down and knew to “la la” along with the Happy Birthday song, give herself a round of applause and have a snuffly go at blowing out the candles. As my family topped up their prosecco and handed out slabs of Colin the Caterpillar, I found myself reflecting on the most monumentally challenging year of my life. How did we go from complete sleep-deprived panic when our daughter was first born, existing minute by minute with this tiny Tamagotchi of a thing to keep alive, to now having a walking and (sort of) talking other person in our house, with likes (dogs, books, bubbles, the song Let’s Have a Kiki by Scissor Sisters) and dislikes (avocado, hand dryers, the 161 bus); exceptional comic timing — her “peekaboo” is Larry David level; and a need to dance the funky chicken at the sound of any kind of music?

I can’t believe 12 months have passed since my “so over being pregnant” wife and I sat on the sofa in the tense days after her due date had been and gone, watching Love Island and wondering when the contractions would start. Here we are again, on hot nights, windows open, watching TV with her legs stretched across my lap, but everything else about our lives is unrecognisable. In those days before the birth, I remember staring at the empty car seat we had diligently waiting by the door, trying to picture an actual baby in it. Now it’s covered in stains and cracker crumbs. This first year as my daughter’s mother seems to have passed both as slow as for ever and as fast as the blink of an eye. What did I do with all this love before her?

In so many ways being a gay parent is exactly as joyful, relentless, messy and profound as being any parent, but being a mum raising a child with another mum is also unique, especially when you’re the “other” mother, the one who didn’t give birth but feels emotionally as if you did, especially in those first postnatal months when your hormones also go haywire.

Same-sex parents must carry the emotional labour (the other kind) of having to assert and reassert their roles in their child’s life on a daily basis to everyone from doctors to chatty supermarket workers. Worst was the health visitor who inconceivably kept referring to me as “Daddy” and — perhaps easier to forgive — the taxi driver who thought my wife was the nanny. Both instances go to show how few examples of gay parents people must come across in life.

Which is why it was so refreshing to connect with some other lesbian parents at my friend B and her wife’s baby shower recently. We played Turkey Baster Target Practice (“hit the egg for maximum points”), an ingenious game involving the shooting of red food dye from a baster onto a giant diagram of a uterus. There was also a Lesbi Mums quiz (who knew Jodie Foster’s mum was also a lesbian? Not me, which is why I didn’t win), a three-legged egg-and-spoon race for peak lesbian competitiveness (it’s a thing) and plenty of vegan sandwiches. So far, so woke. Maybe it was that third eco cup of Pimm’s, but I felt totes emosh queering such a traditionally straight female experience together, and also knowing that our child will grow up with friends from all sorts of families, understanding that there’s no such thing as “normal” — despite what those people protesting against LGBT equality lessons in schools might think. Had any of them walked by our crew of “deviants” in the park that day, as we performed some kind of bizarre lesbian mating ritual with eggs, spoons and turkey basters, they may well have thought they had every right to be worried.

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