

Introduction

BY CHLOË BRUSHWOOD ROSE AND SUSAN GOLDBERG

In the beginning, it was all about the babies.

No, scratch that. In the beginning, it was all about getting pregnant. In the abstract, of course, it was about the babies, the children, the next 20-plus years. Many of us knew, in a visceral or a theoretical sort of way, that we wanted to have kids, wanted to be parents. Many of us were equally clear that we didn't want to raise children. But, for all of us, in the beginning, it really was about getting pregnant, about that science experiment of hopefully placing sperm in the proximity of egg and fingers crossed. And when — or perhaps even before — those two forces met and took on a life of their own, the reality hit: this was a Big Deal. This was serious. This involved *people's lives* — many, many people's lives. In ways that we hadn't really quite anticipated.

That's probably the case, give or take, for most expectant parents, for those of us who have to some degree or another wished for and planned, and then conceived and raised, children. For the queers among us, however, procreating has generally, and of necessity, tended to involve more lives, more decision-making, more intimacy, often more processing and imagining and negotiating and relationship-building than your average hetero coupling. If not more, than at least different. Unique. Perhaps unexpected.

The fact that there we're well into a "gayby boom" isn't news. The babies we have created are lovely, adorable, precious, geniuses, even well-adjusted, and so on — but on their own they are not the main story, at least, not for the purposes of this book. For the contributors to this collection, what is newsworthy are the families and friendships that these babies have helped to create and

that have, mutually, created them. What is newsworthy is that these families gestate and shift and expand and accommodate and grow — and sometimes splinter apart — in ways that allow for, even insist upon, new ways of looking at what it means to be related to, responsible for, involved with, in love with, and chosen by the people around us.

And yet, the contributors to this collection consider the challenges and movements posed by their own families and relations while the ground continues to shift under our feet. This, of course, is one of the ironies of a collection such as this — the stories of our families are still being written, heard, told, while we attempt in some way to share in definitive terms what has happened to each of us. The continually shifting ground of family life demands an openness to the unknown, the unexpected, and — frankly — the ignorant, particularly for queer families who must contend with the “normal” challenges faced by any family while simultaneously pioneering new languages, laws, roles, and relationships.

Clearly, the creation of any child, to any set of parents — queer or not — is an inherently risky enterprise. It’s just that, for queer families using known donors, that risk is often more visible. We vet potential donors or parenting partners, imagine endless “what-if” scenarios, sign contracts, involve lawyers, enter territory for which there is (often thankfully) no legal precedent. We deal — quite literally, sometimes — with the messy stuff, the most intimate versions of ourselves, and we often do it in public, under the scrutiny of our loved ones and our critics, and without much of a roadmap to go by. We create language where there was previously none, searching for the words, the terms, by which to define ourselves.

When prospective dyke mamas ask a man they know (or sometimes barely know) and trust to donate sperm; when gay dads-to-be watch a female friend give birth to their child; when a lesbian donates her eggs to her best straight pals; when a “single dyke” is vehemently not a “single mom” and a “sperm donor” is not a “donor dad”; when parenting dyads turn into triads and boundaries blur between “donor” and “lover”; when a trans mom donates her (carefully banked) sperm to her friends and her lover; when we are

hit with infertility, miscarriage, paternity suits, custody battles, even hurt feelings — we take risks we never imagined and, in so doing, we create and name new ways of being “family,” for better and for worse.

Perhaps this is the most important function of a collection like this: it offers us the space to name and describe these experiences of being ourselves and being family that are silenced by still all-pervasive ideals of the “nuclear family.” And yet, the stories in this collection in many ways challenge the notion that the nuclear family has ever existed in isolation without a wider community, and they push us to reconsider our many family relations and experiences that are not governed by the strict codes of biology. While in many cases these are stories of finding (or not finding) the “right” — or at least readily available — biological stuff for baby-making, they are also stories that powerfully call on us to reconceive the family beyond biology.

While queer families often invoke the slogan “love makes a family,” the stories in this collection insist on something else — love, yes, but also courage, patience, flexibility, generosity, and a sort of inclusion that can accommodate the unknown ways in which people may or may not come together to make a family.

We have been amazed at the diversity of roles that donors and parents — and their children — occupy, and the creativity and thoughtfulness they bring to those roles. Rather than asserting that their families are “just like everyone else’s” (and, by extension, somehow, worthy of “equal” treatment or rights), the contributors to this book (mostly) revel in their families’ uniqueness, see the unexpected as a strength, something to be celebrated, despite — or even because of — the challenges that difference poses. Because of this incredible diversity, and the shifts and risks inherent for queer families made through extended relations, we hope that this anthology provides, if not quite a complete roadmap, then at least an extended conversation and a place to begin to articulate a language that can work for ourselves and our children.

When the two of us first dreamed up this project, Susan had an eight-month-old son and Chloë was six months’ pregnant with

her first child. As we write this introduction, four years later, Susan's younger son is just about to turn two, and Chloë is a few days away from giving birth to her second child, who will be welcomed into the world by his three-and-a-half-year-old sister. The original impulse to co-edit an anthology on the phenomenon of the "known donor" reflected the realities of our lives: the intense, and in many ways unexpected, joys and challenges not only of conception, pregnancy, and early parenthood, but also of negotiating relationships with the men (ironically, both named Robert) who are our donors. Both of us, and our extended families, have been surprised, challenged, blessed, fascinated, and infinitely thrilled by the ways in which our risk-taking has been rewarded.

In the spirit of our continually shifting, evolving, and unexpected families, we look forward to the further conversations and future books this initial collection may incite. Our models for thinking about family and our language for telling our own stories are, at best, incomplete and, at worst, almost disabling. And yet the stories we tell and begin to tell here can help us to see ourselves more clearly as well as to see the gaps, silences, and spaces begging for stories still to be told.

Susan Goldberg and Chloë Brushwood Rose
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The D Word

BY MARY BOWERS

Sarah and I planned on a known donor from the get-go. My life has been a narcissistic pursuit of Self, and if my kid were going to do even half as much navel-gazing as me, she'd need to know both ends of her gene pool. Plus, we could pick the perfect specimen — a classical guitar-playing firefighter with rock-hard abs, if that wasn't asking too much.

But how does one acquire sperm, and once acquired, what does one do with it? Luckily, our local gay men's health clinic hosted a weekend alternative insemination workshop. We missed the first day of the insemination weekend where they must have covered lesbian conception. Sunday's topics were: international adoption, hiring a surrogate mother, and the financial considerations of having a child. The messages were, in a nutshell: good luck, good luck, and good luck. Financial Considerations Lady flipped foamcore graphs with huge red arrows pointing up, up, up. Her message: none of us could afford kids. Kids triple your expenses, she told us. Could any of us afford to live on a third of our current salary, she asked. That's a lot of cat food, and the lesbians huddled tighter. Financial Considerations claimed she and her partner wanted kids, but they could not yet afford to live on a third of their salary. I did not believe her. I didn't even believe she was a lesbian. The American Family Foundation probably planted her to scare the bejeezuz out of us gay breeder wannabes. It takes more than a mullet and black slacks to make a lesbian, imposter lady.

Because Sarah and I missed the first day of the insemination workshop, we didn't know how to make a baby. We didn't have sperm. We wouldn't have known what to do with the sperm if we

had it. We needed instructions. This quandary brought us to our local lesbian-owned bookstore, where we found *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians*, the baby-making equivalent of *How to Tile Your Bathroom*.

“It is a turkey baster,” Sarah said, reading Chapter 2.

It really was. Or a 20cc syringe. Or a 10cc syringe. Or an eyedropper. Or a soda straw. Anything seemed to do. The process was simple. Spread legs and insert sperm.

Now we knew what to do with the sperm, but we still didn’t have any. We did have Jack Mott, and Jack Mott had sperm. Jack was not a firefighter, but he did teach high school math. Close enough. Jack was willing. Jack was able. Jack was cute.

We wanted Jack to understand the baby was ours. We wanted his sperm, and then we wanted him to go away. Except if we changed our minds and we wanted him around. Awkward! Coveting sperm is like going back to the best friend you told you would never speak to again, because you want to borrow her sweater.

But Jack was down with the plan. “I like the theory of bringing a child into the world,” he said, “but the last thing I want is this kid showing up at my door looking for daddy to take him camping.”

Yay, the plan was in place. I could be pregnant by the end of the month.

“I’m leaving for Paris next week,” Jack said. “And I’ll be back in six weeks. Then I’m all yours until November when I go to Prague for two months.”

If I weren’t ovulating in the seven-day window Jack was in the country, it would be four months before we could start. I was 36. I didn’t have four months. It was hard to say good-bye to Jack, but we needed someone whose sperm would be ready at a moment’s notice.

When Enrique offered to be our donor, I gasped. “You’ll marry me — I mean, donate your sperm?” I said. Enrique was smart, funny, and dedicated his career to finding a cure for AIDS. It would be our good fortune to score his DNA.

“Absolutely,” Enrique said. “I would be honoured.” Enrique

wanted children; his partner did not. Donating was a compromise that satisfied Enrique's desire to procreate and Brian's desire not to have a child underfoot for 18 years.

"We got Enrique's sperm," I said to Sarah.

"He's not going to be out of the country for large chunks of time, is he?"

In fact, Enrique's sperm preferred to relax in their beautifully restored Victorian home where Enrique and Brian and their two Portuguese water dogs invited us to dinner to discuss sperm logistics. They served rosemary-grilled lamb, braised leeks, and morel risotto on their deck. Bottles of Pinot Noir were pulled freely from their wine rack. A jasmine bush puffed a cheery ambrosia across the dinner table.

"You don't mind signing away your parental rights?" asked Sarah, lamb speared on her fork.

"Of course not," said Enrique.

"And having no say whatsoever on how we raise the child?"

"I am bringing a child into the world," Enrique said. "There are a few things I would want to give input on."

Do tell.

"His name, for one. And the schools he attends. I would want to be present at his birth, or at least waiting at your apartment when you return from the hospital."

Wine glasses scraped across the teak table. Forks clinked against salad plates.

"Also," Enrique continued, "how do I know your relationship is solid? I don't want to bring a child into your lives and have you split up. I want my child raised by two parents."

"You don't want to be a donor," Sarah said. "You want to be a father."

He did. Our breakup with Brian and Enrique was awkward. Two strikes. Maybe it wasn't right, separating friends from their sperm. We turned to a community that valued sperm for its income potential: a sperm bank. For \$400 we could purchase a glob of virility. No one waiting in our living room when we came home from the hospital.

“I want that one,” I said, plunking my finger on the monitor. One donor alone, when asked why he donated his sperm, had written, “Honestly, for the money.”

“He’s direct. I like that,” I said. Sarah was game; he had no acne. We bought Mr. Honesty’s sperm. He got his money. We didn’t get a baby. Four hundred dollars a month for fingernail-sized vials of sperm, more costly per ounce than white truffles, and four months later, we were not pregnant. Sixteen hundred dollars for something that was routinely sprayed on sheets, walls, and floors. It was criminal. I did not want teeny overpriced spermsicles. I wanted steaming buckets full of sperm, and I wanted them free.

We met Chip and Tom at our neighbourhood block party. They sat in matching canvas chairs wearing matching sandals, drinking Corona, and smiling. The Saturday before, Sarah and I had married on the lawn of our condo, and Chip and Tom knew all about it.

“We were out walking Bailey, and we heard *boom-shukka, boom-shukka* coming from your yard,” Chip said.

“We said, ‘That’s got to be a gay wedding,’ ” said Tom.

“I’m telling the story, OK? So we said, ‘That’s got to be a gay wedding—’ ”

“And we stood outside your yard, in the rain, peering through your gate.”

“Uninvited guests.”

“We could see your tent, and people dancing.”

“Was that Donna Summer you were playing?”

“We couldn’t tell, we were so far away.”

Chip and Tom were so disconsolate about not being invited to our wedding that we took them up to our condo, pulled out our wedding video, and pushed it into the VCR. Chip and Tom, our brand new best friends, sat through all three hours.

“Hey! This is where we came in,” said Chip when he heard the warbled lyrics of “MacArthur Park.”

“I wonder if you can see us in the background.” Tom leaned toward the television and squinted. A man dancing with a gin and tonic balanced on his head appeared on the screen, and the picture went black.

“Now do you feel like you were at our wedding?” Sarah asked.

“We do feel better,” Tom said, wiping his eye.

“Are you crying?” I asked. I looked over at Chip. He wiped his eye, too. “Are you *both* crying?”

“We cry,” said Chip.

“It’s what we do,” said Tom. I have since seen Chip and Tom cry during *Sex and the City*, *Shrek*, and *Batman*.

Our friendship with Chip and Tom was forged over our mutual love of food and Sarah’s and my singular love of people who watch our wedding videos. The first time Chip and Tom came to dinner, I served grilled steaks, guacamole, and tortilla salad. The following week they served salmon with mango chutney and cucumber mint soup.

“It’s fresh mint,” Chip said, watching us spoon our soup.

An exhausting volley followed: pine-nut-encrusted pork tenderloin, Irish soda bread, apricot-glazed lamb, hot and sour soup, olive-rubbed chicken, and three-chocolate mousse.

“We could order pizza,” Sarah said one drizzly afternoon as I pored over cookbooks. I disagreed, and grilled shish kebabs in the rain.

Somewhere in the flurry of zesting, besting, and oohing and aahing, we told Chip and Tom our insemination story, including the sky-high sperm prices and acne-scarred donors.

“You can use my sperm,” Chip said over spanakopita. “You can have as much as you want.”

As much as you want. Chip and Tom were enthusiastic. Sure they’d sign a donor agreement. No problem signing away parental rights. Of course they would never tell us how to raise our kids. They lived across the street. They’d be available any time. They had no vacations planned.

“We want you and the child to have a relationship,” we said. “We don’t know exactly how that relationship would look.”

“We’ll play it by ear,” Chip said.

“To playing it by ear,” we agreed.

After a donor agreement and sperm tests, insemination began. Chip and Tom had moved — only a mile away, but on a block

where parking was impossible. Sarah and I pulled the car up to the bus stop in front of their condo and waited while Tom helped Chip jizz into a bag. Frigid December air pushed against the car windows. I resented the air. Cold is the killer of sperm. We had twenty minutes to get the sperm home, up to our apartment, and into my uterus before they started dying. Tom flashed their living room light, and Sarah jumped out of the car and bolted up to their lobby where Tom met her with a plastic baggie of free, warm sperm.

Sarah and I were semen-challenged when we started. I thought we'd get a quarter cup of semen a pop. "That's it?" I said to the first sample Chip provided.

"That's a *lot*," Chip had said.

A few months in, I now knew that a tablespoon of the stuff was a *lot*. I revved the engine and eyed the glacially long red light at the corner. "Please be green when Sarah gets back," I said to it. The light was yellow when Sarah jumped in the car, and we tore around the corner under a deep orange glow.

"You got it?"

Sarah patted her coat.

"How does it look?" I said.

"I didn't look at it."

Chip's sperm was high quality. Our doctor had read Chip's motility results with a breathy enthusiasm, as if she wanted his sperm for herself. It's funny to revere the stuff I have avoided since the afternoon I gave Don Jackson a blow job in our high school stairwell, my last contact with semen. But here I was, reporting to Chip what we noticed about this month's semen: if it was particularly smelly, or thick, or abundant. If I had it to do over, I would simply say, "Thank you."

It took 13 months to get me pregnant. Thirteen months of one to three inseminations a month. We hadn't realized how enduring our donor relationship would be, or how much stamina it required. But the mechanical aspect of getting pregnant turned out to be the easiest part of our known donor arrangement.

Two months into my pregnancy, Sarah became convinced that Chip, the baby, and I would bond into some weird pseudo family,

leaving her in the cold. Sarah got this idea from a story in a gay and lesbian parenting book. Two ecstatic moms and their adorable new baby attend the Christmas party of their known donor. The donor's friends coo and ooh over the baby, the birth mom, and the donor, ignoring the adoptive mom completely, leaving her to consume an entire platter of bourbon balls alone in the bathroom, her salty tears splatting against the octagonal tile floor.

The story blazed through Sarah's psyche, incinerating her confidence for the ten months of my pregnancy. Meanwhile, I was not receiving foot massages, breakfast in bed, or bouquets of roses. I kept thinking of Cher turning back time. If I could turn back time, I would burn that book before it came into our house. I was not worried about us being treated like a family. I was too busy worrying about realistic things like our baby being born with three heads, or with her heart beating outside her chest.

"I would really like you to read this book," Sarah said, shoving the offending thing at me.

"I've read the book."

"But you didn't read it through my eyes, to feel what I feel."

"Uh-huh." I wiggled my toes. They could use a massage.

"Furthermore, when I am pregnant, you will never know how I feel now," Sarah said. "You will have given birth, so you'll never know what this feels like." That irked Sarah, my never being where she was now. Sarah would never be where I was now — exhausted, with bloated feet, getting lectured on how un-pregnant she was.

My only concern was that once the baby was born, Chip would want to keep her. Chip could surrender his parental rights only after extensive interviews with the Department of Social Services. Even then, Chip had three days after the baby's birth to revoke his consent. If Chip revoked his consent, Sarah would have no parental rights, ever. "Sarah would remain a legal stranger," our lawyer told us. So Sarah and I were particularly interested in the outcome of Chip's three-hour interview at the Department of Social Services.

"How did the interview go?" we asked.

"So interesting," Chip said. "I loved Sandra. One of her sons is an ice skater; the other is in Little League, did you know that?"

We talked forever, then she sent me to talk to her boss. Her boss and I spent most of our time talking about Rachmaninoff.”

“The musician?”

“Musician, *ha*. Only the most famous Russian composer ever. We must have talked about Rachmaninoff — and my Cyrillic classes — for oh, twenty minutes.”

“Did you talk about consent?”

“Oh, for sure. They must have asked a hundred times whether I was aware I was giving up my parental rights irrevocably. I don’t know how many times I said ‘Yes, I *know*.’ Oh! And Sandra’s husband is a somewhat well-known mathematician. Pretty interesting!”

As clear as Chip was that he had no intention of revoking his consent, Sarah and I mulled over the idea of putting Chip and Tom on a Caribbean cruise the week of my due date.

Weighing in at under five pounds, with lips like orchids and eyes like river stones, Jesslyn came into the world tiny, vulnerable, stunning. Chip did not revoke his consent. Sarah, Jessie, and I appeared with our lawyer in family court where a judge approved Sarah’s adoption of Jesslyn. Everything according to plan.

Chip was a natural choice for Jessie’s godfather and he stood at her baptism, resplendent in a purple shirt and lilac tie. Chip played the role of godparent-donor perfectly — present but not overly present. He hung back, perhaps to avoid the wail of five-alarm sirens blasting in my head. Sarah held Jesslyn at the font. Without Jessie in my arms, I felt unmoored, without a paddle, drifting. If Jesslyn were to identify Chip as her father, only one of us could be her mother, right? There was no precedent for a mommy and a mama and a daddy. In this three-minus-one equation, somebody had to lose. Who was going to get voted off the island? I didn’t want it to be Sarah. More importantly, I didn’t want it to be me. The priest rubbed olive oil on Jessie’s forehead. Cameras flashed.

Poetically, we did attend the Christmas party of our donor and his partner, our four-month-old baby in tow. We stood in front of the spiky spiral wreath jutting out of Chip and Tom’s front door

and paused. What if the parenting book was right? What if the party turned *Lord of the Flies*?

“Hey guys!” Tom threw open the door, elf hat atop head.

Chip’s friends did not treat Chip and me as the parents. In fact, Sarah and I were not in their picture at all. We gathered from the comments and restrained excitement that an entirely separate story existed between Chip and his friends: The Story of Jesslyn, starring ... Chip!

“We heard that Chip watches Jesslyn while you guys nap,” the friends said to us.

“He did that once,” I said.

“And Chip *feeds* and *bathes* Jesslyn.”

“On the two days a month he watches her, yes — he feeds her,” Sarah said.

“And he’s taught Jesslyn to sing. Amazing.”

Behind us, Chip held Jesslyn, his friends piling up to him like a crowd of Betty and Veronicas pushing into Archie. Snippets of Chip’s voice floated over to us: I feed, I bathe, Sarah and Mary sleep.

“I need to get away from this,” Sarah said.

“Let’s go check out the bourbon balls.”

Sarah and I stood at the appetizer table, watching the crowd circle Jesslyn and The Parent of the Century. Christmas lights flicked on, off, on, off.

“Chip has given us a lot,” I said. “We can give him this.”

“I just don’t need to listen to it,” Sarah said.

“Hey,” Tom walked up. “You girls haven’t tried the flan? Chip made it.”

We moved into a house, and our new next door neighbour, Rachel, hurled herself into my lap, announcing for the fifth time she was four *and three quarters*.

“That’s nice,” I said, extracting Rachel’s head from my stomach.

Five feet away, Chip swung Jesslyn in wide circles, her tiny

feet flying toward the sky as she squealed, “More! More! More!”

“Why does Jesslyn have two mommies?” Rachel asked, wrapping her arms around my neck. I don’t much care for neighbour children draping themselves on me.

“Families are different,” I said. “Our family has two mommies.” We’d had this conversation before. Still, Rachel was silent, folding my answer over in her head like a paper fortune teller.

“But why?” said Rachel.

“There is no why.”

Rachel stood up and walked over to Chip, fists planted on her hips.

“Are you Jesslyn’s daddy?” she asked.

Chip’s already wide eyes got wider. “Ah. ” Chip gathered Jesslyn in his arms and turned to me. “Mary?”

“No, he’s not,” Sarah said, materializing out of thin air, garden trowel in hand. Rachel looked at Sarah, unconvinced but sufficiently intimidated to back away. Rachel turned back to Chip.

“Spin *me*,” she said, extending her arms.

“You’re too heavy,” Chip said.

Rachel sat next to me on the porch steps, temporarily defeated. But if we thought we’d ended the baby daddy question, we were seriously deluded.

Jesslyn pointed to the man smoking a pipe on the toilet in *Everybody Poops* and said: “Mama!” She was two. Jesslyn pointed to the lonely bachelor who shoos bunnies from his garden in *Muncha! Muncha! Muncha!* and said: “Mama!” Dora the Explorer’s mustachioed *papi*: “That’s Mama!” Jim on *Lady and the Tramp*: “Mama!”

Soon I wasn’t even *mama*; Jesslyn was calling me *daddy* and Sarah *mommy*. My heart broke. Did Jessie already feel incomplete without a father? Was I really that butch? Yes, I was, and I came to enjoy it. With two moms around the house, it’s hard to differentiate your unique selling proposition. But as Jesslyn’s daddy, I had a role. We wrestled. We kicked balls. We raked leaves. Daddy stuff. Only problem: I wasn’t Jesslyn’s daddy.

But neither was Chip. He sang to Jesslyn, made her brisket, and bought her first American Girl doll, okay. He blew raspberries on Jesslyn's belly and made her laugh so hard she'd fall over — daddy-ish, sure. But *daddy*? Chip spent five hours a week with Jesslyn, not exactly a daddy-worthy chunk of time, in our estimation. Chip was more than a sperm donor but less than a daddy. How to explain this distinction to Jesslyn? She was two.

“What do you tell your kids when they ask about their dad?” we asked our friends Tammy and Linda, who had three kids through a sperm bank donor. Tammy and Linda looked at us curiously.

“They don't have a dad,” they said. “They have two moms.”

“Do your kids ask about their dad?” we asked a lesbian couple at Gay Family Week in Michigan.

“Not really,” they said.

“I love you, Daddy,” Jessie said to me one afternoon. I took a breath. Today seemed like the day to tell her Chip was — ergh — her daddy. I was about to be voted off the island.

“Jessie, I'm not your daddy.”

“OK, Daddy.” Jessie said.

“Jessie, you have a special daddy.”

“You *are* special, Daddy.” Jesslyn wrapped her arms around me and pushed her cheek into mine.

“Thank you, honey.”

“You're welcome.”

Or maybe tomorrow was the right day to tell Jesslyn Chip was her daddy.

But Jesslyn didn't bring up the daddy question again until preschool.

“I sat with my daddy at school today,” she announced, dropping her Hello Kitty backpack in the middle of the living room.

Alarm exploded through my skull. I crouched in front of Jesslyn and held her hands.

“*Who* did you sit with?” I asked.

“My daddy. The Spanish teacher.”

“Jessie, the Spanish teacher is not your daddy.”

“Yes, he is.”

This was getting ridiculous. I muttered a serenity prayer.

“Jessie, Chip is your daddy.”

“*Chip?*”

“Yes, Chip. How do you feel about that?”

Jesslyn shrugged. “It’s good.”

It was more than good. It was revelatory. It was Christmas, birthday, and Fourth of July fireworks rolled into one. “I have a daddy. His name is Chip,” she told the postman. Jesslyn told her classmates she had a daddy. She told kids in the park, teenagers canoodling in front of our house, neighbours raking their leaves, shoppers at Home Depot. She shouted the news of her daddy, ecstatic, relieved. The only person Jesslyn didn’t tell was poor Rachel, whose family had moved the summer before.

Amazingly, life went on as it had. Jessie did not become more Chip-centric. I was not pushed off the island. Jesslyn continues to muddle through her family configuration, alternately informing us, “I have a mommy and a mama and a daddy and a Tom,” and “You can have two moms or two dads, but you can’t have two moms and a dad.” Jesslyn announces this without judgment, and I’d worry about it if she weren’t so happy.

“What’s in my Pop-Tart, strawberry jam or just strawberries?” she asks me from the back seat of the car, en route to kindergarten.

“It’s actually strawberry filling,” I say, pulling an answer out of my ass.

“How do you know?” Jessie asks.

“Because it has strawberries in it that *fill* the Pop-Tart, so it’s strawberry *filling*.”

“Like how you fill my heart with love?”

“Exactly like how I fill your heart with love.”

“Like how the sun fills my shoes with glinting?”

“Exactly.”

“I don’t want to go to kindergarten, Mama.”

“I know, honey.”