

## Oh, Baby! True Stories about Conception, Adoption, Surrogacy, Pregnancy, Labor, and Love

**Lee Gutkind, Editor**

**Alice Bradley, Editor**

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*This is the welcome kind of parenting book that sugarcoats nothing.*

*Oh, Baby! True Stories About Conception, Adoption, Surrogacy, Pregnancy, Labor, and Love* features twenty-three brief essays for parents. Edited by Lee Gutkind and Alice Bradley, this new anthology spans themes that include changed expectations, discovery, and mortality. No controversial *What to Expect When You're Expecting*—the baby bible for millions—this thoughtful, vital examination of new parenthood is a sharp alternative guide from the literary trenches.

A variety of voices shed light on issues few dare to mention when it comes to prepping hopeful parents-to-be—including resentment toward partners and the blindsiding nature of colic. *Oh, Baby!*, however, doesn't aim for disillusionment. Account after careful account reveals adults who experienced the shock of the first few months with a baby. They succeed in showing—to borrow phrasing from one essayist—how terror underscores the “sublime,” and provide solace in numbers. Essays written by parents with older children provide needed perspective.

A few essays strike similar tones of levity and concern as they chart the divide between parents' ideas regarding their impending new roles and their often different reality. The finest invite deeper engagement by juxtaposing multiple layers, such as “Boothville,” a story of unexpected pregnancy that challenges a young woman's career expectations in mid-1980s Australia; “How Little,” which considers postpartum depression amid literary forays; “Four Early Lessons in Parenting,” a father's reflection on the loss of innocence by way of his son's natural curiosity, superheros, and news events; and “The Baby Room,” a memory of adoption interspersed with studies on cortisol levels in adopted children. “States of Permanence and Impermanence” deserves special mention; it skillfully sets the scene for a son's plagiocephaly treatment while subtly reflecting on fragility and hope.

Through contributors that include columnists, poets, memoirists, and others, *Oh, Baby!* distinguishes itself with consistently smart writing. Personal narratives build on each other and speak to the sheer difficulty of child rearing without losing oneself in the process. This is the welcome kind of anthology that sugarcoats nothing: love for a child amplifies, but it also eviscerates.

KAREN RIGBY (Winter 2016)

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