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opening extract from

Your Baby and Child

written by

Penelope Leach

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To the children who were
yesterday's future and have become
today's present

A second generation of children inspired this new version of *Baby and Child*. I would like to thank all the representatives who appear in it (especially Cassie, Rory and their friends), as well as their parents, grandparents and caregivers, and all the children and adults who let us take pictures we eventually had to leave out. Every photograph is of real people rather than models, and for her sensitive photography I owe special thanks to Jenny Matthews.

I would also like to thank the design team – in particular Sally Smallwood and Hilary Krag – for their work in creating a new look for this book and ensuring that words and pictures work so well together.

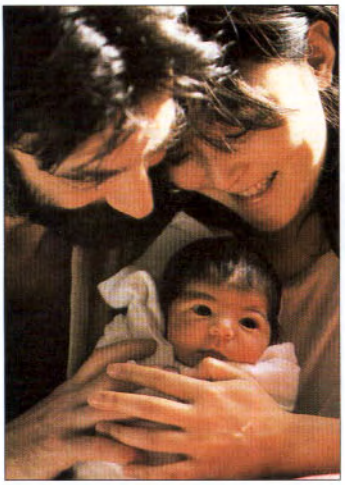
Without the editor, Caroline Greene, though, the sheer size and complexity of the project might have overwhelmed us all. I thank her for her knowledgeable interest in the subject as well as her professional skill in the medium, and I thank her for being a pleasure to work with.

Penelope Leach

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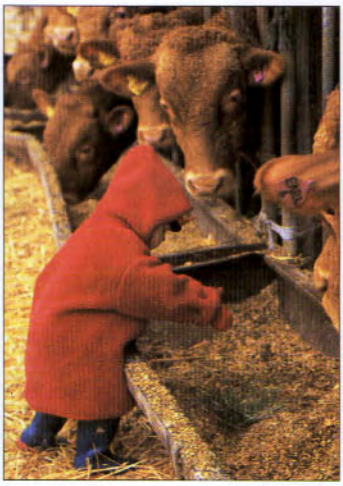
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INTRODUCTION

YOUR BABY AND CHILD is written from babies' and children's points of view as far as we can understand them because however the society in which they are brought up changes, and however the demands made on parents may shift and alter, those viewpoints remain relatively stable, vitally important and often neglected.

This book looks at children and their experiences from shortly before birth until the beginning of their compulsory schooling. It looks at the successive tasks of development with which they are involved, the kinds of thought of which they are capable and the extremes of emotion that carry them along. Babies and young children live minute by minute, hour by hour and day by day and it is those small units of time that most concern the people who care for them. But everything a child does during those detailed days reflects what he or she is, has been and will become. The more you, and any other adults who regularly care for your child – let's say a daughter – can understand her and recognize her present position on the developmental map that directs her towards being a person, the more interesting she will seem. The more interesting people find her the more easily she will get the attention of all the adults who are important to her, and the more willing attention she gets, the more satisfied and satisfying responses she will give.

So taking a baby's point of view does not mean neglecting the viewpoint of parents or other caring adults because they are inextricably intertwined. The happier you can make your baby, the more you will enjoy being with her and the more you enjoy her the happier she will be. And when she is unhappy – as of course she sometimes will be – you will usually find yourselves unhappy as well. Your baby affects you just as much as you affect your baby. In fact if you have spent years learning to maintain a businesslike distance between your professional and personal lives, you may be astonished to discover how difficult it is to maintain any distance at all between adult lives and baby matters. It is because you and your baby affect each other, for better or worse, that although this is a book, it does not suggest that you do things "by the book" but rather that you do them, always, "by the baby".

Raising a child "by the book" – by any set of rules, predetermined ideas or outside instructions – can work well if

the rules you choose to follow fit the baby you happen to have. But even a minor misfit between the two can cause misery. You can see it in something as simple and taken-for-granted as the "proper" way to keep a newborn clean. Bathed each day according to the rules, some babies will enjoy themselves, adding pleasure for themselves and a glow of accomplishment for parents to the desired state of cleanliness. But some will loudly proclaim their intense fear of the whole business of nakedness and water. However "correctly" you bathe such a baby and however clean she becomes, her panic-stricken yells will make your hands tremble and your stomach churn. You are doing what the book says but not what your baby needs. If you listen to your baby, the central figure in what you are trying to do – and your only reason, after all, for reading the book – you will defer the bath and use a face cloth. Then both of you can stay happy.

This kind of sensitively concentrated attention to a real-life child who is a person-in-the-making, is the essence of love. Loving a baby in this way is the best investment that there is. It pays dividends from the very beginning and it goes on paying them for all the years that there are. This baby is, after all, a brand new human being and you are his or her makers and founders by virtue of your loving care, whether or not there are genetic links between you. As you watch and listen to her, think about and adjust yourselves to her, you are laying the foundations of a new member of your own race and of a friendship that can last forever. You are going to know this person better than you will ever know anybody else. Nobody else in the world including your partner, however devoted, is ever going to love you as much as your baby will in these first years if you will let her. You are into a relationship that is unique and can be uniquely rewarding.

Loving a baby or child is a circular business, a kind of feedback loop. The more you give the more you get and the more you get the more you feel like giving... It starts in the very first hours. You chat to your baby – let's say a son, this time – as you handle him, and one day you notice that he is listening. Because you can see him listening you talk to him more. Because you talk more he listens more and because he is listening he is less inclined to cry. One magical day he connects the sound he has been hearing with your face and, miraculously, he smiles at you. Less crying and more smiling from him certainly predispose you to provide more and more of the talk that so charmingly pleases him. You have created between you a beneficial circle, each giving pleasure to the other.

It goes on like that too. A crawling baby tries to follow you every time you leave the room. If his determination to come too

makes you increasingly determined to leave him behind, each trivial journey to the front door or the washing machine will end in miserable tears from him and a mixture of claustrophobic irritation and guilt for you. But if you can accept his feelings and cheerfully slow your pace to his and help him go where you go, he will pay you back in contented charm and turn the chore you had to do into a game you both enjoy. Later still your toddler or young child will chatter endlessly to you. If you half-listen and half-reply the whole conversation will seem, and become, tediously meaningless for both of you. But if you really listen and really answer, your child will make more sense and because he or she says more, you will feel increasingly inclined to listen and answer. Communication will flourish between you.

So this whole book is orientated towards you – the parent, parent-figure or any caring adult – and the child as a unit of mutual pleasure-giving. Fun for that child is fun for you. Fun for you generates more for him or her and the more fun you all have together the less time and fertile growing space there will be for pain and problems.

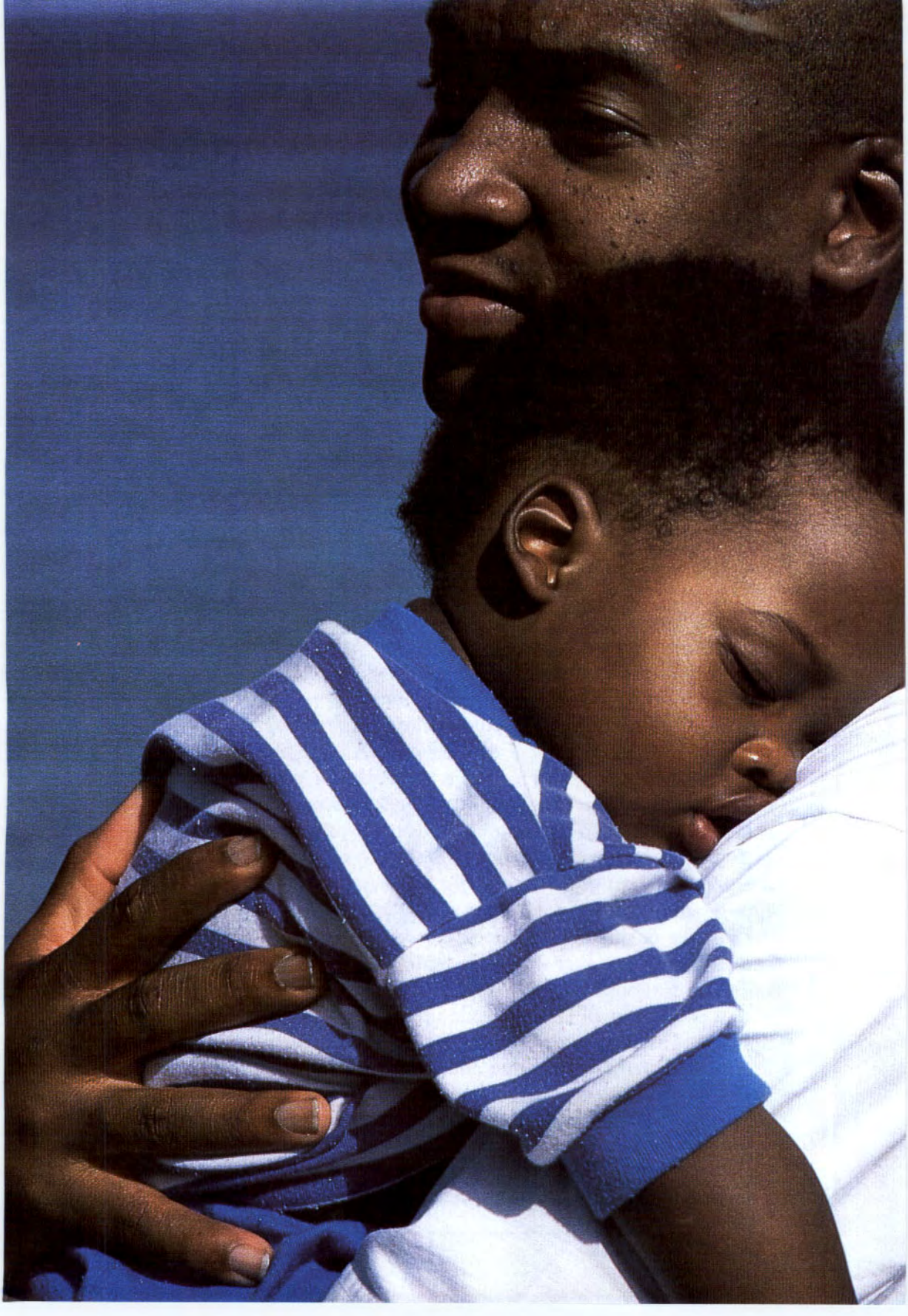
I have written the book in this way because experience with the children of many families who let me share their relationships with each other as part of my research, as well as with my own children and grandchildren, constantly reminds me that pleasure is the *point* of having children but that pleasure is horribly vulnerable to life's other stresses. We are at last beginning to revise the traditional assumption that every stable couple will want a child. But while we acknowledge that parenthood is and should be a genuine option, we are far from acknowledging the increasing practical costs and emotional implications of exercising it. Although responsibility for the safety, health and wellbeing of a child has always meant anxiety and hard work, new strains of those, coupled with crippling guilt, threaten to counterbalance, even overbalance many people's joy in parenting. There may be anxiety about balancing the equation of time spent with children and time spent earning money to spend on them; guilt over spending too little or too much time at home or at work and giving too much or too little attention to children, partners or personal fulfilment. And there is always hard work because raising children *is* hard work whether you are at home and hands-on, at work and in remote control, or some of each.

For millions of parents, money and jobs are too scarce for these to be matters of choice. But even amongst intact and relatively privileged couples there are women who feel guilty about enjoying home-based life with a baby because they "ought" to be earning money and work-experience, if not for now then against the real

possibility of marriage breakdown and lone parenting later on; women who feel guilty about enjoying working outside their homes because "my children need me"; even women who, having achieved good compromises between paid career work and unpaid caring work, feel they do neither "properly" and are guilty about both. Fathers seldom fare better. For every chauvinistic male who still behaves as if children – even his own – are women's business, there is another who wants to take an equal part in his child's life and upbringing but must fight long tradition and prejudice for the right to be there enough to learn how, let alone keep on doing it while maintaining the mortgage.

Whoever and wherever you are, having a child makes a difference; for almost everyone it means making compromises, and for many there are new kinds of family to be made, new styles of parenting to be explored. When something works out well and the organizational practicalities of life run smoothly for a while, please try not to waste a good time in guilty fretting because you are not "perfect parents". Nobody is. You probably could not even describe such parents and I certainly would not try because they are mythical. Anyway, children do not need superhuman, perfect parents. Yours only need you: the good-enough parents they happen to have and will take for granted as perfect because you are the ones they know and love.

Guilt is the most destructive of all emotions. It mourns what has been while playing no part in what may be, now or in the future. A prime purpose of this book is to help you find the courage to dismiss unnecessary guilt so that you can find positive courses of action which will truly benefit your child where your self-reproach will not. Whatever you are doing, however you are coping, if you listen to your child and to your own feelings, there will be something you can actually do to put things right or make the best of those that are wrong. If your new baby cries and cries whenever he is put in his cot, guilty soul-searching about your "mishandling" or his temperament will get none of you anywhere. Stop. Listen to him. Consider the state that his crying has got you into. There is no joy here. Where is he happy? Slung on your front? Then put him there. Carrying him may not suit you very well right this minute but it will suit you far better than that incessant hurting noise. And when, and only when, peace is restored you will have a chance of finding a more permanent solution. If your three-year-old panics when you turn out her bedroom light, stop. Listen to her; listen to your own feelings. While she is afraid, there can be no luxurious rest for her or well-earned adult peace for you. Put a light on again and let both of you be content. It does



not matter whether she "ought" to be scared of the dark; it only matters, to everyone present, that she is.

Bringing up a child in this flexible, thoughtful way takes time and effort, matching hard, committed work to long-term rewards. But what worthwhile and creative undertaking does not? Bringing up a child is the most creative, most worthwhile and most undervalued task you will ever undertake; furthermore while all your previous personal experiences and professional competencies will feed into your parenting, not even the most "relevant" will prove to have prepared you for it. Don't expect that your track record in keeping a major company running smoothly will make running a family a cinch or assume that happily caring for twenty small children in a classroom every day means that just one in your own home will be easy. Yes, fifty centimetres and three kilograms of infant can, and undoubtedly sometimes will, reduce two or more intelligent, competent, organized adults to anxious, exhausted, incompetent jellies.

Every creative person is also a craftsperson, who must learn the tools of her art just as a tradesperson learns the tools of hers. There is a craft to this project too. If you accept, and insist that everyone who cares for your child observes, the principle of striving for everyone's intertwined happiness in all your dealings with her, you will be able to see that while there are seldom right or wrong ways to do the things that need to be done, there are usually choices to be made between ways that maximize or minimize the sum of your household's happiness; ways that feel easy or difficult and ways that seem effective or ineffective. A large part of this book is devoted to helping you to find what works for you, whether the issue is changing the nappy of a two-week-old who hates being naked or a two-year-old who hates keeping still; coping with your own distress over leaving a three-month-old or a three-year-old's distress over leaving you; or finding fun play, satisfactory care and appropriate education for a child of any age. Please don't make the mistake of thinking that even the smallest of these detailed concerns are trivia that should be beneath your notice – or let adult companions imply that they are beneath theirs. Daily life with a baby or small child is made up of hundreds of minutes of minutiae. The more smoothly those minutes roll by, the more easily hair gets washed, food is eaten and transitions are made from being awake to being asleep, being alone or being in company, being on a swing or walking home, the more time and emotional energy you will have for enjoying him, and yourself with and without him. So details are important, even domestic ones. You can organize nappy-changing in many different ways, but as a five-to-ten times

daily occurrence it will have to *be* organized – and the way that best suits your particular house and household, including your baby and yourself, will be the best for you. You can store playthings in many different ways, but the way that makes clearing up easy for you, or easy for you to delegate, while keeping the room tidy enough for your tastes and the toys available enough for your child, is worth thinking about.

This book does not lay down rules because there are none. It does not tell you what to do because I cannot know what you should do. But it offers you a complex and, to me, entrancing folklore of child care which, once upon a time, you might have received through your own extended family, combined with some even more complex and, to me, entrancing results of child development research. I hope that you enjoy it. I hope that it will help you to enjoy discovering the person who is your baby, and to enjoy looking after that baby person and helping along the processes that gradually turn him or her into your child. If it plays a part in helping you to make your child happy and therefore in making yourselves happy, helps you to revel in your child as your child revels in you, it will have done its job.

The baby for whom you are reading this book may not be your first. Second babies are supposed to be "easy" but you may find the first months of this second round dauntingly difficult, especially if your first child has taken up a great deal of your time and energy for the last couple of years. If she needed so much from you, how can this one possibly manage with less? And if everything you give him has to be taken from her, how can you bear it? You know that your toddler must be helped to accept the new baby but in advance of that planned and wanted birth you may find yourself bitterly resenting him on her behalf. She is a person whom you know and love; he is a stranger. After the birth, though, don't be surprised if your feelings swing just as immoderately the other way. You knew that your toddler was likely to be jealous, but on your new baby's behalf you are a tigress; so protective of him that you hurt her feelings – and then you hate yourself.

Caring for babies and small children demonstrates Parkinson's law in reverse: somehow, time and energy expand to meet the demands made upon them. All other things being equal, you will do as well by the new baby as by the first and you will not seriously deprive either in the process. It is not because second babies are easier; it is because their whole situation is quite different.

First babies have the often unenviable task of turning people into parents. That first time around you had to learn all the



practical, craft aspects of parenting. You had to learn how to change a thoroughly soiled nappy without having to change all your clothes as well; you had to learn to manage a breast or bottle with one hand so as to hold the telephone with the other, and you had to discover how wide your doorways were before you could stop being afraid of banging her head on the frames. Although the new baby may seem amazingly small and fragile in comparison with your tough little toddler, you know all that. The skills stay with you, like riding a bike.

In reality, your days are going to be fuller this time, and you'll have fewer chances of catnaps, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you'll feel even busier and more tired. First babies take up every available moment of parents' time because even when they are asleep and needing nothing, parents still can't get on with anything else because they are hanging around just in case. But you know better this time. You know that your baby will cry when he does need you and far from dithering about until he does, you will be snatching every moment to spend with your toddler.

Your first child really *needed* your undivided attention because she not only had to demand some one-to-one attention but also to expose you to the realities of child care, like teaching you not to try to write your novel when she was around and awake, and only to invite the kind of daytime visitors who would pretend they had really come to see her. Your second baby will find that if you are there at all, your attention is fully child-centred (although he may have to claim the one-to-one from his sister) and whether you are there or not, he will find much more to entertain him because she is. You wouldn't have left her sitting in her highchair for a minute after she finished her lunch, but he stays there, absorbed in watching her finger-paint with yoghurt and then watching you clear it up. You always took her for a walk after her afternoon nap but he will get taken out and about on her affairs and try out the sandpit and the big swings at a much earlier age. Staying at home for an afternoon (because she has a cold) may be a change for him rather than an unfair deprivation. As for her, your beloved first-born: being the older rather than the only child may be tough on her for a while, but she has had all your attention to compensate her for being the one you learned on, and she may enjoy having you house-bound by a new baby even before she can begin to enjoy him. And one day, with any luck, she'll do that too.

But what if you have two (or more) together? Twin babies share a womb, parents, most of each other's company and almost all the major landmarks of childhood from birthdays to starting school. Neither they nor anybody else is going to forget their twinness