





Author of

["Birth Stories from the Yogafairy™: Real Tales of Birth from
Yogafairy™ Mamas"](#)

And

["You CAN Change your Marriage Overnight:
Ten Tips for Couples in the New Millennium"](#)

www.yogafairy.com

www.floridapsychotherapy.com

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Dedication

Dedicated to Mia and Eva, my fairy girls.

You've changed my life, my person, my being
in ways for which
I will forever be grateful.
Who I am today
wouldn't exist without you.

"What magic we weave
when we choose to believe
in fairies and elves -
but mostly in ourselves!"

- author unknown



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Chapter 1: Music to my Ears

Let's take a moment and sing the Sesame Street song. "Suuuun-ny day, sweeping the clouds away." Heard in more than 120 countries, the words may be in Russian, Arabic or Zulu but the tune is always the same and so is the meaning. Free time for mom and dad.

Pre-parenthood, I never gave theme music a second listen. Barney was simply a huge phallic symbol appealing to children in the oedipal stage. Little did I know that he sings and dances. Little did I know that I would dance *with* him because little neurons in my brain would shoot off singing, "Free time! Free time is here."

A lot of kids dream of becoming rock stars. Fans will fall at their feet, throwing panties and kisses at them. Little do they know that someday their musical inclinations will be applied by writing music for children's shows. "Hey Mom, someday I'm going to write a catchy little tune that millions of toddlers will sing every day and carry into their adulthood." It's not your average "When I'm a Grown-up" dream.

Sesame Street still plays at our house, but it's the theme songs of Dora the Explorer and Dragon Tales that make me dance with joy. My hips start moving. My feet tap. I do a little salsa with Dora and start singing. Both my daughter and I are smiling at the same time.

Being a psychologist, it has occurred to me that I'm classically conditioned. "Let's all go to Dragon Land" is associated with 30 uninterrupted minutes to myself with no disasters from a running, climbing, crayon obsessed toddler in sight. I can check my email, get a start on a story, or even take a shower. Yes, Dragon Land is wonderful.

The music also lets me know exactly how much freedom I have left. The Dragon Tales "Get up and Dance" interludes that come on half way through the show get those kids moving, but also tell mom that only 15 precious minutes are left before her full attention is again required.



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I set my clock by the songs that Dora the Explorer sings. "Backpack, Backpack" means they're just packing up to start the adventure. No one has gone anywhere yet. "Come on, Vamanos" signals that they're on their way. While my daughter is off rescuing baby leopards in the jungle, I'm surfing the net for the best deal on sneakers. The "You Did It" song after the adventure is complete warns that mother-daughter interaction is just over the next hill.

But it's not just about me. Excitement overtakes my daughter as well. She runs to the television, lets out a gasp, yells out the name of her favorite show, and plops herself down about an inch from the television.

Knowing that my toddler is happy to see her show makes me happy too. I look forward to a cheerful child telling me about all the animals she rescued or the dragon berries she picked when we reconnect for our own real life adventures at the end of the show.

Maybe the reason we can all hum the Sesame Street theme on cue is because the entire household was happy during Sesame Street, Mom and Dad included. So those of you out there writing a new generation of theme songs, perhaps lamenting that you never reached stardom, please take my panties. Let me throw them at your feet. They're yours to keep.



Top Tip #1

Rose Art washable markers are NOT washable. I'll repeat. They are NOT washable! I have no idea why they advertise them as such. Don't get sucked in by the low price. The only ones I have found that are truly wipe away washable are Crayola brand.



Chapter 2: Sing your Own Tunes

A mom has to sing - sing through newborn crying spells, through fever and colds, through boo-boos. A mom has to sing a child from sleepiness into a peaceful night's rest.

Unfortunately, I can't remember the lyrics to songs for the life of me. This really wasn't a problem in my pre-parent days. Now I'm expected to remember 50 songs, in detail, with hand movements, at any given moment.

My musically gifted sister can't believe that I even get the Itsy Bitsy Spider song confused. "It's climbs up the spout *a-gain*, with a British accent," she tells me. She had to sing the song to me several times before I finally got the ending.

Tunes I can handle. I can hum them correctly to my heart's content. When I was pregnant, tunes from childhood came back to me in force. So did panic when I realized all I knew were the first couple of words, or a phrase here or there. "La, la, la . . . a place to call our own . . . doo, doo, doo." I had a vague recollection that the people on the bus did more than just go up and down.

Would I ever be able to sing my child to sleep? How would we handle car trip sing-a-longs?

I tried looking up lyrics on the Internet, but pregnancy was not the best time to be doing this. After graduate school, my memorization skills took a nose dive. It seemed that my body was too busy growing hands and feet. Kiddie songs were low on the evolutionary list.

It didn't improve after my daughter arrived. I would stumble through lyrics - part singing, part humming. I kept repeating the same couple of very short songs again and again.

Finally, out of desperation and boredom, I made up my own songs. This liberating move makes for ever evolving lyrics and unending entertainment while pacing the floor with a crying infant or pushing a child for what feels like forever on the swing set. You can change the words without guilt. You can sing the same



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thing over and over and over, just varying one word or phrase until you find the perfect one. I started using the strategy on classic kiddie songs as well.

Besides going up and down, people on our bus did all kinds of things no one else on the proper bus ever did. Babies nursed instead of cried. Daddies passed gas and mommies tickled. We had animals that roared, hopped, and neighed on our bus.

Making up my own songs also made for something I never expected - my daughter started making up hers as well, tunes and all. The results keep me and my husband laughing. Her favorite is "Don't be sad. Don't be mad. Don't be happy," at which point she looks off into the distance, not quite sure which part doesn't make sense.

Fortunately, my daughter did not inherit my gene for lyrics. She remembers all of them. She recently sang the whole Itsy Bitsy Spider during a 4 a.m. potty trip, gestures and all. And nailed the ending with the correct "a-gain."

I called my sister the next morning to tell her the news. "Thank god," she said. "At least one person in your family will someday sing to their baby the right way." I laughed. What she doesn't realize, but my daughter and I know, is that *any* way is the right way to sing to a baby.



Top Tip #2

Music can change your entire mood! If you feel like you're going crazy inside the house, put some music on. Dance around with your baby, dance around with yourself! When the baby is older, have an instrument box for music time. Even little babies can shake a shaker or maraca or bang with sticks on the floor. Set the timer for 10 minutes and have music time.



Chapter 3: Four Jellybeans and a Show

I weaned my daughter with television and sugar. I nursed her long enough for her to say, "jellybeans!" when offered the choice between nursing and her favorite candy of all time.

Doctors and books tell moms to wean by replacing nursing sessions with food. None of the literature says what to do when your child closes her lips tight, turns her head to the side, and pushes the spoon away with her tiny hands. The books don't address strategies for a child who adamantly says, "no food, na-na (code word for nursing)."

The World Health Organization recommends nursing for a minimum of two years. About 17 percent of mothers in the United States nurse for one year. Less than 6 percent of mothers in the United States nurse for two years. There are no statistics past two years in the U.S., because for us it enters into freakdom, even if your child is nursing just once a day.

I could handle freakdom knowing this was really important to my child. I could also handle it knowing that the longer I nursed, the longer I protected my child from allergies, obesity, and asthma. I knew I was also reducing the risk of breast cancer for both myself and my daughter.

But as my daughter nursed less and less frequently, the benefits began to be less important to me than the drawbacks. Twenty-five pounds on top of you at 6 a.m. hinders your breathing somewhat. A toddler asking to nurse very clearly at the playground is a delicate situation. I decided it was really time to wean, completely.

This decision was complicated by the fact that my husband is one of the rare husbands who wanted me to nurse forever. Most husbands want their wives to wean as soon as the baby starts smiling. My friends would go on and on about the pressure from their partners to get the kid in their own bed and on the bottle. Not my husband. He's a softy for whatever our daughter is really attached to. In this case, that meant "na-na." Weaning on her eighth birthday sounded about right to him.



Weaning would have to happen gently and gradually. The quiet gathering of strategies from friends began. The closet nursers began to come out of the woodwork. One mom stored fast food vanilla shakes in the freezer for early morning substitution. Another mom used videos for distraction. A mom who had full support for weaning from her husband planned a weaning party, complete with a petting zoo and a clown if her daughter would go more than a week without nursing. When my husband heard about this, he told our daughter, "weaning parties are very sad occasions."

I decided to go the treat route - jellybeans. Those beautifully colored, tiny little candies could be doled out one by one to my daughter, making me feel less guilty for the early morning sugar load.

"Would you like a jellybean?" became my early morning mantra whispered into her ear. "Four jellybeans and a show," my daughter would whisper back. I had no idea my daughter was so skilled at negotiating, but that sealed the deal. It didn't take long. And it only took a month before my husband figured it out. His response? "Those are mine again?" Actually, they're *mine*.

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Benefits of breastfeeding:

The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, Seventh revised edition. Published by La Leche League International, 2004.

Freudenheim, J.L. et al. Exposure to breastmilk in infancy and the risk of breast cancer. *Epidemiology* 1994; 5(3):324-31.

Statistics on breastfeeding in the U.S. from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/NIS_data/index.htm



The World Health Organization's infant-feeding recommendation

<http://www.who.int/nut/inf.htm>

As stated in the [Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding](#) (paragraph 10):

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed¹ for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health.² Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond.



Top Tip #3

Bribes are an acceptable form of parenting. Your child will not be scarred for life by them and you will keep your sanity. If the concept bothers you, reframe it as part of the activity. Have a kid who won't get into the car seat? Try, "I have some fruit treats for the ride home!" Well, yes, they have to get into their car seat to start the ride home, but that's neither here nor there, is it?



Chapter 4: Mia's Baby Book

It's part happiness and part morbid exercise for me to write in my daughter's baby book. My father died when I was 18, long before I could appreciate his knowledge of my early childhood. I can't help but think of him every time I open the baby book and start to write. In case something happens and I don't make it to Mia's adulthood, I want my daughter to know, in detail, what she was like during her early childhood.

My mother kept a baby book. She diligently recorded dates of vaccinations, congratulation cards and birthday presents received. Although I pore over the book and love her for her effort, none of it truly tells me anything about myself. I look for my emerging personality and only find dates of emerging teeth.

I admit that, like my mother, I do write down the first things, such as the first word Mia said and the first step she took. I know that someday when my daughter has children, she may want to know those things. But I also want her to know how she developed as a person.

I recorded the first joke she ever made and things that a three-year-old finds hilarious. What makes her angry and how she handles it. How she will ride a pony for an hour and a half straight while the other children run around, and how she cries when we have to leave. How she will paint for hours at a time, eventually painting her toy ponies, her Barbie dolls, and finally herself. How she draws maps all day long. Perhaps when she's changing careers at some point and searching for what she loved as a child, I hope that these facts will give her information long lost to most adults.

I have a driving force that compels me to also tell her my experience of motherhood. I described the sheer exhilaration that came over me when I found out I was pregnant, but I also recorded the panic. The mama love that overwhelmed me the first time I saw her is there, as well as how sleep deprivation makes for all kinds of crazy thoughts.



I want Mia to know that mothering is not always easy. That sometimes it's nearly impossible and downright exhausting. And that other mothers can be a life saver.

I also entered why her father and I are parenting the way we are and the philosophical reasons behind the choices we make. I think it will go a long way towards her self-understanding; longer than the usual "we did the best we could."

One of the oddest things I noted in Mia's baby book was the type of face powder, the soap and the deodorant I use. After my father died, his smell is something I could never quite recapture. I hope the smells of me will meet some basic need for my daughter someday.

The publishers of baby books today don't have what I write in mind. You never see sections entitled "My favorite perfume in case I die." I ignore most of the page titles and just put what I want. I know the chances of me remembering these little details 20 years from now are slim to none. So I hope that everything I write will tell her why she is who she is and just as importantly who her mother was as well.



Top Tip #4

There are all kinds of ways to keep a baby book. Writing in an actual baby book is just one of them. You can video blog, picture blog or even just have a jar on the counter. Write little things you want to remember on scraps of paper and put them in the jar. If you're going to attempt a baby book, try to pick a book with lots of space and think of it spanning age 0 to 5 rather than just the first year. Try to write at least once a year, on your child's birthday.

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