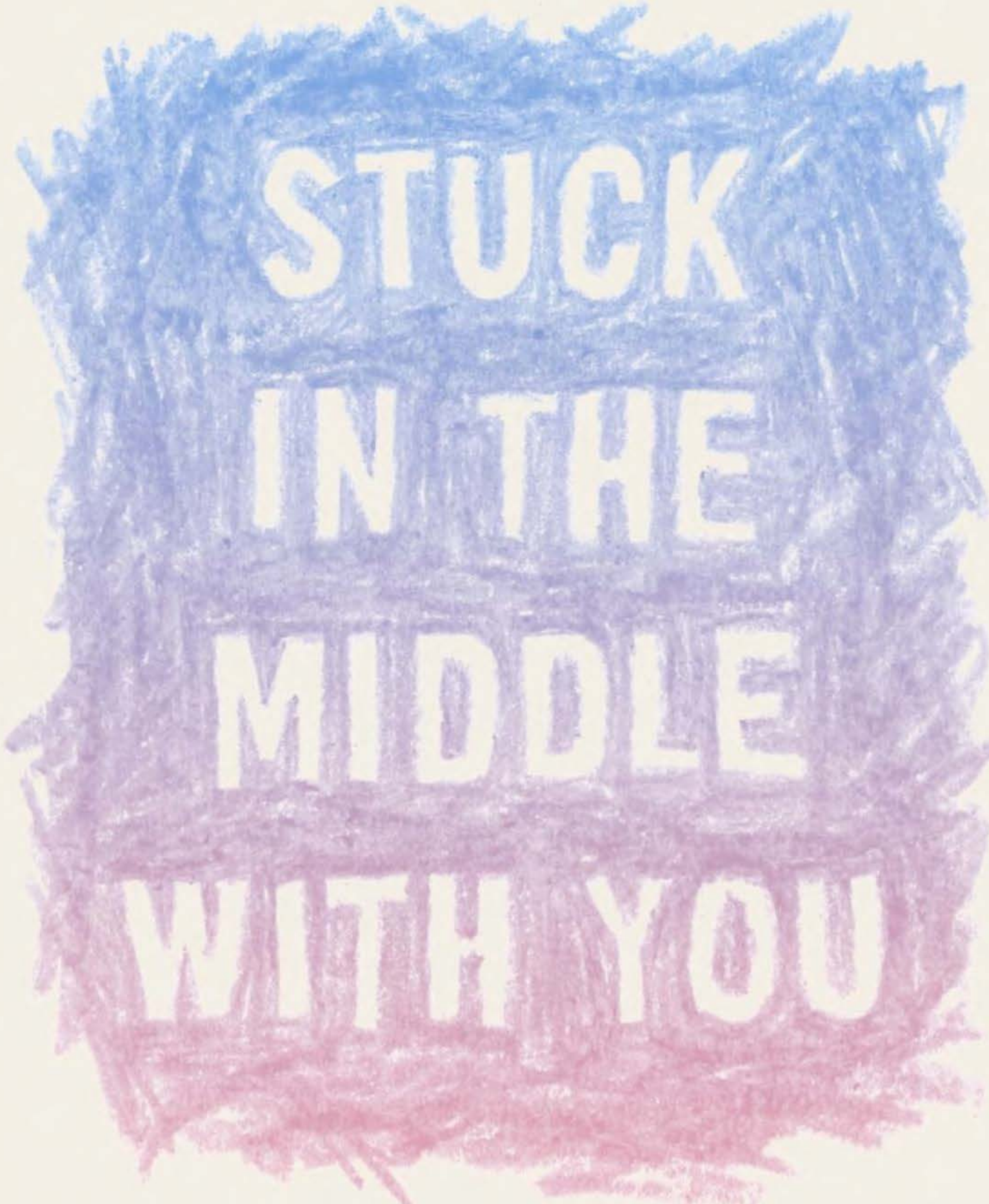


A MEMOIR OF PARENTING IN THREE GENDERS



STUCK  
IN THE  
MIDDLE  
WITH YOU

Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *She's Not There*

**JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN**

"No other memoirist I've read so perfectly blends intimacy and witty remove, soul-searching and slapstick, joy and pain."

—MARY ROACH, AUTHOR OF *STIFF* AND *PACKING FOR MARS*

FEATURING CONVERSATIONS WITH  
RICHARD RUSSO, TREY ELLIS, AUGUSTEN  
BURROUGHS, EDWARD ALBEE, TIMOTHY  
KREIDER, ANN BEATTIE, SUSAN MINOT,  
AND OTHER PARENTS AND FORMER  
CHILDREN

[ STUCK IN  
THE MIDDLE  
WITH YOU ]

A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders

JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN

WITH AN AFTERWORD BY ANNA QUINDLEN

B\D\W\Y  
Broadway Books / New York

Jennifer Finney Boylan is available for select readings and lectures. To inquire about a possible appearance, please contact the Random House Speakers Bureau at [rhspeakers@randomhouse.com](mailto:rhspeakers@randomhouse.com).

Copyright © 2013 by Jennifer Finney Boylan  
Reader's Guide Copyright © 2014 by Random House LLC  
“Extra Libris” and the accompanying colophon are trademarks of Random House LLC.

All rights reserved.  
Published in the United States by Broadway Books, an imprint of the  
Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC,  
a Penguin Random House Company, New York.  
[www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com)

BROADWAY BOOKS and its logo, B \ D \ W \ Y,  
are trademarks of Random House LLC.

Originally published in hardcover in slightly different form in the United States by  
Crown Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random  
House LLC, New York, in 2013.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Boylan, Jennifer Finney, 1958–

Stuck in the middle with you : a memoir of parenting in three genders /  
by Jennifer Finney Boylan; and featuring conversations with Richard Russo, Trey Ellis,  
Augusten Burroughs, Edward Albee, Timothy Kreider, Ann Beattie, Susan Minot &  
other parents and former children; with an afterword by Anna Quindlen.

1. Boylan, Jennifer Finney, 1958—Family. 2. Novelists, American—20th century—  
Biography. 3. English teachers—United States—Biography. 4. Male-to-female  
transsexuals—Family relationships—United States. 5. Parents—United States—  
Interviews. 6. Children—United States—Interviews. 7. Gender identity—  
United States. 8. Families—United States. I. Title.

PS3552.O914Z478 20013  
818'.5403—dc23 2012025579

ISBN 978-0-7679-2177-0  
eBook ISBN 978-0-307-95284-4

Printed in the United States of America

*Book design by Lauren Dong*  
*Cover design by Anna Kochman*  
*Author photograph: Jim Bowdoin*  
*Frontispiece photograph: © Heather Perry*  
*Photograph, page viii: Courtesy of the author*

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Paperback Edition

# CONTENTS

CAVEAT EMPTOR xi

I. DADDY 1

RED CARD 3

THE PLOVER'S EGG 15

I'M AWAKE. I'M AWAKE. 39

TIME OUT I: CONVERSATIONS WITH FATHERS AND SONS

RICHARD RUSSO, RALPH JAMES SAVARESE, TREY ELLIS, AUGUSTEN  
BURROUGHS 57

II. MADDY 89

THAT'LL TEACH 'EM A LESSON 91

THE ORPHAN GIRL 103

THE GRIFFIN 113

TIME OUT II: CONVERSATIONS WITH WAIFS AND ANGELS

EDWARD ALBEE, BARBARA SPIEGEL, TIMOTHY KREIDER 121

III. MOMMY 157

THE JUMBLE 159

THE MUFFLE VOICE 175

[I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO CRY ABOUT](#) 189

[IN THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING](#) 201

TIME OUT III: CONVERSATIONS WITH MOTHERS AND  
DAUGHTERS

CHRISTINE MCGINN, ANN BEATTIE, VERONICA GERHARDF,  
SUSAN MINOT 221

[POSTLUDE: ANTI-VENOM](#) 259

[AFTERWORD: SAME MONKEYS, DIFFERENT BARREL](#) 265

A CONVERSATION WITH JENNIFER AND DEIRDRE BOYLAN  
BY ANNA QUINDLEN

[RESOURCES](#) 281

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#) 285



© Lev Radin/Shutterstock

## DR. CHRISTINE MCGINN

*You cannot deny the biology of men and women. But where society gets it wrong is the binary. There are plenty of people in between. It's a mystery, and I think it always will be a mystery.*

Dr. Christine McGinn is a surgeon, a mother of two, a backup flight surgeon for the space shuttle program, and a transgender woman. As a man, she saved her sperm before transition; ten years later she used that sperm to have children with her partner Lisa. The two of them are both biological mothers of their son and daughter, and each mother was able to breast-feed the twins. I sat down to talk with Christine at her office in New Hope, Pennsylvania, on a hot summer day in 2011.



CHRISTINE MCGINN: Because I was a physician, I knew that you could freeze sperm and use it later. So that's what I wanted to do. This was in the last few months before I started living as a woman.

At that point of my life, I was really afraid. I didn't realize that the transition could be a success. It was like jumping off a cliff. The whole donation thing was very scary. I had to go down and do something that was very male in order to save the sperm. *[Laughs]*

It was totally opposite of everything I was working on at that time in my life. Producing sperm? I mean, please.

I found out that I had to do it, like, six or ten times. I started off trying to do it at home and race in, and it was so embarrassing. I ended

up finding a parking garage, because I would—I could just—I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it at the place, like, the sperm donation room.

JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN: I had a friend who donated sperm for an in vitro. He said it was a strange experience to kind of be taken to a very professional environment, and then to close the door and to open the drawer and to find the copies of *Bouncy* and *D-Cup*.

CM: Like that's going to work? You know? I'm a woman. [*Laughs*] You should have, like, some chocolate here. And a candle.

JFB: Maybe some Joni Mitchell. [*Laughs*] All right, so somehow, you managed to save your sperm.

CM: Right. And then, for the next ten years, I just was freaking out. I would read conflicting studies about how long sperm can survive frozen. It was not the typical situation, but I had a biological clock. Because, apparently, the biggest danger to frozen sperm, or embryos, is ionizing radiation from the universe. [*Laughs*] Which you cannot—you, like, cannot shield against.

JFB: Ionizing radiation from the universe?

CM: Yes. These little particles that are zipping through the universe, and right through our bodies; we can handle the direct hits because we have a lot of different cells, but a sperm is, like, one cell. So the longer it sits, the longer it's exposed, they don't know if it's going to work or whatever.

JFB: And you didn't have a relationship at the time?

CM: Well, I was ending one. I was separated and still married, pending divorce.

JFB: How many times have you been married, in all?

CM: I've been legally married twice, and civil union once, with Lisa.

JFB: When you were a husband—and I don't know about you, I always find it weird to talk about when I was a man—did you and your—wives ever talk about having children?

CM: Of course, because it was very important to me. I've always really wanted kids. It's something I never had any doubts about. Ironically, both of my wives never had kids and had no interest in them.

JFB: What kind of husband were you? What kind of father would you have been?

CM: I think answering that question is just going to be kind of, like, making stuff up. [*Laughs*]

JFB: Hey, man, there's a great future for you as a memoirist.

CM: I'm not playing games with you. I think I would've been exactly like I am now, minus the breast-feeding. [*Laughs*]

I mean, I'm a parent, you know. This whole mother/father stuff is kind of random.

JFB: Is it a false binary? As someone who was a father, and who has been a mother, I'm finding that, in most ways, what I've taught my children are the same things I was going to teach them in any case. But as a man, I was a fairly feminine hippie thing. You know, I've never known how to throw a football. But you, Christine. I mean—you were in the navy? I'm going to guess you knew how to throw a football.

CM: Yes. And I look forward to that now. I really do. Like, I cannot wait to take my kids fishing. But there are plenty of women who fish, you know. My sister is a perfect example. She loves to fish. But it's like my brain lives in two worlds, the "Yes, you have to live in this society where these stereotypes exist about what is male and what is female." Then there is me; I just do what comes natural to me, and sometimes it's considered male by everybody, and sometimes it's considered female by everybody, and I don't really care.

Then there's the scientist in me that knows that there is a difference, there is not a binary, but a gender spectrum. There are chemicals that are different in men and women. And when a transgender woman transitions, we are somewhere in the middle. Especially having gone through a simulated pregnancy, in order to breast-feed, I felt the changes of those hormones. I felt my milk let down when not only my baby would cry, but a baby on TV would cry, and even, ridiculously, when a door would close and make a squeak.

You cannot deny the biology of men and women. But where society gets it wrong is the binary. There are plenty of people in between. It's a mystery, and I think it always will be a mystery.

JFB: It sounds like you're saying that males and females really are two different beings, with plenty of territory in between, but motherhood and fatherhood are social constructs, especially if we're not



talking about giving birth, going through labor. Post-birth, is your relationship with the child the same whether you're male or female?

CM: I challenge people to define what is male and what is female, and I think you run into the same problem when you try and define what is mother and what is father. Especially now that we have science, and you can have an adoptive mother that breast-feeds.

So the mother produced the egg but didn't deliver the baby. The definitions are changing.

JFB: Is it a good thing, that the definitions have changed?

CM: Yeah, I think so. There is nothing in my life that has compared to the amount of love I have for my children. Anytime there is that much love, it's gotta be a good thing.

Ironically, for as much love as I have for my children, I see a lot of hatred produced by people who are not comfortable with that idea. Like the case of the "pregnant man" on TV a few years ago.

JFB: That case kicked up a lot of dust. I get asked about it a lot. I try to take a middle path and basically say, "You know, whatever—here's a family of people that love each other. How can you be against that?" But it is funny the way even transgender people are sometimes as uncomfortable as anybody with the idea of there being something more than two binary choices.

CM: Right. You know, even though I can throw a baseball, I tend to be more of a binary person. I do get gender spectrum and gender queer. I get it all. But personally, that's not where I fit. So I can become uncomfortable by that as well.

JFB: I saw a T-shirt one time that said, "There are only two kinds of people: those who reject the binary, and those who don't."

CM: That's funny.

JFB: Let's back up. Eventually, you wound up with Lisa. Could you talk about your relationship? When did you tell her you were trans? She didn't know when you first started dating.

CM: It was our third date. We went out to dinner, and it was hard. She was assuming I had been married to a man. She was assuming I was one of these lesbians that wasn't sure of their sexual orientation. She wasn't taking me very seriously, because she thought I wasn't, you

know, a true lesbian, a card-carrying member. What we call a gold-star lesbian.

And here I am, nervous, because I'm trying to, like, talk about my former marriages without being too specific. So it was really kind of funny.

JFB: I find that the—sometimes, the simplest, most innocent questions that people ask me can demand that I either lie or else have a conversation that's much more intimate than I want to have, simply in order to tell the truth.

CM: Right, right.

JFB: I'll frequently meet other moms who will say, you know, "What does your husband do?"

CM: And you don't feel like telling them the truth. Like, you don't feel like opening yourself up to their judgment.

JFB: I remember one time I was doing a story for *Condé Nast Traveler*. I was having dinner by myself, as you often do when you're a traveling reporter, in Nevis, which is a Caribbean island. And—

CM: It's also a lesion, in plastic surgery, that could be removed. [Laughs]

JFB: [Laughs] Well—

CM: How do you spell it?

JFB: N-E-V-I-S.

CM: Is it, like, a little red island or something? [Laughs]

JFB: It's next to St. Kitts. Somehow, sitting at the table I made the decision—I'd had a few drinks, and I just decided to be a widow. So I just told them, "Yeah, I used to be married, but you know, he died." And so then I could describe the man I was married to as my former self.

CM: I've had fantasies of doing that, but I've never had the guts.

JFB: Well, can I say, don't do it, because you immediately feel like a creep, because people are sympathizing with you and their eyes are tearing up over something that, in fact, never happened.

CM: It's so George Costanza.

JFB: Exactly. It's the transgender equivalent of George Costanza.

CM: "I'm an architect!"

JFB: So what did Lisa do when you finally spilled the beans?

CM: I said, "I have to tell you something." She's like, "What?" And I said, "Well, you know, when I said I was married?" I don't remember exactly how I said it, but I said something like, "I wasn't the woman in the marriage." [*Laughs*] I was trying not to have to say it.

And this is when I fell in love with her. She just said, "I'm attracted to you. You don't have to go into all that right now. I just want to sit here and have dinner and get to know you. That doesn't matter to me." Which, at that moment, was pretty cool.

JFB: As the relationship deepened, did you have to negotiate your former male identity in any way? Did she have to get her mind around it, or did she essentially say, "Okay, I'm with you, I'll follow you," from that moment onward?

CM: She was, like, an A-student in gender studies. Being a feminist and a lesbian, I—well, that doesn't qualify her, because there are a lot of feminists and lesbians that do not get the transgender thing at all.

JFB: Not to mention gay men. I've seen that. What's the phrase about, "To someone who only has a hammer, everything looks like a nail?"

CM: I agree. But she got it.

JFB: How long after—how long into the relationship did you start talking about kids?

CM: I kind of wanted to get this done by the time I was forty. And yet—this is the kind of thing you don't push somebody into.

JFB: It was a biological clock for you, in a way.

CMG: Yeah, more than one, because I was scared that my sperm wouldn't work the longer they sat.

JFB: Was there a moment when she finally agreed? When she said, "Okay, let's do this"?

CM: It was her idea. She said, "Let's start doing this."

JFB: What was that like?

CM: It took us years to get pregnant. We tried, and then stopped for a while, because it was really emotionally hard to go through that and not get pregnant. The difference with in vitro is that when somebody gets pregnant naturally, you either are or you aren't. When you

do in vitro there's, like, ten different steps where you have to sweat it out for each pregnancy. It is tormenting. It is really just gut wrenching. We had a miscarriage.

I felt like I was in Las Vegas. Like, keep rolling the dice.

JFB: Tell me about the birth of your twins.

CM: The day Lisa gave birth, I had been putting furniture together, which, there you go, there's a manly thing. That was my job.

JFB: I did that, too.

CM: I got stuck with that gender role. But then, I wasn't the one that was pregnant.

JFB: I find that there are certain things that still fall to me, that are the man's job, simply because they're not things that Deedie knows how to do. And I keep doing them out of habit, I guess. Like mowing the lawn.

CM: I really think that that's love. Because that really is annoying for you, probably. But you put that aside and realize that it's just easier for you. That's a very loving, selfless thing.

JFB: And also, I guess my transition took away enough from Deedie that—

CM: So there's guilt involved? [*Laughs*]

JFB: I feel like, in addition to everything else that she may have lost, she shouldn't have to mow the lawn, too.

CM: When my kids were born, it all happened so fast. One of the twins became distressed in the womb. They had that baby out in, like, three minutes. And I never felt so helpless in my life. Here I am, a surgeon, and I can't do anything except hold Lisa's hand.

I've never had so much emotion in my life, ever. It was just a flood.

JFB: You had to induce a false pregnancy in order to breast-feed? Tell me how you did that.

CM: As a doctor, I knew that it was possible. I followed the protocol that involves simulating pregnancy with hormones. It's estrogen and progesterone. My simulation pregnancy was over a month before Lisa delivered—with twins, we were expecting them to be born earlier. That entire month I was just pumping nonstop, every two hours. We had a whole freezer full of milk. And you know, the first couple of

weeks of it was no good, because it had all of the hormones in it. So we only saved, like, the last week or so. But still, it was a freezer full of milk.

Lisa had no idea about the way breast-feeding takes over your life, because this was her first. It was kind of funny that I went through that on my own, first, weeks before she did. And then it took her a couple of days to actually—for her milk to let down.

The children were so small when they were born. They were only five pounds. At first we had to feed them with a syringe. They were breast-feeding as well, but they weren't latching that great on either of us.

JFB: What was it like when they finally muddled on to you?

CM: Oh, I can't even put it in words. I really cannot put it in words. It was—I was just—oh.

JFB: Were you amazed? Were you afraid?

CM: It was heaven. I was afraid. I don't know, it was uncharted territory. Like, I knew the milk was good. Lisa was a little concerned that it would be like skimmed milk, or something, you know. [*Laughs*] Like—she's like, "Is it the same stuff?"

JFB: Is it the same milk?

CM: And she was a little dubious about, like, is this really all right? I think that's totally natural for a mother, to be concerned.

I will just say that there are things nobody thinks about when two women are both breast-feeding. Like, technical stuff that you don't think about. When you have a mother and a father, the mother decides when the kids get fed. Right? The father doesn't, really. Right?

But you know, when you have two women who are filled with pregnancy hormones and have that, like, mother-bear attitude about how things should be done . . . It was really crazy.

JFB: So did that cause serious conflict between you and Lisa?

CM: Totally not serious conflict, because the most important thing are the babies.

Eden finally latched—I breast-fed her more than Luke. Luke was never really good. Lisa hated breast-feeding. Eventually we decided to stop.

I'm putting on my science hat again—when you decide to stop,

there are hormonal issues. The strongest emotion a person can feel in their life comes from oxytocin, which is the love drug.

JFB: Oxytocin?

CM: That's what's responsible for babies' bonding during breast-feeding. So the baby latches on, breast-feeds, your brain just [*makes oozing sound*], just, like, oozes this gooey love substance, oxytocin. Fathers are proven to have higher oxytocin before the delivery, and just stroking your child's head. You know, when the baby—when you smell a newborn's head, it really—that smell, it's like—

JFB: I just saw a friend's newborn on Friday, and I was like, [*makes sniffing sound*]—

CM: My niece said it the best. She came in and smelled them, and she was five years old at the time, and she's like, "They smell like cupcakes." [*Laughs*] And it's universal. When you ask me what that's like, I can't describe it, you know, and I'm a huge fan of food and cupcakes and chocolate, and so that's the closest I can come to it—it's like chocolate. [*Laughs*]

JFB: So when you stopped breast-feeding, was it a kind of a mourning, a loss?

CM: Yes. Lisa wanted to stop before I did. The problem is, once a baby gets a nipple, a plastic nipple, it gives more milk. And so they don't have to work as hard.

It's a unique situation that two breast-feeders in a relationship would experience, but a mother and father would not.

JFB: So did one of you stop breast-feeding before the other?

CM: Yes, Lisa did.

JFB: Lisa stopped. And how much longer did you keep it up?

CM: Not long, because they got the nipple.

They were both so small. We weren't all that successful at it. We were so worried about their birth weight, and making sure they got enough with the syringes. There were definitely times where, you know, we both would breast-feed and, man, I will never forget that. Like, three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, in the little cocoon, nursing.

The heat of their body, their naked body on your chest. The

amazing thing is, it really does kind of hurt when they really get going, you know. And you just . . . I don't know how else to describe it. You feel like the life force is just coming out through you. It's so powerful. It relieves that pain that you have in your breast. It releases that oxytocin, and it's just—it's heaven.

JFB: Did you ever do that thing where you would fall asleep with the children in the bed, and wake up with the children in the bed beside you?

CM: Yeah.

JFB: I loved that. It's one of my strongest memories of being a father. Having gotten up in the middle of the night. And they are so small, but such an incredibly powerful feeling, the two of you together surrounding the child. With us, we also had a dog at the bottom of the bed. [*Laughs*]

CM: And we have two, and that was also very important to me, too. We have miniature pinschers.

JFB: So how many months along did you stop breast-feeding?

CM: Three months. It was really emotionally painful, and I cried a lot. I was really sad.

I was pretty sure we were not going to have any more kids. So I'm like, "This is it." It was very sad.

JFB: Is there a moment from the last year and two months where you think, This is what it's like to be a mother, this is it?

CM: Yes, immediately. It was hot as Hades outside. It was, like, a million degrees. We had just had the kids. It was, like, May or June, and my mom was over, and it was, like, we had all this help, initially, because Lisa and I were just not getting any sleep and it was, like, round-the-clock feedings and the kids were small, and Lucas had an apnea monitor that he had to wear all the time, and it was just really hard. And there was a big thunderstorm, and the power went out.

And so, at this point, they weren't really latching very well, so we both had to pump, and then feed them with the syringes. So Lisa and I are totally, like, engorged with milk. And the power's out, and the pumps are electric. Right?

JFB: Right.

CM: So there's no electricity, it's hot as hell, we're worried for the kids. Lisa and I are in pain. We're both leaking. And it was the weirdest, funniest situation. And my mom's there. She runs out to the store to get batteries, and you know, she's just being a mom. She's getting everything, running around like an angel. And Lisa and I are in pain, we're miserable. When she finally came back, the batteries wouldn't work on the pumps—something else was wrong. Lisa and I are dying.

And so, here's the guy part of me. . . . I get the pump that has the backup battery power and the backup car charger. Like, I got all tech on it. [*Laughs*] I'm out in the car trying to get the car charger to work on the pump in the pouring rain. And it's ninety-five degrees out. It's all wet inside, like, the humidity on the windows.

I'm just trying to get some kind of relief.

And this stupid pump didn't work that way, either. We come back in and my mom has candles lit.

And then the electricity comes back on. And we all just laugh and pump and breast-feed. And every one of us is in heaven.