

Mom University

Ann Douglas

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This is one in a series of ongoing "Mom University" columns about motherhood. This time out, I'm talking to humour writer Dorianne Sager, author of *Baby is a Four Letter Word* (Key Porter Books, 2006, \$22.95, www.sager.ca).

Ann: What is it about motherhood that compels so many of us to want to write about our experiences, whether we're journaling, blogging, emailing other moms about what's going on with our kids, or writing books or articles about life on Motherhood Avenue?

Dorianne: I think the all-consuming nature of motherhood and the pressure of responsibility require us to share with other mothers. Writing about motherhood is a great way to create a sense of community; to reassure ourselves we are doing a good job, and to remind us that we are not in fact crazy, no matter how hard our children may be working to convince us otherwise! And as my husband pointed out, once you become a parent, something new happens every day as you watch your baby develop. Before we had our son our lives centred round travelling, eating out, and regular sex, I mean how boring is that?

Ann: You share a lot about yourself in your writing. How do you decide where to draw the line?

Dorianne: I'm sure that after reading my 'Sex After Baby' chapter my husband would argue I have yet to draw the line! I have to say, that when I was writing the book I choose to share just about everything. I found motherhood to be so intense in what it required of me, both emotionally and physically, that I felt if I didn't talk about the struggles and insecurities I wrestled with, I would compromise the value of those moments that brought such laughter and joy.

Ann: You're about to pull up stakes and move across the country. You tell me you're driving from BC to Ontario, mega-pregnant, with a preschooler. Is this because you're driving the moving van yourself? Because you're going to be too pregnant to fly? Inquiring minds want to know....

Dorianne: My husband loves road trips. He spent the three weeks of our honeymoon driving around eastern Canada while I slept in the passenger seat. He's from New Zealand and has never seen the Prairies, which is why we decided to drive to Ontario. I blame the pregnancy hormones for letting him convince me that a two-week trip across the country in a cramped car with a dodgy bladder and a bored toddler kicking the back of my seat the whole way could still be considered a vacation! (Luckily we were able to coincide the trip with a bit of a book tour, so we'll be multi-tasking.) It seems to be a bit of a pattern for us, the last time I was seven months pregnant we moved from the UK to Vancouver. I've told Andrew that this has to be my last pregnancy, because I do not want to move again after this!

Ann: I feel that giving birth to a book is like giving birth to a baby. Am I crazy or do you see any similarities? (Don't feel obligated to answer the first part of that question.)

Dorianne: I would definitely agree: both are painful and messy processes, but ultimately rewarding. Of course, the birth of a book is slightly easier when a glass of wine is sitting beside the computer. Doctors



tend to frown on alcohol in the delivery room!

Ann: Here comes the most predictable question of all: the one every mom who writes gets asked: "When do you find time to write?"

Dorianne: I'm lucky that I have a very supportive husband who regularly entertains Zach to give me time alone to write. When I was writing the column, I would take advantage of Zach's nap times, and the days when I could send him to playschool for a few hours - but I did find a lot of that time felt hurried. When it came to writing the book, Andrew, Zach and I ended up moving back to Ontario to live with my parents for six weeks so I could write all day. I met my deadline, and my parents and I are still speaking, so it all worked out!

Ann: It's been a few years since I landed the contract for my first book. Back then, everyone told me it was impossible to get that first book contract unless you had friends or relatives in publishing. (Due to poor planning on my part, I failed to choose any publishing barons as my parents.) People say it's even tougher to get published these days. I don't remember reading anywhere that you are a publishing heiress--if you are, 'fess up now! --so it must still be possible to break into book publishing, all the nay saying aside. What advice would you offer to any writers who are trying to land a contract for their first book?

Dorianne: Actually, the best piece of advice that I have for a writer trying to land a contract I got from you Ann, and that is to first buy a copy of Michael Larson's How To Write A Book Proposal. Most publishers and agents won't have the time to read an unsolicited manuscript - but they will scan a proposal. I found that if you can distinguish yourself with a well-written proposal, you will catch someone's attention.

My other piece of advice would be to try and find a good agent before contacting publishers - securing a publishing contract can be difficult enough: understanding it is another thing! A good agent will be able to get your proposal or manuscript in front of the right people, negotiate terms on your behalf and help shape your career. I would be lost without my agent!

Ann: Dorianne, congratulations on giving birth to your first book--and on the upcoming arrival of baby number two. I can't wait to find out what you're going to do to top this year for excitement. Knowing you, it will make for a very interesting read.