

# Man Gives Birth! Three Times!

*by Richard Michelson in April 2009*

It is mostly men, of course, who compare the writing of books to giving birth. “Oh, the agony,” we say. But I have learned never to say this when my wife, or any other woman who has actually given birth is in the room. As women know, the world would soon be depopulated if men had to actually experience labor pains.

Still, I wasn’t surprised to hear some other guys use the old publication process/courting comparison at a recent writer’s conference. One suggested the classic multiple submission method: propositioning any publisher, large or small, young or old. No matter how many times one is turned down, there is always the hope of a next hook-up. Another preferred to fall in love with one editor at a time and learn everything they could about his/her history and family imprint before beginning the long courtship. It made me want to add that most writers die virgins and others masturbate (self-published authors, please hold your hate letters). Still, for the lucky, there is the ecstatic moment when one finally hears “yes,” and the contract is consummated.

And so I have segued back to the birthing process. Now come the months of waiting, when there is little to do but worry and hope, and tell everyone you meet the titles/names you are considering. You spend your days accepting advice and congratulations, but as the due date nears, the hours seem never-ending and you get impatient as you pace in the waiting room.

Then finally you get to see to what he/she/it looks like—yourself—but your better self, and more beautiful than you ever imagined (maybe she looks a little bit like the editor too, but nobody tells you that). You proudly go to schools and bookstores and hold up your baby for everyone to see. You do whatever you can to provide a leg up on the competition. Those other parents with their “prodigy” claims drive you crazy, especially when the public seems to agree. “What about my handsome, smart child?” you want to scream. But sooner than you ever imagined possible, you realize that there is little more you can do. Maybe one last shout out to the world, to treat your babies well, as they head off on their own.

2008 brought me three new children’s books, by three different houses. I know what that sounds like. Please don’t judge. Each time it was I who was told to pack my bags. I loved each editor and would have happily stayed for life, but they weren’t interested in having my next baby. Perhaps I wasn’t pulling my own weight. So how are my motherless children doing? As it happens, their birth order corresponds to proverbial wisdom.

My eldest is As Good As Anybody: Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Amazing March Toward Freedom. She is a serious child, much praised, and well adjusted. She likes to impress librarians and teachers, and they have adopted her, promoting her virtues. I get regular and good report cards marked with stars.

My middle child *Animals Anonymous: Poems for Teens and Immature Adults* was the class cutup, rowdy and irreverent. He is floundering badly. Lately I have gone four months without hearing one word of his whereabouts. I fear he has fallen on hard times, but I am hoping that sometime in the future, someone will pick him up out of the gutter, dust him off and notice that behind the silly posturing is a child with great potential to speak to other children.

My youngest is *A is for Abraham: A Jewish Family Alphabet*. She has big plans, but it is still too early to know what her future holds.

If you see my children, please buy them a meal, or even better, just buy them. I love them all equally, but I fear none of them will support me in old age. I am hoping for better luck with my next child. It's already spring, 2009. I think I'll proposition some old lovers.