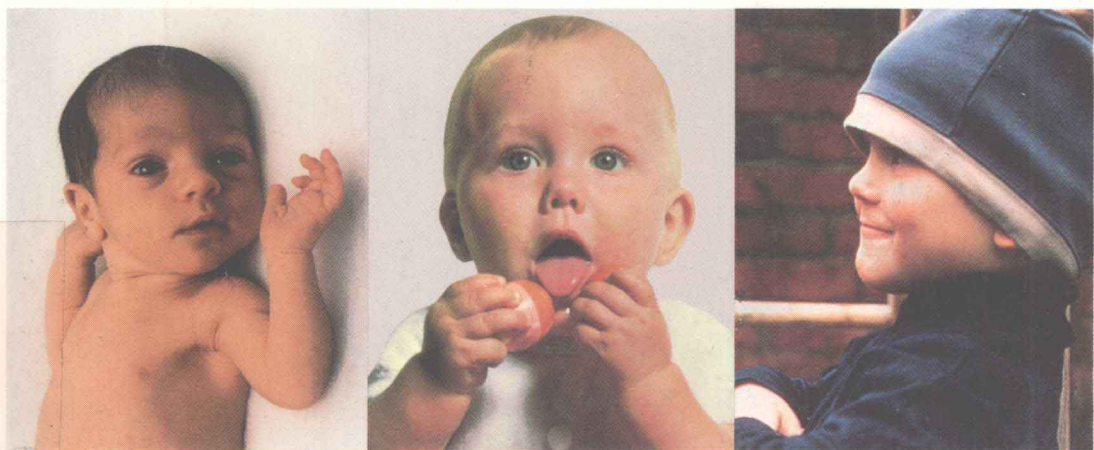


# YOUR BABY & FROM BIRTH TO AGE FIVE CHILD

*NEW EDITION, REVISED AND EXPANDED*



PENNELOPE LEACH

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# YOUR BABY & CHILD

*From Birth to Age Five*

NEW EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED

PENELOPE LEACH

Photographs by Camilla Jessel



*Alfred A. Knopf New York 1994*

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*To all the children of the Maze.  
Past, present and future*

A book of this kind relies on ideas and information from so many sources that it is impossible to thank each person individually. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to research workers worldwide, to supportive colleagues and to the parents and children who have shared bits of their lives with me over the years. I am especially grateful to those who gave me the feedback on the first edition which has guided this new one.

My own education in parenthood began in my close extended family, went on through the births and upbringing of our own children and still goes on now in a household spanning three and a half generations. Special thanks to my husband, Gerald, to my mother, Elisabeth Ayrton, and my sister, Prue Hopkins. Thanks also to my younger sister, Freja Gregory, for producing Alexander. He gave Melissa and Matthew the experience of babies most adolescents lack, and has kept my hand in!

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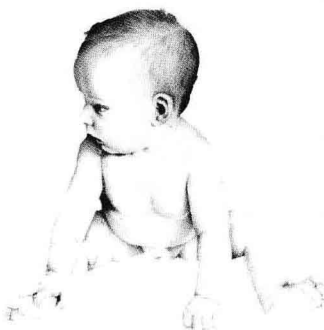
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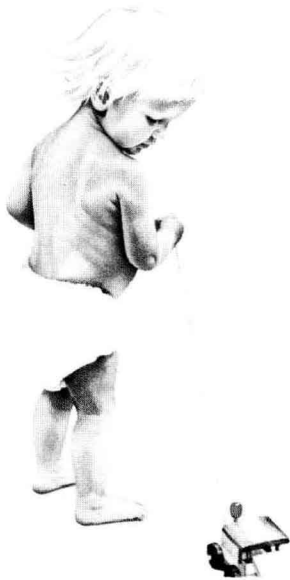
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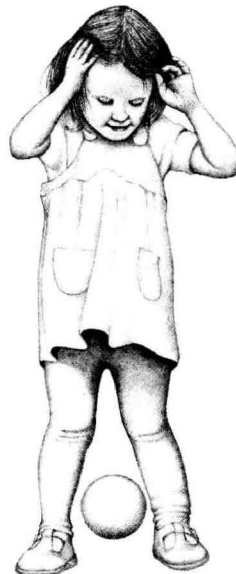
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# Introduction

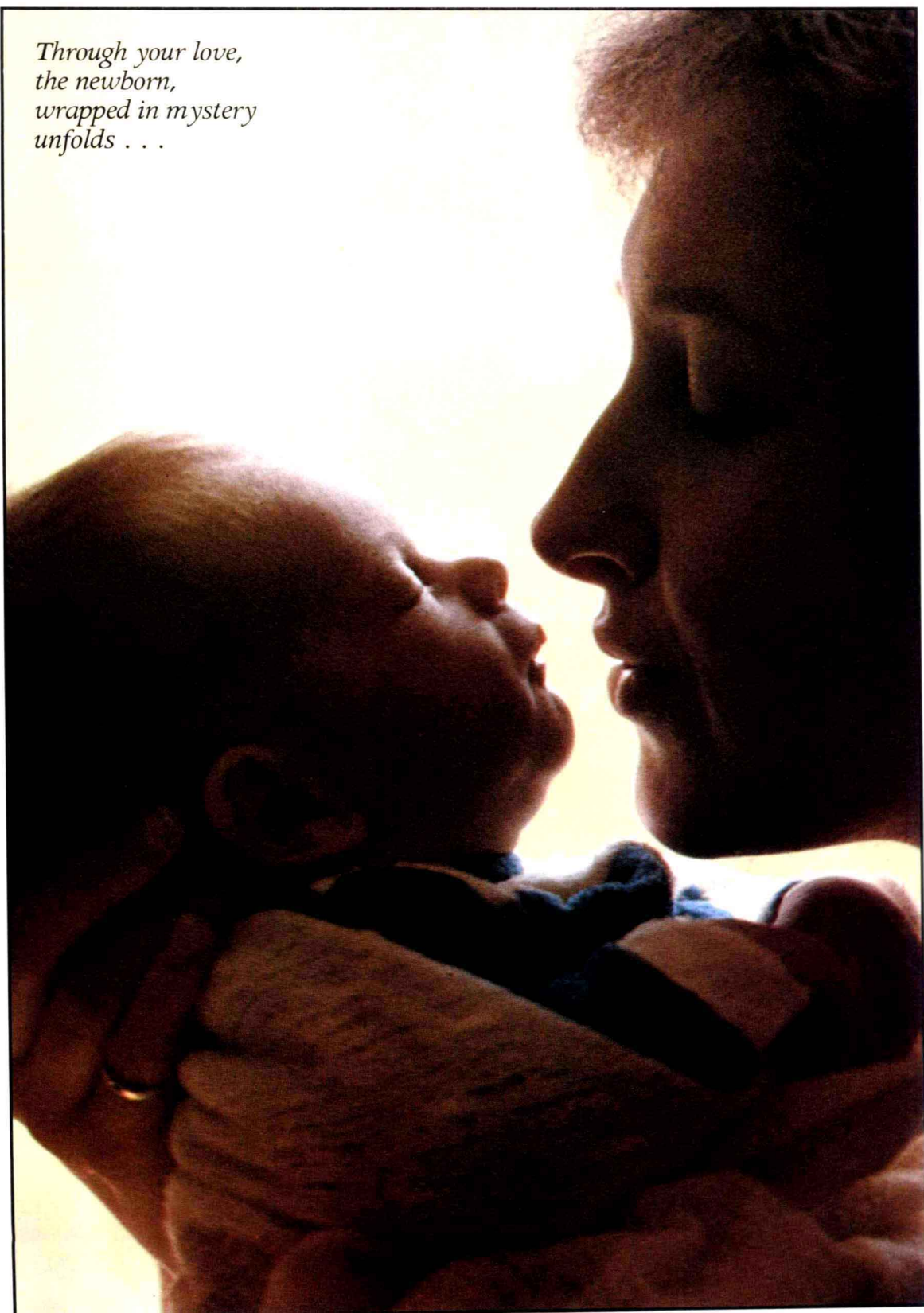
“Your Baby and Child” is written from your baby or child’s point of view because, however fashion in child-rearing may shift and alter, that viewpoint is both the most important and the most neglected.

This book looks at what is happening within your child – let’s say a boy – from the moment of birth until the time when you launch him into the wider world of school. It looks at the tasks of development with which he is involved, the kinds of thought of which he is capable and the extremes of emotion which carry him along. Babies and children live minute by minute, hour by hour and day by day, and it is those small units of time which will concern you most in your twenty-four-hour caring. But everything he does during those detailed days reflects what he is, what he has been and what he will become. The more you can understand him and recognize his present position on the developmental map that directs him towards being a person, the more interesting you will find him. The more interesting he is to you, the more attention he will get from you, and the more attention he gets, the more he will give you back.

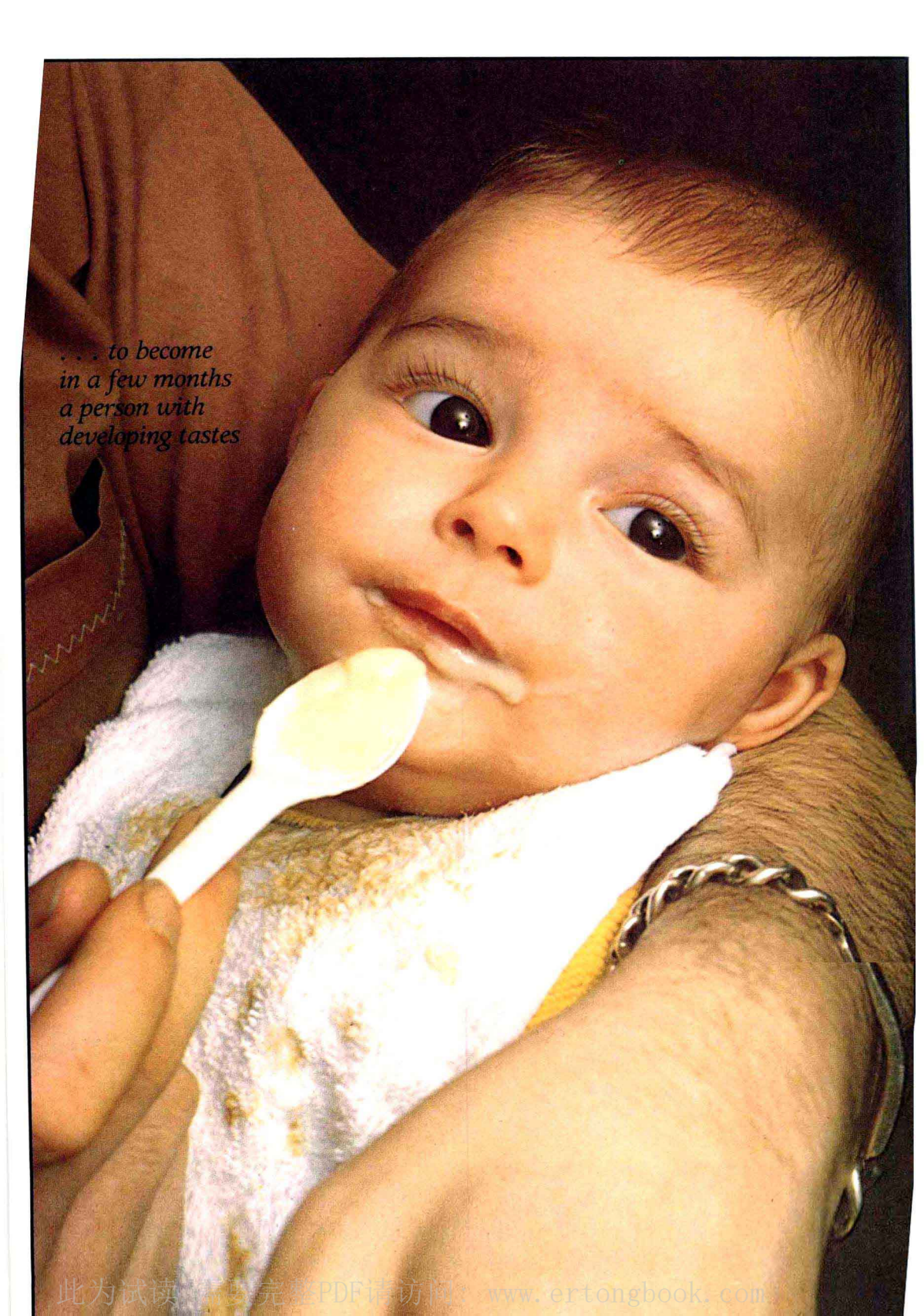
So taking the baby’s point of view does not mean neglecting yours, the parents’, viewpoint. Your interests and his are identical. You are all on the same side; the side that wants to be happy, to have fun. If you make happiness for him he will make happiness for you. If he is unhappy, you will find yourselves unhappy as well, however much you want or intend to keep your feelings separate from his. I am on the same side, too. So although this is a book, it will not suggest that you do things “by the book” but rather that you do them, always, “by the baby.”

Rearing a child “by the book” – by any set of rules or pre-determined ideas – 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 you 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, the 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, you will abandon the bath and use a washcloth. Then both of you can stay happy.

*Through your love,  
the newborn,  
wrapped in mystery  
unfolds . . .*







*... to become  
in a few months  
a person with  
developing tastes*



*... and then a toddler,  
venturing out from beneath  
your sheltering wing*





*... and eventually a child who, secure in your love,  
can discover the pleasures of other children.*



This kind of sensitively concentrated attention to your own 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. He is, after all, a brand new human being. You are, after all, his makers and his founders. As you watch and listen to him, think about and adjust yourselves to him, 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 him. You are into a relationship which is unique and which can therefore 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 weeks. You chat to your baby 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 cries less. 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 mean that you feel like giving him even 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 line will end in miserable tears from him and claustrophobic irritation for you. But if you will accept his feelings and willingly wait for him and help him stay with you, 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 pre-school 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, he will talk more and what he says will make more sense. Because he talks and says more, you will feel increasingly inclined to listen and to answer. Communication will flourish between you. So this whole book is orientated towards you and your child as a unit of mutual pleasure giving. Fun for him is fun for you. Fun for you creates more for him and the more fun you all have the fewer will be your problems.

I have written the book in this way because experience with my own children and with the children of many families



who let me share their relationships with each other as part of my research constantly reminds me that pleasure is the *point* of having children. We have them (usually) because we want them and we cope (somehow) because we love them and enjoy them loving us. That must always have been so. Why else did our distant ancestors, lacking our contraceptive choices but unburdened by our respect for human life, not expose all their babies as soon as they discovered what a nuisance they were? Yet now we assume – often wrongly – that every permanent couple will want children, but we refuse to take the business of loving them, of *minding about them*, seriously. We are in danger of taking away all the joy, leaving only guilt and hard work in its place. There are women feeling guilty about enjoying home-based life with a baby when they “ought to be doing something more worthwhile” and women who do not enjoy home-based life who feel guilty at working outside their homes “because my children need me. . . .” There are even women who, having fought to “have their cake and eat it too” feel guilty because they are managing to work and care yet feel that they do neither “properly.” Fathers fare no better. For every chauvinistic male who still believes that “babies are women’s work,” another wants to share his child’s life and upbringing and cannot do so because, whatever its professed ideals, society still puts work before people. And even when the social practicalities of life run smoothly, there are couples everywhere castigating themselves for not being “really good parents.” Few could describe those parents but they are certainly mythical. We have edged parents into a no-win situation: an emotional trap.

Children do not need superhuman, perfect parents. They have always managed with good enough parents: the parents they happened to have.

This book is meant both to help you find the courage to guard yourself against unnecessary guilt and to find positive courses of action which will truly benefit your child where your self-reproach will not. 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. 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 make things right. If your new one cries and cries whenever he is put in his crib, guilty soul-searching about your “mishandling” 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? On your back? 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. Only when peace is restored to you all will you have the chance calmly to consider more

permanent solutions. If your three-year-old panics when you put out her bedroom light, stop. Listen to her; listen to your own feelings. There is no luxurious rest for her or well-earned adult peace for you. Put the 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. It involves extremely hard work as well as great rewards. But what worthwhile and creative job does not? Bringing up a child is one of the most creative, most worthwhile and most undervalued of all jobs. You are working to make a new person, helped to be as you believe a person should be.

But every creative person is also a craftsman. He learns the tools of his art just as a tradesman learns the tools of his. You can learn this craft too. Once you have accepted the principle of striving for everyone’s intertwined happiness in all your dealings with your child, you will be able to see that there are easy and difficult, effective and ineffective, ways of doing almost everything that needs to be done. So a large part of this book is devoted to helping you to find the ways that work for you. Some of them came to me directly from my own mother; some of them were learned the hard way on my own children; most of them come to me from the thousands of other parents who let me watch them coping. . . . 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 his hair gets washed, his meal gets prepared or he is settled to sleep, the more time and emotional energy you will have for enjoying yourself and him. So no detail is too trivial to think about. You can make up a crib in many different ways but the way that keeps your baby warm but not too hot, snug but not restricted, comfortable in his particular sleeping position, is the way that is best for you. You can store playthings in many different ways, but the way that makes light of the cleaning up while keeping the room tidy enough for you and the toys available enough for him is the best.

I am not laying down rules because there are none. I am not telling you what to do because I can’t know what *you* should do. I am passing on to you a complex and, to me, entrancing folklore of childcare which, once upon a time, you might have received through your own extended family. I hope that you enjoy it. I hope that it will help you to enjoy watching your baby turn into a person, and to enjoy looking after him and helping the process along. If it can play a part in helping you to make your child happy and therefore in making yourselves happy, help 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 most 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 (see p. 277) but in advance of the birth you may bitterly resent him on her behalf. She is a person whom you know and love; he is a stranger. After the birth your feelings may swing just as immoderately the other way. You know that your toddler is bound to be jealous but on your new baby’s behalf you are a tigress. You hurt her feelings by being over-protective 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. 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 unenviable task of turning people into parents. You had to learn all the practical, craft aspects of parenting. You had to learn how to change a really dirty diaper 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 for a few hours, you actually know all that. The skills stay with you, like riding a bike.

First babies take up every moment of your time because when you aren’t caring for them you are waiting for them to wake up and cry. This time around you know that your baby will cry when he needs you and, far from dithering about until he does, you will be snatching every moment to spend with your toddler. Your days will be fuller and you may miss the cat-naps, but they seemed full enough last time and you certainly felt tired.

Your first baby really *needed* your undivided attention because she didn’t just have to demand one-to-one attention, she had to orientate you towards childcare and teach you not to *try* to write your novel in the daytime and only to invite the kind of friend who would pretend it was the baby she had come to visit. Your second baby will find your attention fully on tap (although he may have to claim it from his sister) and he will find much more to entertain him because she is there.