

Enough of Us

INTRODUCTION

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,
She had so many children she didn't know what to do;
She gave them some broth without any bread,
She whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

- Nursery rhyme, Anonymous

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

- Arthur Schopenhauer

Experience has shown us that when we are asked if we have children, a negative response frequently creates an awkward or uneasy vibe. It leaves the inquirer wondering whether there is a) no desire to have children, b) an ongoing attempt to make a baby, or c) an unsuccessful effort to produce desired kids

This book has been simmering in our hearts and minds for almost two decades. When we have talked to friends about the idea of a book that discourages procreation, and our reasons for such an undertaking, the responses, most of the time, were something like, "I would read that book." We especially heard such comments from those who had not (yet) made children.

However, time was our enemy. With two busy careers, we had little of it to spare for this project. However, these days time is on our side. So we finally put our time where our mouths are.

There are three chief reasons we wrote *Enough of Us*: compassion, environmental concerns, and justice. We feel compassion for the large population of American children who live lives of sadness, disappointment and even downright misery. Often, those conditions contribute to parallel emotions on the parts of their parents.

The environmental issues are ubiquitous. Suffice it to say, for now, that overpopulation is the root cause of most of our man-made environmental problems.

The issues of justice have to do with the ways our culture and laws stack the deck against those who remain childfree. It is our view that Western society has elevated the parent-child unit to lofty and honored heights, while casting off the childfree household as something less than a true family unit. With that bias, society has found ways to cause all sorts of unintentional harm on the childfree.

The word “childfree” is slowly making its way into the English vernacular. Some folks are dogless, carless and/or childless. We are none of these. We want dogs and we have them. We want cars and we have them (although we wish we needed only one). We have no children and that is the way we want it. We are therefore childfree and not childless. We will refrain from using the term “childless” when referring to those who opt not to be parents. The authors’ way of thinking holds that those who want children and are frustrated in that ambition, are childless. However, we have noticed that when a couple has no children but they wish they did, they never refer to themselves as childless. Just describing themselves that way, it seems, is humiliating. It’s as if such usage would indicate to others that they have failed in an attempt to be complete human beings.

We, along with millions of other couples and singles, practice childfreedom. “Childfree,” we expect, will soon make its way into the accepted lexicon since so many web sites and books are now using it.

When asked if we have children, we usually respond in a way that indicates our childfree existence is intentional. Examples include, “We decided not to have children,” or in a more

humorous and less tense vein, “I hope not,” or “We’ve spent thousands and thousands of dollars on contraception.” Cheryl often says that she has chosen to be a mother of dogs.

We offer these responses in order to make it easier for the questioner to know we are childfree, not unsuccessful would-be parents.

In June of 2007, we visited Belarus, from which Ellis’s mother’s parents emigrated to America. Our guide to the ancestral city of Bobruysk, Elena, is a single mother with one little boy. She does not intend to have more children. She explained that like most Belarusians she has little money. So what better way for the populace to conserve financial resources than by not having kids? Therefore, Belarus’s population is declining at a fairly rapid pace.

We found it interesting that in most places in the world, poverty is linked to families with lots of kids. America, conversely, has been experiencing a mini baby boom in the new millennium, despite its enormous wealth, at least through 2007.¹ In other words, traditional trends seem to be heading in topsy-turvy directions.

Ellis: As a child and adolescent I fantasized about becoming a parent. I knew that I would never be the unloving, harsh and insensitive parent my father had been. While I intended to prove it to myself, the path to adulthood included a fresh look at my expectations. I saw families with children who were neurotic, depressive, unhealthy, mentally retarded, or who had died. It became apparent to me that the ideal family depicted in cereal commercials and 1960s television situation comedies was, more often than not, a myth; an ideal to wish for.

I reflected on my own unhappy childhood and considered how I would feel if I were to raise children – as my parents had done with my brother and me – who were profoundly

unhappy well into adulthood. More and more, I began to realize what a gamble it would be for me to create kids.

Eventually I found myself living a lifestyle constructed around a moderately successful show business career. I could not responsibly bring a child into my life with the expectation that I could provide it with the care, time and attention it would require and deserve. How frequently would I be away from home? How much financial security and emotional stability would my lifestyle provide for my child? This line of thinking led me to consider whether parents in general truly consider the complex ramifications of childbearing before deciding to create offspring. It opened my eyes to the fact that so many never give procreation the deliberation it deserves.

Tree hugger that I am, I started contemplating in a deeper way than I ever had, the demands being made upon our planet by runaway population growth. Then there are the issues of animal suffering due to humanity's impact on animals. I did not want to contribute to inhumane farming and fishing practices, the turning of wild creatures into beasts of burden, and the suffering of animals in the entertainment and "sports" industries. I have also become aware of the profound negative effects the meat and seafood industries have upon our environment.

I could no longer justify any contribution to the population crisis.

Cheryl: I never yearned to have a child from my body. I never worried about my biological clock. I grew up in the 1960's and 70s when feminism took root. Women had gained cultural permission to build careers instead of families.

My first marriage was dysfunctional. I was in my twenties and could not imagine bringing a child into our bad relationship, even though our marriage counselor encouraged us to have a child. Intending to follow her advice, we planned to begin the conception process in August of that year but I left in June.

After my husband and I divorced, I lived a single's life for 10 years. I would have gladly entered a relationship with a man who already had children. If the right guy came along and he wanted a child, I would have gladly adopted. For me, single motherhood was never an option.

Adoption seemed right, though. Why not parent someone who was already born and could benefit from home and family rather than create a new human? I did not mind one bit that I would not reproduce my genetic makeup. I was almost forty when I met Ellis. When he and I became life partners we decided not to have children. After several discussions we decided that this already overcrowded world did not need our child. We also realized that having children is a gamble. You can never be sure you will raise a happy, healthy kid no matter how loving and skilled you are as a parent.

To this day, I feel good about my decision. As a marriage and family therapist, I have gained great emotional rewards by helping many children. My experience has taught me that people need to think long and hard before bringing new lives into the world.

There are now almost seven billion humans in the world. In addition to issues involving rainforests, water depletion and global warming, America is facing an energy shortage. Crime is rampant despite recent dips in the crime rate in the United States. One percent of America's adult population resides in prisons and jails. Food and fuel prices have been soaring. Mad cow disease has terrified Europe. Yet everywhere people are encouraged – whether by family, spiritual leaders or government policies - to keep propagating themselves. This raises several questions that are simple to ask, but very difficult for even the most thoughtful person to answer.

Why create more children? Why do individuals dream of, and plan on, bringing more of our own kind into this world? Why threaten the very nature of our planet's surface? To what degree are human beings gambling on creating offspring whose paths could lead them to lives of profound unhappiness? To what degree will ever-increasing population drive humanity to make demands for food that will, in turn, intensify an already fragile relationship between human beings and their terrestrial home?

This book endeavors to make the case that there are too many of us already; and that it is not *just* a case of too many. It explores the question of whether the very idea of creating more

of our own kind is even moral; and whether, by creating offspring, we are gambling that the outcome will be positive and successful.

OUR SURVEY

One way to find out why parents and would-be parents choose to have children – and why the childfree make their choice – is by asking. We created an informal web-based survey in which we solicited responses from both those who have decided to procreate and those who have decided to pass. The survey is neither scientific nor extensive. But it does give insight into societal attitudes. It tells a lot about what, why and how people think.

There is a conundrum in publishing a book like this. People who are most likely to read it are those least in need of encouragement to consider not procreating. Poor, less-educated and young would-be parents are likely to be the least inclined to say to themselves, “Where can I find reading materials that ask me to delve into the complexities of creating children?” It does American society little good to minimize solely the portion of the educated and entrepreneur class while leaving the more prolific poor to populate the country.

Nevertheless, it is our hope to spread the “gospel.” We not only want the reader to reconsider before creating a pregnancy. We want the reader to consider the ramifications for society and for the children themselves and to change the way government, business and society look at childbirth. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, why should government policies encourage people to create kids, especially those young adults who are, respectively, least equipped to raise them successfully?

We use three contrivances in the language of this book:

“We,” usually refers to the authors unless we (yes, the authors) use it as an adjective, as in, “We humans,” or, “We Americans.”

“Cheryl” and “Ellis” refer to the authors individually. When we say, “Cheryl knew a person ...” we are referring to Cheryl Levinson’s individual experience or opinion.

When we refer to other people by name, we use their real names when we have permission to do so or when the subjects and their stories are well known. Otherwise, we use fictional names.

When we quote a survey respondent and the intent of that person is clear, but a response contains misspellings, we have taken the liberty of correcting those spelling errors.

¹ “Against the Trend, U.S. Births Way Up”, Mike Stobbe, Associated Press Medical Writer, appearing on www.Breitbart.com, January 16, 2008.