



# Sometimes Ya Just Need A Good Cry: At Least I Do

BY VINCE SGAMBATI

*Just incase you are tired of hearing the lesbian side of things, I thought I'd introduce you to my favorite gay guy pal in the world so you can get a sense of how the boys are doing raising their daughter — it's an emotional thing as near as I can tell. —Ari Lev*

**WE'RE ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE** expression, "The only thing that likes change is a wet baby." I've never considered myself to be one who has difficulty with change. As a parent, I've been fine with Mona growing from infant, to toddler, to little girl. I've welcomed and enjoyed every new stage. So why am I such a basket case now? Why do I feel that the maxim about the wet baby was written for me?

Several weeks ago Mona and I went to see *Cheaper By The Dozen 2* - a cute movie, silly and sentimental. Taking Mona to the movies used to be naptime for me, joining the ranks of so many

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snoring fathers who have gone before, but more recently we're seeing shows that hold my interest — well sometimes.

For those of you who have seen *Cheaper By The Dozen* (the Steve Martin version, not the Clifton Webb version — now I'm really dating myself), but have not seen *Cheaper By The Dozen 2*, it's basically more of the same except the kids are older, and much of the plot is built around children growing away from their parents: dating, leaving home for college, marriage and pregnancy (in that order). Unfortunately, none of the Baker dozen "come-out" — maybe that will occur in *Cheaper By The Dozen 3*. I teared up during a couple of scenes — identifying with Steve Martin, as the overly sappy father. He reminded me of the father in John Irving's *The World According To Garp*, another character who I so totally get. You have to love a man who buys a house

because a plane just crashed into it, therefore he figures it's the safest place in the world to raise his kids. After all, what's the chance of a plane crashing into the same house a second time? I definitely would have made a purchase offer.

After the movie and ice cream cones at Ala Mode's, it was time to call it a night. "I'm getting too big," Mona fussed. I tried to alleviate her concern, "Isn't it great to grow so big and strong," but Mona hugged me and sobbed. "I'm changing too fast," she cried. "I don't want to leave you." She articulated what I was also feeling since we saw that silly movie and had probably carried at some unconscious level for the past several months. Things are changing too fast! Can't we slow down just a bit? We hugged and sobbed. I tried to comfort her (and myself) with, "Now honey, no one is leaving. You're just reacting to the movie we saw today." It worked, albeit temporarily.

When Mona was ready for bed, Jack and I joined her in her room. She and I were still kind of weepy, and Jack tried to make light of things, "Mona you know how silly Poppy gets." Eventually I chilled. Mona asked to look through her photograph album of first year pictures and to read *Runaway Bunny*. She knows how to milk a situation. She also asked to sleep in our bed. I agreed reluctantly because I don't sleep well when she's with us; I have to listen all night to make sure that she's still breathing. It's an exhausting responsibility.

Later, Jack suggested that I get a grip and that Mona and I were feeding off of each other's hysteria. I guess he expected me to act like the parent. I immediately took offense and interpreted our varied responses and his criticism of my behavior as a cultural disconnect. He's a WASP. How could he understand the emotions of an Italian father? Of course this wasn't it. Jack is a very caring and emotional man. He's frequently brought to tears much easier than I am. It was just his turn to be the man.

In the somber but enlightening book *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher writes, "adolescent girls are saplings in a hurricane." She attributes their vulnerability to their physical changes, girl-hurting "isms" and American cultural expectations for adolescent girls to distance themselves from their parents. She further writes, "Involved fathers bemoan their sudden banishment from their daughter's lives." Having been a teacher for thirty years, I don't wholly embrace "expert" opinion as unalterable truth, but I do take Pipher's insights seriously. I know that, if nothing else, adolescence is all about extraordinary change. I may have done well with letting go of the infant and the toddler in Mona; I'm not quite ready to let go of the little girl. But, in time I will. Sometimes ya just need to have a good cry. ▼

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Vince is a former teacher and continuing writer and activist. He lives with his partner, Jack, of 30 years; their daughter, Mona; his 94 year old mother; and several furry friends.

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