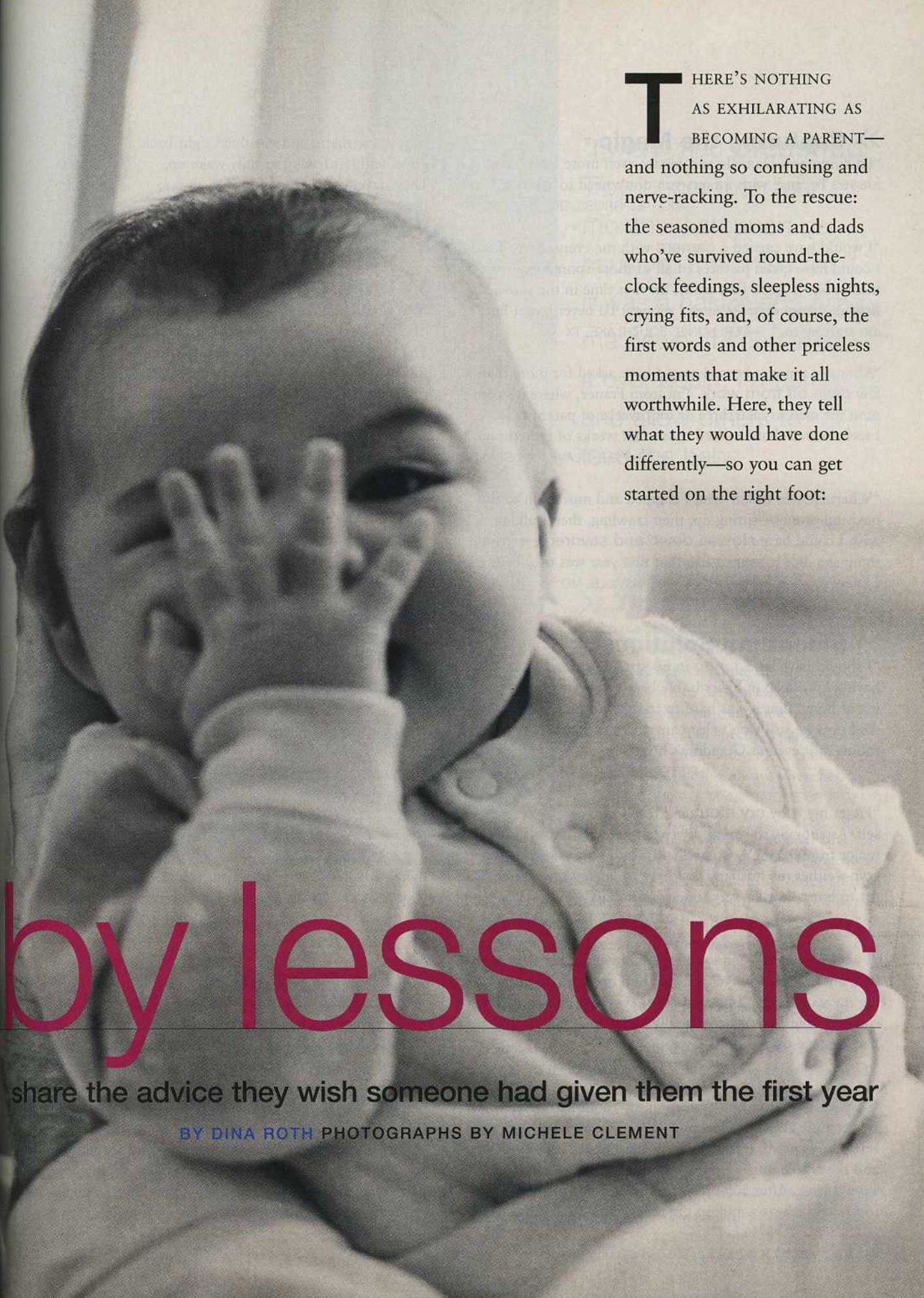


Babies aren't the
only ones who have
a lot to learn the
first year



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Hindsight is 20/20. Here, moms and dads



THERE'S NOTHING
AS EXHILARATING AS
BECOMING A PARENT—

and nothing so confusing and nerve-racking. To the rescue: the seasoned moms and dads who've survived round-the-clock feedings, sleepless nights, crying fits, and, of course, the first words and other priceless moments that make it all worthwhile. Here, they tell what they would have done differently—so you can get started on the right foot:

by lessons

share the advice they wish someone had given them the first year

BY DINA ROTH PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELE CLEMENT

baby lessons

>> Capturing the Magic

"I'd have given Danielle and Jessica even more **hugs and kisses** because with infants you don't need to ask first."

—MICHAEL GROSS, BOCA RATON, FL

"I would have carried a **camera** with me everywhere. Then I could have taken pictures of all of those spontaneous moments, like Casey's first crawl, his first time in the snow, his first ice cream cone—things I thought I'd never forget but am starting to." —TERI NUNIS, SOUTHLAKE, TX

"After my son was born, I would have asked for more than a few **days off from work**. I'm from France, where it's common for men to take three or four weeks of paternity leave. I feel cheated that I missed those first weeks of fatherhood."

—PAUL CLAVEAU, ORLANDO

"When Gensen rolled over, I clapped and moved on to the next milestones—sitting up, then crawling, then walking. I wish I could have **slowed down and savored** every little thing she did. It seemed like that first year was over before I knew it." —KAMI MADISON, HIGGINSVILLE, MO

>> Sleeptime Solutions

"I should have let T.J. **nap** in his stroller instead of always having him sleep in his crib. He became so attached to sleeping at home that it was hard to travel with him anywhere. And now he still won't sleep anywhere except his bedroom—not even at Grandma's house."

—STEPHANIE RANSOM, MERRICK, NY

"I'd let my baby **cry it out** and teach her to go to sleep herself. As soon as she cried, I went to her, and now we're in major trouble. She's two and still won't go to sleep on her own—either my husband or I have to lie down with her. We get to bond, but it's very time-consuming."

—DOT SENNE, DAYTONA BEACH, FL

"I would have had our son **sleep** in his crib. He slept in our bed, and it took four years to get him out! At one point during my wife's second pregnancy, he was tossing and turning so much that he was accidentally kicking her. She actually had to sleep on the floor!"

—PAUL SILVERSTEIN, NEW YORK CITY

"I wish I'd had my **twins** sleep in my room immediately. By the time I'd hear them and walk to their room, they were screaming and all frazzled. It was hard to settle them down, and the whole nursing process took a lot longer than it should have. After a couple of months, I put them in my room, and it was a million times easier—I'd sense them stir-

ring, nurse them, and put them right back down without having to fully wake up. They stayed in my room until they were five months old."

—LESLIE LIDO, MERRICK, NY

>> Love Objects

"We would have kept my son's **blankets and stuffed animals** in his bedroom.

The sacred items are less likely to get lost this way—and when they're missing, bedtime's a nightmare."

—PATTI NAIM, BRECKSVILLE, OH

"I'd have taken Brooke's **pacifier** away before she was a year old. While it was great for when she was cranky, now that she's two, we have a big problem. She's really addicted to her Binkies and has ten in her crib alone. If I had taken them away when she was younger, she would have cried and gotten over it. Now it's going to be a long haul to get rid of them."

—RANDI KAMER, CHAPPAQUA, NY

"I would have given my son more time to **play independently**. From the start, I was in his face, singing, playing, or talking just about every moment he was awake. Now Joseph is three and still very dependent on me and my husband: He often says, 'I want you to do it, Mommy,' when he's trying to put a tower of blocks together or find a particular toy. I think there's a better balance of playing with your baby and letting him be alone a bit too."

—HOLLY SCHMIDT, BAY VILLAGE, OH

>> The Right Stuff

"I didn't need to run out and get every **baby gadget** on the market. I used to buy everything, from self-feeding bottles to special pacifier cleaners, and carry it all around in my diaper bag, which weighed three hundred pounds. But after using each item once or twice, I realized that most of them weren't helpful." —HILLARY STEINBERG, BRIARCLIFF MANOR, NY

"When I received clothes for my newborn, I shouldn't have taken the **tags** off until I wanted him to wear something in particular. Instead, I washed them all and hung them in his closet right away. Austin grew so fast that he got to wear





"I wish I had **breastfed** Troy longer than four months. I stopped because at the time I felt it was a hassle and tying me down. If I could do it over again, I'd pump and allow others to feed the baby."

—LIZA TAYLOR, TUCSON, AZ

» Time to Eat

"I'd have served Emma whatever my husband and I were eating for **dinner** rather than make her a separate meal, so she could get used to the spices and sauces. Now she'll only eat things like plain noodles, hot dogs, and special veggies, while my youngest eats whatever I've cooked because that's what I've always given her."

—LISA COHEN-DUMANI, GAITHERSBURG, MD

"I should have taught my daughter that dinnertime is **family time**—meaning we sit at the table together. I was so obsessed with

Elizabeth's lack of eating that I would put her in front of the TV and hand-feed her until she finished her meal. Guess what? Three years later, I still often have to do the same to get her to eat." —NANCY HESSLER, NEW HYDE PARK, NY

"If I had contacted **La Leche League**, an international organization of breastfeeding mothers, sooner, I could have avoided some basic nursing difficulties, like cracked nipples and trouble latching on. I went to a lactation consultant who charged eighty-five dollars, but I could have gotten the same information free." —NATALIA LADUCA-APARICIO, NEWTOWN, CT

» Trusting Intuition

"I wouldn't be so sensitive about **unsolicited advice**. People often assume that new moms have no clue and give their opin-

every outfit only once—or not at all. And by then, it was too late to exchange them for a bigger size."

—KIM MENARD, OVIEDO, FL

"I wouldn't have bought so many toys. They wound up all over our house, while our daughter ended up playing with things like tissue boxes. Often, all babies really want is to **play peekaboo and patty-cake**—anything that lets them interact with you." —MARY FOSNOW, McHENRY, IL

"Instead of waiting five months, I would have bought a **Baby Björn carrier** as soon as my daughter was born. It's the best product: Your arms don't get tired and you can do anything—eat, clean your house—with the baby right there. My husband and I wore that thing out and never had to use a stroller." —TRISH BARNARD, ORLANDO



"If I had to raise a baby again, I would **relax**. I worried about every detail of my daughter's life, like whether she peed often enough or was too hot or too cold. It's nature—your baby will wet when the time is right and will cry if she's uncomfortable."

—CANDACE AUSTRICH, PALM HARBOR, FL

neighborhood restaurant. In the beginning, I felt like I was a clock watcher—my whole focus was wake, feed, do chores around the house, feed, and so on. I felt isolated and detached." —KELLI YI, WESTCHESTER, CA

"There was this energy vacuum when our daughter first arrived—she drew all the attention away from me and my wife. I should have made it a priority that we **reconnect** and redefine our marriage. After a year, our dynamic as a couple was gone. We had to go back and figure out how to balance our relationship with this new entity in the middle of it. Now we make sure that we always take time for us."

—DOUGLAS BREITBART, RIDGEWOOD, NJ

"I'd accept the fact that I am not **Supermom**: I would have taken a day off from work occasionally and left my son at daycare, or I would've put him to bed earlier and taken a hot bath. I think that some time apart makes moments you have together more enjoyable. After all, it's the quality, not the quantity, that counts."

—TRACY SLAUGHTER, COMSTOCK PARK, MI ■

ions on everything from teething to diapering. At the time, I'd think, 'Don't they know I'm trying my best and I'm a good parent?' But now I'd tell them, 'I know what I'm doing, I didn't ask for your advice.'" —MARY STANFORD, EL SEGUNDO, CA

"I should have told my husband that I was nervous about being a **new mom**. I was afraid it meant I wasn't a good mother. And because I never said anything, my husband still thinks I have all the answers and it's hard for him to understand that I sometimes don't."

—KATHY MARCH, LAWRENCEVILLE, GA

"I wouldn't have been so militant. I was like a dictator with **my husband**: Change her diaper this way, hold her that way, play with her now. I forgot that dads have their own special ways with babies too." —MARINA LEUNG, FLUSHING, NY

>> "Me" Time

"I wish I had pushed myself to get out of the house once in a while and **meet other moms** or have breakfast in a

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To find out what other new parents would have done differently, or share thoughts of your own, go to www.parenting.com/community/ and click on the Baby's First Year message board.