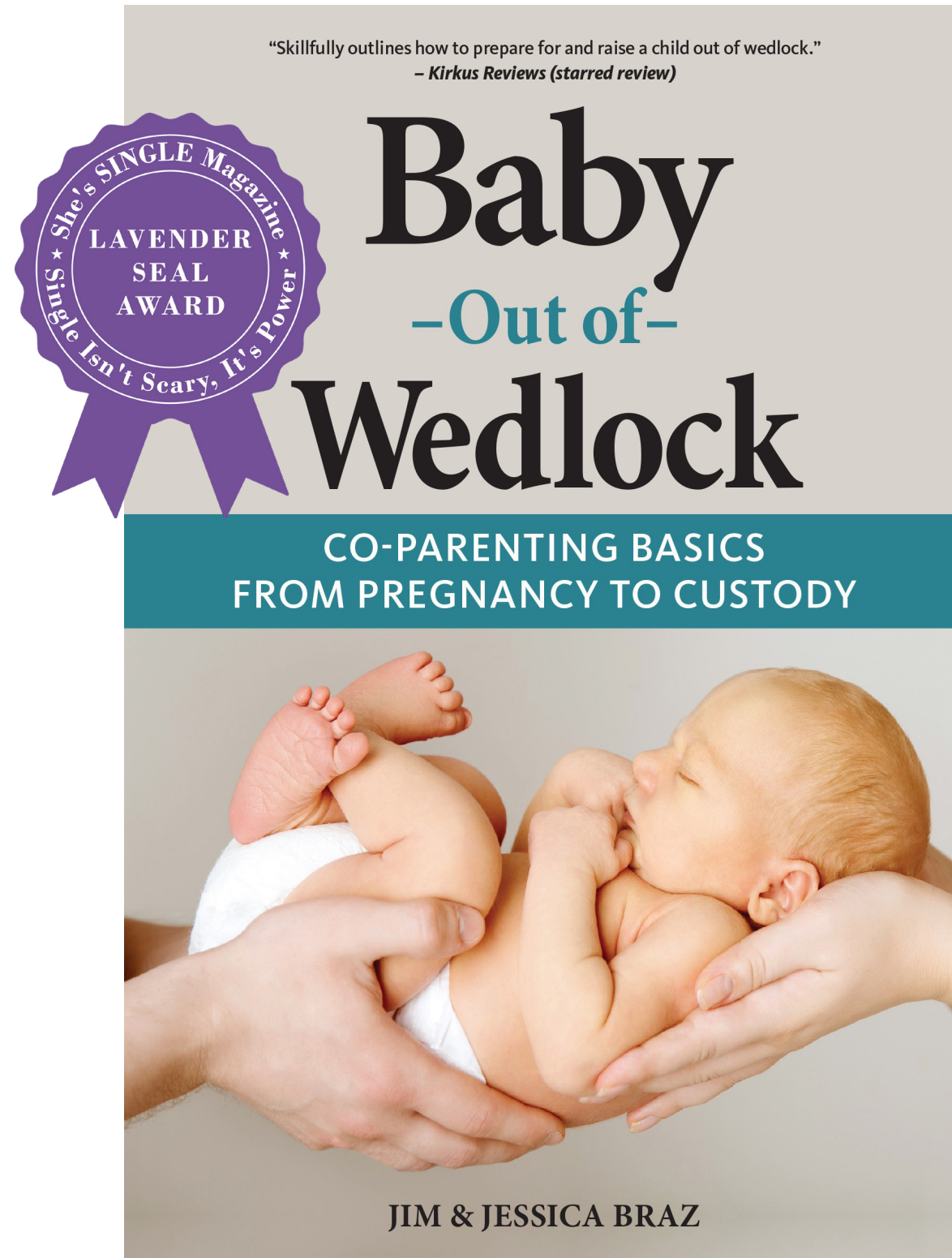




JESSICA AND JIM BRAZ

THEY'RE MORE THAN JUST A COUPLE! THEY'RE A TEAM!



The authors of, “Baby Out of Wedlock” thrilled us with their unique and compelling story of two people who managed to find love outside of their relationships. While this may seem like a story of infidelity, it is quite the opposite. As Jim and Jessica Braz prepared for parenthood with their respected partners – neither of which were married—the pair began to realize that they were somehow meant for each other.

Children born out of wedlock are children born to unwed parents. The CDC says 40% of all births in the USA involve unmarried parents accounting for an astounding 1,500,000 births. So, how does Baby Out of Wedlock factor into this? The book is a guide for individuals involved in nasty custody battles and an aid in how child support is calculated amongst a plethora of other things.

When we dived into the book it was fascinating. Not only backed by statistics, Baby Out of Wedlock, speaks on controversial topics such as vaccinations, parenting styles, sleep training, and the roles played by both mom and dad concerning the upbringing of their child/children. For their co-parents, Jim and Jessica did not dive too much into that, rather keeping the story steady, amicable, and insightful all the same.

We see that you’ve written a book called “Baby out of Wedlock.” What was your inspiration for this book and offering free coaching on www.babyoutofwedlock.com?

J.J.B: About twelve years ago (before we were a couple), we were each involved in surprise pregnancies with people we did not want to marry. We had no experience with parenting or family law, and we both made many mistakes that ended up costing tens of thousands in legal fees and unbearable stress.

It wasn’t easy to find answers to basic questions, such as when overnight visits should begin away from mom or how child support was calculated. Small misunderstandings with our co-parents led to minor arguments, which compounded and spiraled into full-blow custody battles.

Since then, friends and family have often asked us for advice on behalf of someone they know who is going through the same situation. Everyone seems to know someone going through this: the CDC says 40% of all births in the USA involve unmarried parents (<https://bit.ly/CDCBOOW>).

In addition, 85% of all abortions in the USA involve unmarried mothers, accounting for another -600,000 pregnancies out of wedlock. Added together, we are talking about over 2,000,000 pregnancies each year, or 4,000,000 parents who would benefit from the information we offer.

Furthermore, the percentage of unmarried parents at birth is 50% for mothers under age 30 (50%!) and even higher for some minorities. For example, as of 2016, 69% of African American mothers were not married when they gave birth. Despite the large numbers, we could not find any other books out there dedicated to these parents.

Seeing the unmet need and remembering how much we struggled, we were inspired to write a guidebook that answered all the questions we had back then. Our primary objective is to help readers avoid nasty custody battles and achieve better co-parenting relationships, ultimately benefiting the children. Our website lets readers ask follow-up questions, get free coaching, or learn more about us before buying the book.

What is your least favorite part of the book?

J.J.B: Probably chapter five, which is called “Pregnancy and Infant Questions.” Here we cover common pregnancy and infant care issues that *could* lead to arguments. For example, should the father come to the pre-natal sonogram appointments? Should mom give birth in a hospital or an alternative setting? Vaccinations, breastfeeding, sleep training, etc. Some of these issues are controversial, and people tend to have strong opinions on them, so it was challenging to write advice that walked a fine line. We tried to show the reader what the other parent was likely feeling about these issues, hopefully leading to fewer misunderstandings. But, chapter five is not the heart of the book, and some sections are no longer relevant for readers whose child is already born. Still, we recommend everyone at least skim chapter five because some crucial topics are covered, even if your child is older. For example, the section in chapter five on parenting styles is very relevant to unmarried parents.

Can you tell us a bit about Jim and Jessica? How did you two meet? Goals?

J.J.B: Well, we met in high school and had a very brief kiss at a party back then. But life took us in different directions, and we lost touch for over a decade after high school. By chance, we both became unmarried parents within six months of each other, and through Facebook, we reconnected and started comparing notes on our respective custody battles. It was great to get each other’s perspectives on the issues. To talk to someone who could relate to the struggles and frustration of a custody battle meant the world.

We stayed in contact for a few years as friends, and when our kids were about five years old, we started dating and then married a few years later. In 2017 we had our first child together, and in April this year, we have our second son on the way!

Goals? Find that more perfect balance between work, play, family, etc. Be better parents and co-parents. For us, this often means learning how not to sweat the small stuff. We are blessed in so many ways; when we find ourselves upset about one thing or another, it’s usually regarding something that doesn’t matter in the long run.

What is the one thing that you wish for audiences to take away from your book?

J.J.B: That is tough to sum up because we think there are many





important takeaways. In general terms, the “one thing” to take away is that being an unmarried co-parent can be a perfectly healthy situation with a happy outcome and doesn’t need to cost a fortune in legal fees. Jessica and her son’s father prove that such an outcome is possible if the two of you just learn the basics, what is worth arguing over, and how to put your child’s needs before your own.

In specific terms, the one piece of advice that we think does the most good for the largest number of unmarried parents is to sign up for a parenting coordinator for at least the first year or two after birth. Parenting coordinators are essential for avoiding conflicts that escalate into expensive trips back to the court system or other dysfunctional situations for the child. It’s usually a voluntary arrangement where both parents agree to let the PC be their binding mediator for the next 12 or 24 months. When a dispute arises (and they always do), people typically start screaming at each other and eventually

end up back in expensive litigation where problems are never really solved. Instead, when you have agreed in advance to use a PC for dispute resolution, practical solutions are found by a professional who hears both sides of the story and attempts to help the parties find a way to compromise. If the parties cannot agree on a compromise, the PC will eventually make a binding decision with the child’s interests in mind. There is no downside to signing up; you won’t need to use your parenting coordinator if you never argue about anything.

What is the first book that made you cry?

J.J.B: Mitch Albom’s book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, is heartwarming and brought tears to our eyes. *Tuesdays* is a true story of conversations he had with a dying friend in the final months of his life, and how the man’s perspective with the end so near was a life-changing experience for Mitch. We would all do better – especially when in the middle of a custody battle – to remem-

ber the big picture and how short and fragile our lives are.

What authors did you dislike at first but grew into?

J.J.B: Well, it’s not really relevant to the topic of our book, but Ken Follett comes to mind. I (Jim) started reading his famous epic, *Pillars of the Earth*, in college. I remember thinking there was no way I would get through this 1000 page book about life in England 1000 years ago. But as the story started to weave together – and Ken is a master storyteller – I became hooked and attached to the characters. Maybe that was when I first started to love reading. Since then, I have read nearly all fifty of Ken’s bestselling books.

What is the meaning behind the title, and did you ever think it would be perceived negatively by your audience?

J.J.B: Good question, because it does sound negative to some readers, especially the older generation who remember how

shameful it was decades ago to have a child outside of marriage. We have to assure them that the book delivers an uplifting message of hope and confidence through knowledge, and indeed we’ve had readers tell us that it has turned their whole outlook on the situation around.

Times have changed, and it’s common now (see the 40% stat above) to have a “baby out of wedlock” that the phrase felt like the best way to sum up the situation in a few words. We wanted to instantly convey what the book was about and who it was written for, and we struggled for a long time before settling on this title.

I’ll take a risk here and tell you that our first draft was titled “Knocked Up, Now What?” We had an excellent and experienced publishing consultant—Holly Brady, who convinced us that title would turn off too many people. I think she told us that with books, it’s better to choose something descriptive over catchy if you have to choose. She liked the ring of *Baby Out of Wedlock*, and along with the subtitle, we thought it did a good job of describing the book in a few words.

When writing, do you try to be more original, or do you give the readers what they want?

J.J.B: We didn’t think about it in terms of originality or pleasing readers. The goal was to help them. Some of our advice might even anger a reader at first, but we tried to stay true to what we think works in real life. For example, a mother might not want to read that the father should have overnight visits before a certain age. But if she insists on something the courts will find unreasonable, then she is provoking a pointless custody battle (and it’s a battle that she is likely to lose). Helping parents align their expectations with reality is one of the main themes in the book.

We tried to go back in time and remember all the issues that caused us to stumble. All the questions that kept us awake at night and led to conflicts. As we wrote, we kept asking ourselves, “if we had to do it all over again knowing what we know now, what worked and what would we have done much differently?”

What does literary success look like to you?

J.J.B: We are first-time authors, so our expectations were very low when we published. I think the statistic is something like a new book is published every five minutes these days, so it is tough to stand out from the crowd.

A few weeks after publishing, the book received a Kirkus Starred Review (<https://bit.ly/KirkusStarBoow>), which we are told is exceptionally rare, especially for first-time, independent authors like us. Kirkus is one of the most respected book review companies out there, and we believe they only give their “star” to 1 to 3% of the books they review. Other authors and industry professionals congratulated us on the accomplishment, so we started to feel more confident about the book’s quality.

Over the following months, the book won four literary awards (details shown here: <https://bit.ly/BOOWAmazon>), and now a fifth from *She’s Single Magazine*. We are awaiting results on a couple of other award contests this spring and are hopeful that further recognition will lead more parents to find help from our book.

We realized early on that even a best-selling book is not a path to financial riches, so if that’s why you are writing, it’s probably the wrong reason.

We both have day jobs, and we didn’t publish the book or



offer free coaching on our website for financial reasons.

Honestly, it just feels good to help people going through this situation. We remember how hard it was, even though the solutions were not complex. People just need a little bit of guidance, and their co-parenting outcome can change drastically for the better.

So to answer your question, success for us is getting off the phone with a reader who tells us the book has changed their life for the better and that calling us to get a follow-up question answered was just what they needed to avoid a nasty custody battle.

What’s the best way to market your books?

J.J.B: We are learning as we go here. We feel our book is a “must-read” for new, unmarried parents or anybody close to one, but probably not of interest to anyone else. It is not like a novel or biography with broad appeal, but it is literally the only book on the shelves dedicated to its important niche.

So, with 40% of babies being born out of wedlock, we think getting the book in front of all parents is a good place to cast a wide net. Of course, anytime we can find groups of new, single parents, we try to get the book in front of them. We have been donating many copies to pregnancy resource centers, father support centers, family law offices, maternity wards, and other such places where we think it can reach the people who need it most.

What did you edit “Out” of this book? Why?

J.J.B: We cut out some negative details about our co-parents that were unnecessary to share. From the beginning, we wrote that despite our legal battles, we have the utmost respect for our co-parents and that the book is not meant to bad-mouth them in any way. On the other hand, they made mistakes too, and we wanted the reader to learn from everyone’s mistakes (not just ours). So while we didn’t sugarcoat anything, we did cut out some anecdotes that felt too personal to share, especially if they were not needed to convey our message.

Do you view writing as a kind of spiritual practice?

J.J.B: We wouldn’t call it “spiritual,” but writing it and coaching people on the phone has been therapeutic. Too often, our lives are about the pursuit of material things or binge-watching the next hot series on Netflix. Writing this helped us reflect on where we came from, how

we got here, and where we are going. It forced us to acknowledge our past mistakes, strengths, and weaknesses as parents. Most importantly, it has felt great to create something that helps others in a real and tangible way.

How long on average does it take you to write a book?

J.J.B: Well, since this is the only one we’ve written, it’s not an average. It took us about a year from start to finish; however, it would have been faster if we didn’t have our day jobs and our children to care for. On the other hand, the extended downtime in 2020 during covid probably helped us find the time.

Do you believe in Writer’s Block? If so, can you explain what that is and whether or not you’ve had that experience?

J.J.B: We didn’t experience it for this book. Baby Out of Wedlock was more about organizing our thoughts into coherent lessons and then learning from professionals in the book industry about how to produce a final product that was top-notch from cover to cover. But we are sure that writer’s block can be a real impediment to authors who write novels and other creative works.

Lastly, what other books or projects are you working on?

J.J.B: This year we are focusing on getting Baby Out of Wedlock in front of all the parents who need it. A good way to do this is to write blog articles and answer questions from parents who contact us through www.BabyOutofWedlock.com.

We’ve toyed with the idea of writing a book sequel that addresses questions that arise as kids get older, but there seems to already be plenty of books out there for co-parenting in general, so I’m not sure we could add much that is unique.

One exciting idea we’ve had is to get the book translated into Spanish for the large population of Latin Americans in the country, who, like African Americans, are statistically more likely to have a baby out of wedlock. It’s a fairly big project because the translation is only the first step. Next, you need a Spanish speaker you trust to proofread it, layout the interior, re-design the cover, and produce a Spanish language website and other marketing materials to go with it. Unfortunately, our rudimentary Spanish language skills are not nearly up to par, so we would have to get a lot of outside help. “Tal vez algún día!” (Maybe Someday!)

