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My Life Changed When I Went From Gay Man to Gay Dad

Bradley Jacobs

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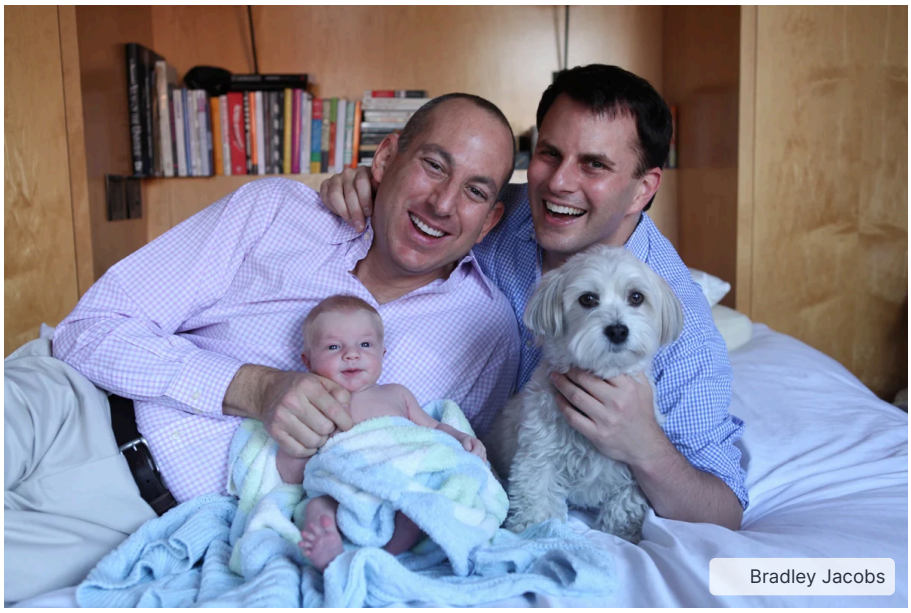

I stopped into Buy Buy Baby last week for the first time in years.

Walking through the aisles of cutting-edge car seats and high-tech sound machines, I was drawn to the most insignificant of items: a $5 **Dr. Brown baby bottle**. I found myself reflecting on a specific moment six months into our parenthood journey.

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The first half-year with our son, Lucas, was rough. But not because of the crying fits, the 3 a.m. **diaper changes**, and the cumbersome stroller — all of that was expected.

The much harder part was transitioning to a new me.

Before parenthood, I had nearly two decades as a magazine writer and editor in New York. By day, I edited news stories, Q&As, and movie reviews, and in the evenings, I saw screenings and Broadway shows, met with friends and colleagues, and downed probably too many drinks.

My partner, Jack, and I were thrilled to **finally become dads** after talking about parenthood for many of our nine years together. But I hadn't processed that my identity — so tied to my lifestyle — would shift so radically as soon as Lucas was in our arms.

I'm well-aware that all parents go through this transition.

Yet my particular journey felt more isolating because of our circumstances. I am a guy who decided to become a dad, at close to age 40, when so many of our **gay friends** — sane, smart guys — weren't at all interested in parenthood. "I love being an uncle, but it's not for me," was a common response. "I don't have the patience," was another. Was I deluding myself? Was I really so different?

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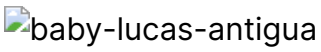
Other guys were more direct. "Do you realize how old you're going to be when Lucas graduates high school?" asked one friend — who's never even wanted a boyfriend, let alone a child — as I folded laundry for our weeks-old infant.

Another longtime friend, with whom we regularly hung out in the evenings, joked, "See you in 18 years."

And the truth is, he was kinda right. Those first months as dads, I'd feed Lucas by bottle with one hand and fire up Instagram with the other — and see a stream of gay friends,

younger and older than us, going to events, toasting at parties, sitting down to eat at 10 p.m.

Occasionally we'd ask our sitter Mary to work late so we could rally and join them for some laughs. But I wasn't much fun. One night, I sat surrounded by my **gay male brethren** in front of downtown drag artist Jackie Beat, and I couldn't wait for the show to end so I could crawl into bed. I needed my energy. Not just for the overnights — duh — but also to tackle the mind-numbing minutiae involved with raising an infant. During Lucas' endless third month, he developed acid reflux, and we experimented with a half-dozen brands of formula before finally finding a product that wouldn't make him puke. Not exactly sexy downtown bar talk.


baby-lucas-antigua

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When Lucas was 4 months old, Jack and I enthusiastically went on vacation in Antigua. Aha — a getaway with our son, how amazing would this be? We packed his gear, transported it 1,800 miles — and then mostly sat in a hot hotel room all day caring for him. We tried to hit the beach, but by the time we planted the tent in the ground, and slathered our fair child with sunscreen, I was too beat to enjoy it. Plus, we could tell he hated the heat and the sand. I emailed friends, "This is not the easiest vacation of my life."

My tiredness showed on my face when I returned. One colleague said, "You're glad you're a dad, right?" I was shocked she'd ask. Of course I was. But when was it going to get easier?

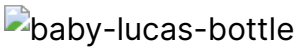
My outlook finally shifted at — of all places — the Sundance Film Festival. It was a chance to be the old, child-free me: press screenings, talent interviews, parties galore.

One night, after a film premiere at the Eccles Theater, I walked alone back to my hotel in the darkness under a wide Utah sky of twinkling stars. It had just snowed, the air was crisp, and the ground was covered with a fresh layer of pristine white stuff. I found myself running down a hill, like a child, enjoying making tracks in the moonlit fluffiness. And I thought to myself, "One day, Lucas will love this." Then I

made a different path, forging a second set of fresh tracks. And it occurred to me, “Jack would adore this moment.” I took stock for a minute. Movie directors, VIP dinners — none of it mattered. I was someone’s dad, and someone’s partner, and I really missed my guys.

I returned to NYC with a new attitude. The next Saturday night, I bathed Lucas, spent 30 minutes putting him to bed, then walked our dog Dexter around 9 p.m. — when I saw a pack of young gay guys I know just starting their nights. I didn’t resent them. I’d had my gay youth in NYC. Jack and I were in a rich new chapter, even it if felt exhausting and often isolating.

And then Lucas did something wonderful.



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Right at the 6-month mark, Lucas’ cries woke me one night at 2 a.m. I filled an 8 oz. Dr. Brown **bottle with formula**, went to his room, put it in his mouth and prepared to hold it upside down, as usual, as he guzzled it over the next 20 minutes.

Instead, Lucas raised his two little arms and took the bottle in his hands, all by himself.

I was no longer required to stand next to him holding the formula for his feedings. He’d drop the bottle to his side when he’d had enough. I could actually return to bed.

It was a little thing. But it was a game-changer. I got those 20 minutes back.

And I started to get my life back as well.