

'Naughty Mommy' explains how she regained her sex drive after having a baby

By KRISTIN DIZON

From The Seattle Post-Intelligencer on February 2, 2006

Heidi Raykeil, aka the "naughty mommy," is talking about a semi-taboo subject: losing one's sex life after having a baby. And women are listening. After Raykeil appeared on the "Today" show in December to promote "Confessions of a Naughty Mommy: How I Found My Lost Libido," the book shot up from 79,000th to No. 29 on Amazon's best-seller list in a day.

While Raykeil, 34, writes tame articles on the subject for Parenting magazine, she's not shy in the book, describing past sexcapades, fantasizing about men other than her husband, JB, shopping at Toys in Babeland, or the thrill of being checked out by a lipstick lesbian. She's also written a sex column for the online "Literary Mama" for more than two years.

(Note: Toys in Babeland was misidentified in the original version of this article.)

But the book is also about learning to accept a new child-filled life and the ups and downs of trying to reconnect sexually in a sleep-deprived, hormonal roller-coaster world while being in the throes of full-blown "mother love." Raykeil also was treated for hypothyroidism, a libido dampener, so her experience may have been more intense than some.

Raykeil, whose daughter is almost 5, said she's considering having another child, but won't decide for another year or so. We sat down with the author at her South Park home.

How does "Sex After Baby" differ from "Sex Before Baby"?

H.R.: I was 21 when I met JB; he was 22. We were in San Francisco; we were partying. We were crazy for each other. ... I guess before baby, sex was immediate and intense, and we were connected, focused around each other. After baby, it was a chore on my list; it was another thing I felt I had to give somebody; it was another person on my body. I forgot it was important to me. I didn't feel it, but I didn't miss it. I missed wanting it, because I know that's important to him and it's important to me.

How did you start writing a sex column for new moms?

"Every time I'd go to a party or my moms group and I'd say something like, 'Well you know, it's not like we're having sex,' the whole room would be silent and then they'd say, 'Tell me more. Wow! That happens to you, too?' So I realized that this was something women really wanted to talk about and I started the column anonymously as "The Naughty Mommy." And I just got a great response from it. People really wanted to hear about someone else's lack of sex life. ...

Women have varying levels of testosterone to begin with and couples have varying amounts of sex to begin with. No matter what it is to begin with, it's going to go downhill. And so, people who were having sex six times a day might only have it once a day and that's going to be as surprising for them.

What's been some of the reaction to the book?

So many say, 'I thought you were inside my head, this is my life.' (Or) 'You're saying what I think everyday.' And it was very surprising to me, because I was expecting more embarrassment. And it's not embarrassing, because they're all like, 'Thanks, thanks for telling me this. ...'

One of the funny things about the book is that people that I don't know very well will come up to me and start telling me about their sex life. And I'm like, 'Aaah! I don't need to know that.' Or 'Ewww! I'm not that person.' I definitely was very public with the book, but I'm a private person. It's a funny balance."

How common is this all-consuming "mother love?"

A lot of women feel those feelings and it's so scary and so overwhelming. ... I think it's something that mothers understand, and whether or not people allow themselves to feel that, I think it's there. You fall in love with them. This is suddenly the best, most amazing thing you've ever done.

So how do people find their lost libido or deal with their new reality?

Communication. Just talking about it not just to your partner, but also to other moms so you don't feel that you're the only one this is happening to, and that you're isolated and a freak, and there must be something wrong with you because you don't have everything covered all the time. Just to try to find under all those layers of parenthood and wife, what's really important to you. And, there are going to be people to whom it's not that important.

What worked for you?

I think it takes work. There's this whole myth of romance that it's all about meeting the right person, and when you meet the right person, you're done. It's happily ever after. The end. But, that's the beginning of the work. ...

And that was shocking too, because sex used to be so easy for us. It was so natural. And all of a sudden, it's work. It's like doing sit-ups and exercise, and nobody wants to do that. It's a constant struggle for us to remember that, but also to stop comparing it to when we were 21 and our hormones were crazy. We have a different kind of lover relationship now and in so many ways, it's better. But it doesn't look anything like our love life before, because we're not the same people we were before, and we don't have the same energy.

A big thing for me was letting go of control and letting go of being super mom, super wife, super sexy, super organized, super organic, super cook. Whatever. For me, it broke down to letting go and holding on to parts of myself that are important -- my naughty side, my lover side, my go-out-and-listen-to-music side, my have fun side -

- outside of all that kid stuff. And to hold on to my marriage as something that is important to me.

Why does the lost libido seem to happen to so many new parents -- and not just for the first few months?

There's nothing really sexy about it, despite all the Hollywood moms who are sexy and pregnant, like the new accessory is the bump. ... I was horribly sick and throwing up. Your boobs, your body, nothing's the same. I lost baby weight pretty quickly, but it's not the same now. It's that whole period of time. You're not showering a lot. You're not listening to music, except for "Patty Cake." You just kind of put your life on hold. It's so easy to get caught up in, 'What do we need to do?' in that whole early parenthood culture.

Why is this often so different for women and men?

Everything changed for me -- what I was doing, who I was doing it with, how I spent my days. My friends didn't understand me. I was completely, 100 percent different in my day-to-day tasks. Of course fatherhood changed him, but in the day-to-day details, 75 percent were probably what they were before.

Does your daughter hear all of this talk about the sex book? What does she think?

She thinks that the black bra on the book cover is sunglasses. It was too cute. My hope is that she'll grow up hearing about it and we'll never have to have "the talk" about the book. ... I don't want to keep anything from her, but I don't want to sit down and tell her things she's not ready for yet. And I think if she had a baby, I'd want her to read this book. I feel good about that.

TO LEARN MORE

Heidi Raykeil's Web site is www.thenaughtymommy.com (Be sure to type "the" or you'll find yourself at a truly adult site.) Her column is at www.literarymama.com