

**Let's Pretend We're  
Christians and Play in  
the Snow:**

**The Adventures of a  
Jewish Dad**

By Ed Harris



Published by Fifty Tales Media, LLC  
PO Box 52653  
Bellevue, WA 98015

[info@fiftytales.com](mailto:info@fiftytales.com)

Copyright © 2013 by Edward Harris

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission.

First Edition August 2013

ISBN 978-0-9898076-0-9

This book is based on actual events. However, certain names have been changed.

For Gabriela, Sam and Izzy. You have enriched me in ways I never could have imagined.

And for Anne, whom I spied as a youth bathing on the rooftops of Jerusalem. I determined in that moment to win her heart; I hope I have done so.

Other Books by Ed Harris

*Fifty Shades of Schwarz*

*Put it On the House*

*Murphy's Bed*

*“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”*

Albert Einstein



# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Just Your Average American Family.....	1
Chapter Two: Attitude is Everything .....	4
Chapter Three: Babies <i>Do</i> Arrive by Stork .....	7
Chapter Four: The Child is the Father of the Man .....	33
Chapter Five: A Chance Encounter	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Six: The Family Expands..	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Seven: Who’s the Father...	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Eight: The Road to Hogwarts .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Nine: It’s a Dog’s Life .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Ten: You Want Fries With That? ....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Eleven: Teach Your Children Well..	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Twelve: A Real Job .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

Chapter Thirteen: Honey, The Kids Shrunk Me . **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Fourteen: Parenting, Jewish Style .... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Fifteen: Embrace Spirituality, But Don't Turn Off Your Brain ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Sixteen: Don't Be Misled by the Facts ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Seventeen: Sex ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Eighteen: On The Sixth Day God Created Homosexuals, and Then He Rested..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Nineteen: Where Do Babies Come From? ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Twenty: Summing Up ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**





# Chapter One: Just Your Average American Family

America celebrates its diversity, and rightly so, since it is a large part of what makes our country great. Our little household has simply taken the concept of combining different ingredients to make a better tasting dish and run with it to an extreme. We believe our personal journey, which contains several categories of minority – skin color, ethnicity, adopted vs. biological birth status, country of origin, religion and sexual orientation – adds up to an interesting story. I hope you'll agree.

Our nuclear family, living in the suburbs of Seattle, consists of five individuals: me, a New York-born American dad, my wife Anne, a Dutch mom who grew up in the Netherlands and moved to the U.S. from Israel at age twenty, our twenty-three year-old adopted daughter, Gabriela, from Peru, a twenty-year old biological son, Sam, from Seattle, and another adopted son, fourteen years old, Izzy, from Guatemala. We have also added a son-in-law, Andrew, along with two grand-cats, Kitty and Gabe. Finally, along the way, we also added and then lost our beloved eternal puppy, Max, leaving a dog-sized hole in my wife's heart.

A common unifying theme for us that cuts across all other points of difference is our identity as Jews. As I've told my kids, they aren't compelled to believe in anything – there are no “tests of faith” in Judaism. But they at least have to respect that each one of them has inherited a culture that is four thousand years old, and

that many of the generations who came before them sacrificed their very lives to ensure that Judaism survived. Being Jewish isn't racial, as our family proves, and is certainly is more than just a religion. It is, in part, a world view that, among other things, imagines a universe created by a God who prefers ethical behavior and envisions a global society consisting of many faiths, many peoples, and many nations, living in peace and respecting one another's differences. It is a philosophy that seems tailor-made for a family like ours.

Ultimately, what makes a person unique is inside of them, but people can't help but notice the exterior. It is literally impossible not to see skin color and ethnic features. Navigating our way through life with an unusual combination of these characteristics can be a source of added amusement. For example, Izzy was designated as one of the very few so-called "children of color" at the private Jewish religious school in the Seattle suburb he attended. Apparently, most of his classmates must have fallen outside the visible portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. When I asked him once if any of his classmates had ever commented on him being so dark, he replied, "Nope, they just call me Obama."

Even the one child we had the old-fashioned way, Sam, would eventually add another category of minority to our clan by being gay. As the only member of our brood who actually sprang from my wife's loins, he is not grateful for the Semitic heritage we have bequeathed him; that of the prominent nose, luxuriant profusion of body hair, and propensity to being vertically challenged.

Our two adopted children, Gabriela, from Peru, and Izzy, from

Central America, despite being born in different countries, actually resemble each other sufficiently enough to pass as biological siblings. Nonetheless, Izzy gets teased by his brother *and* sister for being Mexican.

Sam is fond of remarking that his sister, although the shade of a dark-roasted coffee bean, is the whitest person he knows. He says that being white is ultimately “a state of mind” and not a skin color.

Had the Census Bureau shown up at our front door while Gabriela was still living at home, before she got married, they probably would have counted two Hispanics in the family. Yet, while my wife speaks five languages, Spanish is not one of them. Also, Gabriela comes from the Cuzco region of Peru, the historical homeland of the Incas, where the locals still speak Quechua as their mother tongue.

We are a friendly, outgoing family. Yet, one of our neighbors seems to avoid us. True, he's white, Christian, and drives a late model, gas-guzzling European luxury sedan which puts our well-worn minivan adorned with liberal bumper stickers to shame. However, my suspicion that he doesn't like us may have nothing to do with race, creed, national origin, or his suspicion that he moved next door a collection of weirdoes. For we let our lawn go brown every year in the oxymoronically dry Seattle summers, figuring it's a waste of water, while meanwhile his automatic sprinkler system whirs like clockwork, keeping his yard as green as a golf course fairway. Maybe we should start caring more about color after all.

## Chapter Two: Attitude is Everything

A couple of years ago, *The New York Times* ran an article about the challenges faced by mixed-race families, despite the considerable progress our society has made on civil rights. The theme of the story was the struggle such households face for acceptance among those with old-fashioned views about race. The journalist focused on the experiences of a specific family with adopted and biracial children who lived in the Northeast. The parents sensed that their family was constantly being viewed by others with suspicion and distrust because of the assortment of skin colors among them. They felt the outside world was judging them, that they always had to be on the defensive. Their lives were filled with stares, unwanted attention, and what they perceived as silent racism. They loved each other, but felt that had to fight to maintain their identity as a real family, since they didn't fit the traditional profile of one.

It may be that their experience was partly shaped by geography. Archaic attitudes about race are perhaps more prevalent on the East Coast than in Seattle, tucked up as we are in the far left-hand corner of the country and surrounded by bicycle-riding liberals, scenic beauty, and an efflorescence of coffee shops. But I wonder how much of this family's perception was not the reality of what they encountered, but their own internalized reaction to it.

Consider our family's experience as a counter-example. In just the same week this article ran, we had two incidents that could potentially be viewed as judgmental or racist. First, at the studio

where Izzy takes dance classes, one of the moms cautiously inquired of Anne why he was so dark. This gave my wife an opportunity to share that Izzy is from Guatemala, a part of his heritage all of us take pride in. It's not for nothing that he wears a hand-woven Guatemalan kippah, or that the blend of coffee I buy at Starbucks is from his homeland (a habit I have continued even after they raised the price by three dollars a pound).

Just a few days later, we were invited over to have dinner in the sukkah of our local Chabad rabbi. His adorable son, who was seven at the time and hadn't seen Izzy in quite a while, noted that he was "getting more tan." Since Izzy is in fact the color of a Cocoa Puff, we all had a good chuckle over this innocent remark. (By the way, the holiday tradition of Sukkoth, to dwell outdoors and take meals in flimsy structures less well-insulated than a camping tent, originated in Israel, where the cooling of autumn comes as a delight after the intense searing heat of a Middle Eastern summer. Celebrating this holiday in North America at any latitude further north than Albuquerque is an exercise in masochism, not piety. Nowhere in the Torah are Jews commanded to fulfill mitzvot that require the wearing of long underwear.)

We have always enjoyed the fact that when you combine us as individuals, we create an unlikely family. But isn't it the case that the most interesting stories are when people are not what they seem? In fairy tales, part of the magic is that a frog might just be a prince. In legends about Elijah the Prophet, he typically appears disguised as a simple beggar. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the runaway slave Jim is by far the noblest character, despite his

seemingly lowly status.

Once at synagogue, when Izzy was about two years old, he was roaming the hallway like a free range chicken as I hovered a few steps behind. Two grandmotherly Israeli women were chatting when suddenly they glanced over at what appeared to be an unattended toddler. As one of the ladies said to the other in Hebrew, “Where’s his mother?” I was able to reply back in Hebrew, “I’m his father,” thereby dealing with two stereotypes at the same time.

A few years ago we went out to dinner at an Asian noodle restaurant, the five of us plus a friend of Gabriela’s, Natasha, who happens Russian. When the waiter came to our table, he casually asked if we were a family out to dinner. Feeling playful, I said five of us were and one was our guest, and challenged him to see if he could tell who was who. Puzzled, he took a couple of awkward guesses, unsure how to combine all the brown and white kids and hoping it wasn’t going to impact his tip. Finally, I relieved him of his sense of unease and let him in on the truth.

We are, in fact, what a family looks like. It is not racist to notice we have different skin colors and it’s a lot of fun to be on the inside of an unusual family that often catches people off-guard. We have discovered that life is quite a bit more entertaining and enjoyable when you’re in a good mood and always ready for a laugh.

## Chapter Three: Babies *Do* Arrive by Stork

Anne and I married at an unusually young age, at least for those coming from our socio-economic background (middle-class and in possession of all their own teeth). In 1988, shortly before our tenth anniversary, we moved into a charming little Cape Cod-style house in the even more charming town of Montclair, New Jersey. Montclair oozed so much quaintness that it was like living on a movie set. The community had a perfect little downtown, with a cinema, a main street a few blocks long and lined with stores and restaurants, a manicured park with a bandstand, a library, and a train station. The residential areas of Montclair are filled with charming houses set among stately trees. On most of the streets, saplings that were wisely planted generations earlier intertwine high above, creating a beautiful canopy effect. When we moved into our little home, I was several years out of business school and making a good living. We decided it was time to start a family, meaning the type that included more than just the two of us. Accordingly, we stopped using birth control and pursued marital relations with wild abandon, on more than one occasion after 11:00 P.M., showing just how devil-may-care we were.

At the end of a year, we had nothing to show for it, except I sometimes had to walk a little gingerly because of soreness in a certain sensitive area. The standard medical definition of infertility is “a year of sexual activity without getting pregnant” (the woman getting pregnant, to be specific). One day Anne and I looked at

each other and said “this doesn’t seem to be happening, so let’s adopt.” It was a decision that just seemed perfectly natural to both of us. Neither of us had any interest in finding out whose “fault” it was that we had failed to conceive. We just figured that our path to a family would be adoption, and with little soul-searching or agonizing, we went ahead and began the process.

This was the pre-Internet era, so just getting information was tedious and time-consuming. What we eventually learned was disheartening: adopting was going to be a significant challenge. There were a number of reasons for this. First, birth rates had declined substantially since the height of the baby boom. For most generally healthy people, fertility is not a binary state – you can conceive or you can’t - but rather a continuum. The chances that a woman will get pregnant peak at around age twenty-one and then gradually decline, with the drop accelerating in the mid-thirties. More and more couples like us were waiting until further into adulthood to have their first child, and discovering that getting pregnant was not as easy as they had thought it would be. In short, demand far outstripped supply.

We went to an orientation meeting at one of the leading adoption agencies in Manhattan. Sitting through a presentation, we were essentially told the extremely long odds of being selected by the agency made winning the lottery look easy by comparison, given the very small number of babies available and the hordes of prospective parents seeking placements.

We then researched private adoption. It turns out that that would also be difficult, not just because of the imbalance between

available babies (not that many) and hopeful couples seeking them (a lot more). Another factor was that social attitudes had changed dramatically. A generation or two earlier, a teenage girl or single young woman in a family way would have been considered scandalous. A pregnant girl would often be sent someplace remote where no one knew her, have the baby, put it in an orphanage, and then return back to her family. Ever hear of the term “home for unwed mothers?” Today, it sounds like something out of Dickens, because now the stigma is gone. In fact, the trend has gone so far in the other direction that currently, in the U.S., almost half of all babies are born to unmarried mothers, and the proportion is well-above fifty percent among poor and minority women.

As a result, birth mothers, rather than being banished in shame and disapproval, now found themselves with significant negotiating leverage in deciding their baby's fate. Adoption had become a competitive process. Couples like us had to put together files about themselves describing all of the reasons they would prove to be loving parents and provide the best family environment possible, and hope they would be the lucky ones able to convince the birth mom to choose them.

In addition to controlling the decision about who would become the parents, the birth mother could also demand an “open” adoption where she would have an ongoing role in the child's life. There had even been a heartbreaking case on the news at the time we were researching our options where a birth mother changed her mind two years *after* the fact, and a toddler screaming “mommy, mommy” was ripped away from his parents by police

and forcibly returned to his biological mom.

While, in theory, you could make a case that the legal rights of the birth mom and her ability to dictate the terms of the adoption represented social progress, from the standpoint of prospective adoptive parents, we only saw the downside. Who wants to live with the fear that someday there might be a knock on your door, with a lawyer informing you that the birth mother had changed her mind and wanted the baby – your baby – which you loved to the very depths of your soul, given back?

So once again, without any debate or argument, Anne and I decided that adopting internationally made the most sense. The question for domestic babies wasn't whether they would be adopted, but which lucky couple would be chosen. Internationally, the issue was completely different. In poor countries, far too many children languish in orphanages. While there were significant bureaucratic hurdles to overcome, we knew that ultimately, if successful, we would be united with a child who truly needed us. So we began researching our overseas options, and discovered an organization that held meetings near us which served as a combination of an information exchange for prospective adopting couples as well as a support group for families who had recently adopted.

We learned each country that was a potential source of adoption had its own unique set of issues. Because international adoption is only available among nations that are struggling economically and politically unstable, the rules are constantly subject to overnight reversals. A country can go from “open” to

“closed” abruptly as a result of a change in government or introduction of new laws.

We went to the support group meetings and met other prospective couples seeking to adopt and discovered that we were by far the youngest persons there. Everyone else we met, and especially the wives, had endured years of expensive and often painful infertility treatment. Most of the other couples were in their early-to-mid-forties and had decided to adopt only after they felt they had exhausted all available medical options for becoming pregnant. In our case, we were a full decade-plus younger and never for a moment felt that adoption was an inferior choice for creating a family.

I had difficulty relating to the urge that so many others have to propagate their own genes. I happen to have an unprepossessing combination of physical characteristics, including a surfeit of body hair and a nose which advertises my Semitic heritage like a lighthouse beacon. I am unathletic in the extreme, and most people (including my immediate family) find me whiny and annoying. I didn't object in theory to passing these traits along to a descendent through the act of sexual reproduction (as I eventually did), but I certainly didn't feel it was my biological destiny, either, or that the human race was counting on me not to let them down.

And then a small miracle happened. The woman who ran the support group, Bonnie Taylor, introduced us to the fairy godmother of our family, Ysabel Llerena, who has also become a dear friend. Ysabel was living in Los Angeles at the time, had developed an international private adoption practice focused on

Peru, where she is from. Ysabel assured us Peru was “open” and getting a placement would not be difficult.

We assembled the extensive array of paperwork required for our adoption case: A social worker’s home study, police reports, medical records, copies of passports, birth certificates, tax returns, bank statements, reference letters, and so on. All of the documents then had to be notarized. There was only one remaining step - the Peruvian government required that international documents receive another level of processing and be “authenticated” by their consulate. It was the Spanish, after all, who had invented the term “red tape,” which they used to wrap their official files in Colonial times. The Peruvian consulate in Manhattan, noticing the sudden upsurge in adoption cases and the revenue opportunity this presented, had conveniently just raised the fee for this service from a negligible amount to \$32 per document. The authentication process, which drained our personal finances by about a thousand dollars, was but a foretaste of the liposuction that would be applied to our life savings in the weeks ahead.

Ysabel told us not to worry, that she would have a baby for us quickly, and this turned out to be true. One day in February of 1990, a senior executive at work gave me two spare tickets to *Les Misérables* on Broadway, as the client he was going to take had cancelled on him. Anne and I were at the theater when, in the middle of the show, Ysabel called and left a message on our answering machine (this was in the ancient times before cell phones or voice mail) to let us know we had been selected to adopt a little baby girl in the Cuzco region of Peru. She told us to

get ready to leave as soon as possible, so we quickly prepared ourselves to travel to South America. And to this day, *Les Miserables* remains a special memory for us.

At the time, Peru had for many years been embroiled in a long-running civil war, waged by a Marxist revolutionary guerrilla army, The Shining Path, who funded themselves by profits from cocaine trafficking. The Andes region, except for Cuzco and other large towns, was effectively under The Shining Path's control. The wife of the mayor of the city we had moved from to buy our house in Montclair, Jersey City, NJ, had been killed in a suspicious train crash on a recent visit to Cuzco, and foul play was suspected. We were flying straight into a war zone. I think we would have traveled to Neptune, however, and taken the odds, given how strong our urge to adopt was.

Ysabel instructed us to bring \$18,000 in hundred-dollar bills to cover the expenses. When I went to make the withdrawal at the bank, they advised me to take the money out on consecutive days in \$9,000 amounts, because cash transactions of \$10,000 and above were automatically subject to FBI review for potential drug dealing.

My best friend, Howard Stern, was over visiting us a couple of days before we left (I know, what a coincidence about the name). He asked to see the money, and after we handed the cash to him he threw it up in the air, just to see what it felt like to toss a thick wad of hundreds and watch them rain down.

Our plan at the time, which was standard procedure for adopting families, was to arrive in Cuzco and receive temporary custody of the baby. The amount of time required to process an

adoption was impossible to predict with precision, but two months was generally the minimum, and the maximum was anywhere from “who knows” to “never,” the latter if something happened to go wrong with your case. So, depending on job requirements, one or both parents would return home, either leaving the wife behind with the baby or both parents leaving and having one’s lawyer arrange child care, while waiting for the case to work its way through the torturous Peruvian legal system. Accordingly, I had only asked for a week off from the investment bank I worked at, where I was a VP in the corporate finance department, expecting to leave Anne in Cuzco and return back to the office.

Peru was one of only three countries in the world at that time which the U.S. State Department had an official travel advisory in place for, because of the ongoing violence caused by The Shining Path and the drug trafficking. The other two nations were Cambodia and Cuba. Ysabel told us we would be met at the airport in Lima by her local representative, Hector. She said when we landed and were in the terminal, we should hold up a sign with our names so Hector would know who we were. Fearing that this might be interpreted as “rich Americans, please kidnap,” I suggested instead that Hector hold a sign for *us* to identify *him*.

We flew down to Lima on Eastern Airlines. Readers of a certain age might recall the carrier from their heyday in the 1970s. As an investment banker, one of the first deals I worked on was the sale of Eastern to Texas Air Corporation, which at the time also owned Continental Airlines and the old People Express, who popularized “no frills” travel at cheap prices (now the major airlines provide

exactly the same bare-budget operations, while charging for meals and luggage, the only difference being that today the crummy service is substantially more expensive). Eastern was struggling financially, and operating in Chapter Eleven bankruptcy as it attempted to reduce costs, a relatively common practice for airlines, but it was the only carrier between the U.S. and Peru, so we didn't have much of a choice.

One of the things you see when traveling to desperately poor countries that you don't necessarily encounter while flying from, say, New York to London, is people who have obviously limited finances and who have likely saved for years to buy their tickets. Such passengers therefore tend to be extremely inexperienced travelers. As we sat on the runway at Newark preparing for takeoff, we listened to the flight attendant blandly going through the safety instructions. Because the plane was going on a route that would be partially over water, she recited in a flat monotone the standard spiel about inflatable life vests that could be located under the seats in the event of an emergency landing. As she gave these instructions, the man sitting next to me leaned over and started groping around underneath his seat. Raising his hand, he said to the flight attendant in halting English, "Excuse me, but my life vest is missing." Given what I knew about Eastern's finances, I figured we should just be grateful if there was enough jet fuel to get us to our destination. Life vests were probably a luxury Eastern couldn't afford. The flight attendant, as I recall, had no reaction, and was probably equally worried between landing safely and whether her paycheck would bounce.

Arriving in Lima, we located Hector holding his sign. As we exited the terminal, I thought we might have wandered onto the set of a remake of *American Graffiti*. Nearly all of the cars we saw on the streets were vintage U.S. models from the 1950s and '60s. Just like MacArthur's line about old soldiers never dying but fading away, it seems that worn-out American Chevys also don't die; they are just shipped to Latin America.

Ysabel had arranged for our accommodations, and we stayed in an apartment in a small building in Miraflores, an upscale neighborhood of the Peruvian capital near the beach. Our first night there, I brought takeout from a local Chinese restaurant back to the apartment for our dinner. The soup was packed in plastic bags similar to those found in the produce section of an American supermarket. We quickly realized we weren't in Kansas anymore.

The next morning, we registered our adoption case at the U.S. consulate, and then arranged for our flight to Cuzco. Hector came by the apartment and asked if we had the money Ysabel told us to bring. I had never carried such a huge amount of cash in my life, and walking around with that type of bankroll in a poor country that I knew had one of the highest crime rates in the world was rather unsettling. I handed the wad of hundred-dollar bills over to Hector. He briefly went into a separate room, and came back with a handmade envelope, formed by taking loose-leaf notebook paper, folding the sheets over, and then stapling them shut. It was about an inch thick and obviously contained most of the money we had just handed him a few moments earlier. Hector said this was a "letter" we were to deliver to our lawyer in Cuzco, Dr.

Fernando Comte de Moyano, when we arrived.

If travel from Newark to Lima was an unusual experience, the domestic flight on AeroPeru to Cuzco made Eastern Airlines seem like Air Force One. The plane was an ancient 727, the aviation equivalent of all those 1950s beaters crowding the streets of Lima. Carry-on luggage by fellow passengers included live chickens in crates.

Cuzco is located high in the Andes, at an altitude of eleven-thousand feet. Coming through the clouds and surrounded by mountains, the decrepit AeroPeru plane strained, or so it seemed, in order to generate enough lift to reach the runway. Finally, with my teeth chattering like castanets and hands clenched on the armrests for dear life, we touched down.

The terminal was bedlam. The building looked like it had been constructed at the dawn of commercial aviation. It was a good fifty years old and showing every bit of its age. The checked luggage from our flight was brought inside and placed in a small enclosed area, about twenty-five feet across, and surrounded by wooden barricades waist-high. Inside the enclosure, three wizened, elderly men in faded uniforms were assigned to the task of handing suitcases to their owners. As a planeload of just-disembarked passengers simultaneously yelled "*este, este*" (Spanish for "that one, that one"), the geriatric baggage handlers remained utterly indifferent to the impatient crowd and, with the deliberate gait of old men, slowly picked up bags and handed them over one-by-one to the shouting throng.

We took a cab to our hotel, the Royal Inca, our

accommodations again arranged by Ysabel. During the ride, we marveled at our surroundings. Cuzco, with a population of about 350,000, has a breathtaking, haunting beauty. It was the capital city of the Incan empire, who regarded it the spiritual center of the world, literally the “navel of the universe.” When Cuzco was conquered by the invading Spaniards, they re-used the massive Incan stones to construct their own buildings. The city is surrounded by the Andes, and with its ancient stonework and its mix of Incan and Spanish architectural styles, the allure is startling. So is the altitude. Sometimes visitors, unused to the strain of trying to walk or even just breathe at eleven-thousand feet, collapse right on the tarmac when they step off the plane and need to be revived with an oxygen tank that is kept on hand for such emergencies. I was in relatively decent shape back then and had the advantage of youth on my side, so I mostly felt the effects when I tried to climb stairs, at which point my heart would start racing wildly.

One of the ways that locals cope with the altitude is by drinking *mate de cacao*, or tea made with the leaves of the same plant that is also processed into cocaine. This is a mild stimulant, more or less equivalent in strength to coffee, which also originated in the New World, except in this case the benefits were not extra energy, but rather the ability to deal with the thin air.

On our second day in Cuzco, a wondrous event occurred. A little tiny brown chocolate Hershey Kiss of a baby was brought to us, and our lives were transformed forever. Just a small bundle of dark chubbiness, and yet our universe was permanently altered. All of our hopes, dreams, prayers and tears had been answered. Our

new little baby daughter's birth name was Milagros, or "miracle" in Spanish. Indeed, it seemed indeed like a miracle that she had been delivered to us and the name was entirely fitting. We kept Milagros as a second middle name, adding in front Gabriela Aviva, the first meaning "God gives strength" and the second "spring" since we received her just on the verge of springtime. Ysabel still to this day calls Gabriela "Milagritos," or "little miracle."

Gabriela was brought to the hotel by a young woman from the remote Andean village where she was born, Abancay, and wrapped in a little handmade knitted blanket, her "pink blankie" which she still has to this day. Anne and I had a special teddy bear waiting for her: Carlos, her guardian angel. Now married and in her twenties, Gabriela still sleeps with Carlos right next to her. She was put into my arms. I counted her fingers and toes, and when I got to twenty, I broke down and started sobbing in a mixture of joy and relief. We had passed through fire and water and had been blessed from above.

We quickly discovered many things, principal of which, and common to many new parents, is that we didn't have the slightest idea of how to take care of a baby. Adding to the challenge was the fact that we were in the hotel room of a third world country before the availability of the Internet or cell phones and just about as cut off from civilization as if we had been on the dark side of the moon.

We realized that while the Royal Inca Hotel was long on charm, it lacked running hot water. Also, our room had a loft level where

Anne slipped on the polished wooden staircase on our first day there, before Gabriela was brought to us. Worried about the risks from the staircase, and also thinking that heated water was an indulgence worth paying a bit extra for, we transferred to a hotel next door that was the sister property of our current accommodations, the slightly more upscale Royal Inca Dos.

An immediate problem in regard to caring for a baby was that unfortunately the drinking water was not safe, and sterile bottled water was not available. Like any infant, Gabriela needed to consume a lot of formula. We didn't want to take the risk of using contaminated tap water, so I went to the local outdoor market and bought a *hulveria*, a little electric water heater. I set myself up in the bathroom, surrounded by billows of steam, constantly boiling and sterilizing water, bottles and nipples. Anne said that from behind the clouds of white smoke, I looked like a witch brewing up potions.

Another obstacle to overcome was that powdered baby formula was in short supply. We had brought as many cans as we could carry in our luggage, but quickly ran out. Every few days I would give one of the hotel bellhops a twenty-dollar bill and send him out to check on all the drugstores in the city. He would usually come back hours later with, at most, two or three cans, and I would repeat the process a few days later.

Because of the narco-terrorism of The Shining Path and State Department travel advisory, tourism in Cuzco had almost completely dried up. About the only visitors were occasional Eastern Europeans who presumably lacked the funds to visit more

mainstream locations, a handful of extremely off-the-beaten-track adventure seekers, plus a few other intrepid souls like ourselves who were pursuing adoptions. But for our constant fear and anxiety we would have actually appreciated the graceful and luxurious nature of our accommodations.

One day in our hotel room in Cuzco, Anne heard the banging of drums and the ringing of tambourines, and said it sounded like Hare Krishnas. Considering us to be in a distant galaxy, I scoffed, saying that was ridiculous. Then we stepped out onto our hotel balcony and looked out as a troupe of twenty or so Hare Krishnas in their flowing robes danced their way through the street below our hotel room.

The Royal Inca Dos had a charming interior atrium five stories high. There was a bar in the lobby, typically deserted, just like the rest of the hotel, but staffed, in addition to the bartender, with an organist. Whenever the lobby door opened and someone walked in, the musician would immediately play the first few bars of the theme song from *Fiddler on the Roof*. The sound would drift up and through the slatted lobby-facing interior windows of our room. Why that particular snippet of music we could not possibly imagine. It was an odd connection to life at home and our Jewish roots, which otherwise felt a million miles away.

Almost immediately, one thing became clear to me: Gabriela was now our baby. There was no difference to us whether she was our adopted or biological child. The original plan, where I would head back home, go back to work and leave Anne to take care of

Gabriela by herself, sounded like a reasonable idea before we arrived. Challenging, perhaps, but, like boiling the ocean, theoretically possible. However, now that we were in a remote Andean city in one of the world's poorest and most dangerous countries, leaving behind my wife and new baby to fend for themselves while I worked on corporate finance deals seemed like the height of irresponsibility. So, I placed a short phone call to my secretary, at ten dollars per minute, asking her to inform my boss that I was stuck in Cuzco and did not know when I would be back. I told her I would contact her again in a couple of weeks to give her an update. It was an impulsive act and ultimately proved to be career-limiting, as I was laid off shortly after we came back home. Nonetheless, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

And so we settled into a nerve-wracking monotony. Dr. Fernando, who received his payment from us at our first meeting, visited every four or five days, giving us a thorough tutorial in the definition of the term *mañana*. Gabriela's case was being processed in the regional court at nearby Urubamba. During his visits, Dr. Fernando would always pantomime how hard he has working, how he would travel *en la noche*, and make a motion of wiping sweat off his brow. There was always going to be an important development in the case *mañana*. Before leaving, he would set a specific date and time for his return. In Spanish, when he said, "I will be back *mañana*," it translated roughly as, "See you sometime next week."

Shortly before we left Cuzco, I met another American adoptive man, as he was standing in front of the hotel. He and his wife had just arrived that morning. He told me that Dr. Fernando left a

message for him at the front desk that he might be coming by in the afternoon to brief him on their case. The dad-to-be, eager to please, was waiting outside. I tried to explain to him that “in the afternoon” really meant “I know you are in Cuzco and eventually, at a date and time of my choosing, I will stop by,” but my fellow American was not in the mood for listening, given his excited anticipation. For all I know, he may still be standing outside and waiting in front of the Royal Inca Dos.

Years later, we learned from Ysabel that Dr. Fernando and the judge in charge of our case were having an affair while we were there. No wonder he was always traveling *en la noche* and working up a sweat on his visits to Urubamba.

Anne and I rapidly settled into a routine. We would greet each new day after getting three or four fitful hours of sleep due to Gabriela's constant crying. Waking like a bleary-eyed zombie, I would stagger to the phone in our room and order *desayuno para dos personas*, which constituted about half of my Spanish vocabulary (the other half was being able to respond to the question, while out with Gabriela, to the question of “*baron o mujer?*” – “boy or girl?” to which I would answer “*mujer*”, and would then receive a quick reply of *que linda*, or “how beautiful”). After a breakfast of fresh mango, toast and *café con leche*, and being restored to a facsimile of normality by showering (splurging on hot water proved to be a godsend), we would then go out for a walk around the center of town.

We had been cautioned by Dr. Fernando to stay close to the

hotel. One day, after we had been in Cuzco for a few weeks, while Anne was in the room with Gabriela, I ignored our lawyer's advice and took a walk some distance away from the center of town, wanting to absorb more authentic local color in a residential neighborhood. As I strolled down the street, silently congratulating myself on my adventurous spirit and connection to the wanderlust of my backpacking days between high school and college, I was suddenly grabbed from behind in a choke-hold, while three or four youths quickly rifled through my pockets, somehow not finding my wallet inside my jacket, although they did manage to unbuckle and purloin my thirty-dollar Swatch watch. I briefly lost consciousness and, coming to while lying on the ground, I saw several locals rushing over to my aid, one of them holding a glass of water. Despite the trauma I had just undergone, I still had my wits about me enough to politely refuse the offered drink, fearful of adding an intestinal bug to physical injury. Grateful both for the concern of bystanders and to find myself still among the quick, I made my way back to the hotel. The choking left me with a sore throat for a week, and with a resolve to be more cautious for the remainder of our stay.

Back then I had not yet become a vegetarian. We would stop for lunch nearly every day at a small restaurant a block from the hotel on the local square, the Plaza de Armas, in the center of town. I would typically order grilled chicken and Anne would have a plate of pasta. We noticed during our frequent visits there was a layer cake set out on display on a tray under a clear plastic cover.

The cake had a good-sized wedge missing, indicating that a couple of slices had been sold. That same cake was sitting on the counter every single visit. We went back to this restaurant over and over for weeks, wondering each time how old that cake must be. During one memorable meal, Anne discovered a cockroach in her tomato sauce. She pointed it out to the waiter, who quickly whisked her plate off the table. He disappeared into the kitchen through a swinging door, and a few seconds later we heard the sound of him screaming at the cook. We told this anecdote to another adopting parent we met who was also staying at our hotel, an older single mom, Paula. She said her preferred tactic for such an event was to inform the wait staff that “her raisins were moving.”

After we had been in Cuzco a couple of weeks, my parents, with the help of their good friends, the Chasens, who owned a drugstore in New Jersey, sent us a huge care package of diapers, wipes, formula, lotions, and other baby necessities. Dr. Fernando gave me a lift to the airport to retrieve the shipment from AeroPeru (FedEx and UPS did not provide direct service to Cuzco back then). After being told by a clerk at the ticket counter that he could not locate a box with my name on it, Dr. Fernando ducked under the opening where checked luggage was collected, and wandered out onto the tarmac, with me trailing behind, as he looked for a baggage handler or someone who knew where packages were stored. I admired his chutzpah and hoped he was putting the same effort forth on our adoption case. Eventually, the package was located and our baby provisions were restocked.

In the United States, the legal process can move slowly. In a

poor and often corrupt country, anything is possible. We had heard horror stories of adoption cases dragging on for months or even years. One couple we met in Lima thought their adoption was going along fine. Then, the courthouse where their case was being adjudicated was blown up by terrorists, and they were caught in a legal no-man's-land, unsure of what would happen next. Since all Anne and I could rely on was Dr. Fernando's friendly but completely insincere *mañanas*, we had no idea if we were making progress or not. It was like being inside of a real life-version of *Groundhog Day*.

Finally, another small miracle – Ysabel came to visit Cuzco. Up to this point, we had only communicated with her by phone and had never met in person. Now the boss was in town, and we were hoping that her presence might provide an extra level of motivation for Dr. Fernando. I don't know which had a bigger impact: Ysabel visiting, or the fact we were the only adopting family in Cuzco during this time where both parents stayed. Whatever the reason, our case set a land speed record, and was finalized in a mere four weeks, lightning fast in a land of endless *mañanas*. The court's issuance of the adoption decree meant we were now Gabriela's legal parents according to Peruvian law, and she was issued a new birth certificate with our names listed as her mother and father.

Our protectiveness, as evidenced by the unwillingness of either of us to leave Cuzco without our infant, was also reflected by the fact that we were the only adopting parents we knew who failed to visit Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas and one of the most

famous tourist sites in the world. *Everyone* who came to Cuzco visited Machu Picchu. It was a one-day excursion, and you could leave the baby with your lawyer. But we could only think about what could go wrong. What if they mixed Gabriela's formula with tap water, and she got sick? What if, like the wife of the mayor of Jersey City, we had the bad luck to travel when The Shining Path decided it was a nice day for a terrorist attack? We felt that we had but a single mission in Cuzco: to leave safely, as a family, with our new little baby. Machu Picchu could wait for another visit someday in the future.

The night the adoption case was completed, we had a small party in our room: Dr. Fernando, the judge from Urubamba, Ysabel, and our translator, Roberto, and his wife, Lareina. The judge had brought a few paintings she had done that she regularly sold to participants in her court to supplement her income. Not wanting to be impolite, and understanding that a casual amount of palm-greasing was a fundamental part of economic survival in a developing nation where salaries for government officials were expected to be supplemented by financial expressions of appreciation, we followed local custom and bought a few of her canvasses.

One last item before heading back to Lima was preparing an English translation of the adoption court decree for presentation to the U.S. consulate in order to process Gabriela's immigration application. This "official" translation was done at the hotel in Cuzco during our last day there. Our translator, Roberto, and I sat down at a table in the lobby. He read the documents to me aloud,

translating them into English as he went along, while I sat next to him and typed furiously (I earned an “A” in typing in high school, notching forty words per minute). Several hours later, the twenty page English translation of the court documents was complete.

Meanwhile, Peru was heading towards a presidential election, always a dicey proposition in an unstable country. During the last two weeks of our stay in Cuzco, each night in our room we would hear bombs going off in the distance. Peru’s incumbent president at the time, Alan García, was a failed populist. Under his leadership, the country had experienced runaway hyperinflation and was losing the war against The Shining Path. In just the month we had been in Cuzco, the local currency, the Inti, had collapsed, and our hotel bill totaled in the millions before conversion to U.S. dollars.

García was being challenged by a Peruvian of Japanese ancestry, Alberto Fujimori, who was nicknamed by the media as *El Chino*, or the Chinaman. Fujimori, notwithstanding his ethnicity, promised to be a strongman in the classic Latin American mold, and his rise in the polls had the flavor of a revolutionary coup. Our biggest fear was that a change in government would be accompanied by internal turmoil that would freeze international adoptions. We knew of too many prospective adoptive families caught in terrible situations when their cases got stuck in legal limbo, and did not want to join them.

Back in Lima, we once again stayed in Miraflores, this time by chance in a somewhat nicer apartment, and now in possession of a

screaming infant who refused to sleep. The final remaining items needed to secure Gabriela's entry into the U.S. were to get her a Peruvian passport and a letter from licensed doctor certifying that she was in good health and free of infectious disease.

Hector took us to apply for Gabriela's passport at a sprawling compound of government offices in the outskirts of Lima. He left us sitting in a snack bar and said he would confer with an official to see what our options were and then come back to report the situation. Upon his return ten minutes later, he said we had two choices: apply for a passport using the conventional process, and receive it in a month, or pay a one-hundred-and-fifty dollar fee and get the passport in an hour.

Sixty minutes later, armed with Gabriela's freshly issued Peruvian passport, we headed back, by taxi, to Miraflores. The next day, we were taken by Hector to a pediatrician who specialized in providing certificates of health to support visa applications for adopted children. I noticed that the physician's office lacked a scale, perhaps the most fundamental tool of pediatric medicine. Nonetheless, he provided us with the required letter.

Finally, with all of the documentation complete, I headed back to the U.S. consulate. I was armed with all the necessary paperwork. After a short interview, Gabriela was issued her green card.

Next stop was the nearest travel agency, to get us on the first flight out of the country. We would be leaving exactly one day before the election. All of Lima was on edge. The scene at the airport was reminiscent of the fall of Saigon at the end of the

Vietnam War. Thousands of people jammed the ticket counters. We showed up hours before the flight, determined to make sure we were on the plane when it took off. The airport seemed to be operating under a policy of maximum confusion. Gate and departure information changed constantly. Finally, we trudged our way back onto another Eastern Airlines jet, the air carrier itself only a few months away from liquidating and ceasing operations.

Gabriela screamed every minute of the entire flight. I walked up and down the aisle endlessly, trying to comfort her, to no avail. Finally, we landed in Miami. Utterly weary from the roller coaster of emotions we had just gone through plus the near-hallucinatory impact of more than a month of sleep deprivation, I was still overjoyed and immensely grateful to be on American soil. I could hardly believe it was true. We were back in the United States with our little chocolate baby, and nothing could change that. The courts and legal system of Peru were a continent away. We were now a family, forever.

Transferring to our connecting flight, we landed at Newark on March 31, 1990, a mere five weeks after we left. Coming home in early spring, Gabriela's first middle name of Aviva proved to be entirely apt. Our car was still at long-term parking and I had the keys with me. A short drive and we were home.

Our fears about the Peruvian elections were not unfounded. We take for granted the luxuries of life in a modern Western democracy, grumbling about budget deficits or rush hour traffic on the freeway, while developing nations often balance on the edge of slipping back to the Dark Ages (sad examples over the past few

decades include Cambodia, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Romania, Rwanda, Somalia, Syria, and Uganda). The worst fears about Fujimori came to pass. The “Chinaman” indeed operated like a Latin American “*caudillo*” and, as such, he flexed his muscles, putting his wife, children, and cronies into positions of authority and suspending personal liberties to ramp up the fight against The Shining Path. And, as expected, the overturning of the rule of law led to the suspension of adoptions. We had literally, by the space of a single day, escaped from a fate that would have tragically left us with permanently diminished lives. Fujimori, after a tumultuous period in power, ultimately was forced to flee Peru over corruption charges. He went to Japan, where lack of an extradition treaty has allowed him to live in disgraced exile ever since.

About a year after we came home with Gabriela, we met an unfortunate young woman who had started her adoption in Peru after Fujimori took office, but before the window had completely shut. We knew her because she had hired Ysabel and we had served as a personal reference. This poor woman’s adoption had stalled, and to make matters worse, she had at one point kidnapped her baby internally inside Peru and tried to smuggle her out of the country, before surrendering to the authorities. She was fortunate not to be criminally charged and was allowed to return back home, where she was trying to complete her adoption case from a distance. The stress of all this seemed to push her over the edge emotionally, and she had an undercurrent of resentment and anger about her. While we were naturally sympathetic, having seen first-

hand so many ways that adoptions could get blocked and the heartbreak that ensues as a result, we were also fearful of getting too involved. As much as we hoped for her case to have a successful outcome, there was no practical advice we could provide, and any reassurances we might offer could prove hollow, as circumstances had now changed since the recent elections. We did not see her again after that single visit.

After returning to Montclair, I went back to work, eager to show off pictures of my new baby. One of the secretaries in the office, seeing all the exotic snapshots of Gabriela next to llamas and Incan ruins (the most well-preserved ruin in Cuzco is Saqsaywaman, referred to colloquially as “sexy woman”), asked if we had gone on an around-the-world trip to celebrate her birth.

Interracial adoption was not uncommon, but it was also not routine. A white mom with a brown baby sometimes turned heads when they went out. One day at the supermarket, someone approached Anne and asked if she had taken Gabriela to the tanning salon. (For the record, Anne insists that she is not white, claiming that, as a Jew and an immigrant to the U.S., the racial category she feels is the best fit for her is African-American). We were unaware that years of these types of incidents lay ahead of us.

## Chapter Four: The Child is the Father of the Man

As Anne and I found ourselves increasingly consumed by the exhaustion of taking care of a baby, and as my role was gradually transformed from that of sex machine to father, I found myself often thinking about my own childhood. I wondered what lessons I could draw from my personal memories of family life as a child that would help me be a good dad and a less disappointing husband.

My maternal grandfather, my Grandpa Cohen, had been a Wall Street professional. He was what was known as a “specialist,” someone who works on the floor of a stock exchange and matches buyers and sellers to maintain liquidity (which is what Ben Bernanke and the U.S. Federal Reserve have been doing on a global scale for the past few years). His domain was the American Stock Exchange, always a distant second to the New York Stock Exchange, or “Big Board,” and nowadays ranking in third place, behind the Nasdaq. Nonetheless, I was particularly impressed that my grandfather owned a seat on a stock exchange. Even if it wasn’t the NYSE, I still considered it a substantial achievement.

When my mother was a child, she said that my Grandma Cohen would tell her that at work her father would talk of “hundreds of thousands and millions” but at home it was just “tens and hundreds.” Today, the comfortable finances of my Grandpa and Grandma Cohen would be completely ordinary, another household

with a bit of extra spending money. However, in their generation, to have surplus cash of any type, beyond what was required for the basic minimum of food, clothing, and shelter, was effectively the definition of being “rich.” My mother remembers that when she went to grade school, she was warned by her parents that if the teacher ever asked the children on the first day to introduce themselves and say what their daddy did for a living, she was to answer that her father worked in a grocery store. During the Great Depression, with all the hardship that people had to endure, their fear was that any reference to Wall Street could potentially arouse jealousy from other families.

This trait of my grandfather’s, to understate one’s status, has carried over to me. For most of my business career, I’ve held executive-level jobs and made an above-average income. I recall our first house in Issaquah, a suburb of Seattle. We moved into a brand-new home on a cul-de-sac when Gabriela was just one year old, and we were surrounded by other young families with babies and toddlers. It was a modern-day version of my own childhood growing up in suburbia during the Baby Boom. During a casual conversation with one of our new neighbors, when asked what I did, I responded that I worked in the accounting department of a local wireless company, even though I was their Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President. Later that evening, when we were back home, Anne was upset. Why couldn’t I be a little bit more proud of myself? After all, she was proud of me. But I thought we were going to be out there pushing kids on tricycles and going inside to change diapers, which turned out to be the

case. Who am I trying to impress? Poop is a great equalizer.

This played itself out a second time when, for several years, I worked for Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, helping manage his personal investment portfolio, which ran into tens of billions. During those years, when asked where I worked, I would answer “for a family business.” Anne again was disappointed in me for not being more proud of my job. But the truth is I did work for a family, an unusual one perhaps, since during that time Paul consistently ranked among the top three or four richest people on the Forbes Four Hundred. But it was his money, not mine. Being a billionaire and working for a billionaire are not the same thing.

Another trait passed down from my Grandpa Cohen to me is that he was an idiosyncratic driver and completely indifferent to the condition of his automobiles. My father, in contrast, got a Cadillac the moment he was able to afford one, and he continued upgrading from there as financial circumstances allowed, to a Lincoln Continental and then eventually a two-seat Mercedes convertible. I drive a 2006 four-cylinder gray Honda Accord that, for some odd reason, perhaps a Japanese engineer's dry sense of humor, has a speedometer whose highest reading is 160 miles per hour. This fuel efficient little sedan would have to fall off the rim of the Grand Canyon to reach that velocity. For me, it's just transportation from Point A to Point B. This matter-of-fact attitude towards cars, in my case, skipped a generation.

Ed Harris

---

Dear Reader, if you enjoyed this so far, please continue on and purchase the full novel at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Yours truly,

Author Ed Harris