

Shell's Paula McGarrigle writes Baby Guide for parents



McGarrigle and daughter Ailish Olien.

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CALGARY, ALBERTA, February 13, 2007 – Not everyone would consider parental leave a good time to get started writing a book.

But Shell's Paula McGarrigle, when at home with her first child, looked at it this way: if you're going to spend a lot of time gathering crucial information about health services, tax forms, parenting courses and dozens of other things – why not publish the information for the benefit of others?

That's how she and her friend Elena Rhodes created *A Baby Guide to Calgary: Making the Most of Your Parental Leave*.

The 190-page book has proven so popular in Calgary that McGarrigle has copyrighted the name in Canada's major cities and plans to franchise the operation so other Canadians can benefit from the resource.

The 18 chapters cover such topics as administrative procedures, "surviving the first six weeks," assistance and support for parents, health tips, feeding the baby, physical fitness, and city walks that are stroller friendly.

Shopping tips are also given, and there's plenty of advice about having fun, such as running birthday parties and creating scrapbooks and photo albums. It's loaded with key agencies' addresses, phone numbers and hours of operation, some of which can be found in other places but are especially handy in one book.

Like many a good idea or invention, the *Baby Guide* stemmed from the complete absence of anything like it. McGarrigle had her first child, Declan, in 2004. She went to her public health unit for her child's immunizations, and she saw posters and notices aimed at parents.

"I began thinking, here's a market segment (new parents) that hasn't got a lot of time to search for this information. They're isolated, excluded. They're trying to connect, and they're desperately looking for a way to make the best of this time because it goes so fast."

McGarrigle met other parents and organized get-togethers for such activities as walking specific routes with strollers. Rhodes was one of the regulars.

"I approached Elena about jointly writing a book because we got talking about swimming classes and she told me the temperature of all the swimming pools, which was useful when looking for those warm enough for a baby.

"I thought, she's very detail-oriented. I could work with her."
(McGarrigle later bought out her partner's share but Rhodes is still involved in promotion of the book.)

The book project lasted into McGarrigle's second pregnancy. When the first draft was done, it was checked by a lawyer friend, who returned it with vast numbers of red-ink edits.

Then it went to two focus groups – a bumpy experience, McGarrigle confesses.

"They ripped it apart. It was humbling."

When the final draft was done, the authors had 1,500 copies of the guide printed. It sells for \$23.95. The first 1,500 sold in six months, then the book went to a second printing.

Early in the process there was thought of putting the guide online, so some mothers were asked for their opinions.

"They said, 'No way. We don't have time to get to a computer. Give me something I can throw in the diaper bag or in the car,'" McGarrigle says. And that's what was published.

This coming Saturday at 2:30 p.m., the authors will be available to answer questions at the Prairie Ink Restaurant, McNally Robinson Books, 120 - 8th Ave. S.W., Calgary.

For more information about the book, go to www.babyguidetocalgary.com.

Photo by Julie Marwood.