



FICTION

# Q&A Emily Giffin



***Baby Proof* (LJ 5/1/06), Emily Giffin's third novel after *Something Borrowed* and *Something Blue*, tells the story of that uncommon creature—the woman who doesn't want children. So what happens when her mate—also “baby proof” when they met—decides that he does? It's a sometimes funny, always thoughtful exploration about how life sometimes has other plans for us than the ones we make for ourselves.**

**You have two children. Where did**

**you get the idea for Claudia, a woman who doesn't want any?**

I had one-year-old twin sons when I started writing *Baby Proof* (they are now two), so I was acutely aware of how much children change your life. For the most part, I believe that they enrich your life, but there are definite drawbacks when you make the irreversible and very serious decision to have children, not the least of which is a loss of emotional and physical freedom that Claudia frets about in the book.

I do think that society leads everyone to believe that the “right” path is to marry and have a baby. But not everyone wants to take this journey. I was interested in exploring the choice not to have a baby from a woman's point of view. In some ways, this is the last taboo for women. You can be a full-time mother. You can be a working mother. But if you don't want children at all, society judges you as selfish and deems your decision as somehow unnatural.

**I was struck by Claudia's line, “Having both [the baby, the career] means doing nothing very well.” Can a woman “have it all”?**

I guess it depends on what you mean by “having it all.” Of course, I believe that women can have a meaningful career and still be good mothers. I know many women who manage to do both things well—and still be happy. But if you're talking about literally having everything—that's impossible for any of us, men included. Life is about compromise and sacrifice and trade-offs. If your career is demanding, you're likely not meeting the school bus and preparing five-course dinners every night. I think the key is to try to let go of the whole “superwoman” mentality and find what works best for you and your family.

**Your book reminded me of earlier chick-lit books, where the focus is more on the character's struggles than on what shoes she's wearing. What authors have influenced you?**

Thank you. That characterization of my

writing means a lot to me. I am proud of the chick-lit label, but it's nice when people recognize that the genre is a layered one and is made up of things other than beach read fluff. I try to read as much as possible and don't limit myself to one particular genre. Some of my favorite authors are Alice Sebold, Anne Lamott, Elinor Lipman, Melissa Banks, Tom Perrotta, Wally Lamb, Alice Munro, Kent Haruf, Sarah Mlynowski, and Jennifer Weiner.

**Your mother is a librarian. Did that affect your decision to become a writer?**

My mother loves books and instilled in me, at a very young age, a love of reading and writing. I dedicated my first novel, *Something Borrowed*, to her for many reasons, but one of them was a way of thanking her for being such a profound influence in my life.

**[PLOT SPOILER ALERT!] Did you ever toy with writing a less-happy ending? Or do you think love does conquer all, even if people want different things?**

To quote one of my favorite writers, Elinor Lipman, “I don't believe readers should be left unsatisfied, with characters staring into the abyss, for the sake of literary coolness.” But I'd also like to point out that the ending in *Baby Proof* is ambiguous. It is uncertain whether Ben and Claudia will ultimately stay together and reach a decision in the great baby debate. In writing the book, I had three choices: Claudia could stick to her guns at the expense of her relationship with Ben, or she could cave in and get pregnant just to keep Ben, or she could decide that the most important thing was their relationship and therefore reconsider the baby issue.

Some readers might feel that I copped out, but the ending is not only true to life but consistent with my belief that this book is, at its core, not a sociological study of whether to have children but a love story between two people. And, finally, I do believe that love really does conquer all and that there is no such thing as a deal breaker when you're talking about true love.—**Tania Barnes, *Library Journal***

Like the fearsome plunge on a dangerous roller coaster, this thriller's denouement gets your heartbeat racing up to just short of tachycardia speed. Jay Tice, a legendary CIA spymaster recently exposed as a traitor, disappears from a prison cell. Petite agent Elaine Cunningham, whose résumé leads with her “hunter” credentials, sets out to bag him. While paying attention to the details of spycraft such as dazzling technogear, the novel benefits from some exploration of feelings and emotions besides the usual fear and terror. Apart from one plot lapse where Elaine is caught in a villain's clutches but inexplicably pops up free later, the plotting is satisfactorily convoluted in the best mole-within-a-mole tradition. Best of all for Washington, DC, junkies is the rich portrayal of the area. The action-packed story makes grand use of Baltimore Harbor and other fabled venues. Lynds (*The Coil; Masquerade*) has added another jewel to her tiara as one of the reigning queens of the international spy-thriller genre. Strongly recommended for spy and suspense collections.—**Barbara Conaty, Moscow**

**McCullough, Colleen. *On, Off. S. & S. Jun. 2006. c.384p. ISBN 0-7432-8642-1 [ISBN 978-0-7432-8642-8]. \$25.95. F***

Veteran historical fiction writer McCullough (*The Thorn Birds*) tries her hand at the police procedural with mixed results. In 1965 Connecticut, at a thinly disguised Yale University research lab, the horrifying discovery of a young female's torso and limbs leads to the grim realization that a very clever and ritualistic serial killer—one who favors murdering innocent, adolescent girls of mixed-race backgrounds—is on the loose. Lt. Carmine Delmonico pits his team against the lab's eccentric researchers, all of whom initially radiate guilt. Once Delmonico wins the allegiance of the lab's business manager, Desdemona Dupre, the clues begin lining up. Clunky dialog and an overabundance of red herrings make this closed-room drama drag at first, but McCullough's storytelling strengths take over as she weaves all sorts of odd psychological elements together and leaves the door open to sequels. There's nothing cozy about this whodunit; it's a direct tribute to the late crime fiction writer Ngaio Marsh. Recommended for readers of British procedurals and dedicated serial killer genre fans. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 2/15/06.]—**Teresa L. Jacobsen, Solano Cty. Lib., Fairfield, CA**

**Malmont, Paul. *The Chinatown Death Cloud Peril. S. & S. Jun. 2006. c.384p. ISBN 0-7432-8785-1 [ISBN 978-0-7432-8785-2]. \$24. F***

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