

The Story of a Pampered Politician

The Nannies



Sam McCue

The Nannies

By Sam McCue

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The Nannies

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Chapter One: Mrs. Magoo



Being pronounced husband and wife by the Governor of your State isn't for the faint of heart. At our wedding ceremony, Sandy and I greeted nearly 60 people – state officials, family members, my Dad's staff, and the Governor's staff – and we all crowded into the Governor's reception office, which is typically used to greet other governors and the president.

Once the Governor had introduced us to our friends as a married couple, she wanted to take Sandy and I, along with our parents, out to dinner. We had a wonderful time. Beef Eater was crowded, but we managed to get a table for seven. Since the Governor was the host, no one asked to see my Driver's License when I ordered wine.

Sandy was talking with the Governor about an education initiative then winding its way through the State legislature. Since Sandy was the incoming Principal of a large high school, the Governor seemed keenly interested in what she had to say.

One of the big issues: Teacher testing.

"I'd be first in line to take the test," Sandy said, "and as I see it, there's no reason why any teacher wouldn't." The Governor found Sandy's attitude fascinating, particularly since the State

teachers' lobby had come out the day before vociferously opposing teacher testing.

"When you get back from your honeymoon," the Governor said, putting her arm across the back of Sandy's chair, "please call me and let's have lunch." Sandy didn't know whether to be flattered or charmed, but my Dad assured her she should be neither. The Governor wanted to 'mine' Sandy for information. Of course, Sandy would be happy to help.

The Governor would not be seeking re-election and the conventional wisdom held that my Dad would be a tough candidate to beat. Maybe that's why Sandy and I were not particularly surprised to find a television truck waiting for us when we pulled into her driveway about 8 o'clock. The reporter wanted to do a stand-up in Sandy's living room with the Lieutenant Governor's son and his new bride. We politely declined, ducked inside, and shut the door.

On our wedding night, Sandy insisted on giving me a bath. She'd taken a shower first, and said she saw no reason to abandon what had been our long-standing evening routine just because we were married. Thankfully, we could still talk to each other like adults. That had long been part of the tradition as well.

"So, Nounou," I asked, "how does it feel to be giving your husband a bath?"

"I don't think it's really registered yet," Sandy replied, then added, "but don't think that means you can get away with splashing."

"Darn," I said to no one in particular. I really did not want to be paddled into tomorrow on my wedding night.

"Do you want a diaper tonight, baby?" Sandy asked. She had never asked before.

I shook my head.

We slid into bed completely naked – rare for us – and cuddled until we fell asleep. When I woke up about 6 o'clock, Sandy still had her arms wrapped around me. Even naked and asleep, Sandy was still babysitting me.

I got up and had some cereal for breakfast, and then Sandy and I slipped out for a run through our neighborhood. When we got back, we planned our first day of married life. We wouldn't leave on our honeymoon until the next afternoon.

"Let's go hit after lunch," Sandy said, meaning tennis, "and then we can go by the office for a few minutes." She was still settling in at school.

My Mom called, offering to drive us to the airport the next day. We accepted the offer and Sandy always looked forward to spending time with my mother. We both knew we'd be counting on Mom and Pansy rather a lot once the baby was born.

Sandy and I did housework much of the morning, had a nondescript lunch – too nondescript for me to remember, although I'm almost certain Sandy had a peanut butter and banana sandwich – waited for the food to settle a bit, then headed to the tennis courts. We had to wait about a half-hour for a court to open. That day, we sat for about 20 minutes and watched the play across the five courts.

"You wanna play a set?" Sandy asked as we walked onto the court. We seldom actually played, although we often practiced our serves.

"Care to make it interesting, Nounou?" I asked.

"Already thought of that," Sandy replied. I didn't find that surprising. She put her arm around my waist. "You win, and you get

to wash my Firebird before we leave tomorrow. I win, and I get to give you some swats.”

No matter how I tried to re-frame the wager, it still refused to be reconciled. I thought about counteroffering but decided against it. That’s because I felt certain that being married to Sandy would do nothing to help me wind up on top, whatever the wager. The same bet quickly became our routine and continues to this day. I very seldom get to wash Sandy’s car.

After our warm-up, we were battling away. We got to a 5-5 tie in our set, each of us holding serve. Sandy was serving like a cannon that day, and I remember her particularly violent service motion. The woman showed no mercy.

Sandy held serve to get to 6-5. Since desperate situations require desperate action, I decided to try to blow her off the court with my serve. That seldom worked, and this game was no exception. Sandy knocked all four serves right back to the baseline and beat me at love. Then she jumped the net and kissed me.

“Game and set to Mrs. McCue,” I said, holding her for a moment. Even though both of us were streaming sweat, we walked off the court with our arms around each other.

We sat in the shade and cooled down a bit. “That’s the first time someone has called me ‘Mrs. McCue,’” Sandy correctly noted, “and I can’t say I like it very much. Sounds too much like ‘Mrs. Magoo.’” Blunt honesty was one of Sandy’s trademark virtues, although it often went unappreciated.

“With all my eye problems,” I remembered, “that’s what the kids at school called me: Sammy Magoo. I don’t blame you.”

“I’m accustomed to being magnanimous where you’re concerned,” I said, “so let me suggest that you keep your maiden name.”

"That's easiest all the way around," Sandy replied. "No real change involved."

We folded ourselves into Sandy's Maui blue Firebird and drove to Onion Creek High. The building was deserted, and we walked the familiar hallway to the Principal's office. Sandy's name was already on the door: Miss Shields.

"Maybe I'll ask them to change the 'Miss' to 'Ms.'," Sandy said.

Sandy unlocked the door and we walked inside. She had a small waiting area – for miscreants, I assumed – and a sofa in her office. Two burnt-umber leather armchairs flanked a small end table on the opposite wall. Sandy's massive desk stood in the middle of the room. This was the first time I'd seen Sandy's new office and I found myself wondering what she'd been worried about.

"See, Nounou," I finally said, "there's plenty of room in here for a playpen."

"If I have *you* in a playpen in my office," she responded, smiling at me, "who will be at home looking after the *baby*?"

I sat down on the new sofa. For whatever reason, the cushions smelled faintly of coffee. Sandy sat in her desk chair and started going through a stack of mail and paperwork. I decided to take a quick nap while the Principal-to-be got organized.

Sandy woke me with a kiss. "Time to pay up," she said. She had her paddle at port arms.

"I haven't done this in two months," Sandy said as I stood up. "Maybe I've forgotten how."

Somehow, I doubted that was the case. Sandy led me to her desk. She instructed me to lean across and put my palms flat on the desktop, then had me stare at something on her desk blotter.

Sandy gave me three swats, the third of which very nearly brought tears to my eyes. As she hugged me afterward, I hastened to assure her she hadn't lost her touch.

"Baby, you really should have held your serve," was all Sandy said.

We went home to pack. The next evening, Sandy and I landed at Los Angeles International, got into our rental car, and drove to Long Beach. We had four beautifully restful nights on the Queen Mary, which is now permanently moored as a floating hotel. While we were there, we toured the Spruce Goose - Howard Hughes' huge plywood airplane that sat beneath a dome next to the Queen Mary.

Incidentally, when Sandy and I visited the Queen Mary again a few years ago on our 30th wedding anniversary, we found the old ship shockingly deteriorated. The elegance and splendor of our honeymoon was almost nowhere to be found. The Spruce Goose was long gone, but the empty dome remained.

We went to Disneyland on the last day of July. Sandy and I had both been to Disneyland when we were very small - Sandy was 7 when her parents took her and I was 6 - but we still loved strolling through the big park. Because of the lines, we were disinclined to ride most of the rides, but we did go on the Adventureland Jungle Cruise. The patter hadn't changed a bit and when the ride operator used his jungle rifle to shoot the hippo, I whispered to Sandy, "Right in the tonsils."

Then the ride operator said the exact same thing: "Right in the tonsils." Sandy starred at me as if I were a prophet.

In our Anaheim hotel that night, Sandy was curious about my long-term memory. "How much do you remember about when I first babysat you?" she asked.

"I remember everything, Nounou," I said honestly. "I remember what you were wearing, what you fed me, what you said when you burped me and changed me. I haven't forgotten any of it."

"I remembered our babysitting codeword for more than five years," I added, "even though you never repeated it."

"Serenity," Sandy said. "I had no idea where that one word would take me."

We flew back home the next day. Mom picked us up at the airport, took us to dinner at *The Street*, and pumped us for details about the trip. We told her about the Queen Mary, and I gave her a couple of souvenir books I'd bought her.

We walked back into Sandy's house – I would have to start thinking of it as *our* house – just before dark on July 31. The next day, I reminded myself, I'd need to go give 30-day notice on my little apartment.

Less than an hour later, Sandy had me in the bathtub. "You've gone five days without wearing a diaper," she pointed out. We'd taken nothing to the Queen Mary. Adult disposables at the time were particularly geriatric and not especially trustworthy.

I needed a moment to realize Sandy was right. I felt certain she would rectify the situation in short order. Nounou finished my bath and dressed me for sleep in a diaper, plastic pants, and one of Mom's big onesies. We were lying in her – forgive me, *our* – bed when I realized I didn't have my pacifier.

"Don't fuss, baby," Nounou said quietly. "Let me show you something else your little tongue can work on."

Sandy slid out of bed and pulled off her pajama bottoms. Then she lay back down and guided my head between her legs. I needed no encouragement, but I didn't want to dawdle.

Once I'd become accustomed to it, I found that I quite enjoyed giving Sandy oral love. Cunnilingus has some unique virtues ... if you leave a light on, you can watch as the woman you love is wracked with passion. Additionally, you never have to relinquish contact with your lover's body. I wasn't an expert, but Sandy gave every indication that she enjoyed herself.

I contented myself with a baby oil hand job every night or two. Sandy would often masturbate me after an evening bath, while I lay naked atop the changing table. While she hadn't been particularly proficient at the task the first time, Sandy quickly gained skill once we were engaged. By the end of our first few months of marriage, I could often last only a minute or so. The more Sandy cooed, the faster I came. She kept a burp cloth ready to catch my wild spray.

Later that week, we brought my desk, typewriter, and word processor from my apartment to the house. My desk went into a corner of the spare bedroom, opposite the crib, and I put the IBM Selectric II in the center of the desk. Once unboxed, my new Panasonic word processor fit a small rolling table beside the desk and I could turn to it when I needed it.

Sandy became accustomed to sleeping until 7 o'clock or so and then finding me, still in a night diaper and onesie, at my desk reviewing text drafts. I seldom typed that early in the morning for fear of waking her. Once the baby was here, I'd be using the much quieter word processor. That was my plan, anyway, subject to the requirements of a newborn.

Even after more than 30 years, I do not look upon our honeymoon or those early days as the time when my life with Sandy began. For me, our life together began on that Saturday more than 15 years before when Nanny Sanny first babysat me. We'd been almost inseparably Intertwined ever since. Those months

before our son was born were merely a respite before our life together sped on.

Chapter Two: The Baby Shower Baby



Sandy's first day as Principal was Tuesday, September 6. I planned to pick her up after school. We were expected at her parents' house for dinner, and the 40-mile drive would take us more than an hour at that time of day.

When I got to Onion Creek, I noticed something of interest: Sandy's bright blue Firebird was front and center, with some members of the high school tennis team scrubbing it energetically with buckets of water and shop towels.

I parked in the visitor's area and walked down the hall to the Principal's office. Now, I noted, the door read 'Ms. Shields.' As I walked in, I noticed that the door of the Assistant Principal's office was open, but Mrs. Shatwell was nowhere to be seen. Sandy's office door was closed. I could hear Sandy speaking inside, and she sounded somewhat animated.

Rather than knock, I thought it prudent to sit down in one of the chairs to wait.

Suddenly, I heard the unmistakable *pop* of Sandy's paddle. Two hard swats were repeated three times, with a pause between

each pair. Then the office door opened, and Mrs. Shatwell escorted three underclassmen past me. All three were crying.

I stood up and walked into my wife's office.

"Oh, good," Sandy said, "you can be next." But she smiled as she said it and slid her paddle into a desk drawer.

"Geez, Nounou," I said quietly, "you don't let the grass grow under your feet, do you?" One day on the job and she'd already paddled three kids.

"You should see my car," Sandy said.

Apparently, the three youngsters I saw leaving the office had been caught – by a police officer, no less – writing 'Welcome' and 'Bitch' on the windshield and back hatch of Sandy's Firebird with white shoe polish. Instead of arresting them, the officer turned them over to Mrs. Shatwell.

Knowing how hard Sandy could paddle, I imagined all three boys *wished* the police officer had hauled them downtown instead.

I said hello to Mrs. Shatwell – who took my hand and patiently reminded me that I could call her 'Christine' – when she stepped into Sandy's office. Sandy had to sign letters to the boys' parents. The incident had occurred several hours before, and Sandy's sudden unavailability at practice time sent her tennis players scurrying to clean their coach's car.

I walked out of the office with Christine, who seemed to feel some pity for the little... fellows.

"She made those boys wait all afternoon," Christine said. "She didn't want to disrupt their classes. I'm sure the waiting was torture for those kids, but they deserved what they got. I've never seen *anyone* paddled that hard." Admiration of a sort was in her voice.

Sandy locked her office door, then we walked outside, where the Firebird was still undergoing a parking lot restoration. Sandy gave the keys to one of the seniors. The tennis players would make sure the car wound up in our driveway. A couple of team members said hello to me.

“Practice tomorrow as usual, guys,” Sandy said as we walked away. She was still the school’s tennis coach since a replacement had not yet been found. Today’s practice had been scotched by the unscheduled after-school discipline session.

We got in my Corvette and drove out to Sandy’s parents’ house. My Mom was there as well, talking with Pansy about baby showers. According to Dick, my long-suffering father-in-law, the ladies concluded that there would be *three* baby showers - one with Mom’s friends, one with Pansy’s friends, and one with all the female staff from Onion Creek.

“Well,” Sandy said, “I suppose they all wanna do *something*.” She did not sound particularly enthusiastic. One shower would be at my parents’ house, one would be hosted by Sandy’s parents, and the final one for the Onion Creek teachers would be held at our house.

Mom told me that Sandy and I were certain to use everything we got. I think that was supposed to be reassuring, but I wasn’t certain. Dick left me with the ladies and went out to work on his Corvette.

Mom asked how Sandy had fared on her first day as Principal. “Some boys wrote welcome messages on my car with shoe polish,” Sandy said, “but other than that, I had a good day.” I told my Mom and Pansy that I felt certain Sandy’s reprimand had made quite an impact. Neither had a clue what that meant, of course.

The women resumed their baby shower planning. I walked out to see what Dick was doing with his Vette.

About an hour later, we sat down to dinner. Pansy had made meatloaf, and my Mom brought mashed potatoes and green bean casserole. We had a nice enough dinner, then Sandy and I followed Mom home. We watched as my mother pulled into her driveway – Dad was already home – and I nodded to the capitol policeman sitting guard in a police cruiser just down the street.

Then I drove Sandy home. The Firebird was in our driveway, looking as pristine as a two-year-old car could look. Sandy went into the house while I pulled the Pontiac into the garage beside the Corvette. Then I hit the button on the garage door opener and the door slid home.

I walked into the house and the house was still dark. I turned on a living room lamp only to discover Sandy sitting on the sofa.

I could tell Sandy was crying. “They’re just kids, Nounou,” I said, sitting next to her and putting my arm around her; she was shaking.

“I don’t know why they hate me so much,” Sandy said quietly.

“They don’t *hate* you, Nounou,” I replied. “They don’t *know* you. They don’t know who they should respect because no one has taught them that yet. They have no standards and no expectations.”

Quite suddenly, Sandy left me to go take a shower. I watched her shake her red hair as she walked out of the living room as if she was trying to clear the events of the day from her mind.

About 30 minutes later, I was sitting in the bathtub while Sandy bathed me. Now four months pregnant, she had a rather prominent baby bump.

“Do I get to attend your baby showers?” I asked. In that era, it wasn’t customary for husbands to be around when ladies feted the mother-to-be.

“Funnily enough,” Sandy said, “I wanted to talk to you about that.”

Sandy wanted to dress me in a diaper and sleeper and have me serve snacks and soft drinks to the ladies. The idea, she said, had come from my Mom.

“Sounds like fun,” I said. With my Mom and Sandy’s mother both avid seamstresses, no one would imagine that the sleeper had been a part of my wardrobe for many years.

“I’m sure we can sneak away for a diaper change,” Sandy said as she scrubbed my back.

After my bath, Sandy pulled me into the bedroom rather than the nursery. “I want sex,” she said, which astonished me no end. However, I was happy to oblige.

Sandy tugged off her pajama bottoms, lay down on the bed, and spread her legs invitingly. I could tell she was quite wet. I wasn’t sure whether to attribute that to the swats she’d given those three boys or to wild imaginings of me in a diaper in front of crowds of women. Either might have aroused her. I was already naked, and Sandy needed but to touch me. I maneuvered her to the edge of the bed and plunged into her.

Sandy had a rather sticky orgasm a few minutes later, just before I poured forth for what seemed an eternity.

I held Sandy close all night. I couldn’t tell her that I would always be there for her. Come morning, she would be on her own again. Whatever terrors the school day held for her tomorrow, the terrors would be hers alone to face.

The more I thought about what those kids had done to Sandy's car, the madder I became. Sandy had effectively handled the incident, of course, but I could tell it had upset her. The damage to the Firebird had been easily repaired, but the entire affair seemed to have made Sandy question herself. In the past 15 years, I'd never actually seen that.

The next morning, Sandy called a school assembly at 10 o'clock. This was almost unheard of and about 1300 kids filled the gymnasium bleachers and those who could find no seat wound up standing along the walls. A podium stood at the far end of the basketball court; the microphone was plugged into the gym's PA system.

Assistant Principal Shatwell introduced Sandy to the students as "a great friend, a great coach, and a great Principal." There was silence as Sandy strode to the podium. She wore tennis shoes, maternity pants, an untucked blue shirt, and her old varsity coaches' jacket. The three sophomores who had vandalized Sandy's car sat in the bleachers near the gym floor, staring back at her.

"I know you have heard of the incident yesterday involving my Firebird," Sandy said. "I'm here to tell you that this sort of disrespect *must not happen again* while I am Principal at Onion Creek."

"Many of you sophomores do not know me, but the juniors and seniors can tell you the kind of person I am. I am fair, I am open, I am honest, and I can be blunt. While I want to be your friend, we certainly don't *have* to get along. But even if we don't, I will *always* respect you."

"Your teachers deserve your respect. I did not attend school here, but my husband graduated from Onion Creek. He's a well-known author, so I know firsthand the kind of education our faculty provides."

"I do not *demand* respect from students who do not know me," Sandy concluded, "nor does being Principal *entitle* me to that respect. *I will earn it.*"

Sandy parceled out the last four words as if they were gold bullion.

Then she walked across the entire length of the floor. A small group of senior tennis players began to applaud as she strode past. Gradually, all the classes joined in. As Sandy walked out of the gymnasium, the students rose and cheered their new Principal to the echo.

I was happily ignorant of this event until the next afternoon, when one of the local newspapers carried an editorial about Sandy's speech, including a full text of what Sandy had said. One of her senior tennis players had surreptitiously recorded the entire event on his Walkman, then taken the tape to the paper. The newspaper editorial called Sandy "an embodiment of leadership this part of the country hasn't seen since the days of Black Jack Pershing and John C. Fremont."

A week later, I surprised Sandy at school at lunchtime. Rather than interrupt a closed-door meeting, I sat outside Sandy's office, chatting with Bonnie and Christine. Bonnie, the secretary, had known me for a decade. Today, however, she called me "Mr. McCue." Heretofore, I'd always been "Sam." I found the change disconcerting. I'd done nothing to earn the new status except marry her boss.

Sandy walked out and saw me in her waiting area. I told her that I'd come to share lunch.

"You're a glutton for punishment," Sandy said.

We went to the cafeteria, the same aroma-filled barn where Sandy had towered over study halls in years past. We slipped into

the food line. Many faculty members knew who I was, but many students did not. I imagine quite a few wondered about the interloper standing next to their Principal. I heard “Ms. Shields’ husband” and “Mr. Shields” quite a lot.

Some minor scuffle in the back of the lunchroom demanded both my wife and Mrs. Shatwell. I sat and picked at my tray. The kids continued to stare. I finally got up, took my tray to the cleanup area, and walked out of the cafeteria. Sandy never seemed to miss me. She never asked me why I left, and I never tried to join her for lunch again. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so out of place in my entire life.

The three baby showers occurred on the first three weekends in October. The groups of ladies were certainly very different, but I found the women Pansy’s age almost lewd and quite suggestive. Several asked if they could change my diaper, and most tried to *check* my diaper. I found myself pulling away from one lady who insisted on unzipping my sleeper to see if I was really wet. Someone had to whisper to the woman that I was Sandy’s husband.

My Mom’s friends all knew me, of course, and I’m sure that fact helped create a more civil demeanor. I enjoyed playing the ‘serving baby’ with her group, and I was glad to see many of Mom’s friends I hadn’t seen in several years.

Sandy seemed to enjoy herself more at Mom’s event. There wasn’t the same edginess I’d seen her exhibit at her mom’s shower. Sandy never seemed particularly at ease in her parents’ home. She seemed to think she continually had to prove herself in some way. In contrast, Sandy always seemed quite content with *my* parents. I did not understand the reason, and I wasn’t sure I ever would.

The final shower with the group of ladies from Onion Creek was flat-out *fun*. Sandy was in control, of course, since she was their boss, but many of the women had known me since I was a student.

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Some of the newer faculty members were my age; most were Sandy's age or a little older. I watched as they played games and as Sandy opened presents, feeling fortunate to see the excitement firsthand. I enjoyed watching them with my wife. They universally respected Sandy, which was a sharp contrast to Pansy's friends.

The three showers produced a blinding array of baby clothing and needed essentials. These were the days before computer-aided baby registries and the like and while we got a few duplicate gifts, we did not receive a single thing that would not be almost immediately useful. For the next two weeks, I helped Sandy write thank-you notes to each lady who'd attended.

Chapter Three: Yuletide



For youngsters, the holiday season is the best time of the year. I think Sandy and I still viewed it that way.

That Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1988 would mark our first holiday together, our last ‘normal’ holiday before the birth of our child, and the last few days we could spend solely with each other. Come January, we’d have to make a room for a newborn, with all the attendant sleepless nights, long days, and assorted challenges. Our plan was to spend Thanksgiving with my Mom and Dad and then spend Christmas afternoon with Sandy’s parents. We reserved Christmas Eve for ourselves.

Some sort of rail disaster on Thanksgiving morning called my Dad out of the house. The Governor was out of state, and Dad needed to make an appearance. Mom, Sandy, and I wound up sharing Thanksgiving dinner by ourselves. Consequently, our conversation was a little more far-ranging than it might have been had Dad been present.

“What are you two doing for Christmas?” Mom asked, then added, “Sammy, I hope you’re not still making Sandy change diapers. You’ll have enough of that ahead.” Her own mention of the

Yuletide made Mom think of the Christmases she and Sandy had spent babying me.

Sandy put down her fork. Remember what I said about my Mom and Sandy never having had a cross word? I felt certain that the situation was about to change.

“Karen,” Sandy said, patting her mouth with her napkin, “you need to understand something. I love *everything* I do with Sammy. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t do it.”

“Mom,” I added, “Sandy has never let me pay her a cent for all the time she spent taking care of me. She would have babysat me for free when you hired her years ago. I still love the care and she still loves providing it.”

“That’s not very professional,” Sandy said, “but there it is. End of story.” She began to nibble at a cranberry slice.

I watched Mom shake her head, as if our dialogue were flatly incomprehensible to her. At age 50, I wondered if Mom was becoming a bit intractable.

We heard Dad coming through the front door. He’d brought his capitol police driver along for Thanksgiving dinner, and Mom was happy to set another place. The man had no family in the United States and nowhere to go except the movies.

We’d met Zuth some months before, but Sandy and I both enjoyed getting to know him over dinner. Zuthimalin was Algerian, and he told us of a part of the world Sandy and I were keen to visit. This was a dozen years before the events of September 11, and countries like Algeria were still tempting tourist destinations for Americans like us. Perhaps more entertaining, Zuth and Sandy carried on a lengthy conversation in French while Mom, Dad, and I watched.

Sandy made a point to bring Zuth a copy of my novel when we visited Mom and Dad on Christmas Eve, and he shared our Thanksgiving dinner the following year, holding our son in his lap much of the time.

For Sandy, school wrapped up on December 21. By then, she was heavily pregnant. When she returned the following year, Sandy told Bonnie and Christine, she'd be a mom. I'm sure the ladies were very nearly as anxious as we were. Christine would be acting Principal until Sandy came back to work. From what Sandy told me, Christine was not looking forward to handling the discipline challenges that were bound to arise in Sandy's absence.

I was halfway through my second novel. The more I worked over the chapters I'd written, the more I was convinced that this book would be a sales success. My last novel had languished and I knew this new story was an improvement.

We entered Christmas week in high spirits... or as high as they could be, given the fact that Sandy was about eight months pregnant. Bathing me was a struggle for her now. Sandy could not bend down, and she could not sit on the floor beside the tub. She contented herself with 'directing me' as she watched me take my own bath. She sat on the closed toilet and told me what to scrub and what I'd missed.

Thankfully, we had a changing table. I would hop up and Sandy would maneuver herself close enough to diaper me. I often had to tug on my own plastic pants, since that movement seemed quite difficult for Sandy to manage. I still went to bed diapered most nights, and I'd spend 30 minutes or so before bedtime rubbing Sandy's feet and ankles. She was sleeping mostly on her back now, so our nighttime cuddling was substantially restricted.

I did enjoy watching Sandy's breasts grow larger as her pregnancy advanced. Her bra size had gone up during the early

months, and her breasts continued to grow apace. Now and then, I'd try to nurse. But this was often either a logistical challenge in positioning or flatly uncomfortable for Sandy. By late December, Sandy said she looked forward to giving me some of her milk once the baby arrived. Then she told me that her breasts were effectively off-limits until the baby was born.

We brought a small suitcase down from the attic, packed it with pajamas, newborn clothing, and other essentials and left it sitting in the laundry room. When the time came, we could head to the hospital well-prepared.

That was the plan, anyway.

On Christmas morning, I sat on the floor in a diaper and light sleeper and unwrapped presents while Sandy sat on the sofa, directing my activity. Some of the boxes to which she pointed were big; I unwrapped a new Gerry flip-top diaper pail, a bigger teddy bear, and a new Duplo set. I was quite content, since these were all things I could immediately use – and did. For our first Christmas together, I gave Sandy an expensive red leather-bound desk journal, a very nice travel bag, and a small stereo system for her office.

Once the carpet beneath the Christmas tree was bare of presents – Sandy said seeing the barren space beneath the tree was the saddest part of Christmas Day – we stored all the baby things in the nursery and Sandy took off my wet pants so I could take a shower.

We'd gone to Mom and Dad's on Christmas Eve afternoon, then Dick and Pansy came for dinner on Christmas afternoon. Sandy had ordered from Rustler's Rooste and I'd collected the food the day before. We had prime rib and holiday turkey, and Sandy's parents seemed to enjoy themselves and the meal. When they headed back home on Christmas night, Sandy hastened to pronounce the day a success.

We sat on the sofa, watching the twinkling lights on the Christmas tree. Outside, the sun was setting. While not particularly cold, there was a chill in the air at that time of day. I could tell Sandy was restless, and I suggested we go out and walk a bit. She pulled on her coaches' jacket, I changed into an Adidas warmup, and we strolled the neighborhood for about half an hour enjoying the Christmas lights and the sounds of happy families inside their homes.

That night, Sandy and I got into the shower together. We had to make a conscious effort to avoid jostling the baby bump, but we had a good bit of fun. We stood under the warm water for about 45 minutes, and I scrubbed the places on Sandy's body that she could no longer reach. For example, she put each leg on the edge of the bathtub, and I washed her toes, feet, and ankles. After the startling lack of intimacy with a hands-off bath, taking a shower together was something we both enjoyed. Christmas evening was our six-month anniversary.

I went to bed that night in a diaper and onesie. Sandy wanted to talk about what the future held for our baby play. For the next two or three years, obviously, the crib in the spare bedroom would fill a genuine need. Beyond that, we'd need some way to hide it and the various other bits and pieces from prying eyes. We had another bedroom we'd been using for storage; that would become our son's bedroom when he was old enough.

"I need to make some money with this next book," I told Sandy, who was lying on her back next to me. "Then we can rent a small apartment, put all my baby furniture there and use it when we like."

Sandy thought that was a good idea on both counts: Money, since she'd been paying most of the bills, and the apartment. The more I thought about the idea, the more I began to regret having

given up my small apartment. Something like it would be ideal when the time rolled around.

"All we'll need is a willing babysitter for the baby," Sandy said. I think she knew my Mom was already on the hook, and there would be others. Sandy pointed out that she could practically take her pick of high school girls.

"I don't think I ever wanna get pregnant again," Sandy said quietly. "You and this baby are the only ones I'll ever have."

I remember feeling especially honored that Sandy had included *me* in her infant count.

We had never really talked about having more children, and I suppose I was content having just one. Sandy had gone through two rather primitive ultrasounds and both indicated that the baby was a boy. However, the reliability of the scans proved somewhat questionable; one technician told us he was about 75 percent sure. The gender of our baby wouldn't really be known with absolute certainty until Sandy gave birth.

I honestly wanted a son, but the thought of having another child if Sandy gave birth to a little girl wasn't something I was desperate to entertain.

I sat up and headed toward the foot of the bed, intent on rubbing Sandy's feet and ankles. I began to massage her left foot and felt her hand patting my bottom.

"After your next book comes out," Sandy said, her eyes closed, "maybe we could consider hiring a part-time nanny."

"Look how well that worked out for me!" I said. Sandy reached out and smacked my onesie-clad bottom.

"I'm serious, you idiot," Sandy said, settling back again. "You're going to need more help than you think. Once the baby is walking, things will never stop unless we have someone else

helping. I'll be gone all day, and your mom and my Mom won't wanna be here all the time."

"I think you'll be surprised about my Mom," I said. Part of me expected my Mom to practically move in with us when the baby was born.

"My real challenge," I said with as much honesty as I could muster, "will be learning how to *do* everything. I've watched you change a lot of diapers, but I've never changed anyone except myself. I've never fed a baby, never bathed a baby ... I've read all the books and watched my Mom, but reading and watching will only teach you so much."

I'd have been far more at ease in that respect if I'd taken the new parent classes the local hospitals offered. But Sandy had told me that very little of the information was immediately applicable. She'd sat in on the groups when she was a candy striper in the late '60s and knew firsthand. When she became a nanny, the classes proved unhelpful.

"You told me once that I was hopeless," I remembered. "Despite all the tennis, I know I'm still a little clumsy. Maybe I'll be all thumbs with a baby. I just have no way to know."

"I told you were hopeless when you nearly got yourself killed. I was scared. I shouldn't have said that," Sandy said.

She took her time responding to my real concern, as if deciding what to tell me and what to keep back.

"You know," Sandy finally said, "there's really no difference between caring for you and caring for a real baby. Everything's bigger, but all the things you do are the same."

"You've watched me for a decade. What you do is what you've watched me do. With newborns, everything is scaled down quite a lot because they're so small."