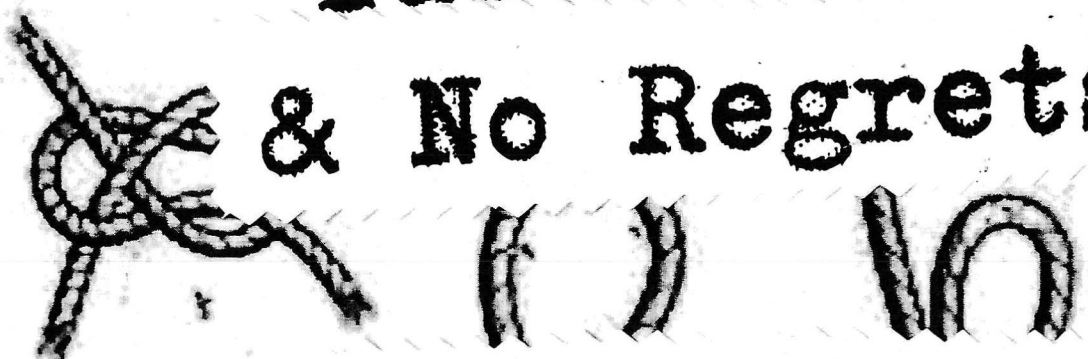
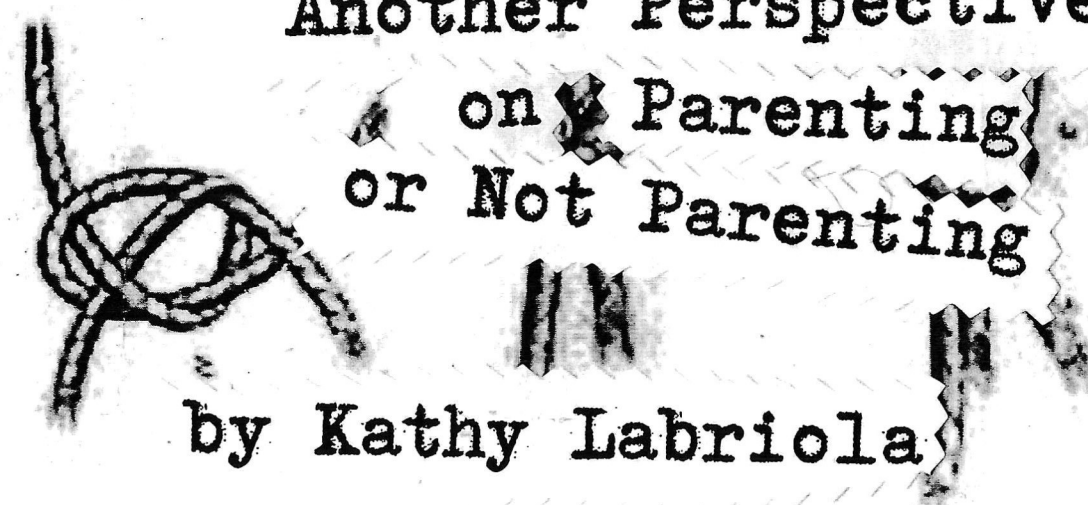


# Tubes Tied & No Regrets



Another Perspective  
on Parenting  
or Not Parenting



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kinds of bizarre motives.

Sometimes people sincerely are just curious, and actually want to know what led me to this decision and to the life I have chosen. Often, they have never met a woman who has actively chosen not to have children, and they sincerely want to learn more, because they have never questioned the assumption that everyone should have kids. In that situation, I am very willing to discuss my life and how I ended up here, because I see an opportunity to let people know that they DO have a choice. I believe having children should be thought through and intentional, rather than based on following a script from another century.

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## **Tubes Tied & No Regrets:**

### **Another perspective on parenting or not parenting**

by Kathy Labriola

I was so glad that the last issue of Slingshot addressed some very important issues: differing opinions about having children, not having children, raising children in alternative family structures, etc. Most radical publications, as well as most radicals themselves, have chosen to STEER CLEAR of this very hot-potato debate, either because they believe it is a very private and personal matter or because they know it will stir some pretty passionate disagreements! I applaud Slingshot for wading fearlessly into the fray, with one article by a young woman who chose voluntary sterilization and a life without bearing children, and another article by a parent who described the many joys and responsibilities of choosing to create and raise children. I am sure both articles (and both authors) will be attacked by people of many different persuasions, but I believe this issue is long overdue for an open discussion, and I would like to add another perspective.

My feeling has always been that parenthood is a calling, and that people who feel a calling to be parents are probably the most ideally suited to becoming parents, and those folks probably should pursue their calling and have kids! People who do not feel called to become parents will probably regret having children, especially if they do so because they are being pressured by family

or friends or because they just “bought the bullshit” that every human must reproduce in order to fulfill their mission in life.

I believe that part of the reason people get so defensive and/or judgemental about these issues is that most people decide to have children or to not have children for a mixture of both altruistic and self-centered reasons. I don't think anyone's motives in this decision can be entirely objective, never mind selfless, and there is always a jumble of different goals and motives involved.

Personally, I knew from a very young age that parenting was not my calling, and was not what I wanted to organize my life around or focus my energy and resources on. I was so certain of that, that I got my tubes tied when I was 21 years old. I am 64 years old now, and with each passing year I have only become more convinced that I made the right decision. I have never regretted not experiencing pregnancy, childbirth, and raising children that share my genetic material. I have always been open about my numerous selfish and unselfish motives, and I wish more people would examine their own reasons and be honest with themselves and their comrades.

For instance, here are the completely selfish reasons I chose not to have children:

It's way too much work and responsibility! Who in their right mind would sign up for that? I was not willing to give up sleep,

parents financially or providing “extras” that the parents may not be able to afford, educating children whether by volunteering in schools or teaching a child to garden or build things or play the guitar, and/or by being a trusted adult in times of crisis or need.

From the day I got my tubes tied in 1976, my decision to forgo child-bearing was roundly ridiculed and vilified by my family, co-workers, political comrades, and many close friends. Even though I have been beyond child-bearing age for nearly 15 years now, people still express shock and dismay that I chose this path. It was much worse in the 1970's and 80's, as misogyny ruled and it seemed to be universally believed that women's only contribution to society was birthing and raising children. I wish I had a dollar for every well-meaning idiot who told me I would never be fulfilled as a woman if I did not have children and that I would be miserable and lonely in my old age. I can attest that in fact, I feel very fulfilled in every arena of my life, and I am far from lonely now that I have reached old age.

When people have attacked me for not having children, I have never felt obliged to “justify” my decision. My body belongs to me and my destiny is mine to decide, and I don't owe anyone an explanation. Whenever someone has a baby, people congratulate them, and it would be absurd if every time a woman had a baby, people demanded that she justify that decision. But for some reason, people who barely know me feel free to interrogate me endlessly about why I don't have children, and accuse me of all

effective method of birth control, and both of those required at least some cooperation from the man and could not be completely controlled by the woman.

As a result, the Baby Boomer generation was the first generation of women that actually had a choice about whether to have children. Prior to that, child-bearing was essentially mandatory (as it still is in some patriarchal and religious cultures). So this is a new decision that no one ever really got to make before, and it is very difficult charting completely new territory, with no role models to follow. My mother got married at age 19 and had 5 children by the time she was 26, and that was fairly typical of the 1950's homemaker and wife. Barely 20 years after my mother had her first child, I had my tubes tied, and I was considered extremely radical and insane.

While I chose not to give birth to children myself, I have had the great joy of actively participating in helping to raise two godsons and three nephews, and I would not have missed that experience for the world! Some of the happiest memories of my life are weekends taking my godson camping or going on bikes hikes with my nephews or taking them to movies and political protests.

I have always felt that for those of us who choose not to bear children ourselves, we can contribute in some way to the lives of children. This could be through providing care for kids, helping

sex, partying, free time, and expendable income in order to devote all my time, energy, and money to raising and supporting kids.

Okay, now for the altruistic reasons I decided not to have children:

The world is overpopulated, and there is no shortage of children in the world.

White people in the so-called developed world use way more than our share of the world's resources. Me adding additional white kids would only exacerbate that imbalance and inequality.

My genetic material is somewhat defective, and really does not need to be reproduced. I come from a family of many generations of alcoholics, addicts, and mentally ill people. I have watched many relatives and siblings struggle with and suffer horribly with addiction and disabling mental illnesses which ruined their lives. I do not want to wish that kind of suffering on any kids I might have, and they would be at a significantly elevated risk for these debilitating conditions.

If I don't have to organize my life, time, and resources around raising children, I can devote much of my energy to working towards radical political and societal transformation.

Women carry an unfair burden of responsibility for raising children, and the men do not do their part (this was even more true in the 1970's and 80's when I was of childbearing age). I refused to participate in that misogynist system of inequality, and I felt that until the men were willing to be full participants in parenting, women could boycott pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing.

People who DO have children often claim that they do so for purely unselfish reasons: because they wanted to give a child love and nurturing, or that they are dedicated to raising the next generation, or that having kids is their contribution to society, and other very lofty-sounding motives.

However, if you get into a longer and somewhat more honest conversation with them, often they will acknowledge more self-centered motives:

I didn't want to be all alone, and having kids will keep me from being lonely, I had kids so I would have someone to take care of me in my old age, I want to pass on my genetic material, my partner and I want to create a unique individual who is a combination of both of us, my kids are my legacy and continue the family line, I wanted to please my parents by giving them grandchildren, I didn't want to miss out on this awesome

experience of giving birth, etc.

And eventually, many will reluctantly acknowledge that they just had an intense visceral desire to have children, not based on any rational reason at all. This is totally normal and okay! After all, sex and reproduction are deeply embedded instincts which have kept homo sapiens alive for millions of years.

There is nothing wrong with any of these motives, they are all completely valid; I just wish people would be more honest about them.

And even more people will admit that they are confused about whether to have kids, and even people who have had kids often have second thoughts and regrets about it. It makes sense that anyone would have mixed feelings about all the pros and cons of having kids, trying to weigh all the costs in time and responsibility and money, against the joys of having that very unique relationship with a child from conception to adulthood and beyond.

And it's not surprising that women in particular would find it very difficult to decide whether to have children or not. For one thing, until the invention of the Birth Control Pill and the IUD in the mid-1960's, no highly effective method of contraception existed. Condoms and diaphragms were the only reasonably