

## EDITORIAL

BEING A PARENT IS OFTEN DESCRIBED as the most difficult and the most rewarding experience of a person's life, as it can feel completely overwhelming and impossible, yet it also inspires an unparalleled degree of love and devotion. This explains why parents often express contradictory emotions, such as a desire to relinquish their responsibilities while simultaneously maintaining close ties with their offspring, which can become particularly fraught as children grow up and leave home. In a conversation with Jane Zwart at Calvin College's Festival of Faith and Writing in 2012, American writer Jonathan Safran Foer described these contradictory feelings as the "tragedy of parenting":

You want your kids to grow up, and you don't want your kids to grow up. And you can't have it both ways. You want your kids to become independent of you, but it's also in a way a parent's worst nightmare: for them to not need you. So, how do you reconcile those two very strong emotions? You don't. You live with that problem.

This conversation took place shortly after the release of the film adaptation of his celebrated novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), which is narrated by a highly eccentric and gifted nine-year-old boy struggling with the death of his father in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. Foer's novel was widely praised for its use of a child narrator, and he argued that literary narratives were particularly valuable because they allowed writers to reconcile the contradictory feelings of both parents and children, who seek attachment and detachment at the same time: "[I]n art you can have it both ways, whereas in life you can't."

Our summer issue features a special section that addresses this theme in various ways. For example, Kristine Scarrow's story "Counting Through It" and Elaine van der Geld's story "Edges" vividly illustrate the difficulties of parenting by describing the experiences of mothers who feel over-

whelmed by the challenges and responsibilities of parenting—to the point that they seem barely able to function. Sacha Archer’s poem “Ms. Yeo Makes a Call After an Extended Hiatus” similarly describes a telephone conversation with a mother who is struggling with a sick baby, and Nicole Boyce’s story “Rat King” describes how the experience of parenting transforms a young couple’s relationship, which leads them to take a much-needed vacation without their children. Dana Snell’s story “Pause” employs a fantastic premise—namely, the development of a procedure that allows parents to temporarily arrest the aging of their children—to describe how the experience of parenting changes as children get older, and it clearly illustrates (and potentially critiques) the pleasure some parents derive from the dependence of small children. Robert Benz’s story “Back Steps” similarly emphasizes the joys of childcare as well as the sense of loss that comes with watching them grow up and make their own mistakes. Like Foer’s novel, Elisha Emerson’s story “All the People Traipsing” is told from the perspective of an eccentric child whose difficulty making friends is exacerbated by her mother’s desire to rise above their social class. Bill Stenson’s story “The Wedding” similarly features an eccentric child who is trying to negotiate parental limitations on his freedom, although this protagonist appears to live in a world where children exhibit remarkable signs of emotional and intellectual maturity. Karen Segal’s essay “Upside Down” provides a more troubling look at the experience of childhood by describing her memories of a popular teacher who was later revealed to be a pedophile. Nadine McInnis’ story “Zero Day” similarly describes a troubled childhood from the perspective of a child narrator, although in this case it is the parents who are the source of tension and anxiety, as they disagree as to whether the family should settle down or remain itinerant wanderers. Michael V. Smith’s poem “Pretending Sleep” and Roger Nash’s poem “The Sewing Machine” focus on more positive and nostalgic memories of childhood, and Scott Randall’s story “Ford Econoline” similarly describes the narrator’s fond memories of a childhood that culminated in the untimely loss of a beloved parent.

Our summer issue also features two new chronicles: Michael Greenstein’s review of Cormac McCarthy’s last novel, *The Passenger* (2022), and Jerry White’s review of Nicole Holofcener’s latest film, *You Hurt My Feelings* (2023).