Fraternal Youth

Fatherhood Fails and Other Tales with Boy-Girl Twins



DARBY JONES

"Mix Jim Gaffigan, Erma Bombeck and Pee Wee Herman into a Darby Smoothie. Add a dash of nonsense that makes perfect sense and you've got a compilation that spans from raising kids to raising hell. I'm an avid fan."

- Wendy Parker, satirist for Overdrive Magazine

"Darby stunned me with this book. It's happy, funny, sad and weird – all the things that make up a life well lived, and he tells it with such beauty and momentum. So many chapters swept me away."

- Ginger Cook, Humorist on Substack

Darby Jones

Joker/Editor/Songwriter (20 years) | Husband/Dad (16 years)

Doom's overdone, so **I share hope and hard laughs**. It's an experimental memoir with lots of QR codes to videos and cultural artifacts like **footage of our dog fetching beer from the fridge**. It was my COVID project.

Fraternal Youth Cocktail

- 4 parts **fatherhood fails** + the absurdity of life
- 3 parts **goofy boy-girl twins** + their **crazy pets**
- 2 parts **wild adventures** to Bonnaroo, Greece + hitchhiking to the Gulf Shores
- 1 part ***Peaceful Parenting*** + simple/proven discipline systems
- 1 part ***Headlines of Hope***: a six-year hunt for tech, medical and energy breakthroughs + my comical spin on antidotes to despair.

Early Excerpts

I changed my first diaper on August 27, 2007. It smelled like fermented mothballs with a touch of failed dreams. I don't know where those subtle notes came from, but they were good reminders to use birth control.

2 years, 8 months old:

Kids got in trouble at the store. Finn dropped a can of tinned-pork on Melina's middle toe. The SPAM survived, but Momma no longer has a piggy that eats roast beef. The toe's still there, but it's a scarred vegetarian now.

3 years, 8 months:

"Finn, didn't you say you'd drink your juice after dinner?"
"I didn't hear *me* say that."

4 years, 10 months:

"Shhhh! I heard a sound make a noise."
– Fiona

5 years, 11 months:

"Every time you go into war, you should go potty first."
– Finn

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Diapers and Grit

I changed my first diaper on Monday, August 27, 2007. The smell reminded me of fermented mothballs with a touch of failed dreams. I don't know where those subtle notes came from, but they were good reminders to use birth control.

Melina and I had just started getting serious, so this was our first major test. Her brother, Paul, was in Paris participating in a 1200 kilometer bicycle race, so we were babysitting his kids for an entire week.

We were told that little Nick knew how to go number two in his potty chair, but the convenience of taking a dump in a diaper whenever and wherever is the obvious choice.

The smug smile on his face looked like it was mocking the anguish in mine. It can't be true, coming from a two-year old, but it felt like a premeditated power play to balance the scales, like maybe I should think twice about my eat-your-broccoli-before-dessert warnings.

Nicholas (in his mind): “How do you like this time-out?”

Me: “I’m going to barf.”

Nicholas: “Mwahahahahaaaaaa!”

I couldn’t help but sneak a smile while writhing in revulsion.

Me (in my mind): On second thought, I’d like to have one or two of these little shits someday. Sophie and Nicholas are too stinkin’ cute. That, however, is not going to stop me from destroying them in the next pillow fight. I’ll be ready this time.

You Have to Cry

Nov 18, 2011 | 2 y, 8 mo

Finn and Fio got in big trouble at the grocery store. Finn dropped a can of tinned-pork on Melina’s middle toe. The SPAM survived, but Momma no longer has a piggy that eats roast beef. The toe’s still there, but it’s a scarred vegetarian now.

Next, Fiona stood up in the cart, which was totally unsanctioned. Melina was only looking away for a second, but of course, some helicopter mom had to swoop in and scold her.

Helicopter Mom: “Somebody needs to watch their daughter?”

Melina: “She’s mine. [Under her breath] Sorry that I don’t have eyes in the back of my head.”

When they came home, I was judge, jury, and executioner. The plea bargain: If our little minions agreed to carry in the groceries, I’d reduce their sentence from five minutes to four. They asked for three, but considering the severity of the crime, I wouldn’t budge – told ‘em I’d throw in a pizza for dinner and they accepted.

So they carried the groceries in and proceeded to their time-out chairs. Fiona immediately started to cry, to which Finn (who had much more experience in time out) responded,

“Fiona, you don’t have to cry in time out.” Fiona stopped crying on a dime and shouted “B-bo! You HAVE to cry!”

I cocked my head back and roared with laughter, which put a stop to the argument ... and the crying. Fiona accidentally chuckled.

“Gotcha!”

Caught her red-handed. I gotta hand it to her though. It was an Oscar-worthy performance.





Finn: “I hear what you’re saying about the poo. I really do, but I still think the pee came first.”

Victory swagger

Dec. 23, 2011 | 2 y, 9 mo

Snowstorms delayed our Christmas flight to Raleigh and we were failing as parents. After an hour reading the same books, Fiona's restlessness turned to tantrum. The stares of people nearby started to look like bad words.



TCA said to put everything in the box. I followed the rules, but X-ray dude looks grumpy for some reason.

I tried to fashion a paperclip into a frog, but one bounce and it was gone. Then, the metaphorical light bulbs flashed as I got an idea. The "bulbs" were right there, staring me in the face in the form of three shiny silver helium balloons floating above the Christmas display by the gift store.

For the sake of everyone's sanity, I ran over and commandeered them for Fiona. As if I had flipped a switch, her crying turned to hysterical laughter. But the new crazy looked almost identical to the previous one and continued to attract glares. Clearly, her energy couldn't be contained in the small deli we were in, so I unleashed her to run the halls.

She wove through holiday crowds at top speed, balloons bobbing behind and occasionally grazing the faces of speed walkers. Before long, people were pointing and smiling.

I was thrilled to be back in society's good graces, but red alerts were still sounding in my head. Toddlers can't just run around willy nilly without something going horribly wrong. Sure enough, we all cringed as Fiona tripped

over someone's luggage. Remarkably though, she had been hugging one of the balloons. Not only did it break her fall, but she slid a few feet across the tiled floor as she crash-landed.

I couldn't tell if the onlookers were getting up to see if she was okay or if they were giving her a standing ovation. In any case, Fio turned it into a game, running a bit faster this time and leaping into the air. A few of the power walkers leaped into the air themselves as she ran up behind them, sliding by like a belly-surfing penguin on ice.

It's too bad we didn't get in on camera. I would have captured the magic myself, except my hands were tied up doing traffic control. Passersby started clearing the way. Now the whole corridor was her personal runway ... until she leaped a little too high.

POW!

Fiona hit the ground, still spread out like Superman as she slid to a stop. At this point, nobody seemed to care that the exploding balloon sounded like gunfire.

TSA #1: "Yeaaaah, we're just going to let this one slide."

TSA #2: "You're fired."

TSA #1: "C'mon!"

TSA #2: "Ok, it was pretty good."

When Fiona stood up, the two other balloons pulled up and away. "Noooooo!" she cried. I jumped, but couldn't get there in time. That was it. The show was over. Fiona was bawling as I picked her up. As we walked back to the deli, I faintly heard someone behind me in the whiskey bar say, "Hey." I looked back and Dude was holding a chair. "I bet you can get her those balloons," he suggested.

I don't turn down a good dare, and this was close enough. The man was betting on me. Sure, Fiona played a part in it, but honestly, I wanted the audience to myself. The twins are always stealing the show.

I handed Fiona off to her mother to be consoled, but it was just a ploy to keep Melina distracted. She's a force to be reckoned with anytime, but especially when I show my ass.

So I grabbed the chair and quickly got to work, but my first attempt fell short. Dude looked disappointed, like my height was false advertisement. I was just another tall white guy with deceptively jumpy vibes.

I could see a few airport staff members pointing my way, trying to decide if I was going to be a problem. At least Melina wasn't watching. That meant there was still time to hatch a new plan. I spied a trash can that looked promising, but the thing was massive, made of stone – way too heavy to slide. What if ...?

It took some muscle, but I was able to tip it over just enough to keep its contents from spilling out, but far enough to slowly roll it along the bottom edge.

It was part balancing, part Frogger as I wove through the speed walkers and grinned at all the what-the-fuck faces. As I climbed atop the big-ass trash can, onlookers from the deli, gift store and whiskey bar were all tuned in. That's when I saw my extremely bewildered wife cutting through the crowd. It was now or never.

[Alright Spielberg. I'll make it easy for ya'.]

FADE IN:

INT. NASHVILLE AIRPORT – LARGE CORRIDOR – DAY

The shrewd face of MELINA looks confused. The warm face of BAR DUDE begins to smile, eyebrows rise in anticipation. A walkie-talkie is heard off-screen.

TSA #1 (V.O.)
We've got a jumper. Repeat.
We've got a jumper. Over.

IN SLOW MOTION – DARBY launches. Fingertips just barely snag the end of the ribbon.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

GREEN SCREEN – DARBY'S hair is standing straight up. We see stars, planets and a big fucking supernova. We hear the string quartet crescendo.

CUT TO:

MEL'S POV

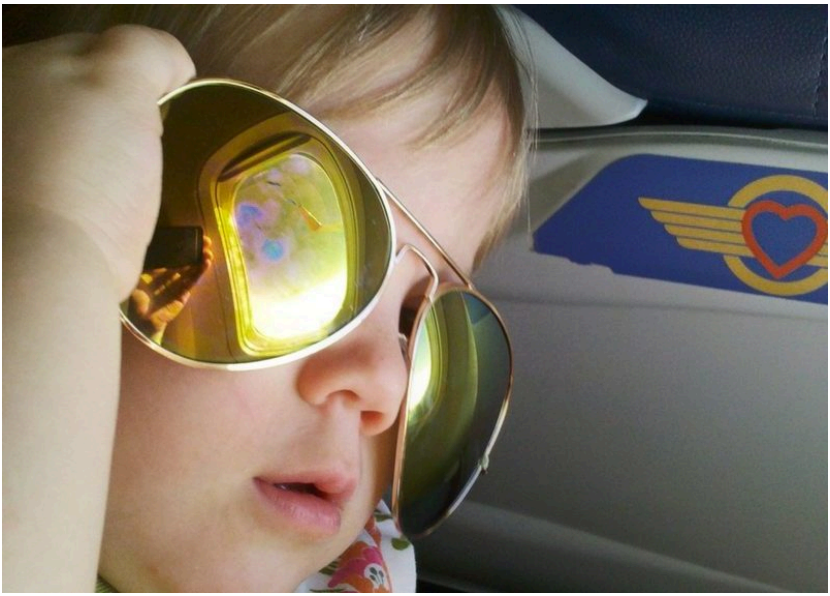
Darby tucks and rolls, still clutching the ribbon. Fiona jumps on him as the barflies explode.

It would have been a Steven Spielberg ending had I not come down so hard. Mel was the only one who could tell I was hurt, but I had so much adrenaline pumping that my limp looked more like victory swagger.

As Fiona hugged my leg, I tied her fuzzy red glove to the ribbon and tossed the two remaining balloons back up toward the ceiling. Her jaw dropped in disbelief. Before she could get mad, the balloons started to slowly drift back down with the weight of the glove. Fiona began laughing, then clapping and stomping in anticipation.

When it was time for us to board, Fiona gave the balloons to a little boy sitting on the floor. I almost lost it, watching him blush at my little girl. I bet he kept that fuzzy glove.

As we floated back to Raleigh, Mel reminded me that I wasn't Superman. Said I was pretty good at flying, but that I needed to work on my landing. Fiona will have to teach me someday.



Video: Carrots for Ra Ra (Rabbit)
April 8, 2012 | 3 y, 1 mo



View the video

Early fatherhood retirement
Sept. 7, 2012 | 3 y, 6 mo

Early morning. Melina's still asleep. Walking into the dining room.

Me: "Hey buddy, why are you sitting there?"

Finn: "Because Fiona cleaned up all the books and I didn't help."

I started laughing, so he cheered up.

Finn: "Can I get out now?"

Me: "Maybe. How long of a timeout did you put yourself in?"

Finn: "I don't know. I can only count to 100."

Me: "Did you learn your lesson?"

Finn: "Yes."

Me: "My job is complete. Let's play!"

Selective hearing
Nov. 4, 2012 | 3 y, 8 mo

Finishing up dinner.

Me: "Hey Finn, didn't you say you'd drink your juice after dinner?"

Finn: "I didn't hear me say that."

Me: “Did you just say, ‘I didn’t hear me say that’?”

Finn: “Yes.”

Me: “Well maybe you weren’t listening to yourself. Drink your juice.”





There's a nice word for poop
Mar. 11, 2013 | 4 years exactly

Eating breakfast.

Me: "Happy Birthday! Do you like your birthday present?"

Fiona: "Daddy, I'm so happy we have a doggie!"

Me: "Awww, that makes me happy, baby."

Finn: "And I'm so happy you got the dog-doo off my shoe!"

Fiona and I laugh at this while Finn shouts over us.

Finn: "You don't call it poop! You call it dog-doo!"

Finn is so PC. A few days ago Fiona was hollering.

Fiona: "Wipe my butt, Daddy! I went poop!"

Finn: "Don't say 'poop,' Fiona. There's a nice word for poop."

Me: "What is it?"

Finn: "My raccoon told me."

Me: "Well, what's the word?"

Finn: "I don't know. I don't understand anything Raccoon says."

One twin loves me. One for two ain't bad.
Sept. 11, 2013 | 4 y, 6 mo

Getting home late from work. Everyone's already eating dessert.

Me: "I didn't get a mango creamsicle. Are there any left?"

Finn: "You can have a bite of mine." [Finn comes over and shares a bite.]

Me: [Looking at Fiona] "Thanks Finn!"

Fiona: "I was going to give you a bite, but it's in my belly now."

Me: "That's really thoughtful of you."



The big wind

Aug. 14, 2014 | 5 y, 5 mo

Finn and Fio crossed the street this morning while we were asleep. It was totally unsanctioned, but they had let Piper slip out the door and chased after her in hot pursuit. I couldn't believe Piper let them catch her, but there she was on the leash, in their hands.

Fiona: "We looked both ways, like five times."

Finn: "No six times! And then we were in Tom's yard, and there was this big wind, and Fiona said,

‘LOOK!!!’ and I looked, but there was nothing there. Then Fiona said, ‘No. Look! Your pants fell off!’ so I looked down and hahahahaha ... she was right!”

Me: “Well no wonder you noticed the big wind.”



The scariest night of my marriage

Nov. 8, 2020

Somehow, the scariest night of my life turned into the hardest I’ve ever laughed. That pretty much sums up our wedding and marriage in general ... but also last Tuesday.

After watching Aliens the other night, I went to bed and dreamt I was in this weird Hunger Games competition, last-one-standing kinda thing, only it was set in a shopping mall and we weren’t fighting people, just avoiding being mauled by roving gangs of cats. Every variety you can imagine: housecats, bobcats, sabre-tooth tigers. Garfield made a cameo, which really messed me up because he’s supposed to make me laugh, not eat me.

Anyway, about the time that I hatched a plan to escape, I felt something crawl up my arm. Keep in mind, Aliens had set all this in motion, so I immediately thought it was one of those little face-suckers that run around like Thing from The Addams Family.

Meanwhile, in the real world, something scuttled across my face. I'm talking about a cockroach. La Cucaracha right across my eyeballs. Naturally, I screamed like a little girl and jumped out of bed.

Melina had felt something moments before, but her dream-mind decided to chalk it up to my hair tickling her arm. She may have ignored the warning from her inner self, but she could not ignore me screaming bloody murder. Out of a deep slumber, she flung the covers to the floor and somersaulted off the end of the bed.

It would have been olympic if she had stuck the landing, but her dismount looked like what it was: someone hurtling off a king-sized balance beam in the dark. There was just enough moonlight for me to see her crash to the floor.

I stood there in horror at the thought of a neck injury or concussion. To make matters worse, Melina started convulsing. The numbers 911 flashed across my mind until I realized she was doing another instinctual thing: giggling uncontrollably, and silently, the way you do because you need to fill your lungs with enough air before you can properly explode. Which she did. From the gut. And we went on like this, howling until our sides hurt so bad that we couldn't tell if the tears were from agony or hilarity.

What a great movie. Totally worth the terrifying nightmares.

Speaking of hilarious scares. This one was epic:



View the video

Dimensions of Truth
Sept. 20, 2021

Truth is found in shades of grey
between black and white lies a doorway
where in walks Yang, out walks Yin
They work hard, but take it easy and sing

for love, for hate? Is it art or graffiti?
Is it all fake or is it Armine?
Who cares? It's a bag ... floating in the air
It's American beauty, a billionaire
who took all the money and gave it away
A swan song on his dying day
An echo that bounces eternally
in the swirl of a Fibonacci
sequence.
We live forever
in the things we create,
in every endeavor
we offend the Fates
Heaven on earth is a legacy
It's living electromagnetically
Positive, negative; a time for each way
for a three-dimensional shade of grey

How to get yourself murdered

Oct. 6, 2021

It's my first time seeing Ani DiFranco, and I'm instantly hypnotized. She's a ferocious little chipmunk. Guitar strings rattle and pop as she scampers across the stage – totally in love with life.

I'm so lost in her spell that I barely notice my wife slip away to get a drink. A few minutes later Melina returns, standing where she was, in front and a little to the left.

I start scratching her back along with some light massaging. This goes on for a couple minutes until the end of the song – when a large Black lady turns around. She's an orbulant beauty.

(Orbulant /OR-byuh-lent/: adjective. 1. Round, radiant. 2. Not in the dictionary. 3. Looks nothing like Melina.)

"HELLO?!" snaps the stranger in front of me.

I literally levitate off the ground, then cover my face. I try to explain what happened, but I'm laughing so hard that it doesn't make sense. Apparently, her husband had gone off to get a drink too, so she thought I was him the whole time.

Then her husband walks up. He looks like Mr. Clean, but with prison-yard tattoos coiling over every bulging muscle. Suddenly the tats start to shape-shift and expand. Nobody spiked my drink. The guy was just flexing. As he towers over me, I pray that he's merely big-bear-hug scary and not "Hulk smash!" scary.

Hulk: "Dude, did you just touch my wife?!"

Fight or flight mode kicks in. However, instead of running, I decide to tell a joke instead – see where it goes.

I blurt: "Yeah, I was scratching her back because I thought she was my wife. Look, my wife is walking up now. She can scratch your back if you want and we can call it even. I'm sure she won't mind."

He laughs, which is my face's cue to turn from pale-white ghost back to pink-white ginger. We all laugh.

What a testament to Ani DiFranco's talent – that she could entrance two strangers into sharing such an intimate moment, completely unaware of each other's name, face, or race. Music will always be colorblind like that. And I'll always be an idiot.

I then do an about-face and power walk to the farthest corner of the club, where I can properly short-circuit in private. I'm still in shock, wiping tears between waves of laughter.

Melina walks up, wearing a familiar look of confusion, but I can only say three words before bursting out into a high-pitched giggle. I sound like a mad scientist but more ridiculous, like Beaker. "I just scratched ..." is all I can get out.

Later on, we pass the couple and I give Mel a little scratch on the back. They laugh, again. But it's different this time. I know what mockery looks like. Their eyebrows squinch a bit.

I lower my head, but refuse to surrender.

"Hey, y'all know where to find me if you get an itch."

About the author

Darby's greatest fear in life is dying. Somewhere close behind is the fear that he might be dumb, or worse – that someday he'll do something really stupid and die like an idiot. The two fears really dovetail nicely.

This book is mostly an elaborate scheme to prove he was here and to validate himself so that he can stop worrying about impressing people and start worrying about doing all the things his wife would like him to do. (It's a very long list. In fact, he should be doing his Darby-dos right now instead of writing this puff piece.)

Darby's kids are super adorable – blah blah blah – and they're always stealing the show, which he secretly resents but outwardly encourages, like the supportive adult he sometimes remembers to be.

At last, he's found a way to capture their essence, bottle it up in a book, and smash it lovingly over your heads, along with a bunch of strange ideas you didn't sign up for when you read the title, which should have been:

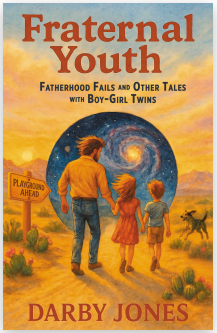
Eternal Goof
Weird Little Weirds and Other Weirdness

The publisher wouldn't go for it.

Anyway, now that everything's out in the open, we can all relax and be real. Tell me your dreams. You want to start a band? I've always wanted to stand on a dark stage under hot lights and yell:

"Thank you, Nashville! Y'all were a lot of fun. We're The Shit! Goodnight!"





Print



E-Book

Took 20 years, but my book is live and ready for laughs!

Available worldwide

Or search *Fraternal Youth* at your favorite bookstore.

Read my book reviews on Amazon!

A little Darb'll do ya

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