

## Paul A. Stankus, Author, Dad Desperately In Need of Training Wheels



### Book Description

Paul thought he had caring for a newborn all figured out from studying multiple baby books—that is, until the first diaper was fired. Come follow this Dad Desperately in need of Training Wheels as he navigates food-art explosions, sleepless nights, diaper disasters, and juggling life between work and home during the first four years of his son Alex’s life. Somehow, in the midst of all this chaos, while being bamboozled by his offspring at every turn, he learns a little about himself. As Paul says, “Watching myself be proven completely wrong was one of the happiest moments of my life.”

This hilarious and heart-warming collection of stories is a must-read for any parent, grandparent, or someone about to become a parent.

## Author Bio



Rockville, MD resident **Paul A. Stankus** is a train scribe who can usually be found composing in the last car of DC Metro’s Red Line. Over the last six years, he has written over 200 short stories, poems, and two books during his 45 minute each way daily commute to a non-profit in Washington DC. Paul was a featured author at the 2012 Gaithersburg Book Festival.

Paul leads a weekly virtual poetry jam called DreadPoet’s Storytime. In three years, it has grown from a handful of participants to over a hundred daily attendees who shout out a name, a place, and an action for the DreadPoet to compose a poem on the spot. He has

written over 130 impromptu verses.

Paul is always on the look-out for what he terms, “the theatre of the absurd”—those real-life moments that are often stranger than fiction.

## Sample Writings from Book

### Observations on Daycare

In the Washington DC area, daycare centers are very competitive. Spots fill up quickly for some of the more prestigious schools, the good at-home daycares have long waiting lists, and those without waiting lists might be operating in a less than official capacity. When we were interviewing with some of the schools we were told that there was a substantial deposit fee, and that there was a waiting list of over a year to get in?

Over a year? How is that even possible?

Assuming that the baby takes nine months to pop out like most babies do, and that maternity leave generally lasts about three months, a waiting list of over a year means that for some of the higher-end schools, your spot on the list must be secured before the child is CONCEIVED.

### The Real Sound of Silence

Our ears perk up when the clatter stops. Any parent will tell you, that you don’t listen for the noises-- you listen for the silence-- because that is the time that the kids are getting themselves in trouble by doing something that they shouldn’t be doing. So when the clattering of the cups and bowls stopped, I immediately began searching, calling out through the kitchen, “Alex. Alex. ALEX” --each call, getting more insistent and more urgent. I rounded the island and looked down and saw two piggies dangling from inside the cabinet. I opened the cabinet door to find him, much to my relief, lying on his belly contentedly stacking bowls one-by-one on the shelves inside. He turned back, saw me and smiled, letting out a surprised cry and yelp, and went back to orderly stacking his bowls as if I never existed.

## **Life with an Infant**

For those of you without children, your mind starts playing tricks on you when you have gone for several days without sleep. Imagine what happens after several weeks of the same pattern? At one point I thought I looked like William Hurt in the mirror, but was quickly disabused of that notion. You learn very quickly that spell check is your friend, and that if people are asking you to repeat things, it's only because what seems to be making sense to you, is coming out as completely garbled and rambling to the outside world.

In this environment, I found myself one evening sitting at the dinner table trying to eat a bowl of spaghetti with one hand, and with the other, attempt to keep the rocking swing still rocking, while keeping the pacifier in his mouth. (One day soon he will hopefully learn cause and effect -- but for now it is just a surprise when the pacifier pops out.) Problem is the batteries were just starting to die on the portable swing, having been used so much over the last month. Every time I set the auto-rocker rocking, and attempt to wolf down a couple of bites, either the rocker would stop rocking, or the pacifier would fall out, resulting in a very LOUD demanding wail that needed immediate attention to.

Now, I have never been accused of being light on my feet-- I can walk down the sidewalk and fall off the edge—so it should come as no surprise that juggling complex feats of eating and timing the reinsertion of a pacifier into the mouth of a screaming infant swinging back and forth in a chair sends me into a spastic, uncoordinated fit. I straddled the chair, trying to feed myself with one hand and time the asymmetrical herky-jerky swinging motion with the other. Every time I tried to guide the pacifier, I would miss his open mouth or smush it into his closed mouth causing him to cry more. Finally, with one last effort and the grace of a greased bulldozer, I lunged for his open mouth wailing at full throttle, and in mid-thrust, realized that I had pushed too far. The supports of the chair skid out from under me and instead of successfully inserting the pacifier, found the hard tiles rapidly advancing on my face--much to the bemusement of Candice who had been watching the whole scene bug-eyed and giggly from the chair next to me the entire time.

## **On Traveling with Toddlers**

People have told me that having children improves your reflexes – but I had no idea how they were going to be tested at 35,000 feet. One hand darted around collecting the contents not quite as fast as the little hands were pulling them out while the other hand was deftly trying to unsnap the outfit to get to the diaper.

I no sooner get the diaper off, and a voice from the loudspeaker filled me with dread: “ATTENTION PASSENGERS PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR SEATS AND FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS, WE'RE GOING THROUGH SOME TURBULENCE.” the flight attendant noted in a somewhat mirthful tone.

...and as if right on cue, we did. So I'm bouncing around the toilet with a semi-naked baby –with diapers, wipes, butt cream containers and toy cars careening around the toilet along with me, trying to keep the gravity-defying objects, Alex, and my feet from ending up in the dank hole of the flying porta-potty.

Somehow in the middle of all this, I managed to velcro one of the diaper tabs together but the other leg is still swinging free. Alex used the free leg to kick off the diaper. I watched, crestfallen, as it fluttered slowly to the floor, a tiny parachute of white fluttering down into the vinyl canyon, wedging itself behind the toilet.

## **PTSD**

Soldiers call this crippling fear of the next attack 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.' Parents call it 'Presence of Toddler Stress Disorganizer.' Either way, the causes and symptoms are the same: Crying out in the middle of the night, heart racing, sweating, reliving the moment earlier that day that you dove a

millisecond too late to save your wife's favorite crystal bowl from shattering into million pieces while you re-rolled the entire roll of toilet paper that had been unrolled in the bathroom, that happened when you were mopping up the milk jug that had been tipped over trying to pour milk into the bowl of Cheerios.

### **On Work and Life Collisions**

Knowing that he was still asleep, I fixed his breakfast of a waffle and sippy cup of milk, and went back to preparing for the conference call. Sure enough, 5 minutes into the call, the slumbering giant awoke, with loud plaintive cries that needed attending to. I pulled him out of the crib, dragged him downstairs gave him his waffle and went back to the call. Standing on the other side of the house, I could plainly see Alex—and he could see me. I thought -- incorrectly it turns out—that I was on mute.

Alex saw me across the room, picked himself up off the floor and walked to me, waffle and milk in his hand, calling out “waffle, waffle, waffle” and chased me around the room in a figure-8 pattern. I'd go to one side of the room, and he'd follow this carefully choreographed dance for upwards of 15 minutes, repeating “waffle” the whole time. Finally he stopped by the kitchen counter. In the loudest voice he could possibly manage, he blurted out “GRAPES PLEASE.” It was loud enough that the entire conference call burst out laughing.

“I'm not on mute?” I asked chagrined into the phone.

“No,” came the multiple laughter-stifled replies.

### **On The Way a Child's Mind Works**

Alex is always pondering. You can see it in his brow as he scrunches it up like the famous Rodin sculpture—*The Thinker*. He often looks like he is just waiting for the right words to say. For instance, Candice has grown frustrated trying to get him to say “Mama” since almost the moment he was born—or at least since he could open his mouth. Every time she feeds him, she'll say, “Say Ma-Ma. MAAAA MAAAAA. MA MA. You can do it. Maaaa Maaaa.” Alex, stubborn as he can be, does not perform on command. Very rarely does he say it. ‘Dad, Dada, daddy’—no problem. But ‘Mama’ is a completely different story. And when Alex, intentionally or not, responds to her pleas of ‘Mama’ with ‘DaDa,’ she calls out to the air, “He's calling for you. Your turn to feed him.”

One day Candice made brownies. As they were cooling, the smell wafted into the next room, drawing Alex toddling into the kitchen. He stood next to the countertop pointing at the pan. Candice looked back at him and told him, “They're not for you, they're for my co-workers birthday,” which of course, means absolutely nothing to the toddler. It only means that he isn't getting them. Alex continued to point.

Realizing that he wasn't going to get a brownie, he arched his eyebrows, made puppy dog eyes at Candice, cocked his head slightly and said, “MAMA.”

Guess who got the brownie after all...

### **On words from the mouths of babes**

Alex was looking for a TV show he had seen advertised a few days earlier. We scanned the schedule and could not find it listed. I told him, “Sorry, it's not on right now. I guess you'll have to wait until next time it comes on.”

Alex looks up from the couch, and matter-of-factly stares me in the eyes—“Daddy,” he says in a huff, “just ‘Dot-com’ it.”