



Eight questions to ask Renee Raab Whitcombe

*Renee Raab Whitcombe, author of the newly released, personalized photo journals *Look who's going to be a Big Brother* and *Look who's going to be a Big Sister*, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the following questions:*

1. Why are these journals *distinctively different* from other sibling journals?

Most journals you'll see for siblings are called something like "you're a big sister now"—the baby has already joined the family. *These journals are truly TRANSITION journals, meant for children who are not yet a big brother or sister, but who will be in the near future. Introduced during mom's pregnancy, these journals prepare and celebrate a child's coming new important role in the family, and explain things from the child's perspective. Let's face it, to a young child; mom's pregnancy—and everything else in the world—is still about the child. So in short, these customized journals get a child ready for the big changes ahead in relevant, personalized terms.*

2. Who are these journals *really* for--kids or parents?

Well, they're really for...both. As a parent of young children, I can tell you that I searched exhaustively for THE tool that would help my older daughter grasp the idea of a new baby and her new role as big sister. We parents are all little nervous that our new baby is going to knock our first baby right off the throne! But rather than feeding that anxiety, these journals provide a tool with a different angle. We can get off the focus on the baby, and turn our beam on the importance of a first child's new status in the world. Now for kids, it's probably a bit more obvious. I mean, here is a book that chronicles their milestone, and their picture is on the cover and sprinkled heavily throughout the journal! This is an actual book about THEM. It's interactive and colorful and tells a story that is entirely personal and customized to what they are going through. Kids just have an automatic love affair with visually personalized stuff, and this journal makes a child a full-on star.

3. Who inspired you to create these journals?

My daughter Alex gets the credit. Her reaction to our new baby proved to me that something was missing in the world's arsenal of tools for this particular transition. When she came to the hospital to meet her new sister, she literally did not acknowledge her. She walked right past her and jumped on my hospital bed and pressed all the buttons, ate her snack and said she wanted to go home. I was amazed. I really thought she knew what was going on in OUR family, but she didn't. All those books we read were about other families, not HER.

4. Do I have to be like Martha Stewart or Houdini to complete this journal?

Just the opposite! I don't know what the technical phobia is for "fear of scrapbooks and albums", but this is the journal for those people. The good news is that this is 24 pages, and comes with pull-out insert cards that tell you exactly what to do. No special talent

required. Literally, all you need is a glue stick and it's going to turn out perfect. When you slap your photo down and slide the card back in, it's a perfectly framed picture within the context of the story. From start to finish, this can be done in 1-2 hours. Done. That's it.

5. Tell me about your favorite page inside the journals.

I have a clear favorite. It's the page in the middle of the book right after the child reads that Mom and Dad will be at the hospital for a few days. The text reads "_____ knows that whenever Mommy and Daddy leave, they always come back", and it's revealed through door they open. This is a credo that so many families use when they leave their kids with a sitter or at school, and what a great time to reinforce that message. Many kids have not been away from their parents for a couple of days, and how unsettling to wake up and see an unfamiliar person preparing your breakfast in the morning. This book tries to give kids all the information they need ahead of time, so that they can read it over and over and feel in control of the situation. By the time it happens, hopefully a kid is yawning instead of melting down.

6. How many of the 25 Terrific Tips from your website have you really used?

Probably 20 or so. Some are Monday morning quarterback tips. For example, I didn't bring Alex to the Sibling Tour at University Hospital because she was considered too young by the sibling education staff. In hindsight, I wish I had set up a one-on-one "tour" for her.

7. What's your secret family handshake, and when do you use it?

I would be violating a sacred pact to reveal our family handshake, but I will give you an example of one that is similar. Kiss/hug/ high 5/pinky squeeze. We use ours whenever our kids are splitting up from us, even if it's for an hour. Dropping off at school, going to work in the morning, during a play date, anytime. The handshake ritual is like an unbreakable promise that says "I am definitely coming back to you, no matter what." And it makes them feel safe and sure. So please, don't forget to use it when you head for the hospital, because if there was ever a time that the reassurance was critical, THIS IS IT!

8. Describe your background or experience with children.

For starters, I am a mother of young children, so I have about 8 years under my belt right there. I also spent 13 years in advertising, so I consider that an advanced degree in working with professional children! I also spent two years working weekly in a parent participation nursery school, and have first hand experience with lots of children and families who are welcoming a new baby. Lastly, I have worked with pediatricians, psychologists and preschool educators over the last 6+ years developing my journals, and have researched and studied this specific topic during that time.

Whitcombe is a former advertising executive/producer and children's designer apparel representative. She lives with her family in Manhattan Beach, CA. Visit her website buddingfamily.com for more information and the complete list of 25 Terrific Tips.