

Sex, Booze, Bookers and Blogsters

Although you can barely call these topics ‘taboo’ anymore in Australian society, they are still the fuel of much humour, as if we still haven’t quite shrugged off our schoolyards sniggers. A libertarian moral nonchalance is consistently patterned in our media, sexual imagery and innuendo are everywhere; on the airwaves, on screens, on billboards, and on buses. Similarly there has been a great ‘normalisation’ of alcohol consumption as a regular part of life.

My purpose here isn’t to bemoan these changes, but to note that as these flavours have intensified in our public life, most adults personally welcome the moral freedom for themselves, but most parents harbour moral reservations about whether these overt aspects of our culture are appropriate and healthy for our children. We are also wrapping our children in ever thicker layers of caution in many dimensions of their lives.

This tension between an **adult culture of permissiveness and a child-rearing culture of caution** leaves many parents feeling disempowered and isolated in relation to how they might approach nurturing their own children into a responsible and healthy relationship to sexuality and substances of influence.

A previous generation worked in a more one dimensional, prohibitive and oppressive environment, in which society colluded with parents to ‘protect’ children morally in regards to sex and alcohol. We have no such collusion to rely on, and so must find ways of parenting through these issues intentionally and ways of finding community and solidarity.

One of the strangest things about Parenting is that you can never get a moment to yourself, but still feel like you’re having to do it all on your own at the same time.

As a facilitator of Toolbox Parenting courses, I am a passionate advocate for **parental conspiracy** – not conspiring against your kids, but for them. I encourage parents to invest in conversations with other parents, not to compare kids, or to whinge about how tough parenting is (though sometimes letting off a little steam in compassionate company IS exactly what is required), but the kind of conversations where you do a reality check on each other. Discuss an issue, share what you’ve tried and ditched or tried and are devoted to now because it works so well, practice some hypothetical ‘what do you reckon you’d do if...’ conversations about some things that you can see just a little way off in the distance. And speak out loud your convictions – your values, your standards, your expectations, your beliefs. Parenting in isolation is dangerous and demoralising, so we need to take all the opportunities, spaces and technologies we can to have these conversations.

I was really impressed to see a facebook friend launch a conversation, posting a moral objection to the content of advertising his son was exposed to watching the cricket. You can see in the comments below (I didn’t include the whole thread, as it ran to 41 comments!) how quickly a whole range of others responded, and then how it moved into action mode, solidarity, critique, and reconsidering, followed by recommitment modes. And of course I couldn’t resist jumping in to offer a word of hoorah, and a link to a resource:



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Beth Barnett <http://www.kf2bk.com/>

Kids free 2b kids are an organisation that actively campaign and can help us express our opinion as parents. Worth checking out for info on ways to advocate on behalf of our kids

14 hours ago · Like

So here is another platform for parents to encourage, resource and keep one another accountable. If you are a facebooker, or a blogger or a tweeter or a texter or latte drinker or a suburban walker – take some initiative and start a parenting conversation: encourage and be encouraged, question and be questioned. I love the organic way this sprouted one lazy Sunday afternoon. And to think it all began watching the cricket...



J: Did anyone see the ad on the cricket just now that used the phrase “more beautiful than my beautiful breasts” or something like that? Can you tell me what it was advertising? Oh, and I’m more interested in making a complaint than I am in seeing the ad. Just sayin.



A: I agree you should complain, it was for the new Ben Elton show, I think it is called Live from Planet Earth.



J: Pretty inappropriate for a G rated slot though - just had my 7 year old repeating it! Thanks for the heads up. Like [1 person](#)



R: :(



J: Consider it complained! If anyone else would like to complain, you can call channel 9 on (03) 9420-3111 I got straight through to a lady that took my complaint.



K: thats good J! - If I had seen it I would also call.

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Sex, Booze, Bookers and Blogsters continued...



J: You can still call K!



M: Good idea! It was gross!



L: I have been concerned by a number of the advertisements that have been shown during the cricket - even just promos for upcoming shows etc. Definitely hasn't been child-friendly.



T: I was just complaining about that too. Thanks for encouraging me to actually do something about it.



J: Nice one T! I don't think I've ever actually complained about anything before... other than to the people sitting on the couch with me! :)



P: Got to complain through acma.gov.au. Last time I did, it wasn't easy. Going round in circles to find exactly how to send it in. Think they did it deliberately. Had to fax through the complaint, now really, who uses a fax these days? Except for the estate agent next door who I give coffee for letting me fax stuff.



Beth Barnett: Viva la resistance, all you fabulous parents, who want to step up to giving your kids the story yourselves, rather than having them 'mis-educated' by someone else. If it were a 50 year old stranger who knocked on your door and said 'Can I chat to your kids for 30 seconds about breasts and sex' you'd call the cops. 'Not even just 30 seconds?' he says. 'Nup. not even 30 seconds...' And thanks J for kicking off the rage. It's not about being prudes, it's about being gutsy.



P: We've had age appropriate, open and healthy dialogue with our 12 year old. All agreed not prudes or hiding stuff but like to choose the time and place for such chats and write my own script rather than be bombarded by media sex sells sales pitch. My complaint was over a Sexpo advert played twice in one ad break about 7:45pm one evening during a PG tv show. Sexually Explicit images, even if only flashed briefly.



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G: Isn't it incredibly hypocritical to complain about something that you haven't even seen? Are you next going to picket outside films that you've heard might offend you but won't watch?



J: Maybe I should just let it go, but....

A few points **G**,

1. I don't know that it's hypocritical to complain about something I haven't seen. A hypocrite is someone that says one thing and does the opposite - what is hypocritical ...about this instance? My wife told me what the ad contained - I don't need to verify that she was telling the truth first.

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Sex, Booze, Bookers and Blogsters continued...

2. It has nothing to do with me being offended, but everything to do with my kids being exposed to material that I don't want them exposed to. I shouldn't have to worry about letting them watch a cricket game whether or not they'll be exposed to sexual innuendo.

3. I'm not very good at making things, so if I made a picket it would probably just fall over.



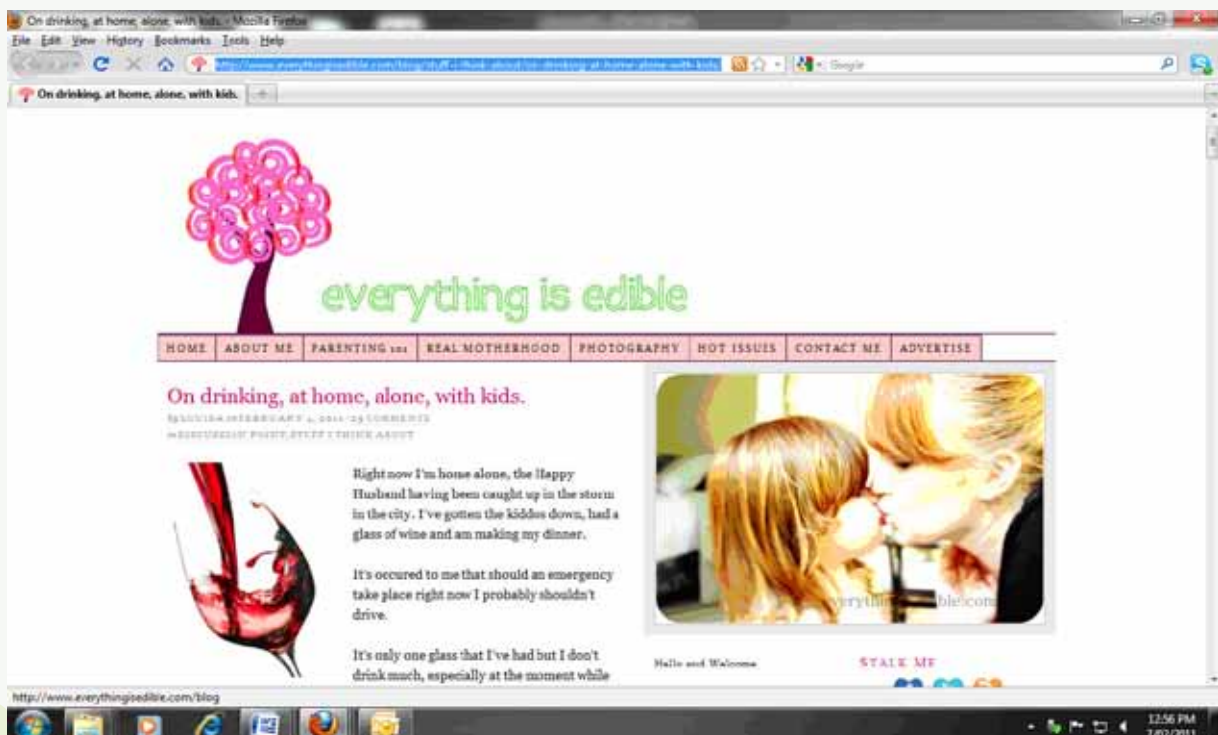
P: Great discussion thread, wish you could all join my bookclub. Would make for some lively chats :)
👍 [1 person likes this.](#)



Beth Barnett: also should probs just let it go...but....the organisation I cited, kids free 2b kids are connected with really good research (academic, peer reviewed, frank and open critical discussion) in this area. I offer them as a resource for parents to have access to information and to participate in the debate...not picket movies, because absolutely right, it is hypocritical to protest something you think might possibly offend you, but its also negligent to give your kids stuff if you're not sure it's safe.

Recently, I have also seen two excellent blog posts by parents of small children, considering the place of alcohol in their home, parenting and schedule.

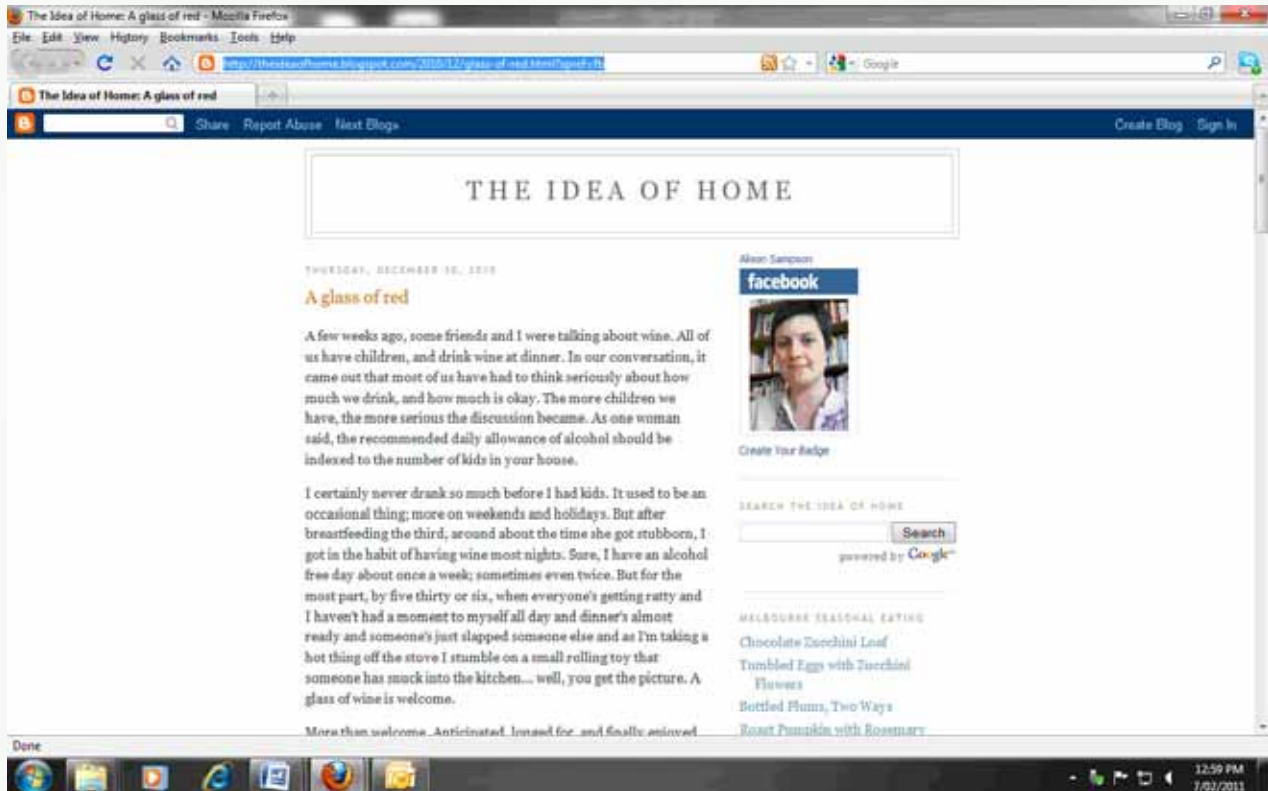
Ali Sampson and Lou Raggatt both conscientious, intentional parents and intelligent Christian women have submitted themselves to a bit of self-critique. In quite different styles, they address an issue and model thoughtful reflective intentional parenting, as well as hanging out quite a bit of non-perfect parenting grace and honesty. So I think there may be something to observe, to note, and perhaps to re-think.



<http://www.everythingisedible.com/blog/stuff-i-think-about/on-drinking-at-home-alone-with-kids/>

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Sex, Booze, Bookers and Blogsters continued...



<http://theideaofhome.blogspot.com/2010/12/glass-of-red.html?spref=fb>

I am very interested in this discussion, both as an 'insider' (someone who cares about the ways we nurture our children, a parenting coach, an educator, a 'just holding it together and sometimes not' parent myself, one who is familiar with the 5pm 'arsenic' or 'witching' hour).

But also as an 'outsider': I have never consumed alcohol.

So the practical immediate question about drinking and parenting is not the only value here. I am interested in the process of using social networking and online interaction – even (and let's be hopeful here) online community. **This is not a surrogate for "face to face; share the space; being grace" relationship**, but an example of how communication can be strengthened, and an alternate voice, a counter-cultural voice can be given some airplay, and an example of how you might kick start some conversations in your own community: your small group, the school gate drop off, the playgroup, the men's brekkie, the book club, the walking group...

Print the blog posts and add them to your playgroup room wall...send a link to your facebook friends in small group, start a community blog yourself - devoted to parenting with guts and grace.

Grace and Peace,
Beth