

Still on my quest to lighten up a bit, I turned, once again this week, to that sweet, frothy brain snack, *People* magazine. Empty calories it may be, but it still gave me food for thought.



Anyone who claims Hollywood doesn't embrace Family Values has clearly let his *People* subscription lapse. Much of the January 28th issue is devoted to celebrities and their families. The feature story, in fact, is a warm paean to paternity, the cover, itself, graced by the hunky-licious presence of Matthew McConaughey, next to the bold headline: "I'm gonna be a daddy!"

The story inside is touching; I almost welled up. It seems McConaughey and his girlfriend Camila Alves, a model born in Rio de Janeiro, are in the family way, and they're "stoked and wowed" about it. *People* readers are invited into Matthew's sun-kissed world, where he surfs in Malibu, holds hands in Paris, and eventually, breaks the exciting news to his mother over the phone.

Upon hearing of her son's great expectation, Mama McConaughey has the gauche audacity to ask, "So when are y'all getting married?"

People's editorial comment on the unseemly query? "Harsh, dude."

Harsh, indeed. Matt's talking maternity and Mom's talking *matrimony*? What a buzzkill.

But our intrepid bohemian actor is undaunted:

"Mom, this is a *love child*," he tells her. "Isn't that beautiful?"

Great comeback, Mattie! That should shut the old girl up. After all, who doesn't love a love child? I almost wish I'd never married my daughter's father, now. If we'd never bought into that whole lame, bourgeois myth about kids being better off with two parents, we could have had a love child! And life would just be one big love *fest*... in Paris... and Malibu... with surfboards and bongos and stuff. Damn.

Another article in *People* laments the sad break-up of a family that, gulp, never had a fighting chance. Eddie Murphy and Tracey Edmonds have called it quits after a challenging two weeks of marriage. Their extravagant, \$500,000 "Wedding in Paradise" had been featured in *People*

only a week earlier. They looked so happy in the pictures, but two weeks can be an eternity with the wrong person, I guess. No one seems to know what went wrong, but

People

tells us "the honeymoon got off to a rocky start with a screaming match and they continued to argue all week." I'm sure this lovely couple did everything within their power to reconcile. Marriage, after all, is a sacred institution, and not to be entered into lightly. Right?

On a more cheerful note, *People* tells us that Jamie Lynn Spears, 16-year-old sister of Britney, will not enter into *anything* lightly – least of all, motherhood. The magazine shares that Jamie, who was in "total and complete shock" upon learning she was pregnant, is following a "Five Point Pregnancy Plan" as she cheerfully awaits the arrival of her joy bundle. She's planning to "get her diploma" by taking the GED; "stick with her family" (especially her mother, Lynn, who knows from diapers); "stay low key," (is this

genetically possible for a Spears?); “take tot classes”; and, most importantly, Spears is “not rushing to the altar” with her boyfriend, the baby’s papa. Thank goodness for that! Everybody knows that 16 is way too young to get married. Don’t tie yourself down, girlfriend. You’ve still got prom to look forward to.

Poor little Dannielynn Birkhead, better known as “Anna Nicole’s baby.” Seems she’s in the news again because she’s battling a “vision problem” that’s very common and can be easily corrected. Big story! According to her father, Larry Birkhead, the problem is most likely genetic and doesn’t have anything to do with Anna Nicole’s drug use during pregnancy. Nevertheless, it’s a big story! Dannielynn might even have to wear a corrective eye patch for a while. Thankfully, baby and father are muddling through. “We’ve been through tougher times than this,” says the stalwart Birkhead, certainly referring to all those months when he was duking it out in court (and the media) for paternity rights, against a host of other would-be baby-daddies. Along with possessing the winning DNA, Birkhead is clearly a wonderful, protective father who never cared a whit about Anna Nicole’s millions. Or publicity.

Another great Profile in Fatherhood greets me near the back of the magazine. Entitled “Kevin Steps Up,” this is the heartwarming story of one dad’s undying commitment to his two little boys. Against almost insurmountable odds, Kevin Federline is proving that he *is* the parent – the loving, stable influence – that Britney Spears never was.

According to People, since Britney’s mental health has come into question, costing her the custody of their children, “everyone thinks K-Fed’s doing a great job” raising the two tiny heirs to Britney’s fortune, Preston and Jayden. Even Britney’s mother is wowed by his sudden parental prowess:

“Kevin has an excellent nanny,” says young Grandma Spears. “She’s wonderful. With regular bedtimes and nap times, the children are on a schedule. All of that is good.”

Wow, regular naps and everything? That *is* good.

People continues: “In addition to the boys’ nanny, Federline relies on a tight circle that includes his bodyguard...a Sunday school teacher on the weekends... his Mom... his Dad... his stepmom...”

Only a full-time nanny, a bodyguard, a spiritual advisor and a handful of family members to lean on, and still this brave, hard-working single dad gets it all done, *and* manages to hit the LA club scene every night. That K-Fed is a multi-tasking, Executive Director of Daddyhood. Ward Cleaver in a wifebeater.

And the family values don’t stop there! Says a “source close to Federline,” about his tag-team of helpers: “They’re always at Kevin’s house or with Shar and her kids.”

Shar, of course, is Shar Jackson, the actress with whom Federline has two other children, the youngest of whom she was carrying when K-Fed dumped her for Britney a few short years ago. But “dumped” is too harsh a word. K-Fed and Brit fell in love, and as Hollywood keeps telling us, via People and its ilk, love can’t be denied. The heart wants what it wants, right Woody Allen?

But wait, if K-Fed dumped Shar – to whom he was never wed – before their baby #2 was born, is baby #2 still a “love child?” I mean, there was no actual *love*, right? And what about baby #2 with Britney? They weren’t yet divorced, but *were*

separated, when he came along, so maybe he *is*

a love child, even though his big brother, born in wedlock, isn’t?

The Modern American Family. It’s wacky! It’s romantic! And it can be a little a little

complicated...

But not to K-Fed. He juggles it all with aplomb, like the selfless family man he is. As *People's* glowing tribute draws to a close, he signs off with some typically profound words of wisdom:

"Becoming a father has shown me how little I am and how big my kids are. It has shown me that everything you think about as a single person or as a bachelor or whatever – none of that means nothing when your child comes along."

Close your eyes, and it might be Robert Young talking. All he needs now is a pipe and briefcase...

All jokes aside... In today's political climate, those of us who worry about the breakdown of the traditional family are mocked as simple-minded old fogies, nostalgically pining for the past ("screaming into the wind for a ship that done sailed," a progressive friend of mine recently called it), fretting about an issue that's virtually irrelevant when there are "real" problems to solve – like poverty. What *should* be obvious, were it not so unfashionable to connect such dots, is that the two issues – family decay and poverty – are inextricably bound. The poverty rate for children in single-parent families is *four times* higher than that of kids who live with both parents, and the percentage of single-parent families has more than doubled since the sixties - the era that, ironically, launched the War on Poverty.

Meanwhile, magazines like *People* continue to glamorize the unconventional families of the rich and famous, with nary a concern for the fact that most people who read *People* simply can't afford such "glamour."