



# A Slow Childhood

*Notes on Thoughtful Parenting*

Helen Hayward

*Foreword by Alain de Botton*

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As philosopher Alain de Botton notes in his eloquent foreword to this book, our child-centred society is overloaded with parenting manuals yet devoid of accounts of what it is like to actually be a parent; we are curiously short of books that give the act of nurturing a child to adulthood the cultural prestige it deserves.

*A Slow Childhood* has at its heart author Helen Hayward's conviction that her children would grow up stronger if she were able to devote herself to them. The story tracks fifteen years of personal conflict triggered by this conviction: of wanting her children to have a slow childhood yet needing to get on with her

own life; of seeking to foster their individuality, creativity and curiosity without sacrificing herself in the process. We follow Helen's journey from first-time mother with a newborn firmly at the centre of her world, through to the ups and downs of parenting young teenagers. She eventually realised – juggling part-time work and full-time family life – that total maternal devotion wasn't the answer for her.

Hayward is honest about the price maternal devotion demands: the loss of confidence, the challenges to intimate relationships, career tussles and time pressures. She also highlights the rewards that come from rising above these pressures and of enjoying children while they're young; in particular the unexpected joy and richness that came with growing up alongside her children, and the discovery that they had as much to teach her as she them.

*A Slow Childhood* highlights the subtle yet essential distinction between surrendering to family life and sacrificing yourself to it, and shows how loving children unconditionally has the potential to deepen your experience of life as a whole.

*"Helen Hayward's achievement is to have written a book about the most ordinary things and to have located therein the most extraordinary insights and ideas. Her topic is beautifully, unashamedly 'boring'. Almost nothing 'happens' in A Slow Childhood. Thank goodness ... from the stuff of ordinary life, Hayward has woven a narrative filled with tenderness, complexity, honest self-reflection and purpose."*—Alain de Botton

**Helen Hayward** is a writer and editor with a doctorate in psychology and literature and a keen interest in family life, emotional wellbeing and the domestic arts. Her writing has appeared in *Aeon UK*, *Vela US*, *The Age*, *Inside Story*, *Tasmanian Life*, *Tasmanian Style* (which she also edited), *Online Forum*, *40 Degrees South*, *The Weekend Australian* and *ISLAND magazine*, and her books, most recently *For the Love of Food*, have been published around the world. Helen lives in Hobart. For more information see [www.haywardhelen.com.au](http://www.haywardhelen.com.au)



Helen Hayward is available for interview and commission.

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