

Study

Interviews June Wan

Dearrest

You've heard mothers talk about what it's like to have a baby late in life — now hear what some men have to say about their experiences



PHOTOGRAPHY SOON TONG/CALIBRE DIGITAL IMAGING HANIZA

Dad Ang Peng Siang, 40,
APS Swim School
Wife Wendy Lee, 40,
admin manager
Son Kai, 4 months

would be kind of tough for the family. I think we left it to fate and things have kind of fallen into place at the right time, so we are grateful for that. The timing was just nice, actually.

Have you had to make any changes in your lifestyle?

It wasn't very difficult. We used to go out after work, on Sunday evenings, to watch movies. Now we try, but of course it all depends on how the baby is adjusting. If we are too tired from taking care of the baby and adjusting to his routine, we definitely come back early! Wendy enjoys breastfeeding him through the night. Baby Kai is sleeping in between us, so we are pretty conscious throughout the night that we don't smother him! I think we have come to a point where we are able to dedicate quite a bit of time to Kai.

Have you made any 'contingency' plans?

We got an insurance package during birth and we would probably continue that. I think the package was valid for up to six months only. As for education, well, I have always believed that one should always be able to work one's own way through that. We will probably have some savings, but at the end of the day, we would like Kai to work his way through university. I competed as an athlete and I was able to get a scholarship to go overseas. That also covered a lot of the expenses.

And you're expecting Kai to do the same?

Oh yeah, yeah! (laughs)

That's a lot of pressure for a baby!

Oh no, no pressure at all! Or else the pressure's on us! (laughs) I think we want to teach him the value of taking on responsibility, being independent, and being able to take care of himself.

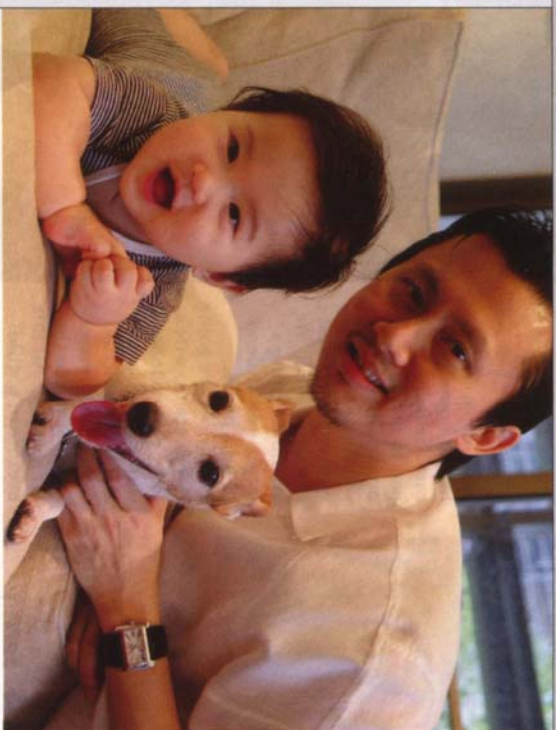
Because once he's twenty, we'll be sixty... even if we have enough savings we still want him to take the initiative and be responsible. We'll just give a bit of assistance when he needs it, lah! (laughs)

Do you think things would have been the same if you had had Kai earlier?

I think it would have been a struggle. Because a lot of things had not been settled, in terms of getting our swim school going, getting it to where it is now. If we had Kai even five years earlier, it would have been a whole different scenario.

Have you learnt anything from this experience?

My relationship with Wendy has been in existence for close to 20 years. We had ten years of dating before we got married. So we had plenty of time to understand each other. In the relationship part, we are quite all right. I think it was the finances that was our number one priority when having the child. Setting up the swim school gave us the financial foundation to prepare for kids.



Dad Martin Huang, 42, plastic and cosmetic surgeon
Wife Patricia, 35, helps run their private company
Son Alexander Bradley, 7 1/2 months

Why did you wait so long to have a child?

We tried earlier but failed to get pregnant. We didn't want a child enough to go for infertility treatments so we came to terms with it. Then out of the blue, we got pregnant while on vacation at the Four Seasons Resort in Jimbaran, Bali, in May 2002, in our ninth year of marriage. It was an unexpected and pleasant surprise. A friend joked that we should name our son Jim Baran! But we named him Alexander Bradley because my wife liked the name Alex while I preferred the name Brad.

Has the experience been up to expectations?

It has been wonderful, well beyond expectations in terms

of the joy we have experienced. Unfortunately because of my demanding career and long working hours, I don't get to spend nearly as much time with Alex as I would like to. But I try to make whatever time I spend with him quality time. I also try to devote most of my weekend time to him as I work a five-day week.

Have you had to make any changes in lifestyle?

Major changes! We socialise with friends and eat out much less often than before, but we don't mind that at all. We try to take him out with us as much as possible so that he can be exposed to the world, and fortunately, he has a good temperament so it hasn't been difficult. We are also lucky to have an excellent and reliable

Why did you wait so long to have a child?
It wasn't planned. We did try when we were younger, but Wendy had a cyst in her ovary which we didn't know about. Once that was removed, she conceived Kai. We registered our marriage in 1990 and had our traditional one in 1992.

Has fatherhood been up to expectations?

We had a kind of 'let nature take care of itself' attitude. As in, if we do have a child, then fine; if we don't, then it doesn't really matter as long as we are happy and enjoying life together. I must admit that it would be a struggle if you are just starting out and you want to have a child. You have to be sure that financially you are at least comfortable, to manage it. Otherwise it



"We are more mature and able to handle being parents"

Plenty, in terms of insurance. I feel that it is very important to have adequate protection for the family. Also, with the spiralling cost of education, we have had to plan for that financially as well.

Would it have been the same if you had Alex when you were younger?

No, it would have been very different. There are some major advantages which we enjoy by having a child later in life. For one, we had plenty of time to enjoy an independent life without the restrictions of having a child, especially with regards to vacations and entertainment. Second, we are more mature now, and more able to handle parenthood. The third advantage is greater financial stability in the family. The disadvantage of having a child later is that when they become older, you are much older. This gives me the incentive to stay young physically and mentally, so that I can enjoy things with my son as he grows up even though I may be relatively old.



Dad Goh Eck Kheng, 48, publisher, Landmark Books
Wife Anita Fan, 40, ex-lawyer, now volunteers with the Asian Women's Welfare Association
Kids Gillian, 4 1/2 years; Tim, 3

How old were you when you had your first kid?
 I was 44 and my wife was 35.

Was it planned?

Both our children were planned. We realised we were not exactly spring chickens and we should have kids as soon as possible. So, I guess you could quite accurately say that we have been parents for almost all our married life. However, we make sure that we still spend time on our own, like having a quiet dinner out. We could do that as soon as we put some domestic support in place. Of course some things had to go. I stopped going to the gym, for instance. But that was because I wanted to be home

to help out and be with my own family (that's such a nice phrase). So, it's not a sacrifice at all when you consider what joy and love you have when you become parents.

Since your first baby was almost a honeymoon child, did you feel that you missed out on enjoying newly married couple time?
 What you don't know, you don't miss! Also, the kids gave and still give us so much joy that you can't even say it's a trade off.

Have you made any 'contingency' plans?

We have made wills in which we appointed guardians, put in medical insurance for the children from their second month (did you know that you can't insure babies in the first 30 days of their lives in Singapore?). As for the exercise regime, when they start to crawl, you get plenty of exercise at home, so that saves the trips to the gym! My bruised knees are testaments to that.

What lessons have you learnt from the experience?

We learnt that there is something to be said for being older new parents. I know we are better at raising kids because we are more mature.

What are your children like?

Gillian loves to draw and is responsible beyond her tender years. Tim is a late talker but is both cheeky and sweet. They both love books and go to The Children's Workshop which has a creative environment.

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The Dad with Two Generation Kids



With third child Anderson and baby Ryan in 1992

Dad Ricky Ang, 52, Group CEO
Wife Melinda, 50, homemaker
First child Audrey, 29, an ASP with the police force
Second child Alison, 26, an engineer with a supply chain management company
Third child Andrea, 13, a student in Nanyang Girls' High
Fourth child Ryan, 11, a student in Parry Primary School

"I was twenty three when I had my first child, 26 when I had my second. The third was born in 1990, when I was 39, the last one was in 1992, when I was 41. Yes, it's two different generations. I suppose the first two children had the benefit of a younger father, and younger parents who had more energy to run around and take them all over the place. We travelled quite a fair bit and we also took time to parks to run about every weekend, without fail. Now, the experience is quite different.

In the early days, with the two kids, our income wasn't a lot, so it was a struggle to make ends meet. There was no such thing as a maid. We couldn't afford one and the kids were looked after by my elder sis during working hours. So the first two were partly raised by my sister. They were with her on weekdays and we would bring them back on Friday night and return them on Sunday night. My wife worked until the first two were in their early teens. By the third one, my wife had stopped working. The third and fourth ones were both raised at home by their mother with a couple of maids to help out.

After the first two, the family unit was quite comfortable, but itchy backside, lah! We felt like the kids were growing too fast, so we decided to have a third one. The fourth one was an accident. When I had my third child, my wife was about 36. That was okay, but the birth of the fourth one was quite traumatic because she was older then. Medically, it was a bit more complicated than the first two. The first two were a breeze.

We didn't have to make any lifestyle changes because we are very family-oriented. We spent lots of time with the children, as much as we could. But I used to do a lot of travelling in my younger days. It was only in the later years - in the last ten years - that I have done less. So the third and fourth one do get more attention, partly because of less travel, and also because they are living seven days at home whereas the first two didn't.

Parenting is a natural thing, you either love children or you don't. You either like responsibility or you don't. I like both. I think the important thing is you have to spend as much time as possible with them. Once you have children, your priorities must change. Both parents must accept that the focus is going to be more on the children than on each other. That becomes the common agenda, a common template. Whatever time and resources you have will go to them. It's no longer just husband and wife. I think that's a key thing."