

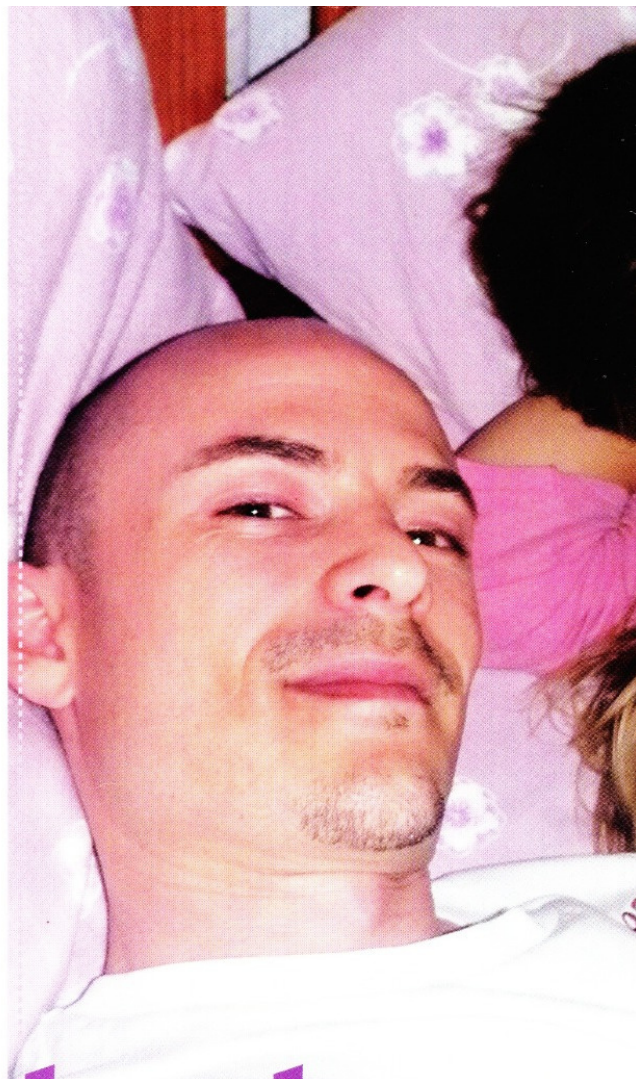
Cosy nights snuggled in bed with my partner, Pete, and 17-month-old daughter, Isla, are pure bliss. There's tickles, giggles, games and cuddles. Then storytime, dim lights and soft lullabies, before my little girl enters dreamland, wrapped in the warmth and security of arms she trusts.

I first revealed my passion for co-sleeping to my Earlybird group when Isla was just a few months old, only to be met with a critical raised eyebrow from the early childhood nurse. "How long are you

planning to continue that for?" she asked, seeming thoroughly unimpressed.

Since this reaction I've remained hesitant to admit to other people that I'm a co-sleeper, for fear of being judged. We even have a perfect white cot set up in Isla's room, though it's just for show, so we can appear 'normal' to any unexpected visitors.

But secretly, sharing a bed with our little one is good. Sending her off to sleep at night is usually very easy and always gentle and loving, just the way I knew growing up...



Three in a bed

A family affair

"I think it's genetic," comedian Mandy Nolan recently wrote of co-sleeping in our local newspaper. And you know, I have pretty good reason to believe it is.

Back when I was a child, my parents were deep believers in the parenting approach described in Jean Liedloff's *The Continuum Concept*, and actually translated the famous book for its German edition. Looking at the way of life in a South American tribe, Liedloff's work basically promotes the ideas of attachment parenting, including breastfeeding on demand, carrying bub everywhere in a sling or carrier for constant physical contact and, of course, co-sleeping.

With the way we live in today's Western world, I've come to realise that it isn't always feasible to practise a total 'Earth Mother'

approach to parenting. But when it comes to bedtimes, co-sleeping just work for us.

Close to me

From the moment I first held Isla in my arms, I knew I couldn't bear putting her down to sleep in the pretty pink-and-white bassinette we'd borrowed while I was pregnant, even though we'd be putting it right next to our bed. I just wanted to hold her and never let her go. I felt so much more secure in knowing that, as long as she was next to me, I could keep tabs on her every breath, know as soon as she stirred and monitor her temperature during the night.

As well as this security, I was breastfeeding, so sleeping together meant I was able to feed on demand without either one of us ever having to fully wake up.

For my parents, it wasn't just three in a bed. My dad worked hard to build a specially-large 'family bed' to accommodate all six of us, at least while we were very little. I don't remember every detail of that experience, it being such a long time ago, but one thing I know is that I'll always cherish the feeling of being so close to both of my parents.

Now, every night when I fall asleep with my little one close to me, all those old feelings of safety, security, warmth, connection and sheer content wash over me once again.

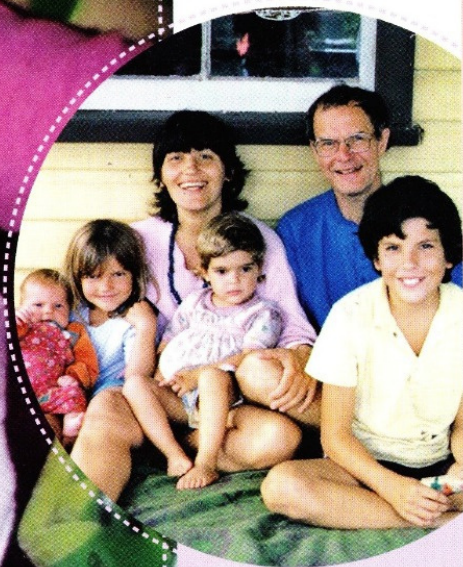
Sleep saver

In the early days, when other babies were already waking at 6am, Isla was content enough cuddling with me in bed until almost 10am. Apart from the odd nappy change, I remained glued

Co-sleeping isn't for everyone, but for Zanna and her family, it's a dream



Sharing a bed has brought Zanna's family that much closer together



Zanna has fond memories of co-sleeping with her parents and siblings

to the bed for twelve hours every night, which I certainly never complained about!

I'm almost certain that, had I not begun co-sleeping with Isla, I'd have been as tired and sleep-deprived as so many of the mums I often hear and read about.

It's taken a while to wean her off breastfeeds at night, but finally Isla is sleeping through. My morning wake-up call has gradually gotten earlier, though she still often sleeps until 8am. And on the days she doesn't, I'll wake to find her crawling over me as the first rays of sunshine filter in through the curtains and it doesn't matter. She can now climb out of bed all by herself and go play with her toys while I get an extra half-hour sleep-in.

I've heard some babies get so used to their cot that they won't go to sleep anywhere else. For Isla,

her Mum and Dad are all that she needs to get to sleep. As long as one of us is there with her, she's fine to go to bed wherever we are. Also, we don't need to worry about carting a portable cot around the countryside with us.

It works for us

I'm proud of myself for sticking to what I believe in. After all, it's my choice as a mother and it's made life so much easier and more enjoyable in so many ways. And, to answer the nurse's question, I plan on continuing with co-sleeping for as long as it works for us.

As for it affecting private time with Pete... well, it's true that it does, somewhat. But alone time is something that decreases for most couples once children enter the picture, whether they co-sleep or not. So we've just had

When I was a kid, it wasn't just three in a bed. My dad worked hard to build a family bed to accommodate all six of us

to make more of a conscious effort to spend quality time together. We have date nights once a fortnight and have fun exchanging the odd love letter (or it's more modern equivalent, the love text!) to keep our relationship fresh.

In the meantime, co-sleeping continues to connect our family in a way I never thought possible. And if we ever decide to have more children, Pete will just have to get stuck into making that big family bed for all of us, just as my dad did when I was little. **PP**

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