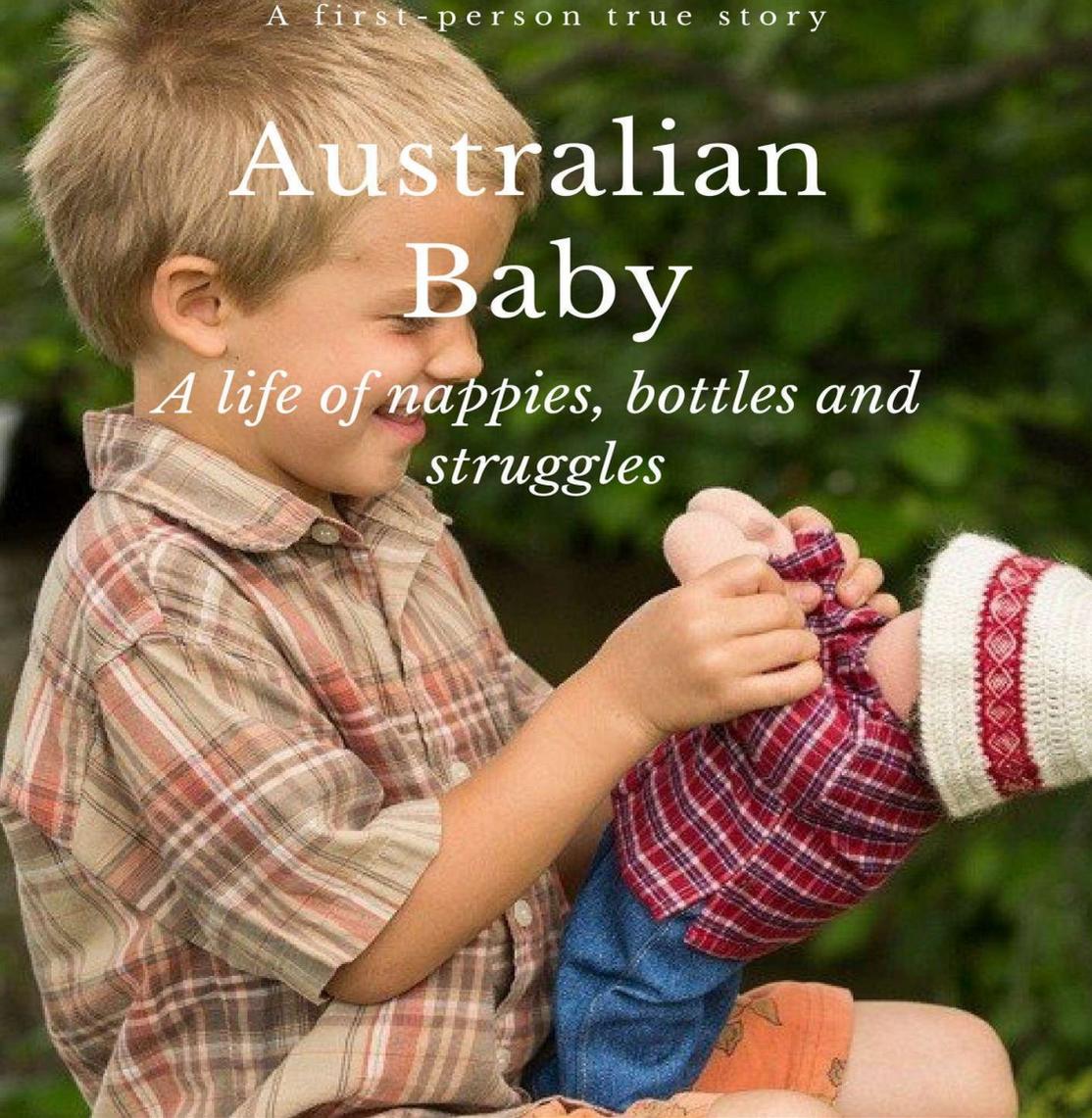


A first-person true story

# Australian Baby

*A life of nappies, bottles and  
struggles*



John Marshall

An AB Discovery Book

## **Chapter One: Baby Girl**

My parents were not particularly imaginative people and so, when I was born, they called me John. An okay name of course, but essentially boring and unsurprisingly, there were no less than six 'Johns' in my year when I finally started school.

Australia at the start of the 1960s had yet to experience the social revolution of that decade and it was still a quaint offshoot of the British Empire. Queen and country and all that. By 2018, that had all long since gone, but in 1961, I was named John Malcolm Marshall. Short back and sides haircuts, black and white television for some, but not most, not many cars and of course, cloth nappies and plastic pants for babies and bedwetters.

I was both.

My early couple of years were like everyone else's – not remembered. The photos and slides of course, gave me clues, but my earliest ever real memory was as a barely three-year-old in kindergarten playing in the sandpit. One thing I remember distinctly were the billowy plastic pants covering a thick terry towelling nappy. By the age of three I was still not toilet-trained and while on that day I did not realise it, by age four I noticed that I was the only one still wearing a nappy at kindy.

It didn't concern me at all. It was just something I was aware of, but gave no particular weight to.

I am not boasting, but it was apparent very early on that I was of well above average intelligence. I started talking early. I walked at ten months and my intellectual development was well above average. It is therefore ironic that my toilet training was the

absolute opposite – terrible. My emotional maturity was likewise the other end of the scale.

Parents like to boast of their children’s achievements and mine were no different. They boasted of my ability to count and speak in complete sentences very early on. The fact that I was still fully untoilet-trained at four and a half years of age was however, a total embarrassment. There were no older kids’ discreet disposable nappies back then. It was thick terry nappies and thick plastic pants – or nothing. To make it worse, this was the era of the rather ridiculous notion that boys under the age of twelve wore shorts. Long pants were what you got to wear when you were ‘a big kid’.

So, what do you think a thick nappy looked like under shorts?

No one had to guess. They were very obvious and playing on the floor made them very visible.

I was taken to doctors. They found nothing physically wrong. I am told I was taken to see a ‘nice lady’ who I now know was a child psychologist who decided that I was just very immature for my age and that my development would catch up before long. She was partly right, but also very, very wrong.

I was a cry-baby. I am not proud of that, but I was very much a cry-baby and literally cried a lot. Most parents can’t wait for their newborn baby to sleep through the night without crying and mine were no different. However, I cried during the night most nights until after I started school. It wasn’t nightmares, but rather what I now feel was a baby-like attitude of ‘I am awake, therefore I cry’. I wanted comfort.

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I was very slow to wean and my demand for substantial bottle feeding went on until I was four years old and it was then restricted to just before bed and sometimes first thing in the morning. My demands for the bottle were wearying to both my parents.

My social skills were fine and I played with other children my age very easily, but when I was four years of age something happened that I still remember to this day in complete detail.

Kindergarten was a great experience for me. I would play, do painting, sing songs and especially make sand castles. No one teased me for still being in nappies, although if I dirtied them, the staff were particularly unimpressed. A thick terry nappy could handle three hours of wetting, but a dirty one needed changing immediately and I was yet to stop doing that completely.

This particular day, another mother brought along her newborn baby to show all of us about bathing babies and feeding them. It was like Show and Tell, but with an infant.

She sat down, undid her bra and started to feed the baby. It is of course, something that would never happen now! The ultra-conservative, no-sex-anywhere Australia I lived in then was happy to breastfeed, while our advanced 21<sup>st</sup> century world would somehow imagine that such an event would traumatise their little precious darlings. I however, watched and was totally entranced.

My mother had stopped breast feeding me a couple years previously, but I still had a morning and night-time bottle and sometimes, a night-time feed, if I cried a lot. I was suddenly deeply jealous of that baby being breastfed.

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I wanted to be breastfed again! Desperately.

After she had fed her, the mum laid her on a mat and undressed her for her bath. I saw the nappy and plastic pants and I remember feeling very chuffed that *'I have a nappy on too!'* The sight made me feel very warm and very special. The emotions just flooded through me powerfully and made this memory a permanent one which could be recalled at any time, even decades later.

Watching the baby girl being bathed was astonishing to me. I was an only child at that stage and while the rest of the boys lost interest, the girls and I drew closer to see what was happening. When she re-napped and dressed her infant girl, I had a sudden epiphany which was to define much of my life thereafter.

“I want to be a baby girl!” I thought to myself.

That night I told my mum, “Mummy, I want to be a baby girl. Can I?”

Her reaction was swift and to the point. “No, you can’t,” she replied, without taking any time to understand what I meant.

But I knew from that point on, that I wanted to be a baby girl.

My life was forever changed.

## **Chapter Two: Still in nappies**

My lack of toilet training was becoming a serious problem, because I was approaching five years old and the start of the great adventure called ‘school’.

“John, you just can’t keep on having dirty nappies!” mum would exclaim when the near daily soiled nappy change occurred.

Blessed with a very good memory, I can still remember my confusion about this. I had no problem with wet or dirty nappies. They bothered me not in the least.

“I will try, mum,” I would say, faking a promise to her, because I didn’t really want to use the toilet at all. The potty looked dumb and the toilet scary, but most of all, I simply didn’t understand why using a nappy to wet and mess in was wrong. Mum and dad were desperate for a solution.

Then along came the wooden spoon.

Ouch.

1960s discipline typically involved a spanking with the wooden spoon, fresh from the kitchen. My very typical parents were no different. Up until age four and a half, I had barely had a spanking at all. I was well-behaved, already learning to read and enjoyed my own company. However, one day that changed. My father decreed in one of his rare involvements in such things that from now on, a dirty nappy meant a spanking.

“No, mum!” I yelled, the first time I was spanked.

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After the dirty nappy was removed and I was wiped clean, I was placed over her lap and the wooden spoon generously applied to my previously unspanked bum.

I cried and cried for what seemed like hours, but was probably only ten minutes.

“No more dirty nappies, do you understand?” she said firmly to my face, holding my chin. “You will get a smack every time you do it!”

I nodded, but inside I was devastated and confused.

“Why?” I would ask myself. “What am I doing wrong?”

A lot of parents claim that their kids still wet the bed or their pants because they are lazy and that it is a deliberate act. They are almost always wrong, but in my case, I admit now that it was probably true of me – at least in part. It wasn't deliberate as in defiant, rather deliberate in that I didn't see it as a problem.

But I could be defiant at times, just the same.

It was now just two months before I was due to start school and I was still in nappies. My parents had worked out an arrangement with the local public school about my 'special needs' and happily, there was one other child still in nappies there.

However, dirty nappies were simply not on. That had to be stopped.

I was *not* a willing helper in this.

It was warm weather that particular day and I was playing outside in just my nappy and a shirt and I was enjoying myself. The

urge to poo came on and as I had grown accustomed to, stood still briefly, pushed the mess out in my nappy and then continued on playing. The problem was that I had been seen, deliberately dirtying my nappy.

Mum came racing out into the yard carrying the wooden spoon and she was furious!

“John!” she shouted loudly, so that our neighbours could hear. “I saw what you did, come here now!”

I walked meekly to her standing on the lawn and she pulled down my nappy. Since I had not sat down again since messing, my bum was not that dirty. Grabbing my shoulders, she thrashed my behind far more than I had ever experienced. I was crying in seconds, but the hits continued.

“You... will... never... do... that... again...” she shouted, punctuating each word with another wallop of my rapidly reddening backside.

I sobbed in reply something incoherent and was dragged to my bedroom for a fresh nappy.

“If you want to act like a baby,” she shouted, “Then I will treat you like one.”

She quickly pinned a clean nappy on me, pulled up plastic pants and pyjama top and put me back in bed. I was still sleeping with a dummy (pacifier) at night, since I refused to give that up as well. Mum grabbed my dummy from under my pillow and shoved it in my mouth. I grabbed my teddy bear as the blinds were closed, the door shut, and I was told to go to sleep.

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I was in big trouble and I knew it.

But I still wanted to be a baby girl.

I quickly fell asleep and before long mum was opening the door.

“You can get up now, John,” she intoned with a smile. “Just remember, no more dirty nappies.”

She would be so lucky!

Life can be very confusing and contradictory to a little kid and it was thus for me, but I tried to comply with this new and inexplicable demand.

School was due to start in just a few weeks’ time and I had managed to use the toilet for poo a number of times and there had been no dirty nappies for a couple weeks or so. I was in the good books again with both mum and dad for that, although I truly hated the toilet.

One particular day had changed the direction of my dirty nappies. That day I had dirtied my nappy twice and I received an epic thrashing for it – one from each parent. As further punishment, I was sent to bed before dusk and instead of a proper dinner, I was given a formula bottle instead.

“Babies dirty their nappies,” mum scowled. “And babies drink from bottles.”

It was supposed to be a punishment, but I really liked formula bottles and when I was given a second one in lieu of dinner, I didn’t complain. I just drank it up and I felt like I was a baby again

– a good thing. Despite the pain in my backside from the double spanking, I felt happy having my bottle and sucking my dummy.

But I was not stupid. Before I went to sleep, I worked out that I was a bit different from other kids. I didn't exactly know why, only that I was different. I decided that from that point on, I was going to be a baby girl, but I would need to make my parents happy at the same time.

The next day, I asked to use the toilet and for a couple weeks, I managed to poo in the hated porcelain bowl every day.

I remember thinking to myself while seated on the small kids' seat on top of the adult toilet, *"This is stupid! Why do I have to do this?"*

But do it, I did. Until that fateful morning a few weeks before I started school.

I woke up in a dirty soiled nappy.

My nappy was soaked as always, but I quickly realised that I had messed during the night, as I normally slept very soundly.

I stayed in bed until mum came in to get me up. It took only a few seconds for her experienced motherly nose to work out what had happened.

"Oh, dirty nappy, Johnny-boy?" she cooed sweetly. "That's alright. Let's get you cleaned up."

Without another word, she stripped off my pyjamas, pulled the back of my nappy out for a visual inspection and continued. "Boy, Johnny, that's a big mess for a little boy! Bath time I think!"

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Mum quickly ran a bath, wiped the worst of my bum clean and plonked me in the warm water to play, while she took the offending yellow and brown nappy to quickly rinse and put in the nappy bin in my bedroom.

My fifth birthday was two months away and I was more than old enough to work out that something odd had happened. A few weeks ago, I had been thrashed not once, but twice for a dirty nappy during the day, but this morning, nothing but motherly care and calm.

I finally understood.

I had dirtied my nappy in bed, not while at Kindergarten or playing or out with other kids or adults.

“So,” I mused silently. “I can poo my nappy when I sleep, but not during the day.”

My intellectual development was way ahead of my peers and so I easily worked out that I could actually have what I wanted back again, but without the spankings. A dirty nappy while I slept was ‘an accident’ and okay, because no one else had to know. A day-time dirty nappy however, was a problem because other people would find out.

This discovery was something fabulous to me because...

I wanted to be a baby girl.

Babies wore nappies. So, did I.

Babies wet their nappies. So, did I.

Babies dirtied their nappies and now, once again, so could I.

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My whole attitude changed. There was a way now to still be the baby I wanted to be.

My mother probably realised something had gone on because now, every second morning I was dirty. To be fair, I usually woke clean, but then pooped myself, because I could. She didn't complain. She noted it a few times, but as I had discovered, a night dirty nappy was not a big deal – even though I was almost five years old.

Being a baby girl though, meant something about 'girl'. At five I was not really aware of the differences between boys and girls other than clothing. That awareness would come later.

## **Chapter Three: The Great School Adventure**

School is a surprise to every kid and I was no exception.

I absolutely loved it!

I could already read at a seven-year-old level and my number skills were excellent. Where I struggled some however, was in playtime with other children. At Kindergarten I was fine, but school was different.

I was the 'little kid' and that was one thing, but I was also a boy in a rather obvious nappy. School shirt, school shoes, school socks, school short pants and... very un-school bulky nappy and plastic pants.

I was one of two kids starting school still in nappies and for the first time in my life, I felt self-conscious about it. It had never worried me before, but now I felt a bit unsure. There was another boy in my class in nappies and looking back, it was obvious that he had some developmental issues, as he was behind in everything. It was quite the surprise when he came back from the first holiday break without nappies. He was so proud of it and for the first time ever, I felt foolish still wearing them myself.

When I look back and remember my feelings, I recall that nappies were just something I wore. There was no embarrassment, no stigma and from my end, no effort. I had never tried to toilet train and here I was at school, the only kid in Reception year still in a nappy.

Mum would come to school every lunch time and change my nappy in the Sick Room where some spare nappies were kept. She

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was a fast nappy changer and I missed out on less than five minutes of the long-awaited lunch-time play.

Daisy was my first real friend at school.

Daisy had long blond hair in pigtails and wore glasses. The very first day she came up to me and said, “My name’s Daisy. Why are you wearing a nappy?”

“Coz I do,” I replied, in my usual matter-of-fact voice when I didn’t know what to say.

“Okay. What’s your name? Do you want to play with me?”

And for her, that was all that mattered. We were friends. I still wanted to be a baby girl and the ‘girl’ part of that eluded my understanding. Daisy was a girl and I liked her.

A few days later, we were sitting together swapping sandwiches for lunch when she stated, “I wear nappies to bed too.”

“Neat!” I replied. I actually had no idea how to respond because it was so awesome that I knew someone else who wore nappies to bed. The truth was probably that quite a number of my school mates wore a nappy to bed or wet their sheets, but I was the only one still in them at school.

I got teased for my nappies a lot, but mainly by older kids. The teachers told them to stop and after a while, it did, more or less. However, there were still a lot of comments behind my back when they thought I couldn’t hear.

I didn’t know what to do about wearing nappies. My parents had tried toilet training for years with zero effect. They were so

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pleased that I was smart that they appeared to tolerate my nappies more easily.

That was when I discovered my mum was pregnant. By the time I was six and now in grade one, I had to share my mother's affections with a baby. A baby girl.

My first year of school in Reception grade went well. I was way above them intellectually, and the notion of skipping a grade was brought up and then instantly shot down. My intellectual abilities were not in doubt, but my emotional maturity was definitely below the rest. And I was still in nappies. There was to be no skipping grades for me.

I struggled particularly with thumb sucking. I used a dummy at home a lot and no amount of effort was able to persuade me to stop. At home, it was thumb sucking or dummy and at school, I tried desperately to stop the thumb sucking, but I reverted to it easily and often.

And then my baby sister, Janet was born. My world exploded yet again.

To read this entire story go to

<https://abdiscovery.com.au/australian-baby-a-life-of-nappies-bottles-and-struggles/>