

## People Magazine - The Helpful Hunk

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At first glance, Matthew Bennett looks like any other obsessive iron-pumper who haunts West L.A.'s au courant Sports Club. Clad in clingy red shorts and a tank top, the 6'3" 210-pounder has jumped rope for 60 minutes and put in another hour on his massive lats. When he takes a break, though, he talks shop not with fellow bruisers but with a gymmate whose leotard reveals a burgeoning pregnancy. Strolling over to Bennett, she asks, "What kind of vitamins should I be taking?" Without hesitating, he booms, "Vitamins aren't necessarily safe for you, so they should be treated like medicine. Check with your physician."

Known at the Sports Club as Baby Man, Bennett, 32, is the bachelor author of *The Maternal Journal* a 30-page paperback pregnancy guide that has sold 30,000 copies (at \$9.95 each) and drawn raves from parenting experts. Packed with advice on choosing a physician, coping with morning sickness, adapting exercise routines and even adding dash to maternity clothes ("colorful tights can brighten the look of dull support hose," it advises), the *Journal* is a sprightly, reassuring introduction to the world of stretch marks and birthing rooms. "It's a terrific way of taking one of life's scariest moments and explaining it in a very accessible manner," says Jamie McCreary, national promotions director for the March of Dimes.

A driven sort, Bennett published his "infocalendar" in June 1991 while running his own insurance-brokerage business, guest-lecturing on entrepreneurship at UCLA and volunteering for the special Olympics and the March of Dimes. Polymath or no, he began thinking about pregnancy only in 1988 when a friend who runs an ultrasound and mammography center complained to him about the "horrible" state of prenatal care in the U.S. (now 24th in infant mortality among industrialized nations). Bennett was outraged. Although he admittedly "knew nothing about babies," he realized that visits to the obstetrician can prevent birth defects and infant deaths. "I kept running into women who couldn't afford maternity coverage, which put two people's health in danger," he says.

Fired up, he decided to put together the essentials for moms-in-waiting. He plowed through 30 books and hundreds of medical journals, talked to "every kind of doctor you can imagine," condensed madly and ran the final product past 40 physician-consultants before recruiting financial backers. "It was a ton of information to condense," he says. "There were times I felt I was emptying a lake with a thimble."

Attempting the impossible, however, is nothing new for Bennett. "People ask me, 'Where do you find the time for all of this?'" he says. "I tell them I learned it from my mother. She's my inspiration."

Born in Brooklyn, Bennett was 6 when an aneurysm claimed his father, Irv, an accountant. His mother, Betty, then an English instructor at NYU (now dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at American University in Washington, D.C.), earned her Ph.D. while raising sons Matthew and Peter, who is now 36. "I got used to talking to someone who had a phone in one ear, was listening to the radio reading microfilm and translating it from English to Italian at the same time," he laughs.

A "sickly kid" who loved poetry, Matthew was plagued by bullies until a hulking classmate took charge of him in ninth grade. "A bunch of guys were beating me up, and he threw them off," he recalls. "He said, 'You've got to learn how to defend yourself.'" With his friend's help, the 88-lb. weakling took up wrestling and eventually mastered karate. By the time he was a junior in communications at UCLA, he was a 216-lb. black-belt good guy who in his spare time counseled sororities on rape prevention.

After college, Bennett saw duty as a copywriter at an L.A. ad agency and, in 1985, opened his own copywriting firm. At the urging of his uncle, Herb Edelman (who played Bea Arthur's ex-husband on *The Golden Girls*), he studied acting and won parts in movies, including 1985's *Once Bitten* and the next year's sci-fi epic *Invaders from Mars*. In 1987, deciding that insurance was a "very exciting, changing field," Bennett started a still-thriving L.A. brokerage firm. He has even been a trainer to the stars, helping clients like actresses Karen Black and Louise Fletcher go for the burn.

Uberachiever or no, Bennett still manages to catch seven hours of sleep a night at his two-bedroom home in Bel Air. Aside from the obligatory stationary bike, Jacuzzi and bodybuilding journals, contemporary paintings vie for space with crystal balls, glass sculptures ("there's something intangible about glass that I find intriguing"), a sword collection and a pair of teddy bears.

Bennett is now about to introduce a baby fingerprinting kit as well as *The Baby Journal*, a guide to an infant's first 15 months. Can Matthew Jr. be far behind? He blushes. While he says that girlfriend Natalie Mijatovich, 29 (a computer specialist), would make a model mom, he allows that he's not yet ready for the real thing. "I'm very happy with the way things are," he says. "But when I do it, it will be all the way."

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