

## Baby Talk

Having a baby could wait. Elizabeth Whelan, 30, was a successful epidemiologist, her husband, Stephen, 29, was a lawyer, and they were living a busy life in New York City. "We kept postponing our decision," recalls Beth, "until suddenly we were struck with the thought, 'My God, maybe we won't have a baby at all.'" But they still hadn't sorted out all the pros and cons, and when they sought help, there wasn't much available. So Beth Whelan talked to scores of doctors and couples, and last year she turned her experience into a book, "A Baby? ... Maybe: A Guide to Making the Most Fateful Decision of Your Life."\* The book provoked such an enthusiastic response that Whelan then started "A Baby ... Maybe" counseling service, the first of its kind in the country. In the past year, she has seen more than 300 couples. "There are marriage counselors for marriage problems," she says, "but there is no one to help couples decide whether or not to have a child."

Her timing was right. The rate at which American women are bearing children, which plunged to a historic low last year, rose by 6 per cent in the September-April period as against the same period last year. Census experts conjecture that children of the World War II baby boom, now entering their 30s, had delayed becoming parents

for various reasons and are suddenly making "now or never" decisions. Whelan reports that most of the couples she sees fall into three categories. "There are the 'quandary couples' whose problem is timing," she says. "There are cases where one party wants a child and the other doesn't, and there are couples with infertility problems."

The purpose of Whelan's service is to help couples clarify the decision-making process. The service's board of advisers includes gynecologists, psychiatrists and fertility specialists for referrals. Whelan

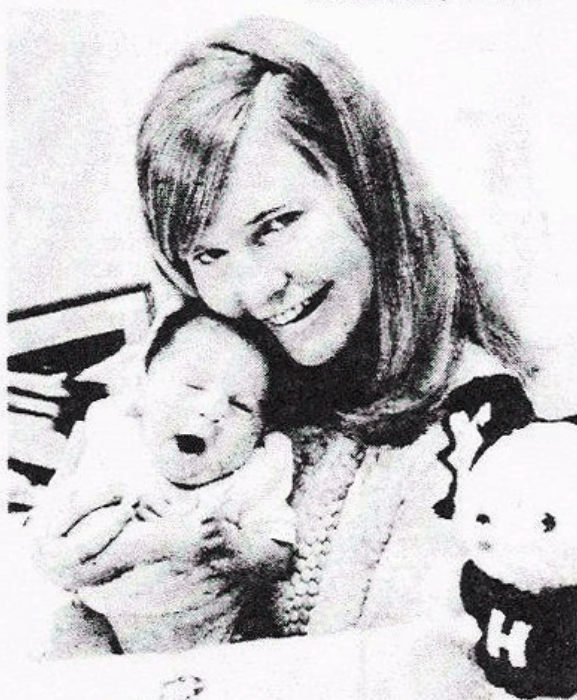
finds that a couple's main worries are often economic. She may ask them to list their expenses and what they think a child will cost; then she shows them that in many cases their estimates are overblown. Career couples are advised to map out the next three years of their lives to see how a child could fit in. She also tells clients to call up child-care agencies for estimates of full-time help.

One 33-year-old publicist wanted a baby, but her 37-year-old husband wanted to retire early and move to the country. "He didn't want the financial burden of me and a baby," she says. Whelan suggested that she study job opportunities near their country home. The woman found that nurses were in demand and applied to nursing school hoping that her new career would take the financial stress off her husband if they did have a child. "Seeing Dr. Whelan was the turning point for me," says the publicist, who is now planning to have a baby.

**Human Reasons:** As pragmatic as her advice is, Whelan admits her own decision was purely emotional. Last month, she had a daughter, Christine. "I just wanted one," explains Whelan. "Ultimately, I've found people have babies for downright human, self-serving reasons, which is important to know." Now that the Whelans have made that decision once, what about a second baby? "Maybe," Whelan smiles, "but then I'd have to write a whole other book."

—BETSY CARTER

*Whelan and Christine: A personal decision*  
Robert R. McElroy—Newsweek



\*237 pages. Bobbs-Merrill \$10