



# My first (PLAY) date

by Damian Robinson

**F**reelance writing has its benefits. It allows me to spend more time with my 21-month-old son, Jack. When we are left to our own devices, though, we sometimes fall foul of Jack's mum (and my wife), Sarah.

For instance, Jack and I used to be able to stroll into Holland Village to grab a bite to eat and watch the world go by. But that stopped when Jack started to speak and Sarah wanted to know where he had learned to say the words "chips" and "beer".

Rather than take Jack to bars, Sarah recommended that I should entertain him with stories and nursery rhymes. This I did until one day Jack proudly showed his mum how he could operate the TV and DVD player to watch *The Wiggles*.

Now, Jack and I have to spend our time together more constructively. And the easiest way to do that is to follow Sarah's recommendations. So, last week I took Jack to a nursery play date for the first time.

At first, I was slightly taken back by the cost: \$45 for 90 minutes. But if Jack enjoyed himself, then it would be money well spent. Besides, while Jack was playing I could read the newspaper and make a few phone calls.

That was until I was told that I had to stay for the class and join in all the activities – something that must have slipped Sarah's mind. Either that or she was getting me back for allowing Jack to watch too much television.

So I put my paper and phone away and trundled after Jack to the class. It began with some very informal introductions – sung to the tune of "What do you think my name is?" As I am useless with names, every name went in one tone-deaf ear and out the other.

For the next hour or so there was plenty of singing and dancing – just like an episode of *The Wiggles*, really. Except that there was no Sam, Murray, Jeff or Anthony. In fact, I was the only

guy in the room. And the only one who could not sing or dance.

However, the mums, who were obviously regulars as they knew every song, were not perturbed by my musical inability. In fact, they went out of their way to make me feel welcome as we ran around with/after our toddlers.

When the class was finally over, a mother of the child that Jack had played with the most invited us around to her place the following week. I felt uneasy swapping phone numbers with an attractive woman – especially as I had forgotten her name. Nevertheless, I took her number for Jack's sake.

That night, when Sarah heard about our trip to the nursery, I was back in the good books. Although I did have some explaining to do when my phone beeped and I asked Sarah to read the message for me. It was from "Playmate", asking if we were still on for next Tuesday. **■**