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Two new books by local authors published nationally

By **Mary Ann Grossmann**

Updated: 08/06/2010 11:40:30 AM CDT

There's nothing I'm less interested in than newborn babies, unless they belong to my family. But Alexa Stevenson won me over with "Half Baked: The Story of My Nerves, My Newborn, and How We Both Learned to Breathe."

Stevenson's snarky, often-funny and always-honest book is about the in vitro fertilization that resulted in twins for her and her husband, Scott, and Stevenson's weeks of living in the neonatal unit after their daughter was born weighing less than 2 pounds

Parts of this story are familiar to fans of Stevenson's popular blog, flotsamblog.com, and National Public Radio listeners know her as a commentator for "Morning Edition."

In letters to her unborn twins, Stevenson refers to them as "science babies" that she carried during a "zombie movie pregnancy."

But the boy, whom Stevenson named Ames, died in her womb at 22 weeks and two days. Stevenson was put on bed rest, and Simone was born at 25 weeks in an unnamed Twin Cities hospital.

And so the Stevensons, mostly Alexa, became residents of the neonatal twilight zone. She learns to advocate for her daughter, even when some medical p

ersonnel don't like it, often having to explain her baby's behavior — Simone had a mind of her own, even though she was tiny.

And Simone needed lots of attention; her skin was so fragile it tore, she wore protective sunglasses, she was on a ventilator, and when she needed an operation, the surgeon used

Q-tips. Stevenson is alternately hopeful, furious, exhausted and, occasionally, tearful as Simone has ups and downs in her struggle to survive.

Besides telling a compelling story, Stevenson gives readers a writing tour de force that ends with Simone as a happy 2-year-old.

Among her thought-provoking topics: why she doesn't like the phrase "miracle baby" for preemies and why a counselor told her that her son's death had to have meaning. (No, it doesn't, she writes.) Her honesty is sometimes painful to read, as when she describes the deteriorating condition of her son's dressed-up corpse and her ambivalent feelings about forgetting Ames for stretches of time while she falls in love with her daughter.

If you want to be treated to a memoir that's close to perfect, read "Half Baked."

COLIN SOKOLOWSKI

Did the guys in Adam Sandler's film "Grown Ups" seem familiar to you? They're the sort Colin Sokolowski admires/ skewers/advises in "The Accidental Adult," subtitled (take a breath) "Essays and Advice for the Reluctantly Responsible and Marginally Mature."

Sokolowski, a former teacher and now a

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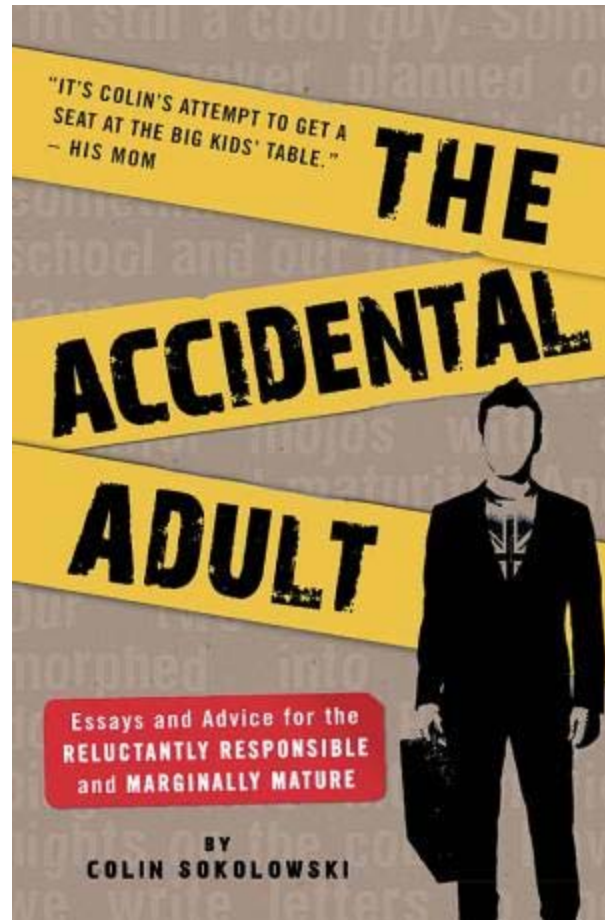
professional writer, uses a humorous approach to 30-something males trying to walk the fine line between the fun they had when they were carefree youngsters (crashing on couches, drinking, rock concerts) and the responsibilities that go with wives, children, mortgages, lawn care and dinner parties.

In other words, how to act your age without losing your cool.

For instance: He still laughs when someone scratches a joke on the hand dryer in public restrooms; once a month, he forces a metal stud through the closed puncture in his left earlobe even though he doesn't wear an earring anymore; he kicked a fertilizer spreader so hard he burned "a dozen jagged yellow stripes" in his yard.

But Sokolowski isn't advocating childish behavior. There are times, he admits, when you must be an adult. That means being a responsible citizen

and neighbor and an attentive husband and father.



Still, that leaves lots of room for a man to indulge his not-adulthood:

Work: Always look busy; send late-night e-mails; beware of the professional professionals; don't hang in your cubicle motivational framed prints, cutesy animal calendars, cartoons/sarcastic signs or photos of your college Cancun spring break.

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Music: Don't force it on others. Making mix tapes and burning best-of CDs was a great way to nurture a crush when you were younger, but today, no one needs to hear early INXS blasting from the bowels of your Toyota Camry. Why? Few people care about music you like, and no one wants to hear you explain that you listen only to old INXS because they went all 'dance club' on you with the "Kick" album.

Home Improvements: A buddy gave me a caulking gun for the purpose of providing a roomful of juvenile guys an excuse to enthusiastically repeat the word "caulk" in unison for the rest of the night. Thanks, Potter. You make me feel mature.

Let's hope Sokolowski writes a sequel when he's in his 40s. Will his tight group of friends finally throw in the towel on growing up, or will they stay united in not taking the adult world too seriously?

Book critic Mary Ann Grossmann can be reached at mgrossmann@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5574.

Title: "Half Baked"

Author: Alexa Stevenson

Publisher: Running Press

Cost: \$14.95

Author appearance: Alexa Stevenson will discuss her book in conversation with Patricia Hampl at 7 p. m. Wednesday at Common Good Books, Selby and Western avenues, St. Paul; 651-225-8989.

Title: "The Accidental Adult"

Author: Colin Sokolowski

Publisher: Adams Media

Cost: \$12.95

Author appearance: Colin Sokolowski will sign copies of his book at 9:30 a.m. Friday at Lake Country Booksellers, 4766 Washington Square, White Bear Lake; 651-426-0918.

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