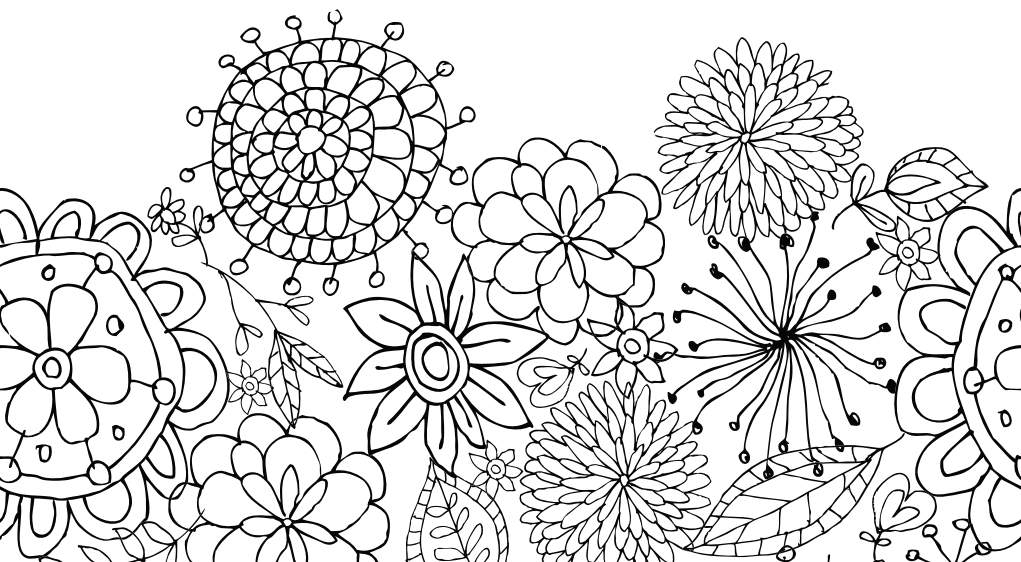


An Australian mother's
journey from heartbreak to hope.

love &
tears
autism



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Ark House Press, a division of Initiate Media

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ISBN: 9781921589638 (pbk.)

Cataloguing in Publication Data:

Author: Paterson, Cecily.

Title: Love tears and autism / Cecily Paterson.

ISBN: 9781921589638 (pbk.)

Subjects: Paterson, Cecily.

Autism--Diagnosis--Australia.

Autism in children--Australia--Biography.

Parents of autistic children--Australia--Biography.

Autistic children--Biography.

Dewey Number: 616.858820092

Printed and bound in Australia
Cover design and layout by Initiate Agency



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CHAPTER ONE

The best laid plans...



I declared to the world at the wise old age of 16 that I *might possibly* get married, but I would certainly never have children. Children were too messy, too needy and too hard to control. Besides which, I was going to have an extremely high-flying and impressive career. I was a high achiever with big plans for my life.

I married Andrew, a law student, when we were both 22. And at the age of 24, sitting on the couch one night, I felt a surge of hormones rush through me. From that moment, the career and the ‘no-children’ declaration were forgotten. I swapped one plan for another. I wanted babies and I wanted them now.

We drove a large, green family sedan, and when I sat in the front seat and looked behind me I could imagine a group of three little children sitting happily in the backseat. They were clean, washed and brushed. They had blonde curls and lovely manners. They were spaced two years apart, were all healthy and smart and came from easy pregnancies and happy births.

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That was the plan. I assumed that having children and all that went with it was within my control. If I heard stories about infertility or miscarriages or children born with disabilities, I shut my eyes to them, shuddered and thought, *'how awful. But that happens to other people. There's no way I could cope with it if it happened to me, so I'm going to pretend it doesn't exist and make it all go away.'*

But as I quickly found out, things were not going to happen according to my plans. In fact, my plans were given a big shake-up by God.

To begin with, it took me twelve months to fall pregnant the first time. Every month that went by with no result felt like an eternity. I felt desperate, emotional and worried. Would I ever have a baby? Both Andrew and I were ecstatic when the pregnancy test read positive.

I had an easy pregnancy, so I put the waiting behind me and concentrated on the baby. Our daughter, Jasmine, was born in 1999, a healthy girl as beautiful as a dove. We were besotted and so were the rest of our relatives. We moved into our new house in our new neighbourhood, joined a new church, settled down and began the task of raising our family.

Unfortunately, that 'family' wasn't arriving as per my schedule.

When Jasmine turned one, I thought we had probably better do something about trying for the second child because it had taken so long the first time. I abandoned my birth control regime and hoped for the best. Again, the months went by with no result.

This time, however, I had a friend in my efforts. Sarah was a young mum from church with a little boy a year older than Jasmine. We met up for regular play dates and sanity sessions on long hot

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afternoons. Our children enjoyed playing together and as time went on, we found ourselves sharing more and more of our lives.

“I’m really getting worried,” I confided one afternoon as we listened to the children zooming their trains and cars up and down in the next room. “We’ve been trying to conceive another baby for eight months now and nothing seems to be happening.”

“I’ve been trying for a year longer than that,” she replied. “I don’t really know what to do about it. I don’t want to go down the IVF road. I don’t even know if it’s right to go and see a doctor about it. Maybe God only wants to give me one baby. But I really would like a bigger family.”

“Why wouldn’t God want you to have more than one child?” I said. “Even if you don’t want to do IVF, there must be steps before that, surely? And it’s not wrong to go to the doctor. You’d go if you had a broken leg wouldn’t you?”

It was the beginning of a very interesting journey with very interesting results for both of us.

Sarah started first, seeing the local fertility specialist. I followed, a month after her. The diagnosis in both our cases was a failure to ovulate regularly. We both began to take tablets that would help. If they didn’t produce a result within six months, we would go back and try something new.

The only things the tablets produced in my case were severe cramping pains for two days in the middle of every month. After six months of trying, but no pregnancy, both Sarah and I stopped taking them. It had now been 18 months for me of trying to conceive, with no baby in sight yet.

The next step was to have my tubes checked for blockages. This

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involved sitting straddle-legged and open under an x-ray machine while dye was pumped up into my fallopian tubes. We watched to see if the dye would go all the way through the tubes, or if there was a blockage somewhere. It was uncomfortable and embarrassing, but I tried to make light-hearted conversation with the radiologist.

“What’s that white shape showing up in the x-ray?” I asked. It was moving across the screen and I didn’t think it looked like any of my organs.

“Oh, that’s just a fluff,” she said, grinning.

“A fluff?” I asked, confused. “I’ve never heard of that. What’s a fluff?”

“You know – gas,” she explained, going a little bit pink in the face.

“Oh,” I nodded, trying not to look as humiliated as I felt.

But for all the embarrassment, the test showed a result. My tubes were blocked. I was booked into hospital to have keyhole surgery. Once my tubes were cleared, if all went well, there would theoretically be no reason why Andrew and I couldn’t have another baby.

A few months later, the surgery was done. I was clearly still ovulating, judging from the back-breaking pains every month, and it seemed that we could try again for our baby.

Finally, almost exactly two years after we had begun waiting for our second baby, I fell pregnant. Andrew and I were overjoyed. As we had done with our first pregnancy, we told the world from the very start. I felt suitably ill and tired, but we were both so excited that I didn’t mind. I felt bad for Sarah, but she was gracious and generous and wished me all the best.

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Week 5, week 6 and week 7 passed as normal, but in week 8 something strange happened. For a few days I didn't really 'feel' pregnant any more. And then I started to bleed.

It was if a stone had been dropped into my stomach when I saw it. 'This can't be right,' I thought. 'I'm not having a miscarriage. No. This is the baby we've been waiting for so long.'

I rang Andrew at work in a panic of tears.

"You've got to come right away. Something's happening to the baby."

I was so distraught that I didn't even get into my clothes from the pyjamas I was still wearing and we turned up at the hospital casualty department with me in pink and blue flannelettes. Andrew explained what was going on to the nurses while I sat numbly on the hard plastic seat, trying to keep my baby alive in my thoughts.

They ushered us in for an ultrasound and then a young doctor told us the bad news.

"I'm afraid it looks like you're going to lose the baby. We're not sure whether it is just a miscarriage or whether it is an ectopic pregnancy, so we'll take some blood tests and see what happens over time."

"What's an ectopic pregnancy?" I asked. I'd never heard of it.

"It's where the embryo gets stuck in the fallopian tube. It keeps growing, but because it's not in the womb it's not viable. If it grows too much, the tube can burst and then you can be in serious trouble with internal bleeding, so we would have to take it out. Plus, it can damage the tube."

This was bad news. It was hard enough to lose the baby. It was even worse to think that I might have a damaged fallopian tube; after

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all I had been through with them already. Surely that would mean it would be harder for me to be pregnant in the future?

I sat and cried for hours while they did tests and we waited. We waited all that day, and then we waited some more over the next few days. I had regular blood taken to test the levels of pregnancy hormones in my body, but I wasn't getting any clear answers.

"We're still not sure what's going on," the doctor told me a few days later. "Go home again, take it easy and you'll probably miscarry naturally in the next few days. But call me if you have any pain or if anything unusual happens."

We waited for a week. I felt ill and unwell and I was still bleeding. Finally, my mother persuaded me to go to our regular GP. To be honest, I went only to keep my mother happy because I wasn't expecting much from him. He was a good doctor, but every time I had taken our daughter to him he said something like, "Don't worry, she will get better. If she's not better in three days, come back, but just let her get some rest." He was reluctant to give drugs, reluctant to order significant tests and generally happy to let viruses take their natural course.

I drove up with Jasmine and told him what had been going on. He sent me for an immediate ultrasound and told me to come straight back. When I arrived for the second time in his office, he said, "You've got an ectopic pregnancy. You have to go to hospital."

"Oh," I said. "So do I ring them up and go in tomorrow? How does this work?"

"No," he said. "You're going now. You probably shouldn't even be driving by yourself. Your tube could erupt at any moment and you could bleed to death. I'll ring and tell them what's going on, so

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go now.”

Such strong words from my usually cool and collected GP were worth taking notice of. I drove home in a panic, found a babysitter for Jasmine, called Andrew home from work, and took myself straight to the hospital.

Andrew and I waited for eight hours for me to go into surgery. Finally, late at night, he went home to be with Jasmine. I stayed alone, looking at the ceiling and shivering slightly under the hospital blanket. At midnight, after hearing at least two groaning expectant mothers being wheeled past for caesarean sections, I was finally taken into theatre.

We lost our baby and I lost my left tube. Rather than having keyhole surgery, I was cut open because the internal bleeding was getting so bad. Recovery took six weeks, in which time I cried and cried. I cried for the baby that died, I cried because I was scared of not conceiving in the future, and I cried because I wanted a baby so much.

We planted a tree in our garden for the sweet soul that we had nurtured for just those few weeks. I felt better, seeing new life growing, but the new life I really wanted to see was a baby inside my womb, and I wasn't sure it was ever going to happen.