



A Mom's
Wish

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Finding the Path through the Autism Maze

Christina Lee

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by
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Dedication

To Gerald, my husband and best friend.

I am so blessed to have you in my life. I often wonder what I did to deserve you. You're such a wonderful husband to me, father to our children, and example of what young men should aspire to be. You are my hero, my superman, and my inspiration in life!

To Andrew and Kevin, my wonderful sons.

Once upon a star, I wished for each of you. I could never have imagined I would be so fortunate to have been chosen to be your mom. You have both grown into fine young men whom I love dearly!

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*Author's note: Names indicated with an asterisk have been changed to protect those identities.

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Many people have helped me bring this book to publication, and if I forget anyone, forgive me, for I am a busy mom!

Most importantly, I would like to thank my husband and our sons. Without your patience and encouragement, I would have never had the confidence in myself to put “pen to paper.” You guys bring out the best in me. Andrew, this book gives a view of our life as I recall. I could not be prouder of the experiences we have had together and what you have taught me in life. Thank you for all of your input and views. Kevin, thank you for being my “learning curve” and for letting me have my first mommy experiences with you. Both of you inspire me and make me proud to call each of you my son.

To all of the parents, educators, clinicians, etc., with whom I have spoken over the years, thank you for all the advice, experience, and lessons you have given me. Without you, there would be many unfinished chapters in our lives and this book.

To the publishers and staff who worked to bring this book to print, thank you for your patience, hard work, and dedication!

Introduction

When you read this book, it is my wish that you use it as another “tool in your toolbox.” This is only one story of one child in one family. Our experiences are all unique; however, by publishing this book, I hope to lessen the pain you might be experiencing and improve on what is working in your family. There are millions of you out there who have a child with autism. Or shall I put it in the media terms? One in every 110 children, and one of every 70 males, will be autistic. And one child is diagnosed with autism every twenty minutes. That brings it home, now, doesn't it? This is the latest information according to Autism Speaks™. Thank you for taking the time to read our story.

CHAPTER . . .

1

In the beginning, Gerald and I dated for about a year. We were a young couple who had a great sense of who we were as individuals and complemented each other as a unit. I was twenty and Gerald was twenty-nine when we decided to marry. Our nine-year age difference never seemed to bother either of us. We both felt blessed to have met and fallen in love.

Gerald was a handsome, healthy, well-educated forest ranger for the state forestry department. I, on the other hand, was a healthy, headstrong girl with a high school education who knew what she wanted—marriage, a home, and of course, a family. Not only did I want this, but these would become our priorities. However, I knew this was the life I wanted the first time I met my future husband. Gerald came from a close, loving and large family who lived nearby. My family was more distant; despite that, they were a steady, reliable group as well.

A year after we met, we married. On our wedding day, the sun was as bright as the day was beautiful. What a great way to start our future!

Within the first year of our marriage, our first son Kevin was born. My pregnancy lasted a full forty weeks. It was relatively uneventful and did not seem a hardship on my young body. My husband was convinced I had a “mommy glow” and the weight I gained just added to the charm. From the day I found out I was pregnant, I knew Kevin was a boy. It was just a gut feeling that stuck with me. In the delivery room, the doctor stated, “The baby has a girl’s face.” He may have had a girl’s face, but he was definitely a boy!

Kevin was the first grandchild in several years, and he enjoyed lots of attention. The only issue we ever seemed to have with Kevin was his picky eating habits. As a toddler, he only wanted french fries or pancakes. In his words, “no real food.” The pediatrician assured me that as long as he drank a glass of orange juice and took a multivitamin, he would survive. He remained in the ninety-fifth percentile in growth as chronicled in all of his appointments, and later in life, Kevin discovered pizza.

When Kevin was about six months old, Gerald and I started seriously discussing having a second child. We both thought it would be best to have our children close together in age. We also entertained the fantasy that they would be the best of friends and play together. I call this a fantasy, because any parent with more than one child knows that being friends and playing together nicely is not quite reality.

For about six months, we tried to get pregnant. We thought that since Kevin was conceived so easily, things should have happened right away. I finally got the brilliant idea to have intercourse every day in the month so the odds would have to be in our favor. I’m certain this is the only time in our relationship I have ever heard my husband say, “Do we really have to do it again?” I am not sure about our methods, but it seemed to work for us! In November of 1989, as they reported in the old days, the rabbit died. (For those who may be unfamiliar, rabbits were previously used to test a woman’s urine to see if she was pregnant. It was said “the rabbit died” if she was indeed with child.) We actually took one of the box tests and it had a positive result. Success at last!

The best part of being pregnant in the winter is that you have plenty of time to “nest” and eat. And eat I did! My husband was obligated to go on the mashed potato and dumpling circuit. This may be better known as county fire department banquets. I could never have imagined how much older people at these events enjoyed seeing a pregnant woman eat. They even brought the desserts to me. God bless all of them. Back then, my obstetrician never mentioned a limit on my weight gain. And if he did, maybe I just didn’t hear him.

My pregnancy lasted a total of forty weeks. As you will read in later chapters, it was very eventful. I only had one complaint during my pregnancy (don't ask my husband, he swears it's more). In the last months, the baby's head would turn and he would hit my bladder. Not only was this shocking, but the surprise pee that came with it made me invest in a lot of panty liners.

When Kevin was sixteen months old, he had a life-changing event in the form of an accident. The day was February 3, 1990. There had been a lot of rain that winter in Maryland, and the county tax ditch that ran along our property was full of water. This water ran straight into the Beaver Run Dam. My husband was feeding our dogs and Kevin was "helping" his daddy. Gerald turned his back to throw away a bag, and in that split second, Kevin fell into the ditch. I was taking a nap and heard Gerald yell. When I woke up, I saw Gerald taking off his coat and diving into the water. I called 911 and went to help. At the time, I was about five months pregnant with Andrew. Gerald pulled Kevin from the water and brought him into the yard. Kevin was unconscious, without a pulse, and unresponsive. Our neighbor heard the fire department dispatch and rushed to our yard to help.

We did CPR until the ambulance arrived. The local volunteer fire department not only sent its ambulance, but along with it, a utility truck and countless volunteers. Kevin was revived with the help of a multitude of people. We are forever grateful for everyone's efforts. While Kevin was being transported to the hospital, Gerald collapsed from the cold-water exposure. He, too, was transported to Peninsula General Hospital. I felt helpless as I raced from one room to the other, worried one of them might die without me there. Later, Gerald was released, and Kevin was sent to John's Hopkins Hospital[®] Pediatric Intensive Care Unit here in Maryland. He was there for about a week. During his stay, my legs would ache so much, I could barely walk. I could only think the stress of the event and my ongoing pregnancy caused my leg pain. After we came home, we all came down with the flu. I was hospitalized for three days

and finally sent home without further complications. Life had finally settled down.

In May, there was one more incident that gave our family a scare. I was getting out a birthday cake from our garage freezer for my father-in-law's sixtieth birthday. The wires for the garage door assembly were exposed to the wires that led to the electrical box. This caused the door wires to be "live" with electricity. I grabbed one wire and it seemed to hold onto my hand. My sister-in-law was with me and saw what happened. I passed out and my body weight pulled me off the wires. I had to be seen by my doctor to make sure there was no harm to the baby. We were lucky, as there was no harm done! Gerald came home from his trip and said, "I am never traveling again!" Yes, these certainly were famous last words.

During my pregnancy, my girlfriend gave me a book by the late newspaper columnist Erma Bombeck. This book tells the story of a woman watching her toddler son watch television. St. Peter was assigning saints to people and an apostle asked who this woman's saint was. The woman looked very tired and was sad because she knew her son would never play like the other children. St. Peter said, "She is her own saint, no need to assign her one." I cried like a baby after reading this story. The whole time I read the story, I felt like I knew what this woman was feeling and that I may have to deal with this once I had our baby.

In July, I had some Braxton Hicks contractions (also known as false labor) throughout the month. On July 28, 1990, I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby boy. Andrew weighed eight pounds, fourteen ounces and was twenty-one inches long. I was able to breastfeed Andrew with great success. He was such an accommodating, easy-going, happy baby. Andrew was a dream baby, sleeping through the night early and taking life as it came. He was also in the sixty to seventieth percentile of growth and development, so he was also above average. Kevin loved attention, and Andrew was okay with his brother being the proverbial star of the show.

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