

## *Author's Note*

**BECOMING A MOTHER OVER** forty doesn't make me unique or special; it makes me a statistic. And tired. I decided to share my forty-something journey to motherhood and beyond to show other women like me they're not alone on the ride and that age doesn't define the love and laughter found in parenthood. I'm certainly not perfect, so I give no advice, and I've made many mistakes through the years. I challenge you to show me a mother who always gets it right.

I wrote this book as a series of stand-alone essays, so you don't have to read them in order. All the stories are based solely on my memory, and since I haven't slept a whole night's sleep since my son was born, I may have used some creative licensing. Some of the essays did not happen precisely as I wrote them, some dialogue has been recreated, and some names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

Motherhood at any age is challenging. But as Erma Bombeck once said, "When the going gets tough, the tough make cookies." I'll add, just make sure you don't eat them in one sitting all alone.

Enjoy, and thank you for reading!

# Introduction

## *I Want a Dog*

**WHEN I WAS IN MY** late twenties, I wanted a dog. My then-boyfriend, whom I thought I'd marry, said, "You can barely take care of yourself; you're not ready to take care of a dog."

We broke up shortly after.

He was right, but how those words stung. Even over the next several years, as I learned to care for myself and built a successful communications and public relations career, his words echoed in my head. My clock ticked further and further away from my twenties. I felt as if I lived on The Game of Life board, driving around, collecting a paycheck, and choosing a career path over family. My little car sat empty with no husband and no blue or pink pegs. When I entered my thirties, I realized I wanted a family and a dog.

While in my late twenties / early thirties, my life was about having fun, listening to rock 'n roll, and building my career. I lived independently, worked, and paid bills; that's all I did for myself. I took my laundry to my parents' house every weekend for my mother to handle.

“Do you even know how to do laundry?” my father asked.

“Yes, I know how to do my laundry. But Mama does it so much better than me,” I said.

And she did.

While my father teased me, I knew my mother loved caring for her little girl. Who was I to argue or stand in her way?

I also possessed limited cooking skills and the sparse kitchen setup to prove it.

Hannah, one of my closest friends, said, “Haveson, you have nothing in your refrigerator but water, batteries, and frozen chicken that looks like it’s been there for months. How do you feed yourself?”

“Cooking has never been my thing. But I make great reservations,” I joked.

While living my best life, my friends (including Hannah) were walking down the aisle, and I amassed a vast collection of colorful bridesmaid dresses and matching shoes. And then everyone started having babies. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t suffer from FOMO. I feared I was missing out on marriage and children. I feared I was being left behind because I’d waited too long. Yet I continuously thought, *I’ll have this one day too, right?*

I always fashioned myself a late bloomer, and not solely based on my timeline for marriage and having a family. Yes, I wanted marriage, a family, a career—and a dog. But I never felt ready. I was focused on finding myself and my purpose.

It would have been easy to blame everything on the tragedies and losses in my life: experiencing sexual assault at age twelve, living through multiple health issues with my parents, and losing my sister, Celia, to cancer. Any of my life experiences could have left me in the fetal position, never wanting to get out there and make something of myself. I could have gotten angry at the world for ruining what I

believed to be an everyday existence. But that would be playing the victim card, something I vowed never to do.

The real reason for my hesitancy is this: I was scared. I was frightened to live my life, fearful that something terrible would happen if I let my guard down. This theory, unfortunately, is how life conditioned me. The most significant example of this thinking is when I lost Celia. She was twenty-six when she died; I was nineteen. Her death left me paralyzed, and I often wondered how I could move forward with my life, much less find purpose or happiness without her.

Before Celia died, she wrote me a letter encouraging me to keep going, even after she was gone.

“Judy, promise me when the time comes, I don’t want you to change, and I want you to continue being your smart and funny self,” she wrote.

She made me promise that her death wouldn’t mean I’d stop living and following my dreams. But that’s the thing; I didn’t know what my dreams were in my twenties and thirties. I moved from Texas to California, back to Texas, and eventually to New York, trying to find myself. I built a successful career in radio broadcasting, music promotions, and public relations. I lived my life one day at a time. Then I hit my late thirties and realized I wanted to stop moving. I wanted to settle down and build something more than a career. I wanted a husband, children, and a dog.

Unfortunately, I didn’t have an excellent dating track record. Never one to pass on a free meal, I went on many first dates but few second ones. One such first/last date example was with a guy named Matthew. While living in Austin, Texas, I entered the cyber-dating world. Matthew became my first online date. We met at Trudy’s, a trendy Austin joint known for its margaritas.

*Hey, I might as well feel no pain while going through what will probably be the most painful experience of my life.*

They say every picture tells a story. According to the outdated photo posted on Matthew's dating profile, he had something in his story to hide. I have no problem with men who are hair challenged. Some bald men are very handsome. Including my dad. But what was he thinking by posting a picture from at least fifteen years prior? Did he think I wouldn't notice? Hell, he should have just posted his bar mitzvah picture. At least that would have been funny.

But Matthew's outdated photo is a close second to the best part of the meeting. As I walked toward him after arriving at the restaurant, I noticed a pin on the lapel of his ski jacket. Upon further inspection I figured out it was Eeyore, the donkey from *Winnie the Pooh*. While I fondly like Mickey Mouse, I don't wear him on a first date. Thinking the date had nowhere to go but up, I approached the rest of the evening with the positive thought that I'd soon be chugging down the fabulous margarita I'd been dreaming about all day.

I'm not sure what happened next, but I remember the wait to be seated was too long, Matthew was hungry, and we left to walk down the street to eat at El Patio, a famous Tex-Mex dive in Austin. The good news was that it would be a very short evening since El Patio nuked all their meals.

Somewhere between the puffed chili con queso appetizer and the cheese enchiladas, I learned Matthew had recently stopped practicing law to return to school and get his master's in library administration.

"I think the legal profession is a joke," he said. "I can get more out of life by checking books out to law students and telling them to drop out of law school while they still have the chance."

What an uplifting and cheerful guy Eeyore turned out to be. While I could hardly wait to learn more, I decided to leave Eeyore, Piglet,

and Christopher Robin at the House at Pooh Corner and never look back.

I continued my part-time dating job after I moved to New York City in 2001, with similar results. This job became more exhausting than my full-time career in public relations. After a wild plethora of dates, I decided to take a break. During my hiatus, a guy named Adam contacted me on Jdate, the online dating site for Jewish singles. A few months before I turned thirty-eight, and he turned forty, we met for a drink. Shortly after that first drink, we became inseparable.

I hadn't met anyone like Adam before. He gave me stability in a way I couldn't ever imagine, especially after suffering so much heartache and loss in my earlier years. While I'd met several men when I first moved to New York City (online and off-line), none felt like someone I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. Until Adam. And not only because he cooked. But that fact did help seal the deal. Also, my sarcastic humor seemed a great counterbalance to his serious nature.

We dated for a year before he asked me to marry him. While we dated, we'd often talk about our future, where we'd live, and whether kids were part of our plan. Adam and I married when I was forty, and he was forty-two. We never spoke out loud about "trying" to get pregnant or put a timeline in place for it to happen, but I secretly wondered if my body would cooperate and if I could even get pregnant in my forties.

According to [babycenter.com](http://babycenter.com), a forty-year-old woman has about a 40 to 50 percent chance of getting pregnant each year. Comparatively, a woman in her mid-thirties has about a 75 percent chance each month. But by age forty-three, a woman's chance of getting pregnant within a year drops significantly to 1 to 2 percent.

Motherhood finally happened to me at forty-three. Clearly, I defied the odds.

As older moms, we've lived a lifetime, and our experiences will only help guide us and build a stronger bond with our children. By association, having a child later in life can make you feel younger too. You'll still feel inadequate, guilty, and every bit of your advanced age daily. But as Erma Bombeck, one of my all-time favorite authors, said, "Children make your life important." She also said, "Insanity is hereditary. You can catch it from your kids." There's definitely a good argument for both thoughts.

The following collection of essays is my take on motherhood after forty. From suffering multiple pregnancy losses, to finally carrying to term, to leaving the career I'd spent years building to stay home and raise a child in New York City, to becoming a card-carrying member of the sandwich generation while navigating the loss of a parent, I chronicle my journey and showcase my realities, sadness, failures, insecurities, and triumphs as an "older" mom. I give no parenting advice, only personal reflection. And I take nothing in my life for granted.

My message to other women like me is to embrace the title of "oldest mom on the playground" and let go of the guilt and insecurities. And don't worry that your breasts aren't as perky as they used to be or that you have more wrinkles than the younger moms (that can be fixed). Wear it all like a badge of honor. Just pray that when you're surrounded by other moms at a class event or an eight-year-old's birthday party, no one mistakes you for the grandmother.

*Midlife Mama*



## *Pregnant at Forty, Forty-one, and Forty-two ...*

SIX WEEKS AFTER ADAM broke the ceremonial glass under the chuppah and we smashed our wedding cake in each other's faces, I peed on a stick and stared in disbelief when I saw the two pink lines. At the age of forty, I was pregnant.

*How can I be pregnant so soon? We still need to order our wedding pictures.*

At first, I misread the directions and thought the two lines meant I wasn't pregnant. This mistake made me realize that my forty-year-old eyes would require reading glasses to see the tiny print from then on.

"Adam, come here. I need to show you something," I said, dragging him away from the kitchen where he was preparing a delicious meal for dinner.

"Okay, okay, I'm coming," he said. "Let me turn down the heat so I don't burn the fish."

As I pulled him toward the bathroom, he stopped me before we walked through the door.

"You're pregnant?" he guessed.

"Yes," I said with a big smile. "Are you shocked?"

"How, I mean, wow!" he said.

While we weren't seriously trying yet, we were newlyweds.

"Do you think we're ready for this?" I asked.

"I guess we'll find out soon," he said.

I'm confident those exact words are uttered by every soon-to-be-parent when they find out a baby is on the way. Truth: I was more than ready to become a mother. This had been a dream of mine ever since my parents bought me the Sunshine Family Treehouse playset for Hanukkah in 1974. These anti-Barbie dolls included Steve, Stephe, and their baby, Sweets. They lived in a foldable treehouse. I wished I lived in it too.

But Steve and Stephe didn't wait until they turned forty to marry each other and start a family. By the time they reached my age, they were probably grandparents and had downsized and retired to a smaller treehouse in Florida, on a golf course. The same can be said for some of my girlfriends. While they didn't live in treehouses, or on a golf course in Florida, they did get married and have children before I did. And while Adam and I were about to welcome a new baby into our family, many of our friends would soon be grandparents. I certainly didn't live my life being jealous of what others had, but I did long to get married and create a family.

I couldn't wait to have this baby. I thought about all the fun things we'd do, like exploring New York City, playing in Central Park, going to the beach, visiting family and friends, and traveling the world together. This baby would know nothing but love and adventure.

That night I took six pregnancy tests, all of which confirmed I was indeed pregnant. Then I decided we should stock up on parenting reading material.

"I need to buy a copy of *What to Expect When You're Expecting* tonight so I learn everything I can before the baby is born," I said.

After dinner that evening, we went to our neighborhood Barnes & Noble to get the book. Long before the invention of the Kindle or Apple Books, one of our favorite activities included going to the bookstore and buying new books to read over the weekend. While

Adam preferred nonfiction political and business books, I gravitated to chic lit and mysteries. I didn't know what floor housed the parenting section.

"It's not that I didn't think we'd eventually buy parenting books, but did you ever think we'd come here to browse the parenting section so quickly after we got married?" I asked.

"No, I didn't," Adam said, as we rode up the escalator to the third floor.

After I found the pregnant woman's bible, I perused the shelves of other books on everything from what to name your baby to how to get them to sleep. But I noticed one missing topic.

"Excuse me," I said to the salesperson. "Where's the book that tells you how to be a parent?"

She laughed. I didn't.

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Over the next several weeks, I read everything I could about the early stages of pregnancy. I learned why I felt like crap, what to expect each week, and that the baby was no larger than an acorn. Then, the time came for the first sonogram. Adam and I would finally see a picture of our baby. I couldn't wait to meet my little acorn.

The technician led Adam and me to the examination room, where the sonogram would be taken.

"Change into this gown, and I'll return in a few minutes. Soon, you'll see the first pictures of your baby," she said.

I turned to Adam and gave him a big smile. I was nervous and excited at the same time, and so was he.

"Are you ready for this?" I asked him.

"As ready as I'll ever be," he said.

The technician re-entered the room. She squirted gooey, warm gel on my stomach and spent several minutes moving the wand over my belly. After squinting at the screen, she called for the doctor. The doctor came into the room and stared intently at the monitor.

“It appears there may be an issue, and we’d like you to come back next week so we can do another ultrasound to give us a baseline. The baby might have a chromosomal issue such as Down syndrome. You’ll have to consider if this is something you can handle, but we’ll know more next week,” the doctor said.

I was speechless. Out of all the pregnancy books and magazine articles and internet searches, nothing had prepared me for the doctor telling us there might be a chromosomal issue. Or maybe I had decided not to read the countless articles discussing this possibility in older women.

With tears in my eyes, I turned to Adam and grabbed his hand.

“I’m scared. What if we lose the baby?” I asked.

“Let’s not worry until we know everything. I’m scared too, but it will be okay,” he said, squeezing my hand.

Sadly, before we got to the following week’s ultrasound, the baby died. A piece of me died too. When you wait almost half your lifetime to have a family and then something goes wrong, it’s hard to imagine it’s not your fault. Of course, this is illogical thinking, but it’s difficult to think straight when you have a miscarriage.

A few days later, I had a D&C. The test confirmed the baby had Down syndrome, but I blamed myself.

I cried for a week.

The doctor told us we could try again once I healed.

“Should we try again?” I asked Adam. “I don’t know if I can handle it if we lose another baby.”

“Let’s talk about it once you’re feeling better,” he said.

That’s the thing; would I ever feel better after this loss? Even though I was no stranger to loss, losing a baby—my baby—felt different.

But we kept trying. I became pregnant again at age forty-one. That pregnancy also resulted in miscarriage. This time in my bathroom.

“I’m so sorry. I don’t know why this happened again,” I cried to Adam.

“It’s not your fault. Everything is going to be okay,” he said, assuring me.

Just like the previous pregnancy loss, I felt defeated. But I knew life would go on. And it did.

A few months later, I became pregnant again. I didn’t miscarry, but there was no baby. I had a condition known as a blighted ovum, where your body produces the pregnancy hormone and creates a sac, but the baby never develops. The third pregnancy happened exactly one year after the first one. I found myself in the same hospital getting another D&C.

*This can’t be happening, and it’s not my fault.*

Suffering three consecutive pregnancy losses took a massive toll on my body and mind. And while I hurt, Adam hurt too. Pregnancy loss can be more difficult for the husband to process since they don’t have to endure the physical pain. Adam may have felt helpless in my misery and sorrow, but he was anything but. He was my rock and kept me grounded.

Getting pregnant at age forty overwhelmed me. Suffering multiple pregnancy losses in one year gutted me. I couldn’t help but think this was God’s way of telling me I waited too long and wasn’t ready for a dog.

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A few weeks after the third pregnancy loss, I made an appointment with my doctor to discuss my options.

“What else should I do?” I asked Dr. Levine, my OB-GYN. “I feel like my old body has failed me.”

“Judy, these things happen to women of all ages. You may need to give your body a rest,” he assured me.

When I returned to my office, I called Adam to tell him about my conversation with Dr. Levine.

“I spoke to Dr. Levine today about all the pregnancy losses. He told me to stop putting pressure on myself about getting pregnant and relax.”

“He’s not wrong,” Adam said.

While I desperately wanted a child, I wasn’t fond of the process consuming my every thought. I wanted to enjoy my life with Adam, whether that included a baby or not. No matter how old you are when trying to have a child, getting pregnant becomes your sole focus. But being in my forties, I had the added pleasure of work obligations, marriage responsibilities, aging parents with health issues, and a fast-ticking hormonal clock running out of time. My plate was full.

“I need a ‘me’ plan,” I told Adam. “And I need to take my mind off getting pregnant.”

That was when I met Jenny, a personal trainer, who forever changed my life. While Adam and I belonged to a gym and regularly exercised, I’d never worked with a professional trainer. Jenny is a force of nature. Her small five-foot-three frame packs a mean punch and she takes no prisoners when it comes to personal fitness.

At each week’s training session, Jenny incorporated a variety of exercises, including squats, burpees, lunges, deadlifts, and other pain-

inducing routines that made me feel like vomiting. But these sessions shaped my body and mind and helped me realize my potential.

“You want me to do what? I can’t do that!” I found myself saying each week, after she introduced a new exercise.

“You can and you will. It’s mind over matter,” Jenny said.

After several months, my mind started playing tricks on me because I began enjoying the torture. I was stronger, physically and mentally. Miraculously, I became pregnant for the fourth time at age forty-two, less than a year after I began my “me” journey. I felt excited, anxious, and overwhelmed. I’d seen this movie three different times, and I hoped this time would have a better ending. I prayed that the pregnancy gods would be with me. If they were, I’d be a forty-three-year-old first-time mother.

The night I broke the happy news to Adam, we went out to dinner. Not to celebrate, since that never seemed to work for us. Instead, we cautiously talked about our excitement for this pregnancy going to full-term.

“This time, it’s going to work. I feel it in my bones,” I told Adam.

“Me too,” he said.

“My body is more prepared now. I’ve never been this strong or healthy.”

“And you’ve never looked better,” he said with a smile.

I kept hearing Jenny’s words in my head: mind over matter. My mind got my body through the intense exercise routines I thought would break me. And I knew my mind could move my body to get through this new pregnancy with no issues.

After spending a year with Jenny, I’d never felt better about my body and myself. I would stand in front of my floor-length mirror and say, “I don’t look bad for a forty-two-year-old!” I was proud of myself.

## OLDEST MOM ON THE PLAYGROUND

But now that I was pregnant, I worried if I could keep it up and keep up with Jenny. Would I hurt my baby by pounding it out at the gym? Would Jenny go easier on me now that I was pregnant?

The answer to all my questions was a resounding no. My doctor said continuing my intense workout routine wouldn't hurt the baby. And Jenny definitely didn't go easier on me. In some ways, she was harder on me. And I'll forever be grateful for that.

I was still scared of suffering another loss. How couldn't I be? Adam was worried as well. How couldn't he be? But no matter the outcome, we had each other. And that's all that mattered.