

# Unplanned

For once, my IndieInk writing challenge will be nonfiction.

“We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.” – Joseph Campbell

Six years ago, we planned to have a baby. Just one.

We knew we were in trouble when a fertility specialist said, with barely concealed glee, “You two are impressively infertile!”

Second opinion: the only kind of treatment we were willing to use (due to hormonal issues and money limitations – the other option was \$16,000 per cycle for a 60% chance of success, and those were not odds we were willing to play) had a 5% chance over three cycles. The doctor said, if he were in our place, he would not do it.

We didn't. We worked on accepting that we would not have a child.

Several months later, I watched my husband interact with a child we've known for years, and I realized that I wanted to see him with his own child. I mentioned adoption and he said he'd been thinking about it but did not want to push me.

We were rejected, with no explanation, by the first agency. We found another. We weren't completely comfortable, but they seemed eager and had good reviews.

We went to several match meetings that did not feel right or work out for one reason or another.

We became increasingly uncomfortable with the lawyer and agency, but were already in pretty deep, so we decided to play out this hand and see where it took us.

We met a family we liked. They liked us, too. We figured out what worked. I made food for them every time I went to visit; we became friends, of sorts. It is an odd relationship and not well defined, but we knew enough to trust each other.

A baby was born, emergency C-section, time spent in the NICU. Paperwork and confusion followed. Two weeks later we could finally come home.

We planned to do what so many people do so easily, just have a baby. It seemed like such a simple task, something natural in the deepest sense of the word. We have a beautiful baby girl from a life we had not planned, and six years after we started this journey, an entirely new life has opened up. We have more people involved than we expected and we have a lot to learn, but we love this little person completely.

This is not the life we had planned, the timing we expected, or the place we thought we'd be, but I find myself deliriously happy when I am holding our daughter. Sleep deprivation has something to do with it, but not as much as you might think.

Accepting this path was not easy, but it was a very good thing in the long run.

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For the [IndieInk Writing Challenge](#) this week, [Britania](#) challenged me with “‘We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.’ – Joseph Campbell” and I challenged [iampisspot](#) with “‘Achievement brings its own anticlimax.’ – Maya Angelou”

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# Infertility myth busting: Just relax!

When I was invited to participate in a debunking of infertility myths, my main problem was figuring out which one myth to tackle. There are so many frustrating and annoying things that people under the influence of these myths do and say that choosing just one to write about is a difficult task. In the end, I decided to go with the comment that most often made me want to kick people.

It goes like this: I'll be explaining to you that my husband and I don't have any kids because we are infertile, and you respond with, "Just relax! All you need is to destress. Get a massage, take some time off, make sure you are relaxed and happy, and you'll get pregnant in no time!"

This is one of the most obnoxious and hurtful things you can say to anyone dealing with infertility. It is bad enough that the statement is utterly unsupported by the evidence, but the problem is exacerbated by the fact that telling a woman to "just relax" implicitly blames her for the couple's infertility. It suggests that the couple cannot get pregnant because the woman worries too much, or because she has a controlling, Type A personality.

If nothing else, the advice "just relax" is virtually impossible to take. Trying to get pregnant if you are infertile is not a relaxing thing. Oh, sure, it can start that way. Initially, my husband and I had a very relaxed attitude about getting pregnant. We paid a little extra attention to cycles and made some attempt to plan our euphemistic activities in accordance, but we figured that it would happen when it happened.

After the first year, it was clear that this strategy was not

working. We paid more attention to cycles, and eventually marked the calendar with the days that we were supposed to have sex. We got a fertility monitor, which not only had to be peed on every morning, but which utterly controlled our sex life. And this was the fun part of the problem!

Over the next three years, there was a litany of stressors: consultations with medical specialists, exams, specimen collections, needles, pills, hormones, and, in the end, a glorified turkey baster (I believe that the medical term is "intrauterine insemination" or IUI). A massage might have been nice, but it would have done nothing at all to relax me. In fact, I can't think of anything that would have made that time in my life easier to take. It was hard and painful and unpleasant and I never want to go through anything like it ever again. Infertility is stressful, and there is not much that can be done about it.

So, when you told me to "just relax," you were talking to a person who was already under a great deal of unavoidable stress. And you know what? You made it worse. Allow me to explain: when you told me to "just relax" during that period in my life, I had several simultaneous reactions, none of which were relaxation.

First, I wanted to yell at you for giving useless advice. I wanted to tear your still beating heart from your chest and eat it as you watched. I wanted to rip off your head and spit down your spine. I wanted to punish you for saying something so utterly inane. You probably wouldn't have noticed this reaction, but it was there.

Second, my fight-or-flight reaction went into overdrive. Telling me that I would get pregnant if I would "just relax" was an attack on my character. You were telling me that I can't get pregnant because I was doing something wrong. You were saying that our infertility was not one of those unfortunate but random events that are a result of living in a

large and uncaring universe, but a deep, personal flaw, which could be corrected if only I were a better person. I already felt broken and useless. I felt like less of a woman because I had not yet done the one thing that billions of years of evolution suggested I should be able to do. I tried to convince myself that our infertility was not my fault, but you were saying it was. Ouch.

Third, I made the decision, then and there, to never speak with you about anything personal ever again. You blithely came in and offered an uninformed opinion on a very painful subject, and, instead of helping, you did the equivalent of poking me with a sharp stick. On some level, I understood that you were trying to make me feel better, but you clearly lacked basic human empathy. I didn't need to put my hand in that beehive again.

The reality of the situation is this: in most cases, ours in particular, infertility has nothing to do with relaxing or stressing out. We had clear biological reasons that we were unable to conceive. Sometimes that happens, even to perfectly nice people. No matter how much we relaxed, we would not have been able to conceive on our own. Even with a turkey baster (sorry—IUI), we were told that we had less than a 5% chance of conceiving over three cycles. While that may sound like a reasonably good chance, that is medical speak for “You would have a better chance of being struck by lightning.” IUI is not particularly cheap, our insurance didn't cover it, and the chance of conceiving was quite small. We elected not to go through the procedure more than once. We could have tried IVF, but we were told we were not good candidates, and the costs for even one attempt are exponentially greater than several IUIs.

Here's the point: telling me to relax was counterproductive. It only made me angry, which actually increased my stress level. If you really believed that all I needed to do was relax, then the last thing you should have told me to do was

“just relax.”

Right. I've told you what not to do, but that probably isn't the best way to end this discussion. It's just going to leave us all hurt and angry. Instead, allow me to offer some advice for interacting with infertile couples.

First and foremost, you need to understand that infertility provokes a grief response somewhere on the spectrum between losing a good job due to a bad economy, and finding out via text message that your baby brother has just had a stroke and died. If a couple knows that they are infertile, it is certain that they had planned to have children, and that the diagnosis of infertility is threatening to rob them of that dream. This is a real, tangible loss for those couples, and you need to treat them as though they are in mourning, because the reality of the situation is that they are.

Think about how you would speak to a grieving widow. Would you ever say, “Just relax! All you need is to destress. Get a massage, take some time off, make sure you are relaxed and happy, and you'll land a new husband in no time!” I'm guessing not, and if you wouldn't say it to a grieving widow, then you probably shouldn't say it to an infertile couple.

You also need to realize that there is no advice that you could offer that the infertile couple has not already heard. We've all been told that we should relax, and which fertility treatments we should try, and how your best friend's second cousin's freshman year roommate got pregnant after taking a trip to Barbados. Unless you are a physician with experience in the area of reproductive health, your advice is unwanted.

Like anyone in mourning, what we really want and need is to know that you are there for us. Instead of *telling* us what to do, why don't you *ask* what you can do for us? If you know someone who is infertile, think about what you are saying. “I'm sorry you have to deal with this. Is there anything I can

do to make it easier?" is a perfectly valid response. Offer to take us to lunch and give us a shoulder to cry on for an hour. Come hang out at our house for an afternoon and help us fight off the zombie hordes on the PlayStation.

Trying to fix the problem if you've never dealt with infertility, especially if you are fertile, will most likely just make us feel hurt, sad, or angry—or all three! You probably don't know what we are dealing with, and you probably never will unless you ask. In short, think before you open your mouth.

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This post was written in response to [Resolve's](#) "Bust an Infertility Myth" blog challenge. I think it is an excellent idea. One problem with infertility is that there is so much misinformation surrounding the subject that, often, people just give up on trying to talk about it. Here is a link which might help give you [a basic understanding of infertility](#), and here is one giving a background on [National Infertility Awareness Week](#). You can read all of the submissions so far [here](#).

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## [Adoption process frustrations](#)

I figured out one of the things that makes the adoption process so hard. It's like the two week wait, but it takes a lot longer and there are more people poking at us.

For those lucky enough to have avoided infertility treatments, the two week wait is the period between the time that the egg and sperm are supposed to have joined and the point at which you can do a pregnancy test. It's a bad time. Hope wars with

fear. You know the chances of everything coming out well (generally not great chances, just to be clear). You can try to keep your mind off of it, but that date on the calendar is looming. When that date comes, you will either be cautiously joyful (you still have to get to the second trimester, after all) or you will be sad again and have to either gear up for the next month of trying or make the decision to stop.

Two weeks of holding your breath, hoping, fearing, and daring to dream a little is pretty exhausting.

Imagine how much fun that would be if it were extended indefinitely. Add in social workers, doctors, a home study, applications, and awkward communication.

We don't know how long this will take. We don't know if or when biological parents will like us enough to choose us. We don't know if we will find someone who wants to give us a healthy child.

There are a lot of variables. Just as with the two week wait, we've done all we can. We've submitted fingerprints, medical records, applications, proof of employment, and anything else we've been asked for. We have a few things left, but we're reaching the point at which the best we can do is sit back, relax, and hope for the best.

I've been trying to sort out my feelings so I can understand why this process has felt so frustrating and invasive. The more I understand, the easier it is for me to get through this process.

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# 30 days of truth: Day 1

I need to write again. This seemed like a good set of prompts, and I've read some interesting things others have been writing.

Day 1: Something you hate about yourself.

I wish the list were shorter, but I'll pick a couple that are digging at me lately.

I spent two years working 70 hours a week and got really out of shape. It's hard to exercise enough when I'm exhausted all the time, when I'm hanging on to sanity by the edges of my fingernails because that's all I have left. I managed to keep bellydancing. I swam when I could. I did the best I could, and the next year should be much better, but I'm not where I want to be. Hate is overstating the case, but I feel like I don't fit my body right now. I don't know what to do other than to plug away, keep trudging, keep pushing, swim more, Zumba, belly dance, hike. I know it will eventually get better, but right now I'm feeling frustrated that it will take a long time to get back to where I want to be.

I hate that after having been told since I was ten or so that I had baby-making hips, it's not true. I hate that I can't have children, that I can't be pregnant, that I feel like my body has betrayed me in something I didn't even know I wanted until six or so years ago.

I hate that I am so afraid of change and that I am so afraid of failure.

I think that's enough. I don't want to write more on this. The prompt was something, not many things, so I guess I've gone overboard a bit, but I'm frustrated and tired tonight and this was too easy to write.

For tomorrow: Day 02 → Something you love about yourself. I will write as many things on that subject as I did on this. It's important to me that these balance.

If you'd like to see more of these posts, check out these: [Dara](#), [JTW](#), [Raven](#), [Wanderlust](#), [Thinking Too Hard](#), and [girlvaughn](#).

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## Working through

This has been a hard year, and I'm not sure what to do other than write.

First was infertility. We lost something then. Not a child, but the hope of one. We lost ideas and dreams and things we thought would be true. We grieved over it in some ways as if we had lost something more tangible. We'd tried for years, and suddenly there was a hole where all of our expectations got sucked in. It is hard to understand unless you have been through it, so many people could not understand why it was such a big deal. I am still fighting the feeling that I am not truly a woman if I don't have a child. I know it is illogical, but it permeates our culture. Women with children have more status than women without. However unfair that may be, it's true on some level. I get asked by women I've just met how many children I have, or when we are expecting to have kids, and when I say, "We can't," there is an often not-so-subtle movement away. The circle closes and they talk about their children and I am not welcome. That's not true of everyone, especially those who know how much I've worked with children through my life, but it has happened.

I was working on healing, working on accepting the new way of thinking and approaching life, and the next piece happened. My

grandmother, at almost 93 years old, stopped remembering people and places. She stopped being herself, in some ways. It felt to me like that hole from infertility got another part dug out, widening it a bit. I had always wanted to have a picture of four generations of my family: grandma, mom, me, and a baby. The baby was not going to happen, and now grandma was slipping, too. Another piece of grief, although for me this was kind of anticipatory grief because I had to face the likelihood that she would not live a whole lot longer. She might; I don't know. I hope, if she does, she is enjoying life. It was another blow, but we were coping.

June 9, my younger brother died completely unexpectedly. He was 28 and had no health problems that would explain the blood clot that killed him. I still don't really have words for what that did to me. It took the grief from infertility, the grief about my grandmother, wrapped it up in a physically painful grief, and dropped a bomb on me that opened up a chasm.

I have never had such a physical response to grief before. Food has always been a comfort when things got bad. Now food is necessary, but not enjoyed, and I often have to be reminded to eat. I don't taste much, and my stomach hurts all the time. My back hurts, too, and sometimes my feet, and sometimes my head. The first three days my chest cramped up regularly. I have never had such physical pain related to mental anguish. I am tired all the time, too. I've been sleeping 10-12 hours a night just to be able to get up in the morning, but I'm not sure I am resting very well. I'm exhausted. I get through by focusing on one thing, one step, the next thing, on making sure I eat and drink enough, on sometimes just breathing deeply.

I don't know how to talk about this. I talk around it a lot. I cry a lot. I talk to Xander, who is possibly the only reason I have gotten through this. He has been amazing. I spend a lot of time with Nyx. She has been very attentive and snuggly since this happened.

I have a really big hole inside me, surrounding me, engulfing me, and I don't know how to heal. I know that all of this is normal, but it's harder than I knew it could be. I've lost a lot this year, and every once in a while, when I'm just holding still, I feel like I've been hit by a truck. I want to crawl into a hole and pull it in after me, but I know that won't help. The world keeps going. I can grieve, but I can't disappear.

Having work to do helps. Having some purpose, the feeling that I'm doing something useful, is good for me. Dealing with people right now is hard, and by the end of the day I'm wrapped up in pain again, but I'm mostly making it through the days. Weekends are spent on the couch, reading or watching TV. I don't have much interest in going out.

We went for a walk down to the farmer's market yesterday. That was the first day I've been able to do anything even close to exercise since Daniel's death without getting exhausted or cramping up within five minutes. It was a good, long walk. We got food for the week and picked up nectarines to eat on the way home, and mine actually tasted good.

It's not better, though. I still can't work through my little brother being a pile of ashes, never seeing him again. I had nightmares the first few nights, and one of them was just a voice, saying over and over, "There are supposed to be new lives in a family before the children start dying." I was standing in the dark, listening to a voice. That was all. I woke up crying because it was true and I couldn't make it better. There were others, much worse, but that one, I think, shows how all of this wraps up together in my head right now. On some level I can't believe that I won't see him again. He was the focus of our family from the time he was born. I knew that at some point I was very likely to be at least partially responsible for him again. We had talked about how to work him into our lives if it became necessary, and we knew we could handle it.

Daniel was incredibly important to me. It's very hard for me to use past tense. I keep slipping. I woke up with him when he had night terrors. I could tickle him from across the room and bug him from hundreds of miles away. I could make him laugh, and he could do the same for me. We had nicknames for each other that other people didn't necessarily understand. He gave really good hugs. We loved to sing together and we'd crack each other up when we sang certain songs because I'd be silly on purpose and he'd add to it.

There's so much more to him, though. There was. I can't explain who he was as a person because I don't have enough words, or the right words. I am floundering. Our family was centered around him. He gave us focus and meaning. I would not be who I am without him, and I don't think the rest of my family would, either. He changed how I look at the world. He made me more compassionate, more willing to look for the good in people instead of stopping at the differences. He showed me how frustrating it can be to know where the goal is but not quite be able to reach it, and also how angry it can make people if someone tries to help when the person wants to get there themselves.

I don't know if I'm making much sense. I needed to write. I'm sure I will write more again, but I'm not going to be on any consistent schedule for a while. We're going to go see family soon, and I don't know how to write about that, either.

The world is a lesser place without him.

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## Scattered

I usually have some clue what I'm going to write about, but today I don't.

I've been sick off and on for a while now. It's probably the stress beginning to tell. Much of it will be removed by the end of August, but until then I will just keep moving forward and keep trying to stay healthy. I'm not very good at it. I know I push too hard. I have slept 10 or 11 hours every night this week (although the morning that Nyx woke me up at 4:00 AM wasn't quite as restful) and I am still tired. I'm on antibiotics, and whatever it is seems to be clearing up slowly, but even today I had a fever spike rather unexpectedly.

I've been pushing somewhat hard for over a year and a half now, and the past year has been unrelenting. It's my choice, but it hasn't been an easy one.

I know I'm being cryptic. I'm sorry. I just can't explain a lot of what's going on. Suffice it to say that my job, while challenging and interesting, can also be tiring, and, on top of that, foster children can need so much that I come home drained. We don't live with any of them. I think good foster parents have to have an amazing amount of patience, because I couldn't do what they do. I make jokes about not getting bitten or kicked in a while, but they aren't very funny jokes.

I get to spend some time with kids in stable, strong families with intelligent and loving parents. Sometimes I forget how good it is to just be able to hang out with kids without having to actively work with them or keep an eye on them or make sure they aren't doing things they shouldn't. It's a whole different level of awareness, working with kids who are so damaged, and it can be exhausting. Our friends' kids are a relief, a balm to what is sometimes a very weary existence.

I think I am still grieving a little, too. Scratch that. I know I am. Friends of ours recently told us that they are expecting. I was, and am, very happy for them, but on the way home I cried. I wanted to be able to raise our child with Xander. Mostly it's ok. If I get enough sleep, enough

exercise, enough down time, it sinks into the background and doesn't bug me. Once in a while, though, if I am particularly vulnerable and something triggers it, the feelings are there again, raw and sad. My response? We stopped and got good chocolate, and I am eating my share a little bit at a time.

Monday I have completely off. I may not do anything interesting with the time. I may spend the day on the couch. If I feel really motivated, I'll take Nyx out for a nice long walk. If not, though, I'm not going to feel bad about it – she'll share the couch with me all day quite happily.

The last year has worn me down. I am tired even when I have had enough sleep. I feel like I used to be better at things than I am now. I know that my attention is too fractured at the moment to do as well as I have in the past, and I am very glad I'm not trying to take classes right now, because I think I'd fail them.

Next week is a short week. The week after that I am actually taking some time off. I'm trying hard to make it through August, to have enough money set aside so we don't have to worry about money for Australia whether or not a certain job market improves. My job is stable, and I'm happy there. I'm learning a lot.

It's just a few more months. I just have to keep moving, and if I get too tired, I'll skip a day, one way or another. I've been pushing too hard for too long and I think I can't do it for much longer. I don't have to, though. We're almost there.

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# Thinking about kids

I recently came across the term “sparents”, people who don’t have children but still have a powerful impact on the lives of children. They can be relatives or friends. They take an interest in the child and provide another safe adult to help get through life.

First of all, I really hate the term. Just because we don’t have kids doesn’t mean that we are spare anythings. It is a cute nickname, but not my style at all.

Secondly, while “It takes a village to raise a child” is an overused cliché at this point, on some level I agree. The more people children have around that they can trust and talk to, the better off they’ll be. It’s important to have different viewpoints and it’s important for children to be able to talk to people other than their parents. Some discussions are just easier if you can have them with another adult or even just try them out before getting it together enough to feel like you can talk to your parents.

Third, though, I really don’t like the insinuation that people aren’t worth anything unless they have something to do with raising children. That’s ridiculous, and it makes me angry.

We’re lucky enough to be honorary aunt and uncle to two children. At some point, we may have nieces and nephews. Hard to tell. I enjoy having children in my life and I look forward to watching them grow up. I like seeing how they see the world and, sometimes, tilting it a little so they see things slightly differently.

That’s me, though. I don’t think that any person who doesn’t have children should be expected to have a drive to be part of the lives of children because otherwise their lives would not have meaning. I don’t think it should be assumed that someone who doesn’t have children automatically yearns for that kind



of relationship. I'm pretty sure at least a couple of friends of my parents left our house at times thinking "I'm so glad I don't have to deal with those on a regular basis!"

I think what I'm trying to say is that it shouldn't be assumed by anyone that someone else wants to spend time with their kid(s). The two for whom we are honorary aunt/uncle are kids whose parents are very important to us. In the older one's case, we like her in her own right, too. She's smart, interesting, and funny, and she has had enough experiences in her life that she loves to learn new things. We don't know the younger one very well yet, but with parents like hers, she's bound to be an interesting person.

I'm not really talking about infertility here, but the effects of it. We can't have kids. I'm mostly all right with that (although mother's day is not my favorite day of the year!) and I'm looking forward to being part of the lives of other peoples' children, as much as the parents and the two of us are all comfortable with. I don't want people (other than those two families) to assume that because we don't have kids and we did want them that we are automatically going to be happy to be extra babysitters.

Hmm. This is coming out a little bit angrily, and I don't mean it to. If we offer to babysit, it's one thing. If, however, someone says, "Oh, you're good with kids, and you aren't busy that night anyway, are you? So you could spend the evening chasing after my little perfect peach," that's something completely different.

We're going to continue to have an interesting life. We're going to be happy to include some children in that life when it works out. I don't think that anyone should make assumptions about how much we, or any other person who doesn't have children, *should be* willing to include children in our lives. The article irritated me on some level because it felt a little like the author was saying that unless people were

involved in a child's life they weren't really important, and I disagree with that. It may feel true from a parent's standpoint. It certainly isn't true from mine.

If you have kids, if I like your kids, if I would enjoy spending time with them, I'll let you know. I'm pretty sure most people would. I don't like people making assumptions about me or us just because we did want children and can't have any.

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## Once more unto the breach

Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,  
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit  
To his full height.

*Shakespeare's Henry V, Act III*

I will write about infertility at least once more to help with National Infertility Awareness Week, April 24-May 1, and to get one step closer to complete acceptance. There are [a lot of things that I could write about](#), but I think the question that got me most was this: What if I always feel like less of a person because I wasn't able to reproduce?

I am still somewhat angry. I am not angry at any person or being (although pregnant women sometimes tick me off a little – I'm working on that!) because there is no **thing** responsible for infertility. We didn't do anything wrong. I don't believe in a god (although having something to yell at would be nice sometimes). I don't believe this is meant to be or a learning experience or any of that crap. If it makes you feel better, more power to you, but that doesn't help me at all. Life is life. Sometimes it sucks. Sometimes it is amazing. The important part is making the best we can of what we have.

I do feel somehow like less of a person because I can't have a child, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood. (Apparently that's a piece of rap music. Shows how much attention I've been paying.) Having a doctor say that there was no way we could get pregnant without spending enough money to buy a reasonably nice new car, with a 60% chance of success, was not a good thing for me. I felt inadequate and unhappy with my inability to produce eggs on a regular basis.

Hmm. That makes me sound rather like a disappointed chicken, doesn't it?

In fertility terms, to continue the fowl analogies, I'm no spring chicken. The doctor suggested, with no proof, that my eggs might not be particularly viable even if I managed to produce any. I know he was using the same things to push me that marketers often do – fear, uncertainty, and doubt – and it worked. It hurt. It made me feel like I ought to be able to do better, and I can't. That was one of the many reasons that the first fertility doctor upset me so much. Why would someone use those kinds of tactics in a situation like this?

I'm a control freak, for those of you who don't know me. I like being on time. I like getting things done, having everything organized, and making sure I completely understand. Pretty much every other obstacle in my life has been amenable to being overcome with work, creativity, and amazing friends and family. This, though, was a problem that no amount of work, stubbornness, or creativity could solve. This was a wall made not out of brick, which can be chipped away, but out of some indestructible alloy. I couldn't fix this. I can't make it better. I feel somewhat bereft and like I'm not quite good enough.

I don't have any tangible loss. I don't have anything I can point to where I could say, "Look, I lost that." I don't have any way to connect people to what I'm talking about. All I have is a hole labeled "Barren. Unlivable. Infertile." and

it's a hole I can't fill.

I am not devastated by this, at least not now. I am not going to live my life circling that hole, desperately wishing for something to fill it. We will have other peoples' children in our lives, to spoil and talk to and enjoy, to be part of their lives. That hole is not a black hole, sucking in the rest of life. It is there, though, ragged edges flipping in the winds of change, and it will be like a sore tooth for a while.

I always thought having a child would be easy, like breathing, like having sex, like trying something new, a little scary but not too hard. It turned out to be one of the few things in my life that was completely impossible. We had to choose to walk away.

There is a small voice sometimes, during bad three-o'clock-in-the-morning moments, that whispers that I am not truly a woman, that I am proving my grandmother right in her belief that I wasn't feminine enough.

I'm learning to take that small voice and slap it silly. Metaphorically, of course.

Infertile. Barren. Dry. Desert-like.

I live in a desert. Things grow here, live here. There is a good life here. It's just not the same life you'd get in a rainforest.

So yes, this is hard. I may never feel as sure in myself as I would if we had successfully conceived. There is a somewhat off-balance feeling in this acceptance that we will not have children. I may always feel a little inadequate around pregnant women. I am, happily, mostly over the urge to kick them in the shins (I never did! Really! I just wanted to.).

I am working on remembering that everyone has joy, loss, pain, anger – everyone has different experiences, and mine does not

make me less of a person. Not as successful a biological entity, perhaps, but, put in those terms, it's a little easier to take.

What if it had been easy? What if we had a child now? I would not be who I am today. I would not understand the pain of a dear friend who has been through her version of this, be able to sympathize with another whose choice was taken away. I don't think our marriage would have been as strong, at least in the same ways.

What if? I don't know. I would not be the "me" that I am accepting, the one with a new, ragged hole in my life, the one who can look at pain in someone else's eyes and understand a little more. The one who is learning how important it is to actively look for happiness, because sometimes it isn't handed to me. The one who is humbled by knowing that I can't overcome everything.

What if it had been different? What if it had been easy? What if...it doesn't matter now. What matters is the life we have chosen, the joys we will find, and the strength we have taken from this frustrating and painful journey. We are better, stronger, more gentle for this. "What if" is not something I will ask about this anymore.

For more information on infertility, please visit: [www.resolve.org/infertility101](http://www.resolve.org/infertility101)

I am blessed to have a community that supports one another in this journey!


Posted by christine at [2:23 PM](#) 

## 15 comments:



[OnceIwas](#) said...

I'm so glad you posted your positive "What Ifs". I get so focused on all the negatives that it's never occurred to me to think about better what ifs. Thank you!

[April 21, 2010 3:15 PM](#) 



[HopeBPatient](#) said...


Great post! Here from ICLW and while I'm sure most every parent feels their child(ren) is/are their greatest treasure I do also feel that those of us who will have struggled for so long to have children will feel it most intensely (or maybe differently?) I hope ☐

[April 21, 2010 9:49 PM](#) 



[Lollipop Goldstein](#) said...

I am so glad that such a kick-ass post is the first one on the list. This is beautiful and wistful and it made me want to give you a big hug. I hope you get that positive stick one day (and soon).


[April 21, 2010 10:03 PM](#) 

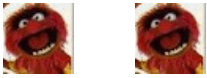


[Sooz](#) said...

Thanks for the poignant post! I've never seen a + either and we've been trying for 15 months. Sometimes I want to give up, but we've got to keep on trying. It'll all be worth it in the end.

ICLW

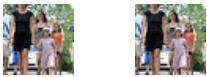
[April 22, 2010 12:49 AM](#) 



[Claire](#) said...

Just over from ICLW. I have seen a + but never held my baby. It never got that far. It's all a bit crap really until that baby actually arrives. My family are also super fertile so I never thought this'd happen. Hey we'll both get there in the end. xxx

[April 22, 2010 8:27 AM](#) 



[Gurlee](#) said...

Beautiful, just beautiful.

I have seen the What IF project and I must admit I cannot bring myself to name my fears. Saying them out loud or acknowledging them out loud is TOO scary. The list scares me too, I just can't get through it, way too heart-breaking. Your approach ROCKS! It brought tears to my eyes, I love it!

I also love the thought of IF being a season in my life. Seasons inevitably change. Thank you for such an inspirational and moving post. Your words strike me.

Here's to hope and love and peace and the promise of a new season!

☐ Gurlee


[April 22, 2010 10:32 AM](#) 



[Mrs. Gamgee](#) said...

I love your positive what ifs! It's so important to keep our eyes on what the dream really is... beyond the positive pregnancy test.


ICLW

[April 22, 2010 11:35 AM](#) 



[spyderkl](#) said...

Terrific post! I loved your positive "what if" too – I hope it comes true for you.


[April 22, 2010 12:14 PM](#) 



[Kristin](#) said...

What an incredible post! The positive what ifs are what kept me going through our IF struggle.

~ICLW


[April 22, 2010 12:26 PM](#) 



[Sweet Pea](#) said...

WOW, what a absolutely beautiful post. Hoping all your dreams come true.

~ICLW #159

[April 22, 2010 12:33 PM](#) 






[-K](#) said...

Thank you for posting this and hang in there. Great blog, can't wait to read more. I'm your newest follower from IComLeavWe.

-K

<http://mypottyseat.blogspot.com/>


[April 22, 2010 4:06 PM](#) 



[Jenny](#) said...

Thank you for this post. These are things I ask myself all the time.

I found you on ICLW and I'll be following you. ☐

[April 22, 2010 10:07 PM](#) 



[christine](#) said...

Thank you, ladies, for all of your comments! They were appreciated more than I can express!

[April 24, 2010 8:34 PM](#) 




[fertilelychallengedblacksheep](#) said...

This was beautiful. One of favorite lines was "When I started this journey I had no idea what it meant to want to bring children into this world. Infertility has shown

me that they will be my greatest treasure.”

I feel the same way. Thank you for putting this into words.

[April 25, 2010 11:50 AM](#) 



[..Soo.See..](#) said...

I agree with Mrs. Gamgee. Having these exact positives will help you through this season. I pray for your positive digital and think it's beautiful what your hubby said. Sometimes they're forgotten in this. Lots of positive thoughts and prayers! Xo

[April 26, 2010 9:40 PM](#) 

## Post a Comment

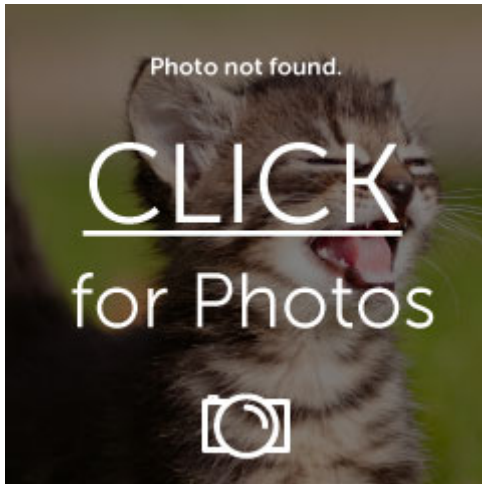
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## About Me



christine

In 2008 I married the man of my dreams (referred to here as MBL-My Big Love). We decided to start trying for a family immediately. We both believed that we'd end 2009 with a year of marriage under our belts and a baby in our arms. Well, our journey was not meant to be a short one. In July 2009 we were diagnosed with male factor infertility and began fertility treatments. Three IUIs w/clomid and one IVF cycle later we are still waiting for our BFP. We want to name our first daughter June, so until we get that BFP and a sticky baby, we are left "believing in June."

[View my complete profile](#) 

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## Love and moving forward

I've been thinking a lot lately about love, how it is different depending on the person and the situation. I've been thinking about this because of everything else that has been going on and because I've had to re-center myself, I guess. It's an interesting proposition, starting over without something that I didn't expect to have to work at much in the first place. That isn't nearly as cryptic as it sounds. Let's

try this – the future we thought we had just underwent a metamorphosis, and I'm running like crazy trying to catch up.

Somehow I always kind of thought love was being swept off your feet and carried off into the sunset. I said I hated most princess fairy tales, not that they didn't have an effect on me. The problem I always had, though, was that I wondered what happened after happily ever after. I wondered that more after seeing Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, which is hilarious and hits rather close to home on the fairy tales. A prince says, "I was raised to be charming, not sincere" after he is caught screwing around on his wife. The princes always seemed to say the right thing, but they were never really people I'd like to spend any time with. If the most interesting thing a guy does is wander around the countryside looking for maidens who look dead so he can kiss the maiden, my first thought is **not** that he's looking for a wife. He could be looking for something much more disturbing.

Happily ever after is a damn sight more interesting to live than to dream about, and it's pretty great when I'm getting to do it with a guy who described himself, after seeing *Into the Woods*, as having been raised to be "sincere, not charming," although he can certainly manage charming when he feels so inclined. To quote the musical yet again, this time from Red Riding Hood's perspective, "Nice is different than good".

So. Life is different. Love is stronger than I thought it could be, and is fed not with romantic gestures (although there are certainly some of those) but with laughter, puns, long bike rides to nowhere in particular, almost constant bantering, a noticeable dollop of silliness, and the willingness to bestir ourselves to do something for the other person when we'd rather be curled up with a book.

Love may be as small as making chocolate chip cookies when we'd rather be sleeping. They were good cookies.

It's okay, surprisingly. I like looking at a future with the two of us moving forward. I was afraid there would be a giant hole where all of the hopes about a child would be, but apparently the first initial grief worked through more than I thought. I spent part of an evening talking to friends (and bawling on them, to be completely honest) and I've been in a funk, which I'm sure will come and go, but it isn't as bad as the many long, dark days after the first IUI.

We will go on trips, and we'll only take along kids if we want their company, not because we have to. We can move whenever we want to and not worry about whether or not the schools or the playgroups are good enough. Not that we probably would have anyway, but that's another discussion. There are freedoms now that we would have had to work harder to get to had we gotten what we wanted.

I'm not happy that we can't have a child. There is still grief worming its way through thoughts and ideas and a lot of other pieces of life. There are things I need to get rid of or give away ("What to Expect when You're Expecting", for instance) because they make me sad when I see them. I am finding myself moving forward again, though. I want to do some decorating in the house, replace blinds with curtains, hang pictures we never quite got around to hanging, finally paint the kitchen.

Infertility takes up a huge amount of energy. I didn't know how much until we walked away. I've been sleeping better and feeling more...open? I'm not sure how to describe it. Relaxed, certainly, less held in, wound tightly, held together, afraid of failing at something once again, especially something I can't control. This was something I couldn't fix, couldn't even mitigate.

We're figuring out what we want, now that the earlier version didn't work out. OS crash? Heh. Grief isn't gone, but we've done this before, and the rhythms are familiar. We will get through, and we are finding other things to move towards, and

we are all right.

Love is...well, love is weird and unexpected and sometimes it hurts like you wouldn't believe, but sometimes it's as simple as chocolate chip cookies cooling on the rack, filling the house with good smells and better feelings.

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## Walking through fog

I'm just going to ramble today. I'm trying to write three days a week, but I won't promise that what I write is going to be fascinating. Right now I'm just working through things.

I'm not unhappy with the choice we made. It was the right choice for us. It wasn't an easy choice, but it was a good one. We can relax and enjoy each other more than we've been able to for a while. We know, now, what to expect, at least in broad strokes. We also made a choice rather than trying and failing again. There was action rather than reaction. We chose. We decided.

At the same time, it isn't an easy walk through this for me. I did not want children with anyone else, but somehow, with him, it was a really positive idea for me. I was not expecting that. I started looking at and hoping for things that were different from anything I had wanted before. The idea wrapped its way through our lives, that someday we'd be parents.

It didn't work.

That's life. Things change, they don't work the way we expect them to, and we adjust. Humans adjust. It's one of the reasons we didn't go the way of the dodo bird. We get through, change, do what we need to, find new paths. It isn't the first time

that I've had to change my expectations of the future, and I'm still here, and still happy.

Life changes. Life is strange.

I'm relieved. I'm more settled, even now, even so close to the decision. Talking to friends has helped, and knowing that other people have walked the same path makes it easier. I know there is a good life past this. I see friends with children who welcome us in their lives, and I see friends without children who are happy and fulfilled with their choices. I am grieving for that which will never be, but it is a calmer grief than the first time around. I am walking forward with a free and loving heart, having made a choice to stop adding to pain, worry and sadness.

There is pain. We will never have what we dreamed, and that will always make me somewhat sad. I know, though, that we will walk through this together and that we will be stronger for it. We turn to each other for strength, not away.

There are always things that will make me smile and laugh. [Peter's post](#) made me smile. I know that I will keep seeing things that are good, and I am already looking for them. I can still smile. In my life, as long as I have been able to smile, I have been able to move past pain.

I grew up in California near the coast, and fog was always a good thing. I loved walking in it and waking up to it. I'm walking through fog right now, living with it, surrounded by it. I remember a quiet joy in fog, so I can live with a bit of it right now until I work my way through grief.

Opportunities are opening up. The world changes, and we change with it. I will keep walking, one step at a time, moving forward and knowing that I will be fine. I will get through this, as I have gotten through stranger, harder things. I have my friend, love, and partner to walk with now, and we will get through and be happy.



It's just a little foggy here at the moment.