



Mandy Barclay

“This time I took rests, and I slowed down to marvel at the miracle.”

When my husband wanted to go for a vasectomy, I went with his decision, thinking that we were complete as a family. We already had a son aged nine and a daughter aged 11. So in 2005 he went for the op.

But the longing to have a third child never left me. In retrospect, I knew all along that I wanted and needed to have a third child. I suppose I was adhering to society ‘norms’ and not my heart’s longings.

I tried many things – probably on a subconscious level to quell the desire. I studied psychology, became an avid gardener and got involved in charity work. But I still felt incomplete.

One day, after many casual discussions, I asked Dean to consider having the process reversed, even though the chance that I would fall pregnant was only 30%. I said that he would have the final say, and if he didn’t want to, then I would never bring up the subject again. He went to the kitchen for water then walked back into the room. It was the longest few minutes of my life! But he looked at me with an almost excited look, and said: ‘I don’t see any good reason why not.’ I had a sense of knowing it was the right thing to do.

He had the reversal op within a month and I fell pregnant six weeks later. Confirmation of my pregnancy came on my 39th birthday. What an amazing gift!

My pregnancy was the most awesome experience ever. This time I embraced the changes in my body, I took rests, and I slowed down to marvel at the miracle. I never wanted to rush through it like I had with my previous pregnancies.

Samuel is now three weeks old. The dream that I’d had for what seems like forever, one that I had given up on, is now a reality. I have my three beautiful children. I am home.

starting over

Four women share their incredible second chances at life, love and everything else.

Anonymous

Before 23 January 2008 we lived a normal, sheltered suburban life. One day changed all that. At 12h10 I arrived home after fetching my daughter from preschool, and within seconds I found myself being pushed onto the floor. I looked up to see 'them' take my daughter and my whole world collapsed. I could do nothing to protect her.

'They' took her to another room and the worst thing was that I could hear her, but not see her or be with her. At one point they brought my daughter to me and demanded that she stop whimpering. I held her so tightly and prayed out loud. At no point during the whole ordeal did I see any of their faces. I saw the scarves and belts intended to be used on us and I feared the worst.

I am not sure what changed their minds, but they never hurt us. They left after 40 minutes. It all happened so quickly, yet it felt like an eternity. The worst feeling was that I had been unable to do the thing that any parent wants to do: protect my child. I felt I had let my little girl down in the time of her greatest need. No five-year-old in the world should come face to face with a gun.

In addition to feeling angry and then terrified and then angry again, I was also very anxious about coming home each time I returned. I am still scared. That will take a long time to go away. For a while after this

traumatic experience I just existed in a kind of a haze. And then, one day, I decided that 'they' were never going to take my *joie de vivre* away from me. That was MINE!

I started living again, doing things I'd never done before. I took part in the 105km Herald Cycle Tour, 18 days after the armed robbery. A month later, I completed my first Two Oceans Marathon. I then decided to enter the Comrades on 15 June and I planned to walk, run or crawl – if I had to – the 87 kilometres that are part of my healing process. Each step was a step closer to

feeling stronger and more vibrant than ever before. If my legs could carry me, I'd be okay. Physically, it was the hardest thing I've ever done, but I did it!

These days, we value more and more the time spent with our children, family and friends. Our pace of life has slowed down, and we try to eliminate any unnecessary stresses and demands. It's ironic, but I feel that I can cope much better. Material things have less status in our lives and we try to show our children that all things are possible to those who believe in it, and that we can overcome most things in life.



'No five-year-old in the world should come face to face with a gun'



Joanne Enslin

'It wasn't in my plan to be a widow with two small children

I was married to Terry for five years. We had an outstanding marriage and two small sons. He was a great father, fit, and strong – and certainly not expected to have a heart attack at 48. Which is what happened.

I got the dreaded call one morning. Someone from his work called to tell me that he wasn't feeling very well and he wanted to talk to me. I drove from Rivonia to Midrand. On the way there, after constant calling, I discovered that the paramedics had been called. When I got there, I saw the helicopter. The medical team was trying to resuscitate him. There was chaos, and in that half an hour I remember pleading with God, bargaining with him to keep Terry alive.

But it was his time. I had to tell our sons, aged one and two, what had happened. How do you explain that their father is not coming home?

My sister had died in a car crash six weeks earlier, so it was a double loss. I found myself consoling two sets of mothers (my own and Terry's mum) and four children (mine and my sister's two teenage kids, who

had come to live with us). And, of course, my own heart was broken. I was really angry at Terry for leaving me.

I carried on working and for four years I was on autopilot, trying to keep my boys intact, trying to survive financially and trying not to break down. There was certainly no time – or inclination – for romance.

Finally, I decided to pull things together and get fit. I joined the RAC running club and started just putting one foot in front of the other. It was there that I was introduced to Carl, and soon we were running together. I was attracted to his gentleness, but it was a slow process. I was so terrified of abandonment and loss – much more than I wanted to believe. The defining moment came about three months later when we went out for dinner. Sometime during the evening, I looked at him and had



JOANNE FOUND LOVE AGAIN AFTER BEING WIDOWED. JOANNE WITH DAUGHTER GEORGINA AND SECOND HUSBAND CARL.

a moment of complete clarity. I had fallen in love with him – six years after Terry had died.

It wasn't easy for Carl. He walked into my life, which was filled with two children, two foster children, lots of loss and fear of more. I hadn't moved out of our house and he had to move into a home full of memories. But we got married a year later and we still live here. Twelve months after our wedding, our daughter, Georgina, was born.

People often ask Carl how he is so non-judgemental about living in this house. He says that it is part of me, and why should we move just because Terry died? He is an amazing man who has complemented our lives so much. It wasn't in my plan to be a widow with two small children. It wasn't in my plan to have my sister die in that car crash and leave her two children with me, and it certainly wasn't in my plan to fall in love again and have a daughter at 42. But often things don't turn out as we planned, and if we open ourselves up to that, there are such gifts to be had.

Bev van Eck

Many people who have nearly died have told stories of seeing white lights. I can't remember much of nearly dying, but it changed my life. I was first diagnosed with Crohn's disease in 1996; my twins were a year old. Crohn's is an awful disease that results in chronic inflammation of the colon. It has no cure, but can be put into remission with large doses of cortisone. Controlling your diet improves and manages the condition but stress makes it worse. I was put onto cortisone and started an exercise regime. In that time, I left my husband and started a life as a single mom to three kids, surviving on R2 500 per month. To say that I was stressed is an understatement – but I got better.

A few years later, I met the love of my life, now my husband, Sean. I was in a job I loved, it seemed as if my Crohn's had gone for good. Then one day, nine years after I was diagnosed, I collapsed. Sean took me to hospital and the doctor confirmed that the disease had returned. The next two years were almost unbearable. I was in constant pain and discomfort. I took unpaid leave and was despondent, depressed and tired.

But in all of this darkness, there were gifts. Sean was amazing. I had been put onto a very expensive drug, but my friend Petra, who is a doctor, gave me all her services for free and stood by me through it all. And all my friends took me into their care.

Just when I thought things could not get worse I was admitted to hospital, vomiting and bleeding. All I remember is hearing that I might die; I had a perforated colon. This meant one thing: a colostomy bag.

Somewhere in this confusion, I remember feeling at peace.

After the op, it was touch and go. I had had three-quarters of my colon removed – and yes, I had become a bag lady!

I remember thinking that this was a time for forgiveness, for acceptance

of past wrongdoings and for letting go of grudges. It was a time to stop being angry and to embrace the love around me. And I did. I remember surrendering to God, wanting to go 'home'. I no longer feared death or the future. It was an incredible feeling.

I had pipes coming in and out of me and couldn't talk because I was on a ventilator. It became my mission to remove one pipe a day. Then came the day when the doctor said that he believed I could breathe on my own. And he switched off the ventilator.

My near-death experience now defines me and what I have learnt. I have an incredible husband. He makes me feel beautiful and reminds



'In all of this darkness, there were gifts'

BEV WITH SECOND HUSBAND SEAN. BEV SURVIVED A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE.

me that my bag saved my life. I have the most amazing parents who have stood by me.

The right people come into your life at the right time. Petra has been unbelievable both as a doctor and as my friend. I've also learnt we should never take our health for granted.

I have learnt how to manage my stress, and that is a gift in itself. I now focus on good relationships, love, health and positivity. I have less fear and more love in my heart.

Our lessons are taught in mysterious ways, but I have learnt never to stop believing that God is good. There is nothing I can't handle, and there is nothing I lack. ❀