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Reviews; Little Daisy-Mae: The Girl Who Couldn't Wait, WHOOSH! A Little Book for Birth Companions

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Little Daisy-Mae: The Girl Who Couldn't Wait

WHOOSH! A Little Book for Birth Companions

Little Daisy-Mae: The Girl Who Couldn't Wait

By Wayne and Jennie Little
Published by The Solopreneur Publishing Company, 2014
ISBN Number: 0992784077
Available from Amazon



Through this book, the Little family offers a rare glimpse into the secret world of premature baby care; care that goes on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, behind the closed doors of wards and units offering care for premature, small and sick babies across the UK. This is a hugely important space of care within the NHS, as Wayne's story testifies, and this book makes excellent reading for anyone who hasn't personally experienced that space (as well, I'm sure, as bringing back bitter-sweet memories for those who have).

Through the collected facebook updates and personal diary entries of Wayne, an ordinary fire-fighter facing an extraordinary challenge when his second daughter is born at just 25 weeks gestation, there is much to be learnt in this book about the ups and downs of being, and being a parent of, an extremely premature baby. Daisy-Mae Little was born unexpectedly at just 25 weeks. As Wayne puts it, she was just two-thirds constructed. The story of how she manages to complete her construction over the following 108 days, until she is eventually discharged, is a detailed one, and offers important insights into the many challenges and diverse medical needs of one extremely premature baby.

Charting almost every day of that period, this is not a short book, but it is a page-turner. As such, it is tempting to read it quickly, not least to escape from the precarious situations in which Daisy-Mae finds herself, in the hope of finding better news in the next entry. But that is perhaps to lose the sheer sense of time that must inevitably elapse before Daisy-Mae is ready to forego the various life-support lines she

makes good use of whilst in hospital. But the innovative structure of the book is useful in forcing the reader to pay attention to this sense of time unfolding, by drawing us back to each day's events up to three times before we can move forward: after Wayne's facebook entry, there is his diary entry to be read, and sometimes too a further perspective offered by Daisy-Mae's mum, Jen. Whilst the double (and sometimes triple) daily entries may prove too much for some readers, I believe that this is a key strength of the book. By being forced to read again, from a different perspective, the same day's events, the reader is offered a tiny flavour of how it might feel to be living through, in real-time, this hugely powerful experience.

Through publishing their writing, Wayne and Jen have offered an important insight into the experiences that they faced with the challenge of an extremely premature baby. It is far from an academic treatise on the issues surrounding the care of premature babies - indeed some may be put off by the informal style of the writing - but it is none the less for that: indeed, it is perhaps even stronger for its divergence from the usual texts. As a highly-articulate narrative from the parents of an extremely premature baby, this book has the potential to teach many people a great deal about the experience of extreme prematurity. Wayne and Jen's voices not only deserve to be heard, but they do a great service in offering us their voices through this book.

But this book is not just about Wayne, Jen and Daisy-Mae. Wayne also generously devotes space to the many people who support them in these first 108 days, friends, family, facebook followers and professionals alike. Although we do not get to hear their voices, for example, this book provides an excellent insight into importance of the professionalism, dedication and love offered by each member of the multi-disciplinary team caring for Daisy-Mae and her family.

With Wayne as the main author, dads finding themselves in a similar situation might find this book particularly accessible, and the Little family have pledged to ensure that a copy finds its way into every neonatal ward and unit in the country, so that it reaches those who might be most helped by it. But I would suggest that the benefits of reading this book go far wider. It represents an important and educational read for anyone interested in the development of babies and the well-being of babies and their families. And once you've read this book, I can guarantee that you will hear the words 'my baby was premature' in a completely different way. This is a simple book which has great potential to build important understanding and empathy. It is a privilege to be guided by Wayne and Jen through their experience of being parents to an extremely premature baby.

Jo Dagustun

WHOOSH! A Little Book for Birth Companions

Written and illustrated by Katie Brooke
Published by Pinter and Martin, 2015 £9.99
Also available from Amazon

If you think that you might struggle to get your partner clued up about physiological labour and birth, and suspect that a full explanation of the physiology of birth won't be appreciated, then this very short and quirky book might be just the thing. With lots of cartoon illustrations and minimal text, this book sets out to offer birth partners a good mini-introduction to physiological birth and the important role that they might play in supporting its achievement.

After a lovely positive introduction, the book is split into three main sections: what you might want to include in the hospital bag and why ('birth supplies'), the physiology of birth ('the science bit') and strategies that might be useful in avoiding induction ('if things are moving too slowly'). The book also ends on a really positive note, including some space for noting down possible baby names, reinforcing a key message of the book: let's enjoy this together.

When first reading this book, I worried that it seemed to infantilise the prospective male birth partner, and that its style might be better suited to a book intended for siblings. According to one father I consulted, however, 'it strikes just the right tone'.

Where I found this book to be really strong was in the way it introduces birth partners to 'the science bit': it presents the role of oxytocin and endogenous endorphins in labour and birth in a really straightforward manner, accompanied by lots of practical tips. The section on induction is also good, but I was expecting the perils of unwanted augmentation during labour to be discussed in this section, so this was a little confusing.

Do also be aware that this book isn't necessarily suitable 'as a loving gift for any birth partner', as the blurb claims. There are many assumptions embedded in this small book which may or may not suit your own circumstances and preferences, and a bit of tinkering might have given this book wider appeal. For example, the current edition assumes that the birth partner will be your intimate male partner and that the birth will take place in hospital, possibly in a birth pool. The list of birth supplies is a good starting point, but is not exhaustive and might be read as rather prescriptive (not everyone thinks a TENS machine is an essential technology, for example, and not everyone eats honey). Nevertheless, the book is sure to appeal to many birthing women and their partners, and it is encouraging to see an expanding range of resources available to support those aiming for a successful physiological birth.

Jo Dagustun