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Book Review: Behind the Smile by Emma Pearson

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Reviewed for AIMS by Sarah Cairns

Behind the Smile

By Emma Pearson

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Find this book on Amazon

Anyone who has suffered the death of a child will be familiar with the stark contrast of life 'before' and 'after'. This book documents the journey of one woman finding her new 'normal' after the devastating stillbirth of her twin sons.

Emma Pearson writes directly and openly about her experience of infant loss, pregnancy after loss and rebuilding a life around the grief. The book also brings home the point that, as indicated in the title, you can never know how someone is truly feeling, especially if they put on a brave face. Emma is refreshingly honest about her struggles and it was incredibly moving to read how she has been able to set up a charity that helps families through subsequent pregnancies and parenting after infant loss,[1] whilst also going on to have two more children.

Emma's story provides a compelling insight into the aftermath of life after a baby is stillborn or dies in the neonatal period. It explores how further inadvertent upset to those suffering might be avoided by the provision of supportive care, not only immediately after the bereavement but also further down the line in subsequent pregnancies and postnatal periods. It is heartening to read Emma discussing how lovely the maternity staff were during her pregnancies, especially the midwives on the labour ward. On the other hand, health visitors in Emma's story do not get such a good review; this is perhaps an area for service improvement. It was lovely to read how Emma decided to fundraise for the hospital that provided

her care, and managed to renovate the bereavement suite with the proceeds.

Infant loss is a difficult subject to write and read about, and at times 'Behind the Smile' makes for emotional reading, but the overall vibe is positive and encouraging. Emma has done a superb job in making her story accessible in this way. The book is inspirational, and I would recommend it not only to bereaved parents, but to anyone who may come into contact with parents who have lost a baby. At the very least, this book deserves a place on the reading list of every trainee maternity care worker, and I am sure that it will be of wider interest too.

Further reading

1. To find out more about the charity that Emma founded, JOEL: The Complete Package, please visit the website: http://www.joeltcp.org/