

KATHARINE HILL

IF YOU
FORGET
EVERYTHING ELSE
REMEMBER
THIS

PARENTING IN THE
PRIMARY YEARS



Muddy
Pearl

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*To Jo Jane and Ginny – fourteen children between us,
and now twelve grandchildren and counting! Thanks for
your friendship and support during the ups and downs of
parenting in the the primary years.*

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FOREWORD



Last month our washing machine stopped working. That little event sent me trawling through the kitchen drawers looking for the instruction manual that I was sure that I had put ‘somewhere safe.’ When I eventually found it I discovered that somebody had torn off the pages that were in English and left me with a choice of Spanish or Mandarin.

It was frustrating, but I can tell you that there were times in our parenting that I’d have settled for an instruction manual in any language. In fact I wish that my wife, Dianne, and I had owned a copy of *Remember This* when our kids were small. In this wonderful book, Katharine tackles the big issues that affect every parent of primary age children. But this is not just another parenting book – this book oozes wisdom, practical help and above all, understanding. There are times in all our parenting when we wish that either we could have another go at it – or at least that there was somewhere we could go to discover help with the everyday challenges and blessings of being a parent. How can we give our children strong roots that will help them face the storms of life – not to mention the trauma of the teenage years? How should we deal with the testing toddler who tries us daily? What is the best way to set (and enforce!) boundaries? How can we get our children ready for the world out there so they can stand on their own two feet? How do our children come to believe that they are loved? Katharine tackles these issues and a dozen more.

This book made me laugh (the cartoons are brilliant!), and at times it moved me greatly, but I think what I love most about it is that it's so very down-to-earth. We need answers to some of the dilemmas we face as parents – and this book gives us those. But even more important is the life-changing, liberating news that we are not alone: even if we are struggling a bit at this stage of our parenting, others have worn that tee-shirt and come through it. And Katharine has worn the tee-shirt, not just as a mother of four but somebody who has spoken (and listened) to thousands of parents.

I hope you enjoy it.

Rob Parsons, OBE

Founder and Chairman, Care for the Family

INTRODUCTION



The day that changed everything was 3rd September. That day goes down in the annals of history for a number of reasons. It not only marks the demise of Oliver Cromwell, the setting of a new world land speed record, and the beginning of the Second World War, but it is also the day that I became a parent. After the elation of seeing the pregnancy test turn blue, followed by months of enduring what is commonly known as ‘morning’ sickness (a misnomer if ever there was one), I was looking forward with excitement to my first child’s arrival. Nothing, however, prepared me for what was to follow.

The week before, I’d had a busy full-time job and (with the exception of the morning sickness) felt fully in control of my world. But at thirty-seven weeks pregnant, rock-and-rolling at a friend’s wedding seemed to be all that was needed to kick-start the onset of labour, and eight hours later I found myself gazing at the little red and wrinkled bundle that was our son.

What I didn’t know was the extent to which life was about to change ... forever. This baby had taken longer to conceive than I had imagined, and the monthly rollercoaster of hope and anticipation followed by crashing disappointment had become an unwelcome but familiar routine. I naïvely assumed that the struggle to conceive and eight-and-a-half months of nausea followed by a night of hard labour meant that the difficult bit was over, and I looked forward to life as a mother with a mixture of excitement and anticipation. I had had antenatal advice by the bucketload on the practical challenges of the first few weeks –

feeding, bathing, changing – all mastered while enduring acute sleep deprivation which seemed to put Special Forces training in the shade.

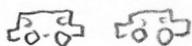
Useful as that was, my focus on the few weeks following the birth meant that I had somehow overlooked the fact that this was just the beginning. The journey of parenthood had really only just begun. If I thought that babies and toddlers were challenging, that was only because I hadn't yet tried to get a four-year-old unstuck from a lamp post and into his first day at school, stayed up till the small hours trying to make my son a Bart Simpson mask for the school play 'like Leo's mummy can make', or realized that my ten-year-old was serious when he told me that his classmate, Charlie, knew where he could get weed – and he wasn't referring to the classroom allotment.

In the whirlwind of life as a parent, for not one or two but eventually four children (what *were* we thinking?), and amid the chaos of finding swimming goggles, making packed lunches, cleaning out the rabbit, refereeing sibling squabbles, delousing hair and mending broken laces, what I have longed for (other than a good night's sleep and some adult conversation) has been a book that I could pick up quickly and easily to find some wisdom to help me navigate this wonderful but challenging season of life. In the same way that the ancient book of Proverbs gives bite-sized principles for living, I needed something that would give me principles for parenting and family life.

I wanted a book of short and to-the-point sayings that I could read in a few minutes while waiting for the kettle to boil – sayings that I could commit to memory and draw upon at a second's notice. This is that book: a series of short chapters offering memorable sayings that will bring direction and clarity to us in our important role as parents and carers. I have tried

to make each chapter heading a catchphrase that can be easily recalled in an instant amid the busyness, exhaustion and chaos that go with the territory of parenting in the primary years.

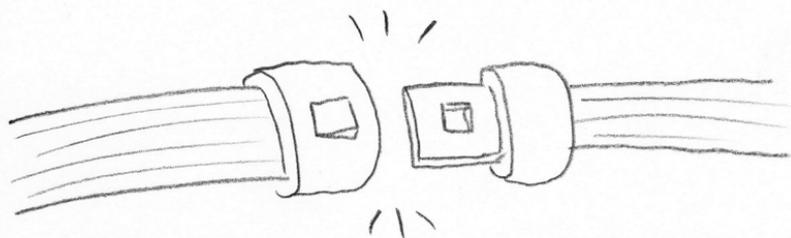
So fill the kettle, make a cup of tea, turn the page, and if you forget everything else as a parent, remember this ...



FASTEN

YOUR

SEAT
BELTS



Fasten your seatbelts



Just recently, I was sitting in my car outside a school and witnessed a wonderful scene. A man was walking towards me. Dressed for a day at the office, he looked confident, as if he had it all together. Yet it wasn't a briefcase he was holding, but the hand of a little girl, who looked about four years old.

I watched them as they left the pavement and made their way down the little path towards the school door. They walked a few paces, then he bent and whispered into her ear, and then they walked on a little further. And suddenly it dawned on me: it was her first day at school. As they reached the entrance, I don't know which of them was the most reluctant to let go, but finally she skipped into school with a wave, and a teacher took her hand and led her into the classroom. The man waved too and blew a kiss at the closed door. And then he moved to a nearby window and I saw him waving again and smiling. His chest swelled with pride as he watched her. And so all was well – a milestone reached and another child launched successfully into a new season. He turned and began walking back towards me.

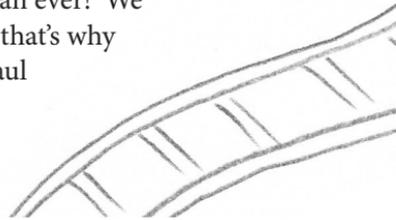
And that's when I saw him brush away a tear.

I sat in the car for a moment and thought about that little scene. Of course, in many ways it wasn't special at all – it was being repeated at a thousand school gates across the country. And yet I knew I had witnessed something profound. The smile, the wave and the tear sum up the incredible task of parenting – fun times, sad times, and every step of the way, getting ready for the day when we have to let them go.

My mind went back to my son's first day at school and another thought occurred to me. This was just the start. If that father was thinking that moment marked the end of the baby years, and this was the last time he would feel such a swing of emotion, then he was wrong. The weeks, months and years ahead would be full of waves, smiles and tears, but so much more: times of unimaginable pleasure, fulfilment, laughter and deep joy, closely followed by periods of exhaustion, frustration, guilt and despair ... and back again. It goes with the territory of parenthood. You will have your heart filled with joy and then broken, and then put back together, again and again. A quote popularly attributed to Elizabeth Stone puts it well: 'Making the decision to have a child – it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.'

Parenting is also a long-haul business. Sometimes at Care for the Family events, we ask parents of pre-schoolers to raise their hands. Then we ask them if they are looking forward (just a bit!) to the time when the children are grown and standing on their own two feet. Weary parents raise their hands – and sometimes I can see just the hint of a hope of a day when they won't have to worry about these little ones. When their hands are lowered we ask if there are any parents in the audience with children in their thirties or even forties. There are always some grandparents present who will obligingly raise their hands. Then we ask them, 'Do you still worry about your children?'

In all the years we have been doing this, we have never been disappointed with the answer: 'More than ever!' We then turn to the newer parents and say, 'And that's why you must pace yourself – it really is a long-haul business!'



Life as a parent is a rollercoaster – moments of incredible joy, fun and laughter followed by times of tears, worry and pain and back again. Tantrums, whining and sibling rivalry one minute; an angelic role in the nativity play the next; frantic trips to A&E

'Have a safe trip and enjoy your new life with the little one.'



and anxious minutes in the hospital waiting room; celebration at success and disappointment at failure; reassurance at milestones met, gut-wrenching worry when they are missed; loyal friendships and cliques, fallings out and school bullies; battles over screen time and worries about mental health; first loves and broken hearts; flooded campsites and holidays in the sun – and all this played out against the backdrop of living in our beautiful and yet broken world. There's nothing else like it – it's the ride of a lifetime. So hold on tight and fasten your seatbelts!