

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been a lot of fun to write – a heartfelt thank you to all those who have helped make it possible. Huge thanks to Rob Parsons for his wisdom, help and encouragement, and for writing the Foreword.

Thank you to the amazing team at Care for the Family – especially to Paula Pridham and Sheron Rice for their comments on the manuscript and also to Samantha Callan.

Thank you to Stephanie and Richard Heald at Muddy Pearl – for your care, creativity and attention to detail – it has been great working with you. And to David McNeill for the wonderful cartoons that make me laugh out loud.

And the biggest thank you to Richard and to our four children: George, Charlotte, Ed and Henry – without whom the book couldn't possibly have been written!

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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.

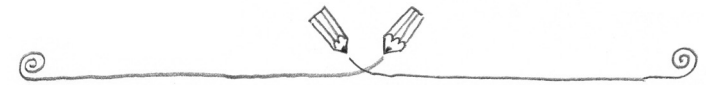
It was frustrating, but I can tell you that there were times in our parenting that I’d have settled for an instruction manual in any language. In fact I wish that my wife, Dianne, and I had owned a copy of *Remember This* when our kids were small. In this wonderful book Katharine tackles the big issues that affect every parent of primary age children. But this is not just another parenting book – *Remember This* 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 mum or a dad. 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 *Remember This* 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 – but not just as a mum of four but somebody who has spoken to – and perhaps even more importantly – listened to – thousands of parents.

Enjoy it.

Rob Parsons
February 2015

INTRODUCTION



Twenty-six years ago today was the day that changed everything. 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 with my husband, Richard, 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 roller coaster of hope and anticipation followed by crashing disappointment had become an unwelcome but familiar routine. I naïvely assumed that the struggle to conceive, eight-and-a-half months of nausea followed by a night of hard labour meant that the difficult bit was over, and looked forward to life as a mummy 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 whilst 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 Jonny's mummy can make', or realised 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 for four primary age children (*what* were we thinking?), amidst the chaos of finding swimming goggles, making packed lunches, cleaning out the rabbit, refereeing sibling squabbles, de-lousing hair and mending broken laces, what I have longed for (other than a good night's sleep and a some adult conversation) was 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 amidst the busyness, tiredness 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* ...

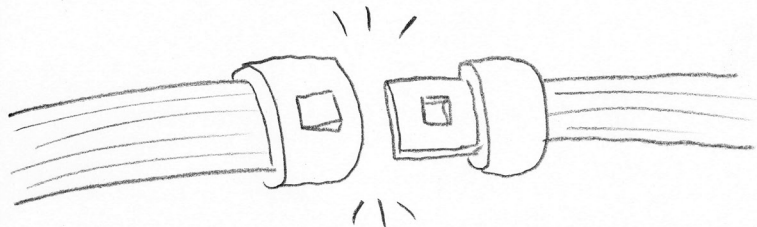




FASTEN

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. He was an office type, he was confident and he seemed to have 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 of the other, but finally she skipped into school with a wave, and a teacher took her hand and led her into her new life. The man waved too and blew a kiss at the closed door. And then he went to a nearby window and I saw him waving again and smiling. I could almost see his chest swell with joy and pride as he watched her in her first classroom. 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 the little scene that had just been enacted before my eyes. Of course, in many ways it wasn't special at all – it was being repeated at a thousand school gates all across the country. And yet I knew I had witnessed something profound. The smile, the wave and the tear sums 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.

If you forget everything else, remember this.

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, even for the most serious and unemotional of grown adults. You will have your heart filled with joy and then broken, and then put back together, again and again. Elizabeth Stone put 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.'

Motherhood and fatherhood is an emotional roller coaster, with ups and downs, joys and challenges, laughter and pain.

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 mums and dads 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 the twenty-five 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 like a roller coaster – a long haul roller coaster – full of moments of incredible joy, fun and laughter and times of tears, worry and pain. Tantrums, whining and sibling

rivalry one minute; an angelic role in the nativity play the next; frantic trips to A&E and anxious minutes in the hospital waiting room; delight at exam success and disappointment at failure, good news and bad news; reassurance at milestones met and gut-wrenching worry at milestones missed; fulfilling friendships, fallings out and school bullies; first loves and broken hearts; financial pressure; flooded campsites and holidays in the sun. And it's something most parents are totally unprepared for, at each new stage! There's nothing else like it – it's the ride of a lifetime – but once you've climbed on board, expect there to be a few ups and downs on the way. So hold on tight and fasten your seatbelts!

"have a safe trip and enjoy your new life with the little one"



REMEMBER

WHO

YOU

ARE



Remember who you are



Donna was a teenage single-parent mum who came to a recent Care for the Family parenting event. She was at least ten years younger than the rest of the women there, and, I confess, I wondered just how helpful the event would be for her. At the end of the evening she came to find me, got out her phone and proudly showed me a picture of her little boy. He was sitting in the bath, covered with bath foam and grinning from ear to ear. What she said next surprised me. She commented that the most helpful bit of the evening was when we spoke about loss of confidence and identity. She had been a student when she had her baby, and she had been catapulted, almost overnight, from her coursework on fashion and design, to the responsibility of parenthood. She said, 'I realised that I was so overwhelmed with being a mum that somewhere along the way I had lost myself. It was such a relief to hear that that was normal and to be encouraged to stop and remember who I am.' This loss of confidence is not simply the preserve of young mums like Donna but seems to engulf mothers everywhere. Mothers, regardless of age, background or life experience find themselves asking the same question: 'Who am I?'

Becoming a parent brings different challenges for both men and women. Many women in particular find that when they become a mum for the first time, their confidence and self-esteem is dealt a surprising blow. We wonder if our bodies will ever return to their pre-baby shape (answer: probably not), and our ability to think clearly or engage in any rational

conversation may seem to have deserted us. It can take time for our confidence to return.

The process of regaining confidence after having children can never be a quick fix, but there are practical things we can do that can help us rebuild our confidence and rediscover our identity. Looking back, finding 'child free' moments certainly helped me in the quest. As much as I wholeheartedly embraced this stage of life, and loved being a mum, those moments were a welcome reminder that there was life beyond children. A weekly Mums' Group with a crèche gave an oasis in the week, with an opportunity to make new friends and to engage in adult conversation. A regular arrangement with a friend also paid dividends. I would look after her children one Wednesday

afternoon and she had mine the next. Full blown chaos in the house one week was rewarded on the alternate week with some time to ourselves when we could shop, bath, read, write, tidy the house, watch TV, drink coffee, or sleep, uninterrupted and unencumbered. Bliss! In my experience, this loss of identity¹ is usually the preserve of mums, but some dads also can find the adjustment to the responsibility of parenthood, the change in family priorities (and in their partner!) a challenge. Dads: if you are parenting together, you can help mums in this area by taking the initiative in nurturing your relationship in small ways – a compliment, a small gift or gesture – reaffirming her identity as the woman you love.



There is no shortage of advice as to how to regain this loss of identity and it often involves keeping your hand in at your previous job or career or reminding yourself how successful you once were. One friend suggested that I keep a copy of my professional qualification certificate framed in the loo and look at it daily to remind myself of what I once achieved. Another friend suggested dressing up once a month and meeting old work colleagues to catch up on the latest 'news'. But frankly, these suggestions fail because they fall into the trap of assuming that my identity was based on my previous job and life. But it's not. I am a woman with gifts, hopes and aspirations, whether or not I choose to work mainly inside or outside of the home. My identity isn't in my paid job, as much as I enjoy it, and – much

¹ Redrick, Mia. (2012). Huffington Post: *How Women Lose Themselves in Motherhood*. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mia-redrick/motherhood_b_1558981.html

to the chagrin of some other parents I meet – it is not in my children either. And, if it was in either of those things, then the day I lost that job or my kids left home I would lose ... *me*. No, I decided to put a different poster on the loo wall: ‘Katharine, God made you and loved you before your job, before your kids – there is nothing to prove.’ (Ok, I didn’t *actually* hang it up – but there were times I wish I had!)

Over the years I have been at home as a full-time mum, and I have worked outside the home, both part and full time, I have volunteered, and I have been self-employed and employed. When the children were small and I was at home full time, my husband and I were invited to a smart executive dinner. In my life BC (before children) I would have looked forward to the evening – a chance to dress up, make up and to engage with interesting people, and I would have accepted the invitation immediately. However now things had changed, and I approached the evening with some trepidation. The prospect of arranging a babysitter who could put four children to bed, then squeezing my body into my BC dress were the first two hurdles to overcome. These, however, paled into insignificance in comparison with my anxiety about whether I would be able to engage in interesting conversation, or even have the ability to string a coherent sentence together about anything other than the escaped hamster, the new recipe for Play-Doh or my daughter’s new reading book. My fears were not unfounded. Once pre-dinner drinks were successfully negotiated, we were shown to our places. Seated to my right was a BBC producer and to my left a business consultant. As we sat down the consultant turned to me and asked me the question I had been dreading:

‘Do you work?’

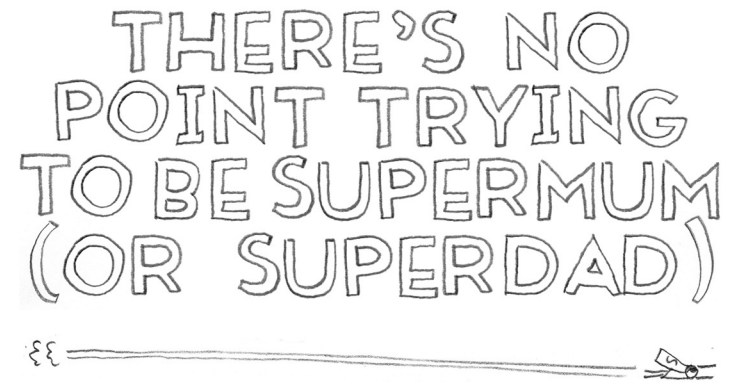
I mumbled something about being at home with the children, he gave me a kind smile and turned his attention to the lady on his left, with whom I imagine he had a much more interesting conversation. Years later I came across a brilliant answer given by another mum when asked the same question. If only I’d had it then – I’d have given him something to consult about!

Yes – actually – I do work. I’m in a programme of social development. At the moment I’m working with three age groups: firstly with babies and toddlers – which involves a basic grasp of medicine and child psychology, next – teenagers – I confess the programme is not going so well in that area. And finally, in evenings and during weekends, I work with a man aged thirty-nine who is exhibiting all the classic symptoms of mid-life crisis – that’s mainly psychiatric work. The whole job involves planning, a ‘make-it-happen’ attitude and the ability to crisis-manage. I used to be an international fashion model – but I got bored.

There is a wonderful scene in the Disney film *The Lion King*. Simba’s wicked uncle, Scar, has tricked the young lion into thinking he is responsible for killing his father, Mufasa, the king. Grief-stricken, Simba flees into exile and leaves behind his identity as the Lion King. Rafiki, the mandrill, befriends him, and, seeking to restore him to the throne, takes him to meet with the spirit of his father. In a reflection from a pool, Mufasa’s voice booms from the deep as he speaks to his son, Simba, ‘Remember who you are.’

If you forget everything else, remember this.

As parents, mums or dads, we would do well to do the same. We have an identity not defined by our roles in the workplace or even by our role as partners or parents, important as those are. We are unique individuals with different gifts and needs, each of whom has been placed on Planet Earth for a purpose. In the turmoil and busyness of family life, particularly in the early days, it's well worth taking just a few moments to ... remember who you are.



I put the finishing touches to the birthday cake and glanced at the kitchen clock. It was 35 minutes past midnight. I stood back to admire my handiwork and had to admit that it was a masterpiece. Rows of miniature coloured icing carrots, radishes, French beans and lettuces were planted in the chocolate icing vegetable patch. A wheelbarrow and garden fork stood nearby, alongside the scarecrow wearing Peter Rabbit's blue jacket and shoes hung there by Mr McGregor. Beatrix Potter herself would have been proud. Everything would be perfect for Charlotte's birthday party.

Years later my friends still laugh about 'The Peter Rabbit cake'. It has gone down in the annals of our friendship, but not for the reasons I would have hoped. The cake incident might possibly have been overlooked if my efforts to emulate Jane Asher had stopped there. But they didn't. I am embarrassed to admit that I recently discovered a photograph album of Hill family themed birthday cakes – Thunderbirds, princesses, castles, forts, dinosaurs, a Mad Hatter's top hat (the *piece de resistance* for an *Alice in Wonderland* themed party complete with fancy dress),