



And Now We Have Everything: On Motherhood Before I Was Ready

Meaghan O'Connell

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One of the most anticipated books of 2018 -- *Esquire, Elle, Nylon, Huffington Post, The Boston Globe, The Rumpus, GoodReads, The Millions, BookRiot, Bustle, The Week*.

"Smart, funny, and true in all the best ways, this book made me ache with recognition." -- Cheryl Strayed

A raw, funny, and fiercely honest account of becoming a mother before feeling like a grown up.

When Meaghan O'Connell got accidentally pregnant in her twenties and decided to keep the baby, she realized that the book she needed -- a brutally honest, agenda-free reckoning with the emotional and existential impact of motherhood -- didn't exist. So she decided to write it herself.

And Now We Have Everything is O'Connell's exploration of the cataclysmic, impossible-to-prepare-for experience of becoming a mother. With her dark humor and hair-trigger B.S. detector, O'Connell addresses the pervasive imposter syndrome that comes with unplanned pregnancy, the fantasies of a "natural" birth experience that erode maternal self-esteem, post-partum body and sex issues, and the fascinating strangeness of stepping into a new, not-yet-comfortable identity.

Channeling fears and anxieties that are still taboo and often unspoken, *And Now We Have Everything* is an unflinchingly frank, funny, and visceral motherhood story for our times, about having a baby and staying, for better or worse, exactly yourself.

And Now We Have Everything: On Motherhood Before I Was Ready Details

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Kristin Boldon says

I'm struggling recently with books that are about important things that I don't think are great and this is an example. The author writes about her unexpected pregnancy, tough birth, and year of postpartum challenge. It's really important to de-romanticize motherhood and babies, to talk about the anger and ugliness of it, and in some passages, she has a winning combination of honesty and dark humor. But too often, I found myself wincing, and wishing she had pushed for more self-insight. I read memoir to spend some time in someone else's life and head and expand my horizons, but in this case I think the author needed to do some more living and self-examination before rushing a book into being.

Adrienne says

I related to this book very deeply, which is maybe odd, because I don't actually have children. But I'm trying to decide if I want to, and reading this memoir allowed me to feel like I was sitting inside a close friend's mind while she experienced everything for me. (Convenient! Except the body horror.)

The writing is inviting, especially for a child of the internet like me: it turns bitingly sarcastic, deeply self-reflective, and breathtakingly vulnerable. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in what it's like to suddenly create a whole person out of tiny cells...and really, it's a valuable primer on being a woman, generally. (I'm having my husband read it now, and we've had such illumination conversations as "Wait, what's an episiotomy?" and "But I thought PMS was just mood swings?") I loved it.

Emily May says

A woman had an electric razor out and was shaving my pubic hair. I debated asking her if she accepted tips and decided against it.

This was such an enjoyable reading experience. I laughed, I remembered, I nodded along with some of the author's experiences and cringed at others. I suppose this is like the evil (and totally honest) twin to What to Expect When You're Expecting.

O'Connell doesn't waste time with the bullshit. I have no idea if this book will have the same effect on those who haven't had a baby, or men, but it was so great to read a book that gets in to all the funny miserable gory details of pregnancy and early motherhood. The author's style is **frank, witty and engaging** as she navigates through the self-doubt and insecurities while pregnant, the birth and recovery period, and trying to hold her relationship together whilst breastfeeding and depressed.

There's so many books painting birth and motherhood as a beautiful, uplifting experience. So many mommy

bloggers on Pinterest bossing life with their mason jar salads, labelled containers of everything from flour to quinoa to chia seed (seriously, wtf?), and their freezers full of expressed breast milk. I don't know about you, but this is not my reality.

And Now We Have Everything definitely makes you want to share your own experiences. I totally get feeling like you'll never be good enough. I get waking up obsessively and squinting at your baby to see if he's still breathing, convinced that he isn't. I get spending months feeling like a lactating pair of breasts and not a human being. Breasts have been sexualized in the society I live in, but there's no cure for this sexualization quite like the pain and messiness of breastfeeding. I am so over breasts.

And, hell, there is so much pressure! Especially in the U.S. (or California, at least). Growing up, many of the women I knew formula-fed their babies. My siblings and I were all formula-fed. This is mostly because our mothers couldn't afford to not go back to work and milking humans with a machine wasn't a thing.

But for me, in Southern California, nobody asked me what I wanted to do. It was just accepted that I would breastfeed unless - gasp - I was unable to. When my second baby had trouble latching in the first few days, we had to supplement with formula, and the nurse looked at me gravely and assured me "Please don't worry, you will still be able to breastfeed" and all I was actually worried about was that my baby got some food.

Breastfeeding was not the most incredible experience of my life, and my baby is still mortal. He still gets sick. I went to great lengths to do it, for reasons I can no longer relate to. Or none other than this: I so desperately wanted to do the right thing, and I had no idea what that was yet.

I love that O'Connell dispels myths surrounding childbirth. She paints it not as a beautiful, miraculous experience, but as a painful, gory, unglamorous one. As she notes at one point, people seem reluctant to be honest with women about what an unpleasant experience it can be - as if they're afraid the human race will die out or something - urging them to "embrace the pain and make it part of themselves" or some other crap. Yeah, maybe that works for some women, but there are many who feel like failures when it doesn't.

Most of all I just love how this book forgives us-- for being unable to breastfeed, for saying "f--- you" to a natural birth, for crying despairingly while listening to Alison Krauss sing Baby Mine (shut up), for spending a year looking like shit, for being crazy, for not being perfect. I think every new mother needs it.

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Bailey says

I didn't expect to read this in one day but I couldn't put it down. Harrowing in a variety of ways from beginning to end, it made me think of all the conversations I've had with friends in the last few years, about living in Brooklyn and coming up on 30 and looking at the future.

Overall I thought it was gripping and devastating and also very funny where I didn't expect it. It scared me and horrified me, but it also made me feel better about everything within than I expected to. Not for the weak of heart but I am really glad I read it.

Cynthia Shannon says

I'm the kind of person who likes to prepare for the worst-case scenario. If I know what the worst possible outcome might be then I can mentally prepare myself for that and be positively surprised if it's not as bad as I thought it would be. This book does exactly that and it's finally a book that doesn't gloss over the awful parts of early motherhood and giving birth (I was holding my breath through the whole birthing chapter).

Everything that can goes wrong goes wrong for her). This book is just one woman sharing her story and though it had its faults it's a refreshingly honest account of the challenges and conflicting emotions about motherhood (and everything the world make you feel guilty AF about). I do hope the author plans on writing an update to this story when her kid becomes a teenager...

Annie Hartnett says

Compulsively readable, honest, & raw. Finished in one sitting and am glad to have read it.

Jennifer says

There are a lot of things I appreciated about this book, but I also found myself feeling oddly judgmental about the author's tone in a way that's really unusual for me. I'll probably be writing about this for another outlet soon, so we'll see if I'm able to articulate it better with a little more time. Still, this is a great pregnancy/early motherhood memoir and I recommend it if the jacket description is calling to you.

Susie | Novel Visits says

My Thoughts: Interestingly, Meaghan O'Connell's book is subtitled "On Motherhood Before I Was Ready." Why so interesting you might ask. Well, it's actually for a couple reasons, one that has to do with all women and one more for O'Connell.

As a woman with now adult children, I can say for all of us that NO ONE is ever really ready for motherhood. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the more ready a woman thinks she is, probably the less ready she actually is. I think it might be a little like war. You can read all about it, and you might even get trained to go to war, but until you've actually been there, you just can't know. Motherhood is an on-the-fly job. You figure it out as you go. As I said, my kids are adults and I'm still figuring it out!

Meaghan O'Connell might have been slightly less ready than the average women, but not for lack of trying. O'Connell had already known that she wanted a baby, so when she turned up pregnant at 29, the decision for her and her fiancée, Dustin, to have the baby was a relatively easy one. From the onset, O'Connell was a slave to information, to answers to the unanswerable questions of how things would go for her, before, during and after the birth of her son. She was a Google maniac constantly trying to calm her many, many fears. For me her anxiety bordered on the neurotic and her experiences, while large to her, were not really all that different from many other women's. O'Connell implies that she wasn't ready for motherhood because of

the timing and where she was in life, but I don't think she'd have been any more ready at 40. Her journey was her journey to take.

O'Connell's writing in *And Now We Have Everything* was sharp, funny and wonderfully easy to read, though I grew weary of her unrelenting angst. I'm sure younger women will appreciate the book more than I did. Still, I'd like to issue a warning to readers who might be considering having a first baby: *And Now We Have Everything* tells the events surrounding one woman's journey into motherhood. Yours will be your own, and likely much different. Please, read with that in mind.

Original Source - Novel Visits: <https://novelvisits.com/mini-reviews-...>

Amy says

Every once in a while there is some genuine insight here, but this was for the most part kind of shallow and annoying. I wanted something that explores the complexity of motherhood, like how you love your kids, you would die for your kids, but if you had it to do over again you might not have them? But this was more, my baby's really cute but I feel so fat. I just didn't like the writing and I felt like the author sounded so high maintenance. Every interaction with her partner is pretty much: she says something, he responds, she starts crying. Now I just want to reread *After Birth* and erase this one from my memory.

Racheal says

As someone who doesn't plan to have kids, I did not expect to be so engrossed by this or to identify with it so thoroughly. It just hit a pitch-perfect tone for me; there's no navel-gazey, hippy mom bullshit in sight, just a particular mix of insecurity and mild cynicism that characterizes life for a lot of late 20-to-early-30-something women as the pressure builds to figure out your life and what you want re: career, marriage, kids.

God, did I recognize some uncomfortable parts of my younger self in the specific brand of chickenshit that she portrays early on. It's this messy mix of the drive to seem Laid Back and without needs in a relationship, the suppression of actual needs, the resulting anger and resentment (shoved down, of course), and a desperate, paralyzing pressure to figure out the "right" thing to do in any given situation. She just fucking *nailed it*.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Meaghan O'Connell writes honestly about pregnancy, birth, and motherhood, including all the physical challenges and how relationships change after you become a mother, no matter what your intentions and beliefs may have been. I think I would have appreciated more reflection and time passing but feel like that might have negatively impacted the feeling of immediacy in her experience.

I was interested in this for multiple reasons, but partly because I want to read more people talking about how they change after becoming parents, whether or not they were biological. This book is very focused on the biological and physical elements, so it wasn't quite as helpful to my personal reading project, but I still learned about her experience, which was interesting in itself. There is a lot here about expectations vs.

reality, adjusting to the massiveness of the irrevocable change of motherhood.

I think even the chapter titles are telling. (Parentheses are mine.) Baby Fever, Holding Patterns (about pregnancy and all the thoughts and physical changes), A Birth Story (whew), Sleepless Nights, A Certain Kind of Mammal (breastfeeding), Slacker Parent (observing her husband as the perfect relentlessly energetic parent while she struggles with physical healing and depression), Maternal Instincts, Dry Spell, Extra Room.

"Dustin and I used to agree about everything. I used to feel like he saw me and knew me better than anyone. But now that we had a child together, I worried we actually didn't know each other at all. We felt less like a couple than like co-workers, in service to the same human project."

"I wanted to arrive by our new happiness honestly, without trying to, at some later date. I wanted it be undeniable, to take us by surprise. A mother, a father, a baby, a family. I would be happy despite myself. I would wake up before my family and go for a run. Before that, though, I wanted someone to come along and agree that yes, everything was shit. I so wanted that person to be him."

"I needed to be able to fall apart. I needed to come to all of it in my own time. And until then, someone had to make dinner."

"How to explain the strange arc of parenthood to new mothers? How to tell it so that they believe you? The way things start out hard and then ease up. It is like finding more hours in the day. It is like the end of the school year, that first day of summer. It's like you moved to a new country, and it's beautiful but there's a war going on. But then the war ends and you begin reconstructing yourself."

Emily says

I passed out on the subway while reading this book. There were probably a lot of other factors involved, but I don't think that Meaghan O'Connell's description of an epidural helped.

Stephanie says

It should be said from the start: this is not a happy story, but yet - it definitely is. When O'Connell finds herself accidentally pregnant, she's thrust from her group of (mostly single) friends into an unknown world. There's fear and anticipation of the future, anxiety over making the right choices. As she starts looking for answers, she finds that there aren't many straightforward resources - so she creates her own.

I've long been interested in the narratives that surround motherhood. Especially in the past few years, as I've walked with friends through their own decisions (or not) to have a child, their pregnancies and adjustment into caring for an infant, I've found layer after layer of... bullshit. Gender reveals, natural childbirth, breastfeeding - all immersed in pressure and expectations.

And there is a lot at stake. You are creating another human, and childhood is obviously a crucial time for development, and O'Connell recognizes that. But what I loved in this memoir is her total honesty about what a struggle it is to separate your own experience from everything that gets put on you not just when you post an announcement on Facebook, but the moment you're a woman with a pulse.

Read this for an unsentimental, honest, and ultimately hopeful journey into motherhood.

Jess says

Gah, I loved this book. O'Connell captures so well the fears and anxieties of would-be moms (and I assume new moms too), and the first part of the book feels like a season of *Master of None*. While this memoir did nothing to assuage my deep-seated fears about pregnancy, I appreciated her honest and straightforward thoughts about all the ups and downs of motherhood.

Rachel says

Reading this book was like reading the diary of my high school friend who never grew up. It was complete navel gazing - there was no greater meaning, no truth, no deeper understanding, and most of the beginning felt incredibly false. Like she took these fleeting tiny thoughts she might have had and made them seem huge and intrusive so she could fill pages. And so it doesn't seem like maybe I just can't relate: I got pregnant with my fiancé before we got married too, so this should be completely in my wheelhouse. I hate that I hated it.

(To be fair, I listened to the audio and she has an incredibly whiny voice, which may have contributed to my immense dislike.)
