

Introduction

The oldest trees often bear the sweetest fruit.

German proverb

This book is an invitation. If I could, I'd inscribe your name on the dedication page and then write: embrace your life as a late-in-life mom. Be willing to let go of preconceived ideas about how your life would play out. Get ready to welcome your child—and expect to be changed by him or her.

If you are a pregnant woman age thirty-five or older, you know how the medical community labels us: Advanced Maternal Age (AMA). As far as I am concerned, those three words are just another way of saying I'm old.

So I'm replacing AMA with a new phrase: *mommy-come-lately*.

Let me explain. My term—*mommy-come-lately*—is closely related to the old term *Johnny-come-lately*. If you rush to look up that term in your dictionary, you may not even find it in

newer versions of Merriam-Webster's. Not many people use it anymore. So what is it?

A Johnny-come-lately is someone who has only recently started a job or activity and has suddenly become very successful.

Put a maternal spin on that—late-in-life motherhood—and you now have a mommy-come-lately: an older, successful mom.

There are all types of mommies-come-lately:

women who chose to wait to have children while they pursued education and careers

women who were surprised by a late-in-life pregnancy

women who adopted children in their midthirties or forties

women who battled infertility or chronic illness to become pregnant

women who became mothers in their twenties—and continued having children into their forties

women who remarried and became a late-in-life mom in a blended family

I designate myself as a “repeater” mommy-come-lately. My fourth child was born twelve years after my third. My friend Mary is a “first-timer” whose only child was born when Mary was forty-six. I wrote this book for moms like Mary and me.

My childhood dream of writing a book was more along the lines of penning a great American novel. But writers are told to “write what you know,” which means I write what I live. I'm not an expert on pregnancy and childbirth. But as a mom of four who's been where you are today, I can offer to you what I looked for during my own unexpected pregnancy: encouragement and practical advice. And that's what *Baby Changes Everything* is all about!



1

The Best-Laid Plans

The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

Robert Burns, “To a Mouse”

Mary and I are opposites.
I am tall. Mary is petite.

I am hazel-eyed. Mary is blue-eyed.

I am a stay-at-home mom. Mary is a work-from-home mom.

I have four children. Mary has one.

Here—as mothers—is where our lives intersected in unexpected ways.

My youngest child Christa was born when I was forty-one—twelve years after my third child.

After years of infertility derailed her dreams for children, Mary’s son Justin was born when she was forty-six.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Empty Nest

I designated my childbearing years to my twenties. Within the span of one decade, my three children—Josh, Katie Beth, and Amy—were born.

Mission accomplished.

Without a backward glance at morning sickness, labor and delivery, or breastfeeding, I lived life as a mom. While my hormones got back to normal again, my body lost its “baby weight” one last time.

My official role was to be my children’s helper. I helped them master potty training, eating with a fork, picking up their dirty clothes, brushing their teeth, being kind to one another, and being obedient to me.

Along the way I learned things too. I discovered that, as my girlfriend Scoti says, mothering is a permanent state of exhaustion. A mom never clocks out. Keeping up with preschoolers demanded energy, creativity, and perseverance.

I surrounded myself with other parents who knew what they were doing. I traded parenting tips and read articles about teaching my children to share, excel at school, and resist peer pressure.

Occasionally the question popped up: why not one more child?

For one, my husband Rob felt challenged to be an involved and available dad while juggling the demands of his job as an Air Force physician. A fourth child could stretch him to his parental limit. I also watched my youngest sister struggle with infertility. Knowing her dream of motherhood eluded her, I just couldn’t imagine saying, “I’m pregnant again.” Besides, having babies was part of my twenties, not my thirties. I enjoyed watching my

friends continue to have children. That was just not in the Vogt Family Plan.

Fast-forward twelve years.

Rob and I were parenting two teens and one preteen. Dinner conversations included topics like how to make right choices and what movies are acceptable and statements like “No, we are not buying you a new car when you get your driver’s license.”

I had not experienced the “baby wants” in years. To humor friends who questioned why we weren’t having any more children, I attended a fall festival dressed—in all my padded glory—like an abundantly nine months pregnant mom-to-be.

“I’m done having children,” I told my friends with a laugh. “This is the closest you’ll ever get to seeing me as a pregnant woman.”

A year later, my body was feeling out of sorts. Occasional mild bouts of nausea accompanied by more than I-live-with-threeteens tiredness. I was fast approaching my forty-first birthday. Was it time to read up on menopause? Before checking out a stack of library books, Rob and I decided to rule out the most obvious *impossibility*.

My physician husband dutifully carried my urine sample off to his medical clinic. His good-bye kiss was accompanied with the statement, “You are not pregnant.”

I called him midmorning and asked, “So, when do we find out I’m not pregnant?”

Silence.

A long silence.

Rob was so shocked when he saw my results, he had trouble reading the computer screen. He double-checked my lab results, figuring he pulled up another woman’s chart.

“What would you think if you *were* pregnant?”

Why was he asking me that?

“Am I pregnant?”

“Well, according to this you are.”

Within seconds I was screaming and crying, overwhelmed with a you-have-got-to-be-kidding-me hysteria.

“Let me talk with Mark Campbell and see if he’ll do an ultrasound to make sure you’re pregnant,” Rob suggested. Dr. Campbell was an obstetrician and a close friend. Rob didn’t tell me that he was certain I was pregnant. He was just buying us some time to get used to the idea.

Early that afternoon I reclined on an examination table, my tummy slathered with cold, goopy gel. Dr. Campbell moved an ultrasound sensor back and forth. Rob and I watched the monitor—and saw a tiny beating heart.

Dr. Campbell looked in my eyes, smiled, and confirmed, “Congratulations, Mom.”

Three days before turning forty-one, menopause wasn’t looming on the horizon. Morning sickness and maternity clothes were. I was AMA—a pregnant woman of Advanced Maternal Age.

Knowing we couldn’t hide our surprise, Rob and I decided to tell Josh, Katie Beth, and Amy right away. That evening as we enjoyed dessert at a local restaurant, Rob said, “I’m glad all six of us are here.”

“Five, Dad,” Josh corrected, giving Rob a quizzical look. His dad knew how to add!

“No. *Six*,” Rob repeated.

Only a second or two passed before Josh looked at me and asked, “Are you pregnant?”

I managed to blurt out yes before bursting into tears.

Other than grinning, Josh, my introvert, didn't say much. The girls made up for his silence by shrieking and jumping up and down. The Vogts were having a baby.

My twin sister Brenda sent a birthday card to me via overnight mail. In it she wrote, "Thanks for proving that at forty-one anything is still possible!" A few months later she had her tubes tied.

A lot of people laughed when they heard our news. I was not laughing. I did not want to be pregnant. I told a friend that it felt like a cosmic joke—but my belief in God wouldn't let me designate my unexpected baby as some sort of hormonal prank.

"Now I know what an unwanted pregnancy feels like." I sobbed as I said those words to Rob. He knew not to try to reason with

The Mommy-Come-Lately Movement

Motherhood is experiencing an extreme makeover. Look in the mirrors of today's moms and you see women in their thirties and forties—not just the twentysomethings of generations past. The dominant birth rate trend of the last decade reveals an increase in AMA moms (those aged thirty-five years or older). For example, the 2002 birth rate

- was 31 percent higher than in 1990 for women thirty-five to thirty-nine years
- increased 51 percent from 1990 rates for women forty to forty-four years
- more than doubled from 1990

rates for women forty-five to forty-nine years¹

A more recent study from the National Center for Health Statistics stated that births to older women continued to increase from 2004 to 2005. During that time, the birth rate

- increased 2 percent for women thirty-five to thirty-nine
- increased 2 percent for women forty to forty-four
- increased slightly for women forty-five to forty-nine, the highest rate for this group since 1970 (although this figure only reflects a small total number of births)²

1. Centers for Disease Control, "Birth Rate for Women Aged 40–44 Years Rose in 2003, New Report Finds," news release, November 23, 2004.

2. National Center for Health Statistics, "Births: Preliminary Data for 2005," CDC website.

a hysterical pregnant woman. Instead, he let me cry. As I did, I placed my hands over my tummy. “It’s nothing personal, baby,” I insisted. “It’s not that I don’t want you. I just don’t want to be pregnant.”

Hope Deferred

“I always wanted to have a large family—six kids,” Mary said. From the time she was twelve years old, she babysat constantly. As a twentysomething single woman, she watched the children of moms her age who needed a night out.

Mary finished college and pursued a career in communications. “I realized I might get married later. But I never imagined I wouldn’t be able to have kids,” Mary recalled.

She was thirty-five years old when she married Doug, and they believed having children would happen easily. Mary’s ob-gyn cautioned, though, that it might take longer for Mary to get pregnant because of her age. During six unsuccessful years, Mary endured people asking her why she wasn’t having a baby. Finally she was referred to an infertility specialist, who then put both Mary and Doug through a battery of tests.

“The results were ‘infertility, with cause undetermined’—despite the doctor telling me that my FSH hormone level was that of a person seven years younger,” Mary said. “I thought for sure they’d find something wrong. When they didn’t, I realized my options were limited by my age.”

The specialist warned Mary she didn’t have a lot of time left to pursue treatment. After talking and praying, Mary and Doug decided not to pursue other possible alternatives like in vitro fertilization or adoption.

“If it was meant to happen at our age, it would. Doug and I didn’t want to go through the emotional roller coaster of treatments. If we’d been younger, maybe we would have.”

With the door to motherhood closed, Mary grieved that they would never have an heir to carry on the family name. “We had no one to transfer our memories to. That was the hardest thing to deal with—it stopped with us. Just seeing another mother holding her baby made my heart ache because it reminded me of my barrenness.

“I always believed that if we were meant to have a child, God would work it out. I tried not to dwell on my disappointment. But slowly I gave up the dream of motherhood and began pursuing my master’s degree. I couldn’t change anything. I needed to move on.”

Going to school and working full-time consumed all of Mary’s thoughts and stopped her from sitting home and thinking about not having children.

Then, four years later, when Mary was forty-five years old, a routine Pap test came back abnormal, raising the fear she might have cancer. Her ob-gyn had closed her medical practice, so Mary consulted her infertility specialist instead. After further testing, he performed surgery to remove a uterine polyp. Despite years of disappointment, Mary requested he be careful and not cause any damage that could prevent pregnancy.

“My request was sort of irrational. I believed it was still possible for me to get pregnant—even though I was telling myself and others it would never happen.”

Age does not define a person, and therefore, being a mother and being older doesn’t define a person either.

Andrea, repeater mommy-come-lately at thirty-six, thirty-eight, forty, forty-two, and forty-three

Trendsetters: Famous Mommies-Come-Lately

Pregnancy is news these days—big news.

From women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Self to People*, the editorial spotlight is focused like a laser beam on pregnant women.

The concerns, risks, and experiences of mommies-come-lately have a prominent place in the limelight. Journalists write about *who* is pregnant and *how* they got pregnant and *what* they're doing and wearing while they are counting down to their due date. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) even publishes a magazine called *Plum*, written specifically for Advanced Maternal Age (AMA) moms and moms-to-be.

In short, the late-in-life motherhood trend is garnering attention—and it shows no sign of abating.

Newswomen Making News as Mommies-Come-Lately

Newswoman Joan Lunden graced the cover of the July 2005 *Good House-*

keeping magazine. She cradled a pair of newborn twins while her then two-year-old twins stood beside her. You've got that right—two sets of twins. Lunden's three daughters from her first marriage were then seventeen, twenty-two, and twenty-five. When she remarried, Lunden first attempted in vitro fertilization (IVF) and then pursued surrogacy. Both sets of twins were carried by the same surrogate mother—who was herself a late-in-life mom! Lunden was fifty-two when the first set of twins—a boy and a girl—were born. The second set of twins—also a boy and a girl—were born when Lunden was fifty-four. That makes Lunden an Olympic caliber mommy-come-lately in my estimation!

Sue Herera, who coanchors CNBC's two-hour daily business show *Power Lunch*, became a first-time mom at forty-six after four years of IVF treatments. Herera became pregnant within a month after she and her husband learned an adoption agency had twin

Two months after the surgery, Mary missed her menstrual cycle for the first time in her life—and, also *for the first time in her life*, she wondered if she might be pregnant.

Mary figured her positive at-home pregnancy test couldn't possibly be true. But during a follow-up exam with her ob-gyn, she rejoiced at seeing the amazing black-and-white image of a tiny beating heart on the ultrasound screen.

girls available for them to adopt. Twelve weeks into her pregnancy, Herera began bleeding. Although an ultrasound showed she had miscarried, she was still pregnant. She had been pregnant with twins, and her baby boy was alive and healthy. Daniel was born just a few months after they adopted their daughters Jackie and Vickie.

Actresses Take Center Stage as Mommies-Come-Lately

Actresses are trendsetters—usually because of what they wear, what kind of designer purse they carry, or what makeup line they use. But these days actresses like Julia Roberts, Sharon Stone, Jane Seymour, Brooke Shields, and Geena Davis are part of the mommy-come-lately movement. Roberts was thirty-six when she gave birth to her twins, Hazel and Phinnaeus. Stone adopted her son, Roan, when she was forty-two years old. She then adopted two more sons, Laird and Quinn. Davis was forty-six when her first child was born and then gave birth to twin boys

when she was forty-nine. Actress Jane Seymour gave birth to twin boys, Johnny and Kris, when she was forty-four years old.

What the News Is All About

Newspaper and magazine articles aren't just focusing on who is getting pregnant. Journalists also write about options like surrogate mothering, IVF, and adoption. Stories discuss the risks of being an older mom—and outline how to have a healthy AMA pregnancy.

The December/January 2006 issue of *Child* magazine published an article titled "The Promise—and Perils—of Genetic Testing." The article discussed the pregnancy of a thirty-six-year-old mom-to-be. In a 2005 *Glamour* magazine article titled "Are Women Doing Things in the Wrong Order?" two writers debated whether women should have kids first and career later or vice versa. And the latest—and hotly debated—news is about the Spanish woman who gave birth when she was sixty-seven.

A friend said it best: "Finally the woman who always loved everybody else's kids has her own child to love."

Company of Friends

Despite living two hours away from each other, Mary and I get together every couple of months. Sometimes we meet for

a girls' lunch without our kids or do a couples' date with our husbands. Other times we choose outings that her son Justin and my daughter Christa enjoy.

Our conversations are interrupted as we follow Christa and Justin through a kids' museum or around a playground or a water park. I talk about my son's pursuit of a publishing career. Mary talks about meeting work-related deadlines. We discuss the school options available for Justin and Christa. At times we stop and just watch our two children playing. We marvel at how they have changed everything—us, our families, and our plans for the future.

The challenges of being a mommy-come-lately—a successful, older mom—are more easily faced in the company of friends.

When Mary faced a tight deadline, I spent the morning in a children's museum with Justin and Christa while she got her work done. Mary listens when I talk about the challenges of Rob's private medical practice. I listen when Mary tells me about her husband's campaign for sheriff. We both hope Justin's and Christa's plans to marry when they grow up come true. (Moms can dream, right?)

Even though our stories of how we came to late-in-life motherhood are different, we both treasure the unexpected blessing. And we're thankful we can walk this path of motherhood together.

The Bottom Line

If you're a mom, you get plenty of advice from family and friends—and sometimes from strangers you meet in the grocery store. You'll find some advice in this book too. But I'm not going to tell you how to read *Baby Changes Everything*. Read it front to back or back to front. Or glance over the table of contents to

find the topics that apply to you right now. But no matter what, enjoy the experience and be encouraged by the knowledge that you're not alone on the mommy-come-lately path.

≡≡≡ Cameo Appearance: **Alice**

Repeater mommy-come-lately by choice at thirty-five and again at almost thirty-seven

Husband: **Gary**

Children: **Megan, age twelve; Abby, age eleven; Matthew, age ten**

Alice was the first voice of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) for me. When I called her about joining my church's MOPS group, I made sure she knew how old I was.

"Come on and join us!" Alice said. "I'm an older mom too."

Alice chose to have children when she was older. She says, "Couples need to trust their judgment and to do what they think is right when it comes to having children. I wasn't ready earlier to be a mom. I'm glad I waited.

"I was one of the many women who chose to first have their career, travel, go to college, and develop a secure relationship with my spouse."

When she finally started a family, Alice received mixed responses from people. "Some moms seemed to almost envy me for waiting," she says. "My husband, Gary, and I struggled less with finances. And some moms pitied me. It was like they said, 'Look! I'm free and you're just having yours!'"

Alice heard about MOPS through a Christian radio broadcast. She was attracted to the idea of connecting with other moms. But there was a waiting list for her church's MOPS group.

“My pastor’s wife told me if I became a care group leader, I could be in MOPS. So I did, even while I was in the Air Force and working nights,” Alice recalled. “At first I felt like a fish out of water. I had not been exposed much to women—just the wives of those I worked with. But as I got to know the other moms, I really liked them. They were a great change from my night job!”

≡≡≡ **Cameo Appearance: Linda**

Mommy-come-lately by adoption at forty-seven

*Husband: **Dave***

*Daughter: **Tori, age twelve***

Linda admits that she had a heartbreaking journey to motherhood.

“I was the second oldest in my family. My older brother and I were the ones who took care of the younger children,” Linda said. “I was not going to have any kids. I felt like I’d raised my brothers and sisters. I didn’t want to be taking care of children anymore.”

After dating for five years, Linda and Dave married. She was thirty-three and he was thirty-eight.

“I wanted my career. I wanted to be working. I had no desire to have children,” Linda said.

Until she turned forty-five.

“Then we thought, ‘We need to do something!’ Our careers were no longer satisfying. I wondered, ‘Why am I doing this? Where am I going with all this? I have nothing to show for my life.’”

Her physician warned Linda that because of her age, her chances of having a baby were slim to none. While they considered in vitro fertilization, they did not pursue it

because of the small chance for success. Dave and Linda then decided to pursue adoption.

“We had to make a portfolio with lots of photos and with our biographies. I had a real problem with that. I thought whoever looked at our pictures would think Dave and I looked really old and then not want us to be the parents of their child. Age was a strike against me.”

A few months later, Linda’s sister mentioned that her daughter’s friend had just had a baby girl. The girl was sixteen and was considering making an adoption plan for her baby, named Tori. Linda said she and Dave would like to be considered as parents.

A few months went by—nothing happened.

Then Linda received an unexpected and life-changing phone call. Another one of her sisters said the birth mother had decided she wanted Linda and Dave to adopt Tori—and she was bringing the baby to Linda. They had nothing for an infant, so while Linda waited, Dave made the first of many trips to buy diapers, formula, and other essentials.

“How naïve and innocent was that? You can’t do that,” Linda said, admitting you can’t just take a woman’s baby and give it to someone else. “Of course, this was not a fairy tale come true.”

Within days the birth father told Dave and Linda he did not want his daughter to be adopted. Tori went back to her birth mom. Then, after having Tori for a visit, the birth father refused to bring Tori back to her birth mother.

Dave and Linda decided they wanted to help the birth mom. They hired a lawyer to protect her rights. A judge agreed that Tori must be returned to her birth mom.

Linda says, “I figured we would never get her back. Because the birth father was not paying any child support, we encouraged the lawyer to garnish his wages.”

A month later, the birth father contacted Linda and said he agreed to Dave and Linda adopting Tori.

“The adoption process seemed like forever,” Linda said. Both the birth mother and birth father had to be interviewed to ensure they were fit to make the decision to place Tori for adoption. Then came a ninety-day waiting period where either the birth mother or the birth father could change their minds. The birth parents could choose to waive the waiting period, allowing the adoption to become effective immediately.

“The birth dad told the adoption counselor he didn’t have a problem signing the waiver, but I don’t know if he signed it. The birth mom did not. We had to just wait while the birth mom thought about her decision. We were in limbo.”

In the end, Linda and Dave adopted Tori when she was a year old. Linda says, “I would not want anyone else to go through what I went through. It was extremely painful. While we were waiting for the adoption to be final, my friends wanted to give me a baby shower. I wouldn’t let them do it until that ninety-day period passed. I couldn’t let myself have her as truly my own until then. I lived with the fear I would lose her.

“I love the fact that I am an older mom—and Tori loves me for who I am. I’ll remind her that I am older than all her friends’ moms and she’ll say, ‘I don’t care, Mom.’ I like that.”

And, yes, Linda admitted it is embarrassing when people ask if she is Tori’s grandmother. Tori, however, just ignores it and tells them that Linda is her mom.

“Older moms are better than younger moms,” Linda said, while acknowledging she might be biased because of her experience. “We are better off financially. We have a better perspective on life that we can share with our child.”