

One Pound, Twelve Ounces: A Premie Mother's Story of Loss, Hope, and Triumph

Melissa Harris

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One Pound, Twelve Ounces is a memoir that covers the terrifying experiences of mothering a premature baby.

Written with candor, Melissa Harris's memoir *One Pound, Twelve Ounces* is both harrowing and joyful in covering at-risk pregnancies and the experience of mothering a micro-preemie child.

Early in their marriage, Harris and her husband decided that they wanted two children, spaced two years apart. Their first child, a daughter, was conceived and born without incident, but the couple struggled to conceive a second time. After a doctor's examination, Harris discovered that her uterus was divided by a septum. She underwent a procedure to correct the condition and became pregnant again; this time, there were complications.

The book first alternates between its accounts of two at-risk pregnancies, two years apart. One ended with a tragedy, the other in the birth of a son at twenty-four weeks of development, which was considered the cusp of viability. Harris's pregnancies are focal; they are treated with a high sense of tension. Accounts of bed rest at an uncomfortable angle and being pumped full of drugs are paired with memories of hospital staff working to keep Harris safe and isolated from triggering situations, like encounters with happy mothers who delivered at full-term. Feeling alone and in need of distraction, she started a blog to share her feelings and to maintain her personal connections.

The book's second part covers Harris's son's progress and setbacks in the NICU. A doctor warned Harris and her husband that they would feel as if they are "riding a rollercoaster" while their son was in the hospital; this is mirrored by recollections of the victories they celebrated, like the removal of the baby's breathing tube, as well as of setbacks, like the possibilities of kidney failure and sustained blindness. Events, both large and small, are presented in a straightforward manner.

The book imparts clear understandings of the realities of difficult pregnancies, premature births, and parenting a micro-preemie. Details of NICU protocols, medical procedures, medications, and the baby's medical condition are unadorned, while the book's introductions of hospital staff members, including an ill-natured and territorial nurse who scolded Harris for cuddling her son too much, include clear images of these encountered individuals. The book's confessions of meltdowns and middle-of-the-night panic attacks are more vulnerable. The days in the NICU blur together as the book progresses and as the baby's release date draws near.

A third section centers on the family during the baby's first year at home, during which they take care to protect him from life-threatening germs and endure further medical emergencies. Hints at marital strains arise in memories of these isolating times, in which people who understand her circumstances are few.

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SUZANNE KAMATA (September 29, 2021)

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