



Unstoppable: Forging the Path to Motherhood in the Early Days of IVF

Ellen Weir Casey

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The powerful memoir Unstoppable follows a singular pursuit of motherhood against the backdrop of the development of in vitro fertilization.

Ellen Weir Casey's captivating memoir *Unstoppable* concerns her desires for a child, culminating in one of the first IVF babies in the world.

Casey, a kindergarten teacher whose pupils loved her, wanted to be a mother herself. After getting married, she found out that her Fallopian tubes were blocked because an experimental IUD from her past. She had to pursue motherhood in unconventional ways, and she did so with single-minded determination. When multiple surgeries went wrong, and adoption and surrogacy turned out to be dead ends, she was referred to the first IVF program in the US. This led to the birth of her daughter, Elizabeth.

Narrated with unwavering honesty, the book details a bevy of emotions, including a wealth of negative feelings. Most prevalent is Casey's grief, which is communicated through descriptions of emotional and physical pain intertwined with, and feeding off of, each other. The grief reaches its highest point during chapters that chronicle a miscarriage and its aftermath: a brief switch from the past to the present tense results in immediacy. But a sense of determination also threads through the book to balance its sorrow.

Casey explored a bevy of routes to motherhood; they are recorded in succinct, decisive terms. And brief asides are included between chapters to cover reproductive history in the United States, helping to contextualize contemporary advancements. Though these advances were considerable in the second half of the twentieth century, Casey notes that she still faced abysmal odds. Her story becomes a slice of medical history as it moves between its personal and global implications.

The book also covers topics like the ethics and responsibilities of doctors and other health care workers. It attributes Casey's infertility to a doctor who neglected to inform her of the risks and contraindications of an experimental IUD. Another doctor is recalled as having assured her that he could conduct a surgery that few in the world were qualified to perform, while a nurse is decried for having displayed a lack of empathy regarding Casey's pain. The book uses such anecdotes to interrogate medical professionals' duties toward their patients.

While the book's pace is consistent for most of its length, its ending skips over a significant moment that the entire memoir seemed to have been working toward. The conclusion is rushed and anticlimactic as a result.

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CAROLINA CIUCCI (March 2, 2022)

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