

**Brave heart**  
The author  
at home

## Carrying on

Mariane Pearl lost her father to suicide and her husband to terrorists. But she puts the lessons she learned to good use while raising her son.

Summer 1976. I am 9 years old. On a sunny afternoon in Paris, my father summons me to his room. My father is a scientist, an intellectual, an original. A man living counterclockwise, sleeping in the day and working at night. He does not have a job, despite his efforts to find one. His room is forbidden territory, a cavern where he reigns like a bear; my mother doesn't even sleep there.

My father hasn't left his bed for the last few months. I am too young to understand this, but he is struggling with a deep sadness and isolation that leaves him always slightly out of reach. Apprehensive and shy, I go to him. He is lying on the unkempt bed, leaning over only to put out cigarette butts on the floor between the bed frame and the wall.

"Sit," he says, and I sense this moment is solemn. All he tells me, as I remember it, is that he finds me a bit overweight. He makes me promise that when I grow up, I will go on a diet. I say, "Oui, Papa." I'd do anything to please him.

"Now that's a good girl," my father says, and he extends his hand to caress my cheek. It is an unusual gesture. Most of the time, physical contact seems to feel too real for him.

The next day, our mother tells my brother, Satchi, and me we are leaving for the south of France, where we will visit one of her friends. The rest happens very fast. My mother, my brother and I leave for Marseille. My mother returns to Paris almost immediately; she asks what she should bring back for us. "Bring back Daddy," I tell her. Four days later, she returns. She hasn't even stepped into the apartment when she says, "It's over, kids. Your daddy has died." She takes us to a bedroom. My face is wet—my tears and my brother's and mother's run together in indefinable grief. We hold each other and fall asleep in the middle of the afternoon.

I dream about my father that day. It is foggy and he is boarding a plane. I see his back, but he doesn't turn around. He disappears into the belly of the plane and the fog closes in, removing any trace of him from my sight.

In the days and months that follow, my mother tries to explain away his death. "You know your father..." she sighs. I am tempted to say, "No." "The doctor told him to quit taking sleeping pills," she continues, "but he took them anyway and his heart couldn't stand it."

She would like to protect us from everything, even our destiny. We never go to the cemetery to visit my father's grave. We very rarely talk about him;

he disappears in a fog, as in my dream. Life goes on and imagination takes over. But over the years, I have pieced him together like a human puzzle, taking bits from my memory, scrap by scrap, trying to make the picture whole.

Eight years after my father's death, Satchi is going through some family archives. He opens a letter. I immediately recognize my father's scribbling. It is a suicide note.

"When one sees a mountain, one wants to climb to the top," my father wrote. "But once you are there, it is only to discover that the mountain has disappeared, you don't see it anymore."

When my mother comes back, she simply says, "You had to find out, I guess." Our father died alone. He swallowed barbiturates. He knew my brief visit to him in his room that summer afternoon would be the last.

I feel pain but also a strange relief, as if I have known all along that he killed himself, an intuition never confirmed by

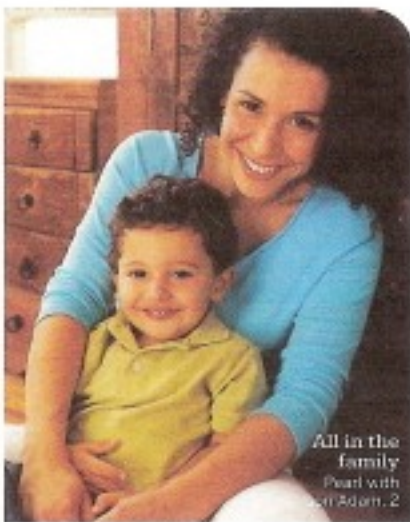
## self expression

» words until then. As my picture of my father continues to fill in, my anger and incomprehension have turned into understanding. My father has become a real man, a man who knew great trauma and fear. At first I mistook him for a coward for taking his own life, but I now sense that he survived as long as he could, struggling against a constant feeling of being unfit for this world. Having prolonged his life, he made the lives of my brother and me possible.

The night before I am to be married, 23 years after my father's death, he appears to me once more in a dream. This time, he is coming out of the airplane. He has come to attend my wedding. He takes me in his arms, and we dive together into a swimming pool. My future husband, Danny, is watching the scene with his quietly triumphant expression. It is the most beautiful dream I have ever had. After I wake, I never suffer from my father's absence again.

May 2001. It is monsoon season in Mumbai, India. The air is so moist that my hand sticks to the leather arm of the chair where Danny is sitting next to me. My husband and I moved to India the year before, when Danny became the South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*. When I met Danny, I knew I was really in love. For the first time, I loved a man for who he was and not for what my father had failed to be.

We have been married for almost two years now, and I know Danny wants to become a parent. But unlike him, I have never known for certain



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whether I want to have a child or not. My father's death left me with doubt. You can never know if a person will just disappear. But then again, I also never knew that I was going to love anyone as deeply as I love my husband.

My father's suicide note taught me that to live doesn't only mean to be alive. You need a sense of purpose stronger than the obstacles you find in your way. So when you give birth to a child, you must do more than exercise a biological privilege. If you are to give birth, you must also give hope.

That hot, humid night, I ask my husband for the first and only time, "Why do you want to have a child?"

"To continue," Danny answers without hesitation, "to perpetuate myself." I look at him, sitting at his handmade desk surrounded by newspaper clips, files and notebooks. He is opening the first bureau of the *Journal* in Mumbai, a daunting task that he faces with optimism and courage. I realize there is no need for me to think twice; I know I will

have no problem giving hope to the child of such a man.

Several weeks later, I take a home pregnancy test. When I see the results, I start to scream and run out of the bathroom, completely forgetting to put my underwear back on. Danny is alarmed. I rush into his arms: The beginning of a little us is now growing inside of me.

We move to Karachi on the day after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Most of the journalists covering South Asia, Danny included, are following the trail of al Qaeda to Pakistan to investigate the story.

Danny is researching an article about the shoe bomber, Richard Reid, whose attempt to blow up a flight from France to the United States was thwarted when a flight attendant found

him trying to ignite hidden explosives. Danny goes to meet someone he believes will introduce him to a Muslim leader he wants to interview. Instead, he is lured into a trap.

I am six months pregnant when my husband is kidnapped by al Qaeda terrorists. When Danny is abducted, I spend every minute of the next month in Karachi struggling to get him set free. I fight like I never have before—using everything I've learned about life and death, love and faith. I spend a sleepless week searching Danny's computer for clues. I put together an investigative team that, for the first time ever, unites journalists with Pakistani police and FBI agents in a rescue effort, pouring my emotional energy into supporting it so no one will give up hope.

Inside myself, I go beyond fear to a place where the terrorists can't reach me or even separate me from Danny. In my heart, I know my husband

is defying them as much as I am. I don't know whether we will both make it out alive, but I know our spiritual victory over those who hold him is certain. Everywhere I go and in everything I do, our child is with me. It is as if our three souls have already merged into one.

I know things are bleak when Danny's captors accuse him of being a CIA agent and then a spy from Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. No one believes those claims—not even the terrorists. Still, they choose to take Danny's life and make a spectacle of the murder. They decapitate him on camera, hoping that television channels around the world will broadcast it. I am 34 years old when I become a widow, two years younger than my mother was when my father took his life.

Three months later, I am alone in the delivery room at the Maternité des Lilas in Paris, the clinic Danny and I had chosen together. For me, this moment is an intense encounter between life and death, with me standing between them.

## self expression

>> I am on the delivery table, silently addressing my two men—one unborn, the other dead. Giving birth to our baby is my ultimate act of antiterrorism. I am perpetuating Danny.

During the pain of childbirth and those difficult last three months, I know that there is only one answer to those who killed Danny: life. Giving birth offers me the courage to deny the terrorists their goal. I write down my beliefs for myself:

*They want to kill joy in me; I laugh.*

*They want to paralyze me;*

*I take action.*

*They want war; I fight for peace.*

*I will pass these words on to my son.*

**So Danny dies and Adam is born.**

When we first see each other, my child and I, we are quiet for a few seconds and then we both cry. For me, it is the cry of humanity triumphing over evil. Now I understand there is something between

"What will you tell him?" people ask me. Most feel so sad, they can't even look at Adam. But he puts his face right up into theirs, playfully searching their souls. This gesture reminds me of his father, both unapologetic and sweet.

"I'll tell him the truth," I say, because you cannot escape from your own story. My father taught me this.

But which truth will I tell Adam? The one conveyed by terrorists who sent out the videotape of my husband's killing, in order to intimidate? In that case, Danny's life would be defined by the way he died. His beliefs would have died with him, torn to pieces, as the terrorists tried to do when they destroyed his body.

Or will I tell my son the truth Danny fought so hard to convey? If someone put a gun to your head and you had no doubt he would use it, would you smile? And if you smiled, what would it mean?

I believe that in Danny's courage at that crucial moment, in his ability to

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people who love each other that even death can't erase. Therein, perhaps, lies the definition of hope.

I name our baby Adam. "We should call him Adam, after the first man," Danny once said. He wanted to celebrate the many bloodlines that would define our son. From his dad's side, Adam is a quarter Iraqi and a quarter Polish. From me, he is Cuban and Dutch. Adam is the antithesis of the message perpetrated by fundamentalist terrorists: He is the living proof that human beings are able to embrace as many ethnicities as the world can offer.

**In the last picture** ever taken of Danny, a photo that traveled the world in an instant over the Internet, he has a gun at his head and a smile on his face. While everyone around me saw the gun, I saw the smile. I smiled with him, and cried.

Adam is now almost 3 years old. He runs everywhere and has the open beauty of an angel. I like the way he extends his arms to strangers, confident that whoever holds him will love him.

show that his captors could not destroy his soul, lies the future of our child. I will try to raise Adam to smile in the face of life as Danny smiled in the face of death.

Adam will never get to believe this is a safe world. But he will know you can defy it even in the worst circumstances. He will understand that you must choose your truth and live up to it.

**"Our son is going to change the world,"** Danny predicted, in his enthusiastic way. Adam sometimes looks at Danny's pictures and blows him kisses. Unlike my mother, I have hung pictures of my child's father in his room. And when the day comes for Adam to see the photos of his dad in captivity, I will not try to hide the truth from him. I will point at the last picture of Danny and I'll say to our son, "See that smile, baby? That is our soul." And I know Adam will understand. I can see it in his smile. ■

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May 2005 *Self.com* 45