

PARENTING  
WITH SHANNON DU PLESSIS



# A year in reflection

Nothing prepared her for 2009, but this year is looking a lot brighter

**A**s a new year begins, I thought I'd tell you a story of loss, grief, sacrifice, hope, joy and love.

It's a story of a woman who spent most of her twenties enjoying life, travelling and working. By the time her biological clock started ticking just before she turned 30, she was happily married and deep into domestic bliss, paying a mortgage and spending more time at home. The next most obvious step was to have children.

Within three months of trying to conceive, she had fallen pregnant, and nine months later had a baby girl. The pregnancy was a little rocky, but the birth went smoothly and she realised that becoming a mother was her greatest achievement in life.

She loved every minute of motherhood, from changing nappies, to making pureed food to rocking her daughter to sleep in the midnight hours.

It wasn't easy, and she faced many challenges, but her mother's instincts and absolute devotion to her child meant that she could always smile at the end of the day, and appreciate the young family that now surrounded her.

A few months before her daughter's second birthday, she and her husband decided it was time for another baby.

She had it all planned out: when she would fall pregnant, when the baby would be due and what age gap she wanted between her children.

When a few months passed and she still wasn't pregnant, she tried not to worry too much and figured that it must be because she's now in her thirties, and that it will happen soon enough.

By this time some of her friends had announced they were pregnant with their second children. She was thrilled for them, thinking it won't be long before she'd be joining them.

A year passed. More friends had their second baby (one even announced she was pregnant with her third), yet that positive pregnancy test eluded her.

She was working long hours, was highly stressed about work, and now stressed about secondary infertility.

Once you've been trying for one year unsuccessfully, you're classed as infertile. It was like a knife to her heart.

How could they have fallen pregnant so easily with the first and not so this time around?

She and her husband visited a fertility specialist who did some tests, which came back all clear, but then pushed them down the road to IVF.

She was distressed, and started seeing a psychologist as she felt she was spiralling into depression and she could no longer breathe. She felt



Joy and trepidation: Pregnancy is a wonder not to be taken lightly.

so angry at people who said "don't worry, it'll happen" or "just relax" for they had no idea of the anguish she faced. When you make the decision to have a child and that decision is taken away from you, it is both frustrating and devastating.

They decided against artificial conception, and to keep trying on their own. Keeping an open mind, she tried Chinese herbs and acupuncture for three months, was feeling far less stressed after dropping her work hours, went on a relaxing holiday.

At long last she fell pregnant. Her joy was overwhelming and she was shouting to the rooftops "we did it!".

But her joy was short because an early scan showed the baby had died. At 10 weeks, she had a D&C, and it was the worst day of her life.

She never expected to have a miscarriage and her grief was all-consuming, compounded by aches and pains following the procedure.

She could not understand why everyone around her was able to "plan" their families just as they wanted, and now that she was pregnant, she lost her baby. Her friends and colleagues were incredibly supportive and understanding, but some people were insensitive and made her angry.

They would say all the wrong things like "it's nature's way", "it's meant to be", or worse "don't worry, you'll have another one" which makes the lost child seem insignificant. She avoided anyone who ignored the fact that she had carried a little baby, and she surrounded

herself only with friends and family who acknowledged her grief and her pain.

What started as a good year had turned into a nightmare.

Things went from bad to worse particularly with her health and finances, but by October she decided it was time to start thinking positively again especially for the sake of her first born child, who was now approaching her fourth birthday and feeling the effects of a cranky mummy.

Just before they reached the two year anniversary of trying to conceive, she was shocked to discover she had fallen pregnant. Instead of joy, she faced fear.

Once a woman has lost a child, they never lose the fear of losing another.

But she is so grateful and feels like the luckiest woman in the world. She now understands what it must be like for women who cannot have children.

Every month she spent hoping, she was crushed with grief at another chance gone. She will never again ask a woman "when will you be having children?" because the truth could be worse than you imagine.

I tell you this story because it's not about a stranger, it's about me, and I'm thrilled to have reached the second trimester.

This time next year, when we reflect on the year that's gone by, and have positive hopes for the one to come, I'm hoping I'll have a baby in my arms and nothing in this world can beat that.

■ Shannon is mum to Laura. Tell us your thoughts at [mumologues.blogspot.com](http://mumologues.blogspot.com)

STAYING IN  
THE LATEST RELEASE BOOKS REVIEWED



JOHN DIES AT THE END

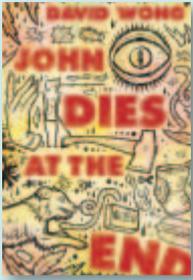
DAVID WONG, THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS, RRP \$25

When this reviewer read the title of the book, he found myself thinking, "Poor John, whoever he is! Doesn't this wreck the ending?" After the prologue my reaction was, "Do we have to wait until the end of the book? Can't we kill this obnoxious jerk off sooner?"

Yet even with its odd, Clerks-meets-Stephen King premise, which pits John and his friend Dave, two bottom-rung, high school dropout slackers, against Things Which Man Was Not Meant To Know, David Wong's style keeps you reading. He filters pop culture through an oddball wit and gives his characters real pathos. You start to care about what happens to them, as much as wanting to know what grotesque horror lurks on the next page.

**Verdict:** Too funny for traditional "horror", but still not for the squeamish.

- Rob Farquhar



HARD GIRLS

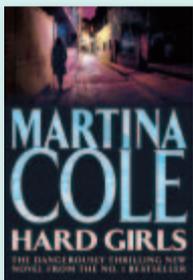
MARTINA COLE, HACHETTE, RRP \$33

A serial killer is knocking off prostitutes and DCI Annie Carr is relying on retired DCI Kate Burrows to help her catch the sadist. But Burrows is distracted. She has left her lover and ex-crim Patrick Kelly after he didn't tell her

he owned the properties that are now crime scenes. This book is about as exciting as watching a re-run of CSI. The join-the-dots plot isn't helped by the thinly drawn characters and Cole's repetitive writing. I got the message Burrows was feeling old and tired and Kelly could be a dangerous man if crossed in the first chapter. Cole's successful book *The Take* is on Channel 7, but she's lost the plot here.

**Verdict:** Mind-numbing

- Blanche Clark



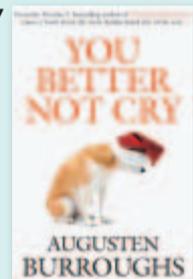
YOU BETTER NOT CRY

AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS, HACHETTE, RRP \$30

There are three memorable aspects to this collection of memoirs. The first is that the author, an American, has dedicated it to "the people of Australia who lost everything there is to lose in the February fires of 2009". The second is the index page describes the book as Christmas-humour, despite it being the bleakest collection of Christmas stories I've ever read. The third is it's very well written and gives an entirely new view of the silly season.

**Verdict:** Ho, ho, ouch

- Rebecca Green



THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL

GREG ILES, HARPER COLLINS, RRP \$33

Natchez mayor and former prosecutor Penn Cage is desperately called to a cemetery at midnight by his old school friend Tim, who works on a riverboat casino. When Tim is gruesomely murdered, Cage has to use every resource he has to bring the killers to justice. Iles is a gripping crime writer but, for me, the violence to women and gruesome dog fights went too far.

**Verdict:** Nightmarish

- Corinna Hente

