



Sydney Morning Herald
Saturday 4/02/2012

Page: 10
Section: Good Weekend Magazine
Region: Sydney, AU
Circulation: 189803
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 710.79 sq.cms.



slice
slicemedia.com

press clip

INTERVIEWS BY SHARON BRADLEY



of us

CATHERINE KNOX & VIJAY ROACH

Life for Catherine Knox, 52, and her gynaecologist/obstetrician husband, Vijay Roach, 46, was thrown into chaos after the birth of their first two children in quick succession. They are now involved in the Gidget Foundation, promoting awareness of perinatal anxiety and depression.

CATHERINE: My sister, Janet, introduced me to Vijay. They were at uni together and she organised this dinner party. I was 26 and he was only 20, with three more years of study left, but I was struck immediately by how witty, sociable, generous and romantic he was. I came from a conservative, middle-class family, but Vijay, whose background was left-leaning, Indian, Catholic and migrant, saw the world through

a different lens and challenged my neat assumptions about practically everything. I found him intoxicating.

The early years of our marriage on Sydney's northern beaches were idyllic. I loved my busy job in marketing and Vijay was a hospital resident. When I discovered I was pregnant, the initial shock quickly gave way to a secret pride.



press clip

Suddenly, I felt very clever indeed. At 30 weeks, though, I was diagnosed with severe pre-eclampsia and Tom's birth, two months later, was traumatic, requiring a lot of intervention. And then I wasn't able to breastfeed. I felt like a total failure. I'd never experienced difficulties of any kind before in my life and I couldn't work out why, six weeks after Tom's birth, I was still having lots of really dark, disturbing thoughts.

When Tom was just eight weeks old, I found out – to my very great shock – that I was pregnant again. The year that I was 32, I had two babies: Tom and, 11 months later, Jack. This time the birth went smoothly but immediately afterwards I descended into a nightmare. Suddenly, I had no idea who I was or what I was doing. I felt that when Vijay left me to go to work, he was abandoning me. I would start crying and beg him not to go. I'd lie awake at night, sobbing quietly, whispering, "God, what has become of me?" I felt *completely* alone.

Vijay, who had a very demanding job, just couldn't understand how his previously competent wife had lost the plot. The house was always a mess, we never had any proper food to eat, domestic organisation was a distant memory – and there always seemed to be a baby crying. There were many terrible rows: neither of us had any insight into the real life or emotional needs of the other.

After eight weeks of this, Vijay confided in one of his colleagues. Straight away, he said to Vijay, "Do you think Cathie could possibly be suffering from postnatal depression?" It was a turning point: within days, I was admitted to hospital. I believe that the treatment I received there and afterwards – a combination of anti-depressants and cognitive behaviour therapy – saved my life *and* our marriage.

Vijay was utterly single-minded in his loyalty to me. For the next year, we saw a psychologist together every week. We had to try to get back to the place we'd known before our babies were born. It took an outsider to teach us that good relationships need to be nurtured and require an investment of time – *and* a sense of humour.

Vijay and I could have walked away from the train wreck. I'm so thankful that, together, we persevered. As the parents of five children – Tom

and Jack are now 19 and 18 – we still share many moments of disarray, but we've learnt skills and gained strength. Vijay listens and he hears. He stood by me through some very unattractive times: I feel blessed to have his love and support.

VIJAY: Cathie has always been a highly organised, intelligent, competent, motivated individual. She doesn't like things not to be done properly. We cannot have a dinner party where knives and forks aren't properly aligned. I'd be happy to order pizza, but that's just not going to happen with Cathie around.

The night I met her, at Janet's dinner party, she stepped on a broken glass. I remember saying to her, as I held her foot and pulled shards out of it, "I'm going to have to marry you." It's true I was very young – only 20 – but I was already thinking about the big picture. I was instantly attracted to this bright, happy, positive human being.

My expectation of her, after having these babies, was that she'd get up, get organised and, when she was ready, go back to work – that we'd continue to function as we always had. But this didn't happen and I saw, instead, a very vulnerable human being. Her sudden, unrelenting neediness was almost impossible for me to adjust to or comprehend.

The fights were terrible. It was about two individuals not being able to see, let alone meet, each other's needs. Every contact we had with each other was adversarial. During this time, we talked seriously about just going our separate ways. I worried terribly that the old Cathie, the Cathie I'd fallen in love with, was gone forever.

People look up to obstetricians. They think they can be counted on to do the right thing, but I'm as flawed a human being as any other. I wasn't there for my wife. I was, quite simply, young, tired and overwhelmed – a 26-year-old first-year registrar working 100 hours a week. I look at 40-year-old fathers now and am almost envious retrospectively of their maturity. But I can't change who I was then.

When the diagnosis of PND was confirmed, my first reaction was to feel immensely protective of Cathie. There was a stigma attached to the illness – any kind of mental illness – and I wasn't going to have anyone think negatively of her.

Sydney Morning Herald
Saturday 4/02/2012

Page: 10
Section: Good Weekend Magazine
Region: Sydney, AU
Circulation: 189803
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 710.79 sq.cms.



slice
slicemedia.com

press clip

We went to therapy together for many, many months. It was the most important thing in Cathie's rehabilitation and the best thing that ever happened to us. This hour a week was the one thing in my ridiculously busy schedule that I would always make time for. We didn't miss a session. We'd go in there stressed and tired and come out holding hands. It was beautiful: we could see each other.

When she became well again, we went back

to being two independent yet strongly united human beings working in partnership. Together, we make things happen. I can't see how our relationship could be better than it is right now.

When we're both at home together, Cathie reckons I follow her around like a puppy dog – which she finds annoying. But the truth is, I am very dependent on her emotionally. She is someone I admire unequivocally. She is my everything, the centre of my life. **GW**

“
For the next year, we saw a psychologist together every week. We had to try to get back to the place we'd known before our babies were born.

”