

One night after a long wait and the same futile diagnosis, I almost screamed, “If there’s nothing wrong with her, then *you* take her home!”

I didn’t *want* there to be anything wrong with our youngest daughter. I just needed her to stop crying!

~~Over the first two and a half years of Maggie’s life, i~~It felt to me like some of the ~~the~~hospital staff in Pembroke thought I was making a mountain out of a molehill, ~~abusing the ER when I was undoubtedly just this overtired mother of three who~~needed a good night’s sleep. ~~Had they dubbed me the Drama Queen Mom? They~~had not witnessed the uptick in Maggie’s self-injurious behaviours. ~~I had. She~~would throw herself onto the floor for no apparent reason and lie there screaming. ~~Was it any wonder that I thought my daughter might be in pain?~~

CHAPTER FOUR

Sense of Direction

Never look back unless you are planning to go that way.

— *Henry David Thoreau*

It’s a good thing that my husband enjoyed driving around the Valley with his family, because after *baby number three* was born, this activity became our go-to. Our incessantly crying Maggie quickly quieted when in a vehicle. Thank goodness, as these road trips afforded us all a much-needed reprieve.

Once Maggie was sound asleep, it was usually safe to stop somewhere, so after Mass on Sundays and a long drive, we often visited his parents. The girls loved to be pampered, and of course were always eager to savor their grandmother’s

Commented [Ed1]: It sounds more like frustration than anything else that you were feeling, but I’m inferring because you haven’t actually expressed your feelings. Let us in on that.

Commented [Ed2]: This seems like a good place for part of this paragraph, but I would encourage you to add some sense of how alone you felt or how rejected you felt by the medical industry, if that is indeed the case.

I wonder if this is one reason you seemed to not have taken Maggie to see a doctor right away when she began to self-harm.

Commented [Ed3]: I recommend combining chapters 3 and 4, but having a scene separator between the two. My reasoning is they both are related to her crying, but chapter 4 ventures into her sense of direction, so it’s growing from the concept of crying. Your chapters are a bit too short, so finding ways to combine them is recommended.

Commented [Ed4]: I’m curious to know why you like to use these words rather than just her name. It feels like you’re deliberately creating a barrier between you and her.

yummy grilled cheese. She had a griller and would stand over it and push down on the top with both hands to flatten the bread. The cheese would then ooze out the sides and quickly harden to a yummy, almost taffy-like consistency.

We always followed the same route: up the street to the first stop, a right turn and down the hill, then a turn into his-Marty's parents' driveway. The day Marty decided to veer off our usual course, however, our baby girl immediately started crying. Unusual behaviour for her in the car.

Strange, I thought. *Could it be possible?* "Marty, just humour me for a moment. Turn around, drive back to the church, then head down the hill."

He did, and immediately Maggie stopped crying.

CHAPTER SIX

Little Red Rotten Hood

You may see me struggle, but you will never see me quit.

— unknown

Maggie had arrived at the cottage wrapped in her father's arms and wearing a new-to-her, ruby red hooded cape that she had discovered the week before, buried in her big sisters' dress-up box. Maggie had immediately claimed ownership of that cape, and she didn't need words to tell us that it now belonged to her. Mention a drive, and Maggie would don her crimson cape.

"Oh look! Here comes Little Red Rotten Hood," exclaimed Gramma.

My mother-in-law probably thought she was being funny and original. But I was

Commented [Ed5]: Nice imagery!

Commented [Ed6]: Had she been asleep and then woke up and started crying, or had she just been awake, quietly riding along?

Commented [Ed7]: I think you can leave this out since your inner thoughts in the next paragraph express the strangeness of it.

Commented [Ed8]: Because we don't know what this route means, since he had been off course anyway, I recommend that you ask Marty to turn around and head back to the house along the usual route, so that the reader can understand that this is what happened, if indeed that is the case.

Commented [Ed9]: This is not the best way to start a new chapter. Unlike the other chapters, this one kind of plunks us in the middle of a scene, which is perhaps more appropriate in a movie than in a book. Give us a bit more context. How old is she at this point? What is the reason for going to the cottage? Set up the scene a bit more because it's a doozy, what her grandmother says next. This scene deserves more than just three short paragraphs.

Also, I think you need to establish more of a series of events that occur to make your mother-in-law think that naming her this was reasonable (in her head). So far, all we've seen is that she cries a lot and she's a bit of a daredevil on the stairs. We haven't seen any strange behaviour. If you start with the challenging behaviour and then have this scene with Gramma, then at least we know where she's getting these ideas, even if we might not agree with her.

Commented [Ed10]: Also provide more of a transitional sentence between this and the preceding sentences.

Commented [Ed11]: It still shocks me that she would refer to a grandchild in this way? Was it known that Maggie had autism by this point? Why would she say such a thing anyway?

I think this scene needs to be set up a bit more. Was this the first time she had called her that? Did Marty say anything? Did anyone react to her words? Laugh or frown or make a comment under their breath or are you the only one to have a reaction? Why did you confine that reaction to an eye roll if it was hurtful and you were close friends? Didn't you feel like you could tell her it was hurtful?

It's in moments like these that you really need to dig down and share more of your inner thoughts and feelings at the time, or if you don't remember your exact feelings, how are you reacting in retrospect? You can do that with a memoir. You can look back and make a comment today about a long-ago scene. Do you wish you had said something in retrospect, or are you comfortable with the idea that nothing you could have said would have made a difference?

the mother of this little girl, this ‘Little Red Rotten Hood’. The words were hurtful, and it was all I could do to confine my reaction to an eye roll. But we had been close friends for a long time, so I knew how her mind worked, and wasn’t really surprised by her play on words. She knew deep down that Maggie was not an easy child, and subtly had associated the red cape with Maggie’s ever-increasing challenging behaviours.

~~E~~

Margaret’s actions were indeed troubling. One afternoon while her sisters were proudly setting up a lemonade stand, with ice cubes and homemade cookies too, I placed Maggie on the seat of her brand new red-and-white tricycle. She looked adorable and seemingly poised, in her little red dress with a white pinafore. Poised soon changed to possessed.

~~Over the first two and a half years of Maggie’s life, it felt to me like some of the the hospital staff in Pembroke thought I was making a mountain out of a molehill, abusing the ER when I was undoubtedly just this overtired mother of three who needed a good night’s sleep. Had they dubbed me the Drama Queen Mom? They had not witnessed the uptick in Maggie’s self-injurious behaviours. I had. She would throw herself onto the floor for no apparent reason and lie there screaming. Was it any wonder that I thought my daughter might be in pain?~~

Between her speech delays, rapid mood swings, head-banging, nose bleeds, screaming (continuously, one day out of three) and smearing, it was time to seek professional help for this precious child.

“It’s more than just incessant crying, Dr. Maartense,” I insisted amid tears and utter frustration.

Commented [Ed12]: You don’t need this scene break because your first sentence provides a transition. You made a connection between the first scene and the second quite nicely.

Commented [Ed13]: How old was she at this point?

Commented [Ed14]: So, did the wondering stop there? You weren’t willing to go to the doctor and ask questions? Why not?

Commented [Ed15]: I think this is in the wrong chapter. This would fit better in the chapter on actually bringing her to the ER. I’ll move it there so you can see.

Commented [Ed16]: In retrospect, do you think it was a bit late to seek professional help? Remember, I asked about this a lot in the earlier chapters. Did the hospital staff at the ER made you feel like you didn’t need help? Try to give us a sense of

1. How long this behaviour was going on before you got help
2. Why you waited as long as you did (if indeed it was a long time)

So, is it fair to say that Maggie was diagnosed at two and a half years old? Is that a typical or atypical age for diagnosis? You don’t have to say this here because we don’t know yet what the issue is, but make sure to address this at some point, perhaps while you are absorbing what the doctors said during that last meeting.

Commented [Ed17]: Is this your family doctor?

They had not witnessed the uptick in Maggie's self-injurious behaviours. I had. She would throw herself onto the floor for no apparent reason and lie there screaming. Was it any wonder that I thought my daughter might be in pain?

Commented [Ed18]: I actually decided to put part of that first paragraph here because this could be part of what you explain to him. You'd have to rework this information to explain how you would bring her to the hospital, but got turned away, that you noticed these behaviours. . . You don't have to go into much detail because the reader already knows, but this is an option.

Alternatively, just leave this out completely. However, I think explaining to the doctor that you haven't felt supported (if this is indeed a conversation you had with him) could be a good way to show the reader that you are opening up to someone emotionally.

He listened attentively, then picked up the phone and called the local pediatrician. We had an appointment for the very next day.

Dr. Dabee listened to our story and watched Maggie momentarily, then he in turn picked up the phone and contacted the nearest children's hospital, and a date for our first of many appointments was set up.

Before we left his office, Dr. Dabee impressed upon us the need to attend all doctors' appointments with Maggie. He knew how important this would be for her future; we did not.

Commented [Ed19]: Are you talking bigger picture, as in years into the future, or just the fact that she wouldn't want to be alone in a room with a stranger?

Once on our way back from a short trip, I had to pull over as Maggie was in the throes of a tantrum. She was not to be consoled, and so I dragged her kicking and screaming from the van and sat her on the side of the highway and drove off. I got 300 feet down the road then pulled over. I sat and waited. Then her sisters started screaming and crying, "Mom, go get her. She'll get hit by a car!"

Commented [Ed20]: Waited for what? What were you thinking in that moment? Here we see you action, but not your thoughts or feelings.

I had no intention of leaving her on the side of the road. I just needed to do something. I wanted her to stop screaming and stop punching the window, and so in a moment of insanity I had chosen to scare her. She could have been fatally injured. That one moment in time could have been the worst of our lives.

Commented [Ed21]: How did you feel when you got home that night? Did you think you'd done the right thing?

~~Today when we drive around, it's one or the other, radio or talking. Maggie has~~

~~learned to turn off the radio and say “Wanna talk, sataa.” Sometimes the radio is switched on and off many times during the ride!~~

~~As for the washroom, Margaret goes in alone.~~

~~-E-~~

I know now that Maggie was often overstimulated during her childhood and her teenage years. That long-ago ~~Our~~ trip to the grocery store, the family get togethers, the attempt to enter the midway, ~~...~~ all are ~~all~~ examples of visual and auditory overload. If you really think about it, her temper tantrums spoke volumes and proved to be effective, as she would be immediately removed from the unpleasant situation and only then able to calm herself.

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~~Learning needs to be lifelong when raising children.~~

Commented [Ed22]: You’re speaking in the present tense, but how likely would it have been for adults to go in large groups? This is something that was common as kids because there were few bathrooms, but it’s a situation that is unlikely to continue as you get older anyway. I think you can do away with this comment.

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Commented [Ed23]: Because she changes her mind about wanting to talk?

Commented [Ed24]: I’d remove this as it’s a given. Maybe another paragraph reflecting on when you realized it or how you came to see that would be good. And maybe referencing things you learned from others, if you were still getting outside support.

