

“I am a special mom”

Nothing can prepare you for motherhood, least of all a special child. But as with all things in life, you learn along the way.

■ By Deepa Garwa

MOTHERHOOD MEANS many things to many people. From the ‘state of being a mother’ to ‘the worst job that we love dearly’, it is most often defined by our individual experiences and journeys into the long, beautiful roads of life along with our children.

The strings of motherhood

Motherhood is expected to bring elation, joy, pride and sheer happiness from its onset, and is considered the most unconditional expression of love. But the truth is that it too is not free of delusions and conditions. It is tied with invisible strings from time immemorial; the strings of expectations, social stigmas, approvals, peer pressure and many others. And these strings are powerful enough to replace the joys of motherhood with fear, doubt, and uncertainty.

The idea of motherhood that every girl is raised with doesn’t provide much flexibility. Everybody is being taught the same idea and expectations and even a slight deviation can bring havoc. It is more so if that deviation comes in the form of a special needs child! Because then, ‘the idea of motherhood’ that one has had all their life has to change overnight. And the strings of social expectations begin to edge out the real concept of motherhood.

Choosing the unexplored road

Long ago when I read *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost I used to ponder, would



Deepa and her daughter Aarshia, on a vacation in Bhutan

I take the road less travelled? I was quite sure that I would—but saying it and doing it are two different things.

While I did not intentionally choose to go on the road less travelled, life threw me there and that too without a map!

I had a lot of choices. I had the choice of being happy and accepting the little precious girl I was sent. I had a choice to bask in the glory of motherhood, to have somebody who was not ‘typical’ for the world but was ‘perfect’ for me. And I had a choice to not get into that vicious circle of complaining to God about why he did it to me and then crying endlessly into the nights waiting for the answers.

But I did not make those choices. I complained, I cribbed, cried, howled through the night holding all the strings that I had tied around my beautiful pink packet of motherhood.

I knew I would have to break free of those strings, change my dreams and fine tune my desires. And I am glad I did that... and more. I am glad that I got up and took charge, because that has made all the difference.

I had always wanted a baby girl who would outwit me with her humour and would be my companion, shopping during sales. She would help me choose dresses and nail-polish and also would gossip with me about George Clooney and Shahrukh Khan. Someone who would go out on countless movies and lunches to celebrate all ‘mother’s and daughter’s days’, right from the day she was going to be born.

Piecing together my shattered dreams

All these dreams came alive when I held her for the first time, but when I heard about her diagnosis of ‘Down syndrome’—in the doctor’s words she was “intellectually disabled”—the world came crashing down on me. I thought I would never be able to do what I had always dreamt of doing. But once I realigned my ‘pink motherhood’ a little above my unknown fears, everything fell back into place.

The realisation that she was going to do everything, but at her own pace, helped me change my idea of a perfect life to make it a *perfect life with all that I had*. I realised that it was not she who was ‘imperfect’ but my idea of perfection!

Cutting the cords that bound me

The strings were not easy to break. They were everywhere: at playschools, parks, pools, friends’ places or in the minds of people around me. These strings were putting her in

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a compartment reserved for ‘less abled’, sympathising with me, pitying her, underestimating her worth to be almost nothing and portraying that I, her mother, was ‘inevitably in pain’.

Everybody thinks that just because you don’t have a ‘typical’ child and ‘typical dreams or journey’ you are disillusioned into thinking that you love your child and you only do so because you don’t have a choice. I wanted to test this myth!

I did a small survey where I asked 20 mothers of special needs children to tell me honestly if they could change or take away the birth of their special needs child from their life, would they do it? I was pleasantly surprised when every single mother told me that they are happy with their lives and would not change a thing about it. All of them said that their special needs child has helped them learn new ways of living, and they are grateful to have such a child in their lives.

My unusual voyage

Motherhood is humbling and emotionally investing. It is about loving your child irrespective of any flaws that they might have. It is the magic of raising a little life with the best of your abilities. And if motherhood should at all be tied up, it should be tied up with the strings of love, compassion, and non-judgement. The ‘packets of motherhood’ that a girl keeps with her while growing up should be tied up with the strings of faith in human abilities and also with the trust that every soul and every being is equal. Motherhood doesn’t come in the same packet for all—it is different for everybody. Every mother is different and so is motherhood... for some it is pink and for other it’s purple. All we need to do to help future mothers experience their greatest motherhood is to wrap it in different colours but to make sure that there are no undesirable strings attached!

