

DEAR MAMA:
STORIES OF
AN EXTRA
LUCKY LIFE



TARYN
LAGONIGRO
&
JESSICA
QUARELLO

www.extraluckymoms.com
hello@extraluckymoms.com

ABOUT THE BOOK



"Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life" is a collection of essays written for the extra lucky community BY the extra lucky community. Extra Lucky Moms was founded in May 2021 by Jessica Quarello and Taryn Lagonigro, who are both moms of children with disabilities. They connected because of their daughters and their friendship sparked the start of their extra lucky journey. Their organization celebrates children with Down syndrome, autism, Jordan's Syndrome, trisomies, heart conditions, and many more, and provides a space where every parent, caregiver and therapist belongs. Dear Mama is a direct result of this community. Jess and Taryn felt there was not enough appropriate and supportive literature available to new moms experiencing overwhelming medical information, appointments and general unknowns. Moms truly just want to feel seen, heard and understood and that they too will be OK. This book hopes to help make that happen. Dear Mama includes 28 essays written by incredibly inspiring mamas who opened up their hearts in the hopes of helping someone else through their words. Our mission is to get this book in the hands of the mom who needs it so she feels hope and peace. We also believe this book is a beautiful and inspiring way for **anyone** to learn more about the experience of parents and children in the disability community.

ABOUT THE COVER

dear mama

Stories of an Extra Lucky Life

Taryn Lagonigro • Jessica Quarello

With Contributions from Extra Lucky Moms

Our vision for this cover was simple. We wanted someone picking up this book to feel calm and safe. You are flooded with medical information when navigating a new diagnosis for your child, which you quickly need a break from. We want this book to be that break, and we think this cover does a good job of conveying that.



dear mama,

Thank you for picking up this book. Whether you are here because you are new to a disability diagnosis for your child or are already part of, or connected to, the disability community, we appreciate you.

The women who wrote these letters are some of the most inspiring mamas we know - in part because they opened up their hearts here in the hopes of helping someone else through their words. They are women who may have lacked what we are hoping you find here - knowing someone else "gets it." We hope that in one of these stories you find YOU - someone who has felt and thought things you're feeling now. Often in a journey like this we feel very alone, but we are here to tell you that there is a book full of women who are very much here for you. They were where you are. They love their babies to the depths of their soul and still can feel very hard feelings. Most importantly - they are okay, and you will be too.

The only thing we asked of any of our writers is to be as honest as possible. You'll get to hear the good and the hard, the very raw feelings but also a whole lot of hope.

Thank you for being here. You've got this.

With love,
Jess & Taryn



ISBN 979-8-9853136-1-1 \$22.95
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Cover art by Morgan Lee Silva

PROLOGUE

DEAR MAMA,

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With Love,

Jess and Taryn



MAJOR THEMES & TOPICS

SUPPORT

Each letter begins with the greeting "Dear mama" to evoke a sense of familiarity and love from the writer to the reader. Support is what each extra lucky mom needs throughout her journey and each story is meant to show her that this community is here to lift her up.

ACCEPTANCE

A big part of moving forward on this journey is acceptance. Each writer vulnerably shares the ups and downs on their way to ultimate acceptance of their child's diagnosis and their extra lucky life.

DISABILITY ADVOCACY

Everyone advocates differently which is why it was so important for our stories to reflect so many different stories of advocacy. We wanted to show each Mama that the way they want to advocate for their child is celebrated and important.

CONTRIBUTOR EXCERPT



"I often think back to my early feelings and my misunderstanding of mothering in general, and I am grateful for the view I have now.

...

I have also found out that I am the mother who will draft 20 e-mails to make sure services are in place, that I will take off my shoes and dance in the rain, I will carve pumpkins, watch sand fall from my kid's hands, let my kids hair run free, and celebrate with my whole heart each skill they learn. I have learned that who I am is just what they need. They are where the magic lives every day. Autism is a part of all of that, and autism is also a part of who my children are.

-Tabitha Cabrera-

EXCERPTS CONTINUED



"Many of us grow up with a vision of what our future will look like. We picture this perfect family with healthy, thriving children. When that vision is taken from us with a child's unexpected diagnosis, it can completely rock our world and break our hearts.

But when your child with a disability has a small victory after months of therapy or they say I love you for the first time or you see their eyes light up every time they see something they love, that joy can make your heart almost burst. Mama, let that joy sustain you through the hard times."

-Sarah Jackson-



"You have already done so much work, to arrive at this day, sitting here with this book. You have already had moments of heartache, pain, joy, bliss, and love. You have done the best of times and the worst of times. There is still hard work left to come because parenting is HARD. Despite the hard, I hope you go forth and live your greatest life's LOVE. You were made for this."

-Lora Jackle-

ABOUT TARYN



Taryn Lagonigro spent almost twenty years in the financial technology field with roles in project management, customer service, customer success and was most recently Vice President at a global organization. Taryn decided to step away in Fall of 2021 to focus on family, writing and entrepreneurship, but remains in the fintech industry as a business strategy consultant. Taryn is the mom to four daughters, the youngest of whom threw her into a world of advocacy when she was born with Down syndrome in March 2020. Taryn is the co-owner of Iris Yoga, a yoga studio in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and Extra Lucky Moms, an advocacy brand in the disability community. Taryn is certified in yoga and meditation and also volunteers for several Down syndrome organizations and sits on the board of two non-profits, the Down Syndrome Diagnosis Network and 321 Sunshine Nonprofit. Taryn's writings have been featured in several national publications and she has frequently been a guest on podcasts and television shows for topics relating to yoga, Down syndrome and parenting a child with a disability.

Taryn runs on coffee, wine and gratitude as she and her husband Raffaele are busy raising their four young daughters, Sofia, Layla, Genevieve and Rhea.



ABOUT JESS

Jess is a Mother of two girls and an influencer and writer in the motherhood space. In 2020 she gave birth to Adeline, who at birth was diagnosed with Down Syndrome. What started as a traumatic and scary diagnosis has propelled her into a life of advocacy and passion for her daughter and the Down Syndrome Community. She co-founded the advocacy platform Extra Lucky Moms with Taryn Lagonigro whom she met and connected with through friendship and advocacy efforts. Their mission is to spread the joy of disability motherhood which they do through their platform, blog, social media (150k+ on tik tok!) programs, connections and apparel that sparks conversation and gives back. She currently resides in Hoboken, NJ with her 5.5 year old daughter Charlee, Adeline (2) and husband Matt. She hopes to inspire others facing a disability diagnosis to not fear the future but to embrace a new beautiful perspective.

Jess was born in Sweden but raised in North Carolina and started singing at the age of 5 years old. She pursued a career in music, modeling and performance and received her BFA in Music Theatre from Elon University. She spent 10 years in NYC and had some great successes which included national commercials, a beauty campaign printed in Vogue Magazine, a recording contract and even working with Timbaland and Snoop Dog. She met her husband Matt on a rooftop bar in Manhattan and they were engaged 9 months later. She decided to switch gears in her career and pivoted to the other side of the modeling industry, fashion! Jess worked as a lead stylist for a style-subscription company, moved into marketing for an international branding agency and worked for a non-profit consultancy, on the sales and marketing side.

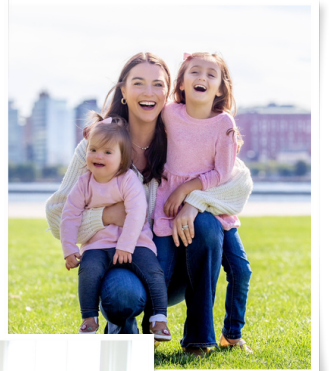
The Dear Mamas

28 EXTRA LUCKY CONTRIBUTORS



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QUICK FACTS

Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life is Taryn Lagonigro and Jess Quarello's first book, published through Four Clovers Publishing. Taryn founded Four Clovers which was named after her four daughters. This is the second book from Four Clovers Publishing, which expects to continue to publish more from authors who have a disability, love or work with individuals with disabilities, with a goal of creating more works to close the gap in inclusive literature.

Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life

Page Count:

Genre: Self-Help

Published by Four Clovers Publishing

Publication date:

ISBN: 979-8-9853136-1-1

Price: \$22.95

Available in Paperback and Kindle Formats

Available at extraluckymoms.com, Amazon & local retailers

DEAR MAMA

PRESS RELEASE

Taryn Lagonigro and Jessica Quarello have published *Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life*, a compilation of letters from moms in the disability community.

While navigating the early days of their own children's Down syndrome diagnoses, Taryn and Jess struggled to find literature that was not just hopeful, but also raw and authentic. This blend of feelings was important in feeling validated in the range of emotions that one may go through when accepting a disability diagnosis for their child.

Taking a page from the inclusive community they created, *Extra Lucky Moms*, which celebrates, supports and educates on a broad range of disabilities, Taryn and Jess imagined a book of letters written from one mom to another. The letters represent moms of children with Down syndrome, autism, Jordan's syndrome, Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy, DiGeorge syndrome, Apert Syndrome, Rett syndrome, limb difference, bilateral polymicrogyria, childhood cancer and congenital heart disease, as well as a woman with Down syndrome herself.

Taryn and Jess hope that this book will inspire readers who may be in their own disability journey to feel hope and peace. They also hope that these stories will spark change and more understanding about the disability community at large.

This book is published by *Four Clovers Publishing*, which was founded in Fall 2021 by Taryn Lagonigro, which is excited to have *Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life* as the second book published by the company. *Four Clovers Publishing* hopes to continue to publish more inclusive literary works to help shine a light on the disability community.

Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life is available on extraluckymoms.com, Amazon and will continue to be rolled out in more retailers through 2023. Wholesale pricing is available for hospitals and non-profits by contacting *Extra Lucky Moms*.