

bundle of joy
being dad: a chronicle

naveen bachwani



This book is dedicated to my wife

– Sonali –

without whom the entire “plot” wouldn’t exist!

Foreword

Sometime in 2003, life took an interesting turn: My wife, Sonali, conceived our first child. And soon, I found myself writing posts on my blog (www.NaveenBachwani.com), on my experiences as a father...

Soon, days passed into weeks, and weeks into months. The more I read on the subject, the more I realized that most of the writing out there was oriented towards (and *written* by) mothers! Dads, as it turned out, were both under-rated and under-published.

Today, having documented many of the milestones traversed, I thought it would be a good idea to share some of those experiences with other newbie, or wannabe, parents.

This book reproduces many of my blog posts on the subject of "fatherhood", in a book-friendly format. It traces the journey of my experience as a parent, from my first child's birth to the time she reached about three years of age.

I've thoroughly enjoyed "being dad" so far... every single moment of it. If your own experiences as a parent are going to be even half as exciting, I can assure you that it's going to be a fulfilling life.

Naveen Bachwani
November 2007

It Happened One Night

February 8, 2004

For months, we had anxiously awaited the day it will finally happen. (The expected date was 8th Feb). And, when that day came, it still managed to take us by surprise ! In fact, we had ordered a movie home, and intended to see it later that afternoon. But we soon discovered that Life had other plans for us.

Just as we finished lunch at 2 pm, that lazy Sunday, her water broke ! It was going to happen today, we told ourselves, almost silently. We were not supposed to panic. The drill was that we should get to the hospital within 2-3 hours of the water breaking.

Soon, we were making our way to the hospital. It felt like the whole world was taking an afternoon nap while we were going through our most eventful life-experience. It almost did not seem fair... except for the fact that there wasn't much traffic on the way.

The hospital staff was most helpful and courteous, and we soon found ourselves in the pre-labour "Waiting Room". But, since her contractions were still far apart, all we could do was wait. So we shifted to our designated room... and waited.

I tried to crack some jokes to lighten the mood, but so far, the wife was doing alright. She was calm and not stressing out, which was good. Of course, that comfort was not meant to last long. The funny thing is, until that afternoon, we didn't even know what a contraction would *feel* like. We had had none. We had read all about them, and how each contraction starts at the lower back and moves towards the front, and how you're supposed to do a cycle of breathing exercises when it happens. But it was all theory. Until now.

By about 6 pm, the contractions became more frequent. By 10 in the night, they were happening every 3 minutes. That's when we shifted to the "Labour Room"... to wait some more, of course. The only difference was that there were a few gadgets there to help monitor the progress of both mother and child. There were no gadgets, however, to help the pain. And the pain kept getting worse. Luckily, we remembered to 'breathe' with each contraction, which helped some. Every 3 minutes, she would get a contraction. And every 3 minutes, it would hurt a lot. And then it would subside. This went on for nearly 6 hours...

Then, the pushing started. And she was taken to the "Delivery Room" for the final part she had to play in this Miracle of Life. There was struggling, and pain, and blood...

And then, at 3.58 am on the 2nd of February 2004, a baby girl was born into our family !!!

Soon, SMS messages were being sent to friends and family, informing them of the newest addition to our family. And I found myself surprised at how glad we were that we had had a "*normal*" delivery.

Never in my life had any thing "normal" meant so much !

I have heard many talk of the birth of their child as a momentous event in which "your whole life changes and you feel all these emotions at the same time". For me, it was a **humbling** experience.

To hold a new born child in your arms, a child that is so... 'complete' in all respects, someone who started life as a single cell, is nothing short of a miracle. What did we do as human beings? Sure, the mother carried the child in her womb, while the father provided support. But, with all the technology and scientific prowess we can muster, we cannot "create" a single cell, let alone bring to life a self-healing, self-sufficient, intelligent, human being !

As much as I try to break it down for myself, or for you, that night will always stay imprinted in my mind as a "miracle". Living proof that there is a God, whatever name he goes by. There is just no other way to explain it.

*P.S. We have since named her "**Khushi**" ('joy').*

It Takes A Village...

April 2, 2004

Two months ago, a new born baby came into my life. Until then, I had heard many more experienced folks tell me that my life will change the day I have a baby. I am slowly beginning to realize why.

The last couple of months have been quite a roller-coaster for me and the mrs. As all new parents, we were thrust into the care of the little one from the first day. As someone wise once said, "Having a baby does not make you a parent, any more than owning a piano makes you a pianist." There is so much involved in caring for an infant that it simply takes over your life, leaving you with little time for the rest of life's pursuits.

One obvious impact of this has, of course, been on the blog - posts in the last 2 months have been at all-time low of just 3 entries each month! (I have resolved to fix that soon.) But, more significantly, the learning for me has been about how much we, as human beings, are dependent on predictability and on a routine in life.

As someone who thrives on change, it was quite a revelation for me to come to terms with this new finding. I had never thought of myself as *not* being comfortable in a situation that does not offer predictability. And, baby care is any thing but predictable.

From the time she set foot in our lives, the world revolves around her. We sleep when she sleeps. We eat when she lets us. We watch movies only at home... often in installments. There is no day or night any more. Sometimes she sleeps for 4 hours at a stretch, and sometimes you cannot think of putting her down, even for a moment.

Don't get me wrong: It's not all bad. In fact, one toothless smile from her, and every thing in life seems just right ! Seriously, words cannot describe how ... *nice* it feels to see your child grinning away to glory. Never mind that you don't know what made her smile in the first place!

But the bottom line is that you cannot do much to make it go this way or that way... you can only make the most of the moment. And we, as humans, are not used to doing that.

It takes a village to raise a child. It really does.

The Invisible Club

May 21, 2004

There are many things in life that need to be experienced; there is just no substitute for them. Parenthood is one such thing.

There was a time when hiccups in my child would make me nervous. Now I know better. In fact, the last 3 months (yes, that's all it's been) have offered more learnings in parenthood than the rest of my life ! As a result, every thing is now just a wee bit different... in ways I'd never even imagined...

I now understand the sentiment that parents go through when their child gets kidnapped for ransom (earlier they were just ransom movies)... I now feel more sympathy for child beggars on the streets... I am now able to get a better understanding of how a human being would put his life secondary to that of another human being's - a parent would do *any thing* for his child...

I am better able to relate to children now. And they, in turn, seem to like me a little more these days ! And, even as I try and prepare myself for the "month 4" and "month 5" phases of my little one, I find other people - new parents - looking to *me* for advice.

It seems I am now a part of an invisible club - "The Parents' Club". And it's unbelievable !

Taken For Granted

July 11, 2004

We take so much for granted in Life. Good health, sound mind, able senses... the list is endless.

A close friend's wife delivered a baby boy nearly a month ago. He was born 2 months premature and weighed just over 1 kg! The boy has spent the last entire month in the neonatal ICU of a hospital. For days at end, his own parents could not even hold him in their arms. Even his food intake was through a drip, until very recently. Of course, every one says: "*The boy will grow up to be a brave spirit.*"

As much as I try, I cannot even begin to imagine what that must feel like for the parents. My own 5-month old daughter - Khushi - developed a cold and a cough this weekend. And we were both worried sick. To tell you the truth, it wasn't a bad bout at all. But, as a parent, you feel so helpless watching a 5-month old react to the congestion in her throat, not knowing what to do. She doesn't even know what a cough is (*this is her first time!*).

It's the same when she goes for her vaccinations. Any parent will tell you that babies don't enjoy getting a big fat prick in their arms every 6 weeks or so. My daughter is no different. Any other day, she is beaming with a smile at the drop of a hat ! But the day of her vaccines (and the day after that), she is just not her self. She just sits there, looking glum, not reacting at all to the usual distractions and entertainment. And that feels awful.

These experiences are all new for me. Children are so vulnerable. And, so dependent on their parents for the smallest of things. And there's only so much that we, as adults, can effect. Ask a parent and you'll know what I mean.

As for my friend, things are beginning to settle down, and chances are his boy will be sent home soon. Thank God.

Her First Christmas

December 25, 2004

This time, last year, was a time of anticipation and anxiety. The baby was due in Feb, and we didn't know what it would be like to be "parents". But it's been a year since then, and the not-yet-born is now a 10-month-old. And she is revelling in her first experience of Christmas.

Last night, we decorated the house with a Christmas tree, stockings and twinkling lights. When Khushi woke up for her midnight feed, she was so taken-in by the transformation of her familiar surroundings that she simply stood in the room (yes, she can stand now!) with her mouth open... for 10 minutes! And then she just broke into a smile. And, would not stop smiling for a long time after that.

From her point of view, it must have seemed like the sensory equivalent of a triple sundae, don't you think? It must be such a fantastic feeling to discover something new and wonderful for the first time!

We are just getting ready to leave for the traditional Christmas Lunch at my in-laws'. Later today, we will take Khushi to meet Santa Claus at the local mall...

This weekend is going to be a merry one!

Sweet Sixteen

June 16, 2005

mama / papa / dadi (grandmother) / grandpa / grandma / uncle / aunty /
bhaiyya (brother) / didi (sister) / mary / wesley / reshma / katie / mandy /
mandira / mother mary / baby jesus / khushi /

green / blue / orange / red / yellow /

one / two / three / yes / no / hi / me / open / stuck / up / down / dip / please /
this /

teeth / eyes / ear / nose / hand / toes / head /

zebra / rhino / haathi (elephant) / doggie / meow / pig / penguin / monkey /
cow / lion / tiger / rabbit / tortoise / raccoon / bear / duck / fish / peacock /
pigeon / crow / chicken / squirrel / bow wow / moo / kaw kaw / coo koo /

papaya / banana / apple / strawberry / pineapple / grapes / unda (egg) /
chocolate / bread / rice / aloo (potato) / tomato / dudi (gourd) / pumpkin /
curd (yoghurt) / coffee / chai (tea) / green peas / cheese /

helicopter / car / motorbike / cycle / auto / aeroplane / truck / school bus / bus
/ bike /

doll / takiya (pillow) / ball / chaader (bedsheet) / shoes / socks / hairband /
clip / potty seat / spoon / dudu (milk) / baby / bed / chair / pillow / flower /
tree / bath / ok / wow /

keyboard / phone / tv / radio / music / book / paper / watch / ring / comb /
soap / shampoo / clock / perfume / powder / light / fan / remote / door /
cupboard / fridge / bath tub / pen / drawing / button / pocket / pant / cd /
bottle / dabba (container) / cap / hot / cold / tablet / calcium / children / pooh
/ cartoon / mickey mouse / photo /

coming / go away / another day / wants to play / susu (piss) / potty / out /
garden / rain / water / going / chapati bhaji (food) / keep it here / happy
journey / put it back / polly put the kettle on / coming / no touch / good girl /
sit down / touch / how are you / fine thank you / baby bear / mama duck /
thank you /

Khushi - my daughter - is all of 16 months old, and already speaks over 200 words !
Isn't she something ?!

Her Secret Life

March 12, 2006

When I was still single, and did not know much about kids, I used to abhor the idea of parents making their children "perform" in front of others, just to show-off what they were capable of doing at a young age. Especially since (in India, at least), most such acts consisted of sub-standard Hindi film songs being sung or danced in front of elders by an innocent four-year-old. Silently, I vowed that when I had a child of my own, I wouldn't make him/her do that.

I have a two-year-old now (Khushi), and I have stuck to the promise I made myself. Thanks to influences from her near and dear ones, though, she knows a tune or two from the bollywood repertoire. And, she's not afraid to break into a song, whenever she feels like it. But I have never, as a parent, made her "perform" for the entertainment of others.

It's not like we don't revel in her explorations. As parents, we thoroughly enjoy Khushi's attempts at making us aware of her new learnings, be it a new poem or a tidbit from a song! And, we always encourage her when she gets something right, motivating her to go and learn even more. But, the most fun we have is when she weaves up an entire conversation (yes, both sides of the dialogue!), complete with her own brand of logic, without any help from *any one!*

Khushi is quite an extrovert, even if she takes a few minutes to warm up to new people. But, for all her outgoing nature, there is a side of her that no one else knows of, including the ones she's most comfortable with. No one, except her mama and papa, that is. The thing is that she has a complete range of dialogues and emotions and what-have-you, inside of her, which she does not share with any one except her parents!

When she's with the two of us, she is so completely uninhibited... so secure... that she will talk about whatever is going on in her little mind.

It's almost like she lives a *secret life*. One, for the two of us, and one for the rest of the world.

Top Of The World

May 2, 2006

There are a few things that bring me as much peace and calm as watching a sunset. Even better when it is done from high on a terrace (in India, the top-most floor of an apartment building). The feeling is that of being away from the rest of the world and, at the same time, being one with nature...

There was a time, back in my college days, when we used to steal precious moments from our hectic lives to visit a friend who lived far away from the city's center, just to experience the joy of climbing onto the water-tank of his terrace and watch the sun fade into the horizon. (Mr. Saxena, I hope you're reading this!) At the time, it seemed like our escapes to the terrace provided the much-needed respite from the trials and tribulations of our frenetic lives. Now, I know how carefree that life really was, compared to now.

Yesterday, when I decided to take my little angel - Khushi - for a walk in the garden, I could not have imagined that it would turn out to be such a memorable experience. As if on a hunch, I asked her if she'd like to go to the terrace instead. Always wanting to try out something new, she replied with a resounding "yes"! (This, when she didn't even *know* what a "terrace" was)

So off we went, to the building terrace, half-expecting the door to be locked (as is the practice in many buildings, these days). But the door was *not* locked. And, we soon found ourselves enjoying the cool evening breeze and the wide open sky. I looked around and quickly spotted a water-tank with steps leading to its top, offering a platform that would allow the both of us to perch even higher! Somewhat precariously, I hoisted her onto my shoulders and began climbing the narrow steps... and soon.. *we were on top of the world!!!*

There, we settled onto the platform, watching the sun set in the evening sky... the birds above us, the earth below... the breeze blowing in our hair, almost like it was cajoling us to take flight.

My daughter and I just sat there... watching the sunset... being in the moment.

The evening did not last more than half an hour, but its memory will last me a lifetime.

It was, and will continue to be, one of the most cherished experiences of my life!

Off To School

June 18, 2006

Mark Twain had once remarked: "Never let your schooling interfere with your education". As much as I believed in it and had entertained the thought of schooling my child all on my own, it was only practical that we considered some formal schooling process to ensure that our child learns the basics in an environment that would go on to become the society she will inhabit in the future.

The date was 15th June 2006. It was the day my little angel - Khushi - would first experience going to school.

We'd debated and discussed the subject, as parents, for many months preceding that day : What's the right age for a child to be put into school? What kind of a playschool should it be? A really fancy (read: expensive) one or a nice homely type? How will she adjust? She already knows so much and talks so well - Will she go there and regress?! She doesn't fight like other kids - Will she be able to manage on her own? Questions, questions and more questions...

My wife did all the digging-up of the various options, what they offer, how much they charge, etc. And, we finally settled on a homely type - *Little Stars* - not too far from where we live. The scheduled start was mid-June, and we assumed it would be a Monday. Sonali (my wife) even scheduled her Training program to start later that week, but life had other plans for us.

The school called : "Please bring Khushi to school on 15th June at 11.15 a.m."

It was a Wednesday, and Sonali was scheduled to be in a Training program! It fell upon me to do the needful. I didn't think it would be a big deal, but as the day grew closer, I started getting butterflies in my stomach... Is she ready for this? Are we ready for this? What if it rains heavily that day? Do we have a raincoat? We don't have a waterproof bag! Questions, questions and more questions...

Aunty Natasha sent her a raincoat just a few days before the school commenced. I bought her a (waterproof) new school bag, in time for the big event. Sonali got it all ready, with the essentials packed in. I told my boss I would be in late - "personal work". And, on the morning of 15th, I drove her to school.

A couple of days earlier, she had developed a bit of a flu. The otherwise cheerful child was not quite her self, on the first day of her schooling. But, we would try to make the most of it. On the way, I coached her as best as possible: Have fun. Don't get scared if other children cry. Don't talk too much if you're coughing a lot. Grandma will come and pick you up. Ok?

And, off we went to *Little Stars*...

She liked the inviting billboard that announced the location of the playschool. "The star is laughing!", she said! This was good. She was taking it pretty well. (I always knew she would!) There was utter chaos outside the playschool. A lot of anxious parents trying to do what it takes... some filling in forms, some consoling crying children, while others were giving/taking instructions of some sort. They were all moms, except for me! I said to myself, "I'll do the form-filling later".

I looked at Khushi and asked her if she's all set to go to her new school. She said, yes, and was craning to get a glimpse of the activity behind the entrance door. So I gave her a big kiss and a hug, and sent her off inside.

Life would never be the same again.

It Could Happen To You

August 29, 2006

I was attending a meeting at work, when mom called.

The playschool van had come to pick up Khushi at the appointed time. But there were no other kids in it! And, the girl who helps the teacher at school, the one who usually comes in the van to escort the kids, was not there either!

That was not all. The empty van was seen only by the maid - she's the one who walks Khushi down to the building entrance when the van comes. So, she actually sent her off in the van ... in spite of this situation.

(Thank God, she had the sense to come up and tell mom about it!
But then, *it got worse!*)

Mom panicked on hearing about the situation. She immediately tried to contact the teacher to school, to verify if all was ok. But the number was not reachable! Thinking on her feet, she sent-off the maid to the school - it was a 10-minute walk - to confirm if Khushi had reached...

Finally... the maid called from the school ...

I'd seen it many times, in movies. I'd read about it in novels too. But, I never thought it would happen to *me*. Until today.

I cannot describe how *many* thoughts raced through my mind in that 4-minute phone conversation with mom, while she was narrating all this to me... Of kidnapped kids and evil men... little children getting lost at malls and airports ... all the movies I'd ever seen on that subject flashed before me in an instant.

This was not happening. Not to me. The wife was out of town too. What would I tell her when she returned? Where would we find our daughter? In what state? Even if I leave office now, it'll take an hour to get there. Shit! Why did my office have to be so far away from home...

For a moment, I lost the ability to think clearly... Until I heard those words :
"Khushi was well."

Needless to say, I called up the teacher and gave her a good piece of my mind. She was profusely apologetic and swore that it would never happen again. In any case, I wouldn't let it.

I hope you *never* have an experience like this, as long as you're alive.

The Greatest Race on Earth

January 27, 2007

The date was 21 January 2007. The event? The Mumbai Marathon.

The buzz in the city was noticeable... Emails from office colleagues and friends communicating their participation. Newspapers brimming with official route details, traffic diversions in place, history of the marathon, and what have you... *Every* body seemed to be gearing up for the Big Race...

Now, I've never been a big fan of the marathon, or any race, for that matter. Even watching it is an unappealing proposition for me, let alone the thought of participating in it! But, 21 January was different.

It was the day my little daughter's playschool was going to have *its* Annual Sports Day!

Khushi - my almost-three-year-old - had been training for almost a week. The official communication had said that she was in the "Red" team, which meant that we had to buy her a red t-shirt for the big day. The school was serious about all this stuff. It even designated a day for parents to come by and get their t-shirt purchases *approved!*

Every day, Khushi would come back from school and want to make some household event or the other into a full-fledged race. It all had to begin with, "On your marks, Get Set, Go"!

The day of the Big Race finally arrived. It was a Sunday, and all the lazy parents had to ensure that they and their little ones are at the track by 9.45 sharp. Needless to say, we were all very excited. Even her *dadi* (grandmother) who usually does not venture out of the house on any occasion, chose to make an exception, that day.

We took our seats in time - right up in the first row! Armed with a camcorder in one hand, and a digital camera in the other, I was ready to capture every moment of it.

All the eager parents watched with bated breath as their toddlers participated in one colourful event after another. The Red, Blue, Yellow and Green teams turned out to be more-or-less matched in their heights and age.

Khushi - and the Red team - took part in two races : 1. Match the Colours, and 2. Match the Shapes. The basic idea was to be given a shape/colour at the start line, run the length of the (25 m) track, find the matching shape/colour, and run to the judges to register your victory!

As it turned out, Khushi came third in both the races she participated in! In fact, she came second... in both. She just didn't get the concept of running to the judges after completing the match, so she delayed that part a little.

Anyway, who cares if she came second or third... our little Khushi actually won the first two races she ever participated in!!! As parents, we couldn't be happier.

Looking at all the news coverage of the Marathon, the next morning, I was only glad that my priorities were clear. The Greatest Race on Earth, that morning, was the one in *our neighbourhood*.

Three's Company

May 29, 2007

Summer was here. The days were already hot and humid; It would be sweltering in Goa. But we decided to pack our bags and head there, anyway.

Most people who know us cannot imagine why we go to Goa *every year*... sometimes more than once a year! But we do. And, we keep going back, each year.

This time, it was a particularly special set of circumstances: Our holiday in March had to be cancelled at the last minute. We had not even gone on a vacation last October, and had decided to stay at home during Diwali. So, a vacation was way overdue, especially considering the next time Khushi's playschool shuts would only be six months from now. Plus, this would probably be the last vacation in a long, long time with just the *three* of us!

By November, if all goes well, there would be an addition to the family - a brother or sister to keep Khushi company.

As much as I try to make time for the family, most of my time on any given week day, is spent at work or commuting to and from work. That's why, holidays like this - even if they're just a weekend getaway - offer a much-needed opportunity to spend quality time with the wife and the little one.

Six days of non-stop action with a three-and-something-year-old spirited child can add up to quite a bit of excitement! Then, there was the pool, the beach, the scooter we'd hired, the daily trips to CCD for a big fat chocolate pastry and the endless supply of prawn curry rice and chicken xacuti. Sure, there were a few occasions when a child's obstinate behaviour can nearly make you tear your hair out. But, the best part was the time we got to spend as a *threesome*.

On the whole, it was a wonderful experience to spend every waking moment with Khushi and bond with her as a father. Not to mention, the chance to spend time with the wife, away from the hustle and bustle of work and home.

The next time we go for a holiday, it may not be just a crowd of three...

Parting Notes

For a long time, I deliberated on whether or not I should throw my life open to the public, through this book. Eventually, I decided that the joy of being a parent is something that *deserves* to be shared with others. And, that it would be *selfish* to keep it all within me.

I only hope you've enjoyed reading it, as much I have enjoyed writing it.

If this book has meant any thing to you, or you have any other comment to share, do send me an email. I'd love to hear from you.

If you would like to continue reading more, you can do so online at www.NaveenBachwani.com/dad/.

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About the Book

Sometime in 2003, when my wife conceived our first child, I found myself writing blog posts on my experiences as a father. Today, having documented many of the milestones traversed, I thought it would be a good idea to share some of those experiences with other newbie, or wannabe, parents.

This book reproduces many of my blog posts on the subject of "fatherhood", in a book-friendly format. It traces the journey of my experiences as a parent, from my first child's birth to the time she reached about three years of age.

About the Author



Naveen Bachwani is an active blogger, and writes extensively on Life, Technology and Fatherhood.

He graduated in Geology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai and then went on to pursue an MBA in Marketing from the University of Mumbai. He has had the opportunity to work in various industries and domains, ranging from e-Business and Corporate Communications to Business Development and Six Sigma.

He presently lives in Mumbai with his wife, Sonali, and his two children, Khushi and Kabir.

You can read more of his writing on www.NaveenBachwani.com