

Choosing Naia: a Family's Journey

By Mitchell Zuckoff

Beacon Press

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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Thayer Public Library, Braintree, MA

Massachusetts
Honor Book
2003



SUMMARY:

Greg and Tierney Fairchild, a young bi-racial couple, have all of the hope, joy, and fear of expectant parents when they arrive at the doctor's office for their first ultrasound. But when the results of the ultrasound and subsequent tests reveal that the fetus has Down Syndrome as well as a heart abnormality, their lives are forever changed. They have three weeks to decide whether or not to abort their fetus before it is 24 weeks old.

The Fairchilds begin to research what life holds for a child with Down Syndrome and if they can handle the responsibilities. They seek out support from their families, consult with medical experts, and speak to other families with Down Syndrome children. Ultimately, they decide to continue with the birth of their child and to name her Naia, which means both "decide" and "purpose" in Swahili.

In *Choosing Naia*, Zuckoff reports on the Fairchild's decision making process, the medical problems that Naia endures as an infant, and her growth during her first years. He also includes background material on the history of the medical and social issues of Down Syndrome, prenatal testing, and genome mapping. More than a story of one family's trial, this book delves into the implications of medical advances in prenatal testing and of raising a child who is different.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. With the introduction of television shows such as "Extreme Makeover," it seems as if our society today is obsessed with fixing imperfections. Will this attitude effect how we view our children? What is the "perfect baby"? What if we could change all babies into "perfect babies"?
2. What are the pros and cons of prenatal testing? Will advances in prenatal testing be better or worse for expectant parents? What are the ethical implications of prenatal testing?

3. Greg Fairchild, who is African American, worries that his child will experience discrimination. Have prejudices changed since Greg's childhood? Will Naia face more discrimination because of her skin color or her special needs?
4. What qualities do Greg and Tierney Fairchild have that will benefit Naia's care?
5. Greg and Tierney have a close relationship with each other and with their families. In what ways does the birth of Naia change the relationship between Greg and Tierney Fairchild, and between the couple and their families?
6. Greg and Tierney choose to face the challenges of raising a child with special needs. How do the Fairchilds inspire us?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Reprinted from <http://www.has.vcu.edu/mac/zuckoff-bio.pdf>

Mitchell Zuckoff is an award-winning special projects writer for The Boston Globe. He won the 2000 Distinguished Writing Award from the American Society of Newspaper Editors for his series, "Choosing Naia, A Family's Journey." That series was also honored by the National Down Syndrome Congress, the American Association on Mental Retardation, and several regional groups that work with the developmentally disabled.

Among his other national awards, Zuckoff won the Livingston Award for international reporting and the Heywood Broun Award for a series on unsavory US corporate practices in developing countries. As a member of the Globe's investigative Spotlight Team, he was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize for a series that revealed fraud and abuse in the state disability retirement system. He and his Spotlight teammates won the Associated Press Managing Editors Public Service Award for a series on Boston police corruption.

Zuckoff is an original member of the Brill's Content "All-Star Newspaper" team, a collection of what the magazine called "the best newspaper writers in the business." Zuckoff has been a visiting faculty member at the Poynter Institute for Journalism, and has served as a panelist at numerous writing conferences, including the National Writers' Workshop on narrative journalism.

Before joining the Globe in 1989, Zuckoff worked as a reporter with The Associated Press, States News Service, and the Bridgeport (Conn.) Post. He has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri, where he was an O.O. McIntyre Fellow. He lives outside Boston with his wife, Globe photographer Suzanne Kreiter, and their two daughters.

HELPFUL LINKS:

Useful books and websites in addition to those listed in the book:

Websites: Down's Syndrome Association <http://www.dsa-uk.com>
Down Syndrome on the Internet <http://www.downsyndrome.com>
Down Syndrome Information Network <http://www.downsyndrome.info>

The Story in Pictures: *Choosing Naia* <http://www.beacon.org/catalogs/f03/zuckoff.html>

Books: Hauser-Cram, Penny, et. al. Children with Disabilities: A Longitudinal Study of Child Development and Parent Well-Being. Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

Kidder, Cynthia. Common Threads: Celebrating Life with Down Syndrome. Rochester Hills, MI: Band of Angels, 2001.

Libal, Autumn. My Name is Not Slow: Youth with Mental Retardation. Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, Inc., 2004.

Wehmeyer, Michael L. and James R. Patton, eds. Mental Retardation in the 21st Century. Austin, TX: Pro-ED, 2000.



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