



Love & loss

A DIARY OF A MISCARRIAGE

Three years ago, when television journalist Miriama Kamo discovered she was pregnant, she started a diary. When she lost the baby, she kept the diary going. This is her story.

DIARY MIRIAMA KAMO PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER

MAY 18, 2009

I FOUND OUT about you yesterday. I went to the doctor to find out why my breasts were sore, and I was considering whether I should take antibiotics for an ongoing post-chest-infection cough. Now I'm worried the cough might have affected your health. I don't know if you'll ever read this. You seem a little unreal. Apparently you can neither hear nor see, you are the size of a sunflower seed. You won't be aware of much for some weeks, months even. But I'm aware of you now.

I feel like you're one day old, too small to be thought of as "needing" anything. But you're more likely to be about six weeks old, long past that "crucial" stage for needing the world's cleanest diet and most attentive mother. Apparently you're growing at a rate of knots, you're real!

And like your grandmother, the doctor yesterday kept insisting on things like scans and obstetricians and midwives. I kept sniggering and then apologising. Eventually I said, "I'm sorry, I feel like a silly teenage girl," and admitted that she might as well be talking to a woman in the waiting room for all the good it was doing me — I couldn't connect with what she was saying at all. I made the decision to listen to her in just that way. *Pretend she's talking about someone else that you care about, try to remember the details so you can help the pregnant lady after the session.*

It worked somewhat, though her final word was, "So, any more questions?" To which I answered, "Just one — are you sure?" The doctor reassured me that her opinion, her colleague's opinion, their combined background in obstetrics and the positive test result were all I needed to be sure. I resolved to buy two more test kits after we left.

I'm quite excited about you, but I'm worried I'll kill you somehow. Let's face it: I don't have the healthiest body. I just choked on a cough as I wrote that. Man, I'm hungry. I've been so hungry this week. So you must be in there... I'm still not convinced. Yesterday I ate two hardboiled eggs and half a pack of sultana pasties for breakfast. Some would say that's more proof of pregnancy than the word of two obstetric doctors and a positive test.

I'm not big on the idea of waiting for three months to tell people about you — I've never seen the point. Those who wait for three months must have an excruciating job of keeping quiet. I think — tell people you're pregnant, and then tell people if you lose it! I'd rather have three months of talking and discussing and chewing over all the interesting/exciting/scary details than persist in silence and then lose everything — the baby, the news, the story, the connection with others. What's to hide?

Having said that, we've only told my family and your dad's family, and a few select friends. The first one your dad told was his hairdresser. I told Lani. Just the night before Lani came over for dinner. We chinwagged about all sorts, including my desire to go overseas for a six-month sabbatical. "There's nothing stopping me," I said, "I don't have a baby, so why not!" We both agreed that it would be a good idea and that your father would be okay, as long as I came back. So, the very next day, it made sense that I should call Lani and exclaim, "Um, I think the trip's off."

MAY 30

APPARENTLY YOU'RE THE size of a grain of rice with a poppyseed heart. Funny how we compare fetus size to food. We don't do that after you're born — yes, she's the size of a watermelon with a pumpkin head and a passionfruit heart. Doesn't quite work that way.

Funny thing happened. Just a day after I found out about you a women's mag hit the stands. Some weeks earlier I agreed to do an article about endometriosis, [but] it came out as a sorry story about my supposed infertility. The cover read, "Fertility Bombshell, TV star Miriama tells, 'Surrogacy is an option.'" The inside story talked about how I didn't know if I could have children, but that your aunties had agreed to be surrogates. Sigh... we spent the week fielding sympathetic calls and texts from friends wanting to tell us how sorry they were. My workmates were apparently a bit stunned that I'd go public with my fertility issues. Well, there you were all along, making fools of us all.

I wonder who you'll look like. I like the Dreaver eyes. They're finely shaped — your father [Mike Dreaver] and Sam [his son, Miriama's stepson] have the same

eyes. Hopefully, you'll have a flatter Kamo nose. We'll find out what you're cooking up in there at some point, I suppose. Mostly I just want you, in whatever shape you come; a round fleshy baby with a delicious baby smell. Hmm, I think I just worked out why we compare babies to food.

9.44pm: I've just finished work. Just before I went into the studio I went to the toilet and found a touch of blood. Halfway through the bulletin I felt as if I might start getting my period. It was very hard to concentrate. Unfortunately, at the same time, the cameras started to play up. At one point two out of our three cameras were down. It was a pretty traumatic bulletin all round.

I hope you're sticking around. We really don't want to lose you. I can almost smell you. But it's so early, and the pressure is pretty intense. If you decide not to stay, please don't let it be late in the pregnancy — I'm getting so attached to you, it'd only make it more painful. I love you already.

JUNE 1

I REMINDED YOUR father today, it's only been two weeks since we found out about you but it feels like a lifetime. In that time I've imagined you, lost you, miscarried you, given birth to you, and been at your 21st. You've been hit by a car, terribly burned by boiling water after your father left the pot-handle poking out, and been fitted with a prosthetic limb. You've worn a gorgeous dress with your sandy blonde hair in pigtails and lips pouting, holding my hand as we've shown off to

I feel a bit of a failure. How is it that heroin-addicted mothers can give birth but I can't carry a baby beyond eight weeks?

passersby. And there you are in your jeans and running shoes, trying to keep up with Sam as he teaches you, his younger brother, how to play basketball.

I refuse to let your father read this diary. Every time I think he might see it I yell, "Don't read this!" while typing. He asked just now, "Are you writing to our baby?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I love you."

JUNE 2

I'M LYING ON my bed. I'm waiting to find out what's going to happen. This morning I went to school (Te Ataarangi, where I've been learning immersion Maori). I told Jessie [not her real name] about you. She's pregnant too — about the same number of weeks. Straight after telling her the news I went to the toilet and passed quite a lot of blood. I felt numb and went back to class. I texted your dad. I said, "I'm bleeding honey, better pick me up at lunch. I'm so sorry." And just to be sure he wouldn't think it was insignificant bleeding, I texted, "Lots of blood."

I tried to act normal so my classmates wouldn't know I could be about to lose you among them all. Your father texted, "Want me to come now?" I said yes. When he arrived I pretended he'd come to pick me up for a meeting I'd forgotten about. We went straight to the doctor. She warned us to expect the worst. Then she did a check and said that given the cervix was still closed she couldn't verify that I was about to miscarry. She told us what would happen with the miscarriage, what we needed to be prepared for. Then she sent us home to wait.

There is a ray of hope; that I may be part of the minority who bleed throughout pregnancy. I'm so

hopeful but feel ready for the worst all at once. I keep prodding my breasts to see how sore they are — I'm worried that they're not as sore as they should be.

So, here I am — waiting and hoping you won't leave me.

JUNE 3

7AM. I GUESS your dad and I are now expecting you to leave. I've had no cramping yet but the blood is continuing. I woke up at 3am and my breasts weren't sore at all. Weirdly, my cough improved dramatically yesterday. The *Mismatch* book by Peter Gluckman seems to suggest this might be the result of a mother not healthy enough to support a baby. The body aborts the baby to improve the mother's health. If the mum dies, so too does the baby, so the body recognises that crucial support is needed to heal the mother first. So, is that what's happening?

I feel a bit undecided about all this. On the one hand, I'm so disappointed. On the other, I don't want you at any cost. I feel so pleased to have known you this long, but I also feel a bit of a failure. How is it that heroin-addicted mothers can give birth but I can't carry a baby beyond eight weeks?

And I'm scared. I don't want to go through the pain and cramping of a miscarriage. I don't want to watch you slowly, excruciatingly, slip out of me into a toilet bowl, to be flushed away — it seems so wrong. I suppose I'm still hoping we'll defy them all — somehow.

6.11pm: So, from around 10am I felt you leave me. It's likely you died quite some time ago — or perhaps

weren't ever really there at all. I am bleeding heavily, though not freely. I have cried twice already. I've spoken to friends. Belinda found out she's having a girl today. Anna told me she'd had two miscarriages. It seems so random. Now, I have to worry about complete evacuation of my uterus and when to try again — if we try again.

I'm a bit cold. My lower back is sore, a sort of dragging sensation. Anna says that's the feeling you get with labour. My breasts are hurting again. And I can't help but hope for a miracle — somehow you'll still be there. But intellectually I know that's not likely — at all. And thank you for leaving me early instead of later — it's painful enough as it is without the added familiarity and investment a month or so more would've wrought. You were so loved in the short time you were here. xx

We did kapa haka at school today. I enjoyed for the last time my pouting stomach, at the same time feeling the pain, the futility of hoping you'd stay. After school I came home, lay on the bed, held my stomach and wailed. It was the cleanest keening I could've imagined — just wailing your loss, feeling the cramps pulling you away from my uterus.

I understood why the wail of a kuia at a tangi is so clean and useful. I cried for about 10 minutes, wondering at one point if anyone walking by might hear me and wonder what was going on. Then I stopped, stood up and made a cup of tea. I did some bits and pieces, rang a couple of friends. Then I cried again.

I rang my mother and said "Mum..." with that upward lilt that a confused and hurt child uses. "I lost my baby."

She said, "Oh, darling," and as a mother does she talked to me, comforted me, and then we rang off. I

PREGNANCY

was alone to deal, as an adult, with that childish sense of having had my feelings badly hurt by someone mean. *My baby died and I don't know why.* I sent an email to the family:

Kia ora all, bit of bad news. The baby has decided not to stick around. I think you've all been given a heads-up, so hopefully this email comes as no surprise to everyone. (Couldn't face making all the phonecalls.) Mike and I are pretty down, but I'm grateful we found out so early — to be honest it's one of the best experiences I've had. Obviously I'd have loved to have had a baby at the end of it, but as Kyla says, at least I know now I want to have kids one day, and as Mum said, at least now I know I can get actually pregnant. So, out of a pretty awful ending, there's a couple of good messages come out of it. Not too keen to discuss it at any length for the next few days as it can take a week or so to physically get through the process. But I know you're all thinking of us, and sending love and whatnot. xx

JUNE 18

FOR ABOUT A week, I cried easily. I cried when I imagined how uncomfortable people might be around me, how they might try to be brave for me, how I'd never get to hold you, how keenly I felt and smelt you but knew you were gone, how the family might feel for me and about our lost baby. In fact, I couldn't talk to any of them.

which made me cry. Thank god it was a gentle and surmountable cry, not one of those gushing dams of grief. Nonetheless it made Bee cry for me. Hormones are powerful.

We spoke about it at length that night. I told her I was worried she wouldn't want to celebrate her baby around me in case it appeared insensitive, and that I was concerned my situation might scare her into thinking she was vulnerable to a similar fate. And yes, both scenarios were pressing on her. Talking it through soothed both our concerns.

The politics of pregnancy. It is the greatest, most-invested dance any woman engages in. I haven't told many women about the miscarriage, and I only told Jessie at school when she questioned me. I didn't want my pain to intrude on her good feelings. I didn't want pity and I didn't want her to feel scared around me. Or to feel awkward about her burgeoning stomach when mine was deflating ever so slowly every day.

As the days went by I realised this was something I had to face. Other women's beautiful bumps.

I am jealous.

There, I said it. I am jealous and wishful and wanting. I want a baby bump — I want to elegantly dress my stomach, watch it grow with every organ, every strand of hair, every finger, hand and arm. I want to show off how I can carry another human being inside of me and bring it to life.

JULY 3

I PICKED UP Joan Didion tonight, *The Year of Magical Thinking*. I never read a book twice, but tonight it occurred to me that this is a book I should look at again. In the space of an hour I'd reread nearly a third of it. I lay in the bath, angry at Mike about an argument we'd had, and drowned myself in Didion's grief for her dead husband.

Didion says, "The power of grief to derange the mind has in fact been exhaustively noted," and then goes on to cite many medical and literary references. I begin to wonder — am I pathologically, addictively grief-stricken? She cites one study which has sufferers reporting a choking feeling, or a constant "sighing". Yes, and yes.

She quotes a study which says "research to date has shown that, like many other stressors, grief frequently leads to changes in the endocrine, immune, autonomic nervous, and cardiovascular systems; all of these are fundamentally influenced by brain function and neurotransmitters".

Could this explain my persistent niggles and ill-health — is this why I have endometriosis? Is that why I lost you?

Sadly, my theories only lead to a most unattractive diagnosis which, if I am to accept Didion's notes, must be "pernicious derangement". But, it could explain why, when I cried for you, I did it with uncharacteristic ease, "cleanly" — I was so well prepared that when I actually had something to grieve for, I did it beautifully.

I got my period, it started on Saturday — today is Monday (nearly Tuesday). As I write about you and grief, my womb is twisted into typical endometriosis-laden spasms. The cramps send fingers down into my legs, seeping toward my knees. I was kind of hoping to avoid that on this period. Conventional medical wisdom



has it that pregnancy improves endometriosis. I was only pregnant for eight weeks, but you can't blame a girl for hoping.

Actually, despite this, I was girlishly happy to get this period. On Friday I was curled up in bed crying after arguing with Mike, contemplating packing my bags and moving to Spain to live a lonely nomadic life, floating through pastoral and city scenes, conducting brief love affairs and dispensing hard-won wisdom before mysteriously disappearing; like a Maori Grasshopper.

This winsome self-pity did have me wondering, just briefly, whether my period might be on its way. It'd

been nearly a month since I stopped bleeding you, but I suppose I wasn't sure what to expect as to the next period. And so, further proof is here that you're gone, but it's not such a bad thing. Firstly, it explained my desolate desperation on Friday, but secondly, it meant life had resumed. You no longer would be the stuff of fluff and wonder, I could try for you again.

To be honest, right now, though, as I sit on the toilet in my ash-rose Farmers dressing gown, the laptop balanced on my knees, breathing through the cramps, the wind, and the reluctant bowel, that girlish feeling has long deserted me. Right now (in fact *right now*), I am simply in pain.

JULY 7

I HAVE BECOME the infertile stereotype. Suddenly, everywhere I see pregnant women, and babies and children abound. The pharmacist was opening a box of Elevit yesterday as I went to ask about thermometers. I cried when Ellie from *Ice Age 3* gave birth to her little mammoth. I stare at little girls and imagine what mine would've looked like, hair in blonde bunches or curled in brunette swirls. There were three pregnant women working on my bulletin on the weekend, and I imagined I was the fourth.

I know about this behaviour, I've read about it, interviewed women about it. I've never been it. Until now. Now I understand the "urge", the "ticking clock". Suddenly there is literature springing out from all corners, usually involving my exact age — from the age of 35 fertility starts to fall off. From "age 35 to 50, there is a 75 per cent reduction in production of progesterone in the body. Estrogen, during the same period, only declines about 35 per cent" (*Diet Guidelines for Estrogen Dominance*). Everything is telling me to try for a baby now, now, now.

But I can't shake that persistent nagging worry — what if I just can't? What if I get pregnant over and over, but am doomed to a life of loss after loss? Mike says, "... and so, you just will, that'll be that." As if determining the future in this way is some sort of comfort.

induce this, but I wailed when I was watching *Outrageous Fortune* — seeing a baby-sized coffin brought back to me that hopeless sense of loss. The grief was instantaneous — I watched just a little and then threw my head back and wailed. In my head I could hear my own voice crying out *my baby*, and echoing deep into the dark voids and wormholes of the universe. *My baby, I've lost you.*

OCTOBER 7

I WAS FEELING bleak at the notion that I may have had yet another miscarriage. I went to see Linda, one of our doctors around the corner, and she gave me some pregnancy tests. I took them but said that I was unlikely to do them.

I made the decision not to that night. Why would I want to know? Who wants to confirm that they've just had another miscarriage? Having said that, I have to confess, that just the thought of it was bleak enough. I spent quite some days afterwards with a weighty heart. Not so heavy as to feel upset or depressed, but enough to register a fear — that maybe I might not ever sustain a pregnancy.

When you don't try you can tell yourself you're not pregnant because you don't want to be. When you get pregnant without trying you can tell yourself that it was never your decision, it was a happy one made by the baby. When you lose that pregnancy you can tell

yourself you were never trying in the first place so it's not like you failed, you can do it again.

But when you lose a second pregnancy, there aren't too many excuses you can give yourself. Fact is, you lost another pregnancy. Truth be told, you might just be a bit useless at this pregnancy thing.

Recently your father and I went out to dinner. We were talking about you and about the possibility that I lost another baby. He said, "I still have the message." I didn't know what he was talking about. He held up his phone, scrolled briefly while saying, "I keep all text messages that really mean something to me, that are really important."

He flipped the screen around. It read, "I'm bleeding honey, I'm so sorry, better come..."

I didn't read the rest, I blanched. It was a shock, but at the same time, one of the most loving gestures he'd ever made.

He kept that message as a homage to you and me, because we matter to him more than anything. In that moment it was clear to me that I didn't lose you on my own. You were his as well, and his grief had been, and was, as real as mine.

NOVEMBER 19

GOT MY PERIOD, it's a bit early, I suspect it could be yet another early miscarriage as I had some back pain a day or so back that felt like the dragging pain of the first miscarriage. So possibly miscarriage number three. Am I getting addicted to the notion of having miscarriages? Not worth thinking too much about it really...

DECEMBER 9

RECENTLY I WAS at Belinda's and we chatted as she breastfed Poppy. At some point the conversation shifted



to you and that you would've been due in January. "Are you going to do anything to mark it?" Bee asked. "I don't know," I said. "What do you do to mark something like this? On the one hand I think it's a nice idea. On the other, I don't want to dedicate a whole month to something so sad. Maybe it's better just to move on."

And that's the thing. I feel January encroaching, and I don't know what to do with it. While both my sisters-in-law will be preparing for the imminent births of their babies, I could well be mourning mine. Is that what I want? And, in any case, how do I mark it?

I guess some might go to the place they lost their baby and mark it in some way. Well, that would require me to go back to my immersion school and flush some flowers down the loo. Not particularly auspicious.

Or I could plant a tree at home. Perhaps that's the thing. I've spent the last two days really enjoying something I normally hate, gardening. Perhaps that's the thing, to plant something for you.

JANUARY 14, 2010

Dear Ms Kamo,

I understand that you are travelling to Europe later this year and would be interested in some sort of role at our station during our summer.

I have a DVD of yours and your CV. I suggest we have a talk about the various possibilities and what might be suitable. Obviously the time difference is a complication. Perhaps you could drop me a mail letting me know when it's convenient to contact you.

Regards, Ewen...

Technically this is very exciting news, and were I not so practised at squashing down joy I'd likely feel excited about it. Instead I feel patient and expectant. Mike keeps prodding me and saying,

"Are you excited?" But alas no, I won't feel like that until I'm on the plane with a freshly issued visa.

FEBRUARY 6

IDID NOTHING to observe you not arriving. Except think of you a lot. Catherine and Agnes are due soon. Catherine will deliver Emmanuel by caesarian section on Thursday, and Agnes is due a month later, I think. I have found the best way to deal with the awkward notion that I would've liked to have been cradling you right now as my sisters-in-law discuss their own burgeoning bellies is not to think of you too much at those times.

I haven't felt jealous or angry or resentful. How can I, when I am about to be in receipt of two new family members whom I will adore unreservedly? I just feel slightly awkward. I think of the times where I was happily discussing your arrival with the family, before either sister-in-law was pregnant, and I feel a bit embarrassed or even slightly ashamed to have felt so much happiness.

Gawd, that is so sad I feel like crying — not about the loss of you but the realisation that I equate unabashed happiness with embarrassment or shame... as if I was ridiculous for ever thinking that I should feel such anticipation.

I did describe the loss of you to Mike last week as like being a child who is surprised and happy to be handed an ice cream by an adult, only to have it grumpily grabbed back and made to feel as if I "should've known" the ice cream was mistakenly given to me, that I "nearly tricked" them, and actually "it was for those other children"!

I must've felt this way sometimes as a child because the feeling is familiar to me. I can imagine that I would've sat down and smoothed my skirt over my knees with a mixture of hurt pride and loss on my face, but desperately trying to hide it, and inside I would've been crumbling and humiliated.

Aha, that is the feeling I have about not being pregnant, and not having a baby, while around my sisters-in-law. I feel humiliated. What a shame.

Your father and I aren't speaking right now. Some silly small issue. We're both tapping away. I'm slightly bothered by the notion that he knows I'm writing to you and will decide that our spat is the result of my feeling vulnerable about you right now. Which I don't think it is. I've just been feeling such irritation and even occasional rage at times. Not sure why. Could be you. Could be all sorts of things. xxx

MAY 9, 2011 (15 months later)

IT'S THE DAY after Mother's Day. I had such a lovely day yesterday. It was the first day of the 3rd trimester. So, we're on our way. I am so invested in you. I wonder about what I could do to damage you, it's on my mind a lot, but not so infused with terror or anxiety.

I hope you're healthy. I hope you have no illnesses, diseases or unnecessary challenges. I hope you can start with a clean slate, and that any challenges that do arise are of your own making, and therefore can be learned from.

I hope nothing I do, or others can do, create barriers to your success and to your happiness in life. I hope you will be more evolved and confident than me. I hope you're my greatest creation, and your own proudest and mindful self.

I hope you're everything that you hope, and will ever hope, to be. I love you, and I can't wait to hold you. See you in three months, Mama. xxxxx

MIRIAM KAMO GAVE BIRTH TO A DAUGHTER, TE REREHUA-HINEHAKA XAVIER KAMO-DREAGER, IN AUGUST 2011. MIRIAM IS A PRESENTER FOR TVNZ AND HOSTS THE CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMME SUNDAY ON ONE, SUNDAYS AT 7.30PM. THIS STORY IS COMPRISED ENTIRELY OF EXCERPTS FROM HER DIARY.

It was clear to me that I didn't lose you on my own. You were Mike's as well, and his grief had been, and was, as real as mine.

JULY 22

YESTERDAY MIKE AND I went to Richard Fisher's [Fertility Associates clinic] to get the results of my tests, and for me to get a smear.

Tests came back normalish. I'm in the 25th percentile of women who are of fertile years, which means if you had a hundred 35-year-old women in a room, 25 of us would be taken away and told we were in the bottom group of fertile women. I'd be the captain of the team though.

Mike, glass half-full, says I could actually be at the bottom of the next most fertile group of 25, ie, the 74th most-fertile woman of that 100, rather than the 75th most fertile... make sense? Not really, eh.

SEPTEMBER 29

THERE ARE TIMES where I think of you, and wish you were still coming to me in January. It will be a hard month. I was just watching *Outrageous Fortune*, the episode where Cheryl and Wayne Judd lose their baby. He named it Tama-o-toku-manawa, boy, or son, of my heart, and struggled to hold it together while he spoke to the family about the name. I had named you. You were going to be Xaviour Hinehaka Kamo-Dreaver.

I suppose I had decided you'd be a girl, even if I did give you a boy's first name. Your father wasn't convinced about the name, he said it was too close to Xaviera something-or-other, a famous author who was either a prostitute or wrote a book about it.

But your name meant something to me. Xaviour — mainly because I've always loved it. I think I stole it from a man I went on a date with once, years ago, who told me it was one of his favourite names, and Hinehaka for your ancestor.

It might seem a bit pathetic that a TV show could