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The Pregnancy Glow and Other Myths of Motherhood

By Barbara A. Eastom Bates

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It happened during the ninth month of my first pregnancy. I was going through a department store check-out lane where a teenage girl was ringing up my purchases. She looked shyly at my burgeoning belly with an expression that could only be described as reverent.

With eyes full of dreams of future motherhood she asked, "Is pregnancy really as bad as everyone says?"

Without the slightest guilt, I replied, "No. It's worse."

The Deception

When my husband and I announced the birth of our blessed expectation some months prior, along with endless congratulations, I received the good news of the many wonderful changes I could expect.

"You'll positively glow."

"Your hair and nails will look fabulous."

"You'll feel absolutely beautiful."

According to family and friends, as a gestating woman, I would feel nothing short of a precious vessel, glowing with health and radiance given only to those experiencing the miracle of growing a child.

About a week later, wearing the pallor of death, I was running away from the smell of my husband's lunchtime tuna fish sandwich knowing I'd never been so violently ill my entire life.

The Reality

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Although it's rumored there are actually women who sail through pregnancy untouched by any ills or discomfort, I was not one of them. If I'd ever experienced a pregnancy glow, I'm certain I could only have been radioactive.

I was told to expect a little morning sickness. I didn't anticipate 24/7 progesterone poisoning, body aches, or never ending fatigue. And in all the happy tales of pregnancy recounted to me, I'm certain I'd have remembered hearing if pure, unadulterated misery were mentioned as a symptom of gestation.

Sitting in my obstetrician's office near the end of the first trimester, she asked how I was feeling. "Sick."

"Good." She replied.

Seeing my defeated look, she offered a small respite. "You'll start to feel better after week 12 or 13."

I crossed the days off my calendar waiting for magical week 13. It came and went. My never ending nausea did not. I was sick, tired, and sick of being both.

I'd been told how sharing a child together would make my marital relationship more intimate. I, on the other hand, hated my husband. No matter he and I had joyfully consented to make this child together, or that he worried and did the best he could to make me feel more comfortable. Somewhere in the back of my mind, as I watched him lie peacefully asleep at night while I was awake fending off nausea, all I could think was, "this is your fault."

And so it went for the entire duration of nine months. I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt, if I ever survived this go-round on the pregnancy rollercoaster, there would be no more children in my future, ever. Motherhood just wasn't all that it was cracked up to be.

The Grand Debut

Jacob Lyle arrived in early fall that year, bearing 10 perfect fingers and toes, a head full of brown hair and big blue eyes. He was bruised and battered from birth, yet, to my eyes, perfection unlike the world had ever seen before.

Suddenly, my entire life made sense. At 23-years old, I wasn't yet sure what I wanted to be when I grew up, or what my future held outside of being a wife to my husband. With the arrival of Jacob, I knew exactly why I was here—to be the mother of this beautiful child. Having Jacob filled my life with a sense of awe and wonder I had never known. I was a mother, and that was enough.

Altered Expectations

While I had expected sleepless nights with my newborn, what I hadn't expected was how much I would enjoy them. I gladly gave up sleep to have the chance just to hold my tiny son in my arms and look at his sweet face.

I expected life to change. I never expected the very foundations of my world to be rocked. It came as a

total shock that the simple act of becoming a mother—wasn't simple.

Previous to motherhood, tragedy in the world was sad. After the birth of my son, it was heart-wrenching. No longer could I watch a movie or read a news report depicting harm to a child without emotion. Every child became my child. What if it were Jacob who was sick? What if it were Jacob who was injured?

Issues I'd previously given no thought suddenly became of substantial importance. Was there truly a difference between breastfeeding and formula feeding? Should we circumcise? If I vaccinated my child, he could have a serious adverse reaction. If I chose not to vaccinate, he could become very ill.

I became an information addict and read every book on childcare I could get my hands on and spent endless hours researching my concerns and second guessing my decisions. The rest of my waking hours were spent staring at Jacob as he slept, assuring myself he was still breathing and would only continue to do so thorough my conscious willing of it. Fortunately, he survived my new mother paranoia and came out relatively unscathed— or at least, I will assume so until I'm presented with a bill for

therapy.

Personal Truths

I had gone into motherhood with the words of many fostering my belief I'd have a baby, but life would eventually go back to normal again by the magical six-week check-up (at which point I'd also have lost all my baby weight). What I didn't know when I gave birth was normal was gone forever, along with any peace of mind, my figure, and any hope of a good night's sleep, but that I'd never trade a moment of my new life to have it back again.

Motherhood, I've come to find, is a journey rather than a destination. And while we may endeavor to share experiences with a new mom-to-be, the truths of motherhood remain personal and hers alone to find. The only certainty is the journey is well worth traveling.

I only wish I could talk to that teenager one more time.

Barbara Eastom Bates is the author of the upcoming release, "Basic Training for Brides-to-Be," and editor-in-chief of Operation Military Spouse,

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Track Your Pregnancy Progress With A Pregnancy Calendar

By Derek Marsh

To help you manage the unbearable waiting times associated with your pregnancy, a pregnancy calendar can help track your progress as well as provide invaluable memories of your pregnancy. For 9

months, a mother-to-be watches her body transform from the shape she knows, to something that is a life support system for the baby growing inside her.

1. Keep Track Of Your Growth

Whether it is something that she can pin on the wall, or something that she has on a file on her computer, or even a website where she has a login-in that takes her direct to her page, the calendar will show at a glance how far she has left to go in her journey towards motherhood. Many of these daily pregnancy calendars will give tips on how to cope with the different pregnancy symptoms that occur during the different stages, such as heartburn, sleeplessness, and Braxton Hicks.

2. Online Calendars Are Available

The online daily pregnancy calendars give even more information. There are even illustrations of how the baby looks during each trimester. She can actually visualize the baby behind the bump and see her baby progress in her mind. It's also possible to purchase a daily pregnancy calendar book where each day you can journal about how you are feeling, any symptoms or check-ups you have, noting the cravings or weight gains, or even preserving the little things you want to say to the baby. Once complete this provides the new mother with a precious picture of the journey she took bringing her baby into the world.

3. Results For Your Doctor

There is a practical purpose behind a pregnancy calendar – if there are any complications with the pregnancy your doctor will have a complete picture of the development of you and your baby during this time and may be able to pinpoint the problem. For example, by recording your meals in the calendar the doctor may be able to link a specific allergen to the welfare of your baby and recommend the removal of that food item from your diet. Babies do not always have the same allergies as their parents.

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