

PREGNANCY NUMBER THREE:  
THE SECOND TRIMESTER

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As the end of my first trimester came and went, nausea and fatigue persisted. My hopes for the burst of energy that so many books predict for the second trimester were bludgeoned, but this time I was not exactly surprised, as I had missed out on this mid-pregnancy bliss while pregnant with Landon as well. At twenty-two weeks, my nausea finally began to subside, only to be quickly followed by a reoccurrence of the sometimes debilitating pelvic pain that had plagued my second pregnancy.

I re-visited the physical therapist with whom I had worked less than two years prior and began the same set of “pelvis stabilizing” exercises which I had been diligent about performing when I was last knocked up. (Don’t you just hate that term? Me too, but I couldn’t resist it here.)

I hoped that by being a good and responsible patient, I could get a jump start on an exercise routine that included therapeutic movements with names like “tail wags,” “supermans” and “hip hikes,” and stave off the worst of the pain that had been a source of great frustration and discomfort in my not-so-distant past. I hooked up with a trainer at the local gym who added exercises such as “wall angels” to my regimen, and I was hopeful that the remainder of this pregnancy would pass uneventfully.

But shortly after resuming the physical therapy program,

I was blindsided by a mid-pregnancy bout of prenatal depression and I became unable to properly look after Ellie and Landon. I stopped eating and drinking and gradually, day by day, slipped further into an emotional catatonia.

Although the majority of this period of my pregnancy quickly became a blur; memorialized in my mind are snapshots of crying spells, emotional and physical despondency while my children milled around me, casting anxious sideways glances in my direction; and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness that I could handle the challenge I was soon to face in simultaneously mothering three young children.

Despite the ghost-like images that float in and out of my recollection of this portion of the pregnancy, I distinctly recall the Thursday evening that Andrew returned home from work to find me silently weeping, crumpled awkwardly around my now protuberant belly into the corner of the living room couch. Ellie and Landon were partially dressed, searching the kitchen for the snack I had failed to prepare for them hours before.

“Honey, are you okay? What’s wrong?” I remember him asking, standing over me, blocking the sunlight from the south-facing windows of the room. I couldn’t answer. I couldn’t tell him why the kids’ hair hadn’t been brushed, why they were ravenous, and how long I’d been stuck there, pressed heavily against the cushions that now conformed to the outline of my tired body. Head buried in my hands, I just continued to cry.

“Come on. Let’s get you back to bed.” He lifted me from the couch, carrying my motionless weight back to our bedroom where I remained for the next thirty-six hours.

After getting Ellie and Landon settled into dinner, he returned to check on me. Sitting on the edge of the bed next to me, brushing the hair from my face, he took in whatever image of me he had left an hour before.

“What can I do to help?”

“I need my parents.”

I heard snippets of the phone calls that ensued—several to the students who were scheduled to attend class with me that evening, letting them know I was “sick, and unable to teach tonight,” and finally, to my mom and dad.

“Kimmelin’s not doing well....she needs you out here... how soon can you come?”

Traci and Meredith came the next day to look after Ellie and Landon, and me, while Andrew went to work for a few hours to tie up loose ends. During brief awakenings, I heard the din of dishes being washed, meals being prepared, and all five children, theirs and mine together, playing happily and rummaging through the toy box in the adjacent living room, accompanied by the hushed voices of their concerned mothers.

“Have you gone in to see her yet?”

“No, not yet.”

“When did this start? I had no idea.”

“I don’t know, he just called last night and said he needed us over here today.”

“When did Andrew say her parents are getting here?”

My mom and dad arrived the next day, and my mother, having arranged for a substitute teacher to take over her third grade classroom, would remain with me for another week while I recovered.



After my experience with postpartum depression following Landon's birth, I had not yet weaned myself of the antidepressant medication prior to my third pregnancy. As I began to worry about the potential affects of Zoloft on the baby, I made a guilt-induced executive decision to take myself off the medication. Because I made this change without telling my doctor or Andrew, neither of them fully understood my sudden emotional demise until I confessed to having gone off the medication the month before.

During my appointment with her the following week, my doctor questioned if I was still taking the medicine.

"No," I whispered, unable to look her or Andrew in the face.

"Why did you stop taking it?" she carefully inquired.

"I didn't want to hurt the baby." Even amidst my private rejection of the pregnancy, I had clung to a thread of devotion to the life forming within me.

"How long has she been off it?" my doctor asked Andrew.

"I didn't know she was off it either," he answered, the two of them now talking as if I wasn't in the room. The anger in his voice betrayed his demeanor of concern.

"Will you start taking it again?" the doctor probed, launching into an argument for my resumption of the antidepressant. "When you're in this kind of state, the baby's not healthy either, and you can't take care of the kids you've got at home."

"I know," I murmured. I was made to promise I would resume the medication, taking it faithfully from that day

forward. “But what’ll it do to the baby?” I struggled.

“We can’t worry about that right now. We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. You were on such a low dose anyway...there’s probably not too much to worry about. Right now we just need to get you back on your feet.”

Andrew’s silence was palpable and I dreaded the discussion awaiting me on the car ride back home. He was hurt that I hadn’t consulted him before discontinuing the medication; that I hadn’t trusted him enough to let him in on the gradual demise I had set myself up for.

Although I was acutely aware of the signs and symptoms of postpartum depression, as well as how prevalent it was in our society (current statistics place it at 10-20 percent of the population), I did not anticipate a similar occurrence during pregnancy. I would later come to understand that the incidence of prenatal depression is equivalent to that of postpartum depression. The difficulty in diagnosing and treating prenatal depression, as with its postpartum counterpart, is in admitting the problem exists in the first place. Most people who suffer from depression, pregnancy-related or not, will tell you they find it extremely challenging to discern their depression while in the thick of it. Whether it is a matter of skewed perception or of successfully disguising their symptoms to the point that they don’t even see it themselves, depression can creep up on even the most informed individuals, as it did me.

I can’t help but believe the overbearing doubt I began to feel as this pregnancy progressed, about what life with three children four and under would be like—and the effect it would have on me as an individual—had much

more to do with the depression than the discontinuation of medicine. Struggling with the assumption that pregnancy is supposed to be a joyful time and that I of all people, being a Childbirth Educator, ought *to adore* the process of pregnancy, made my self perception hideous. I began to feel like a fraud and a monster.

In the end, the journey of dipping into a prenatal depression, re-medicating myself, and recovering was a six week ordeal. The relatively short duration of this nightmare made me lucky. My vain hope that things could only improve from that point forward, however, did nothing but set me up for a greater fall.

While experiencing Braxton Hicks contractions from early on in pregnancy was not abnormal for me, one afternoon I began to notice contractions occurring every two minutes, which lasted for several hours. I was only twenty-six weeks pregnant at the time. Despite following the advice I would offer my own students of resting, drinking plenty of fluids, and emptying my bladder often, the premature labor signs persisted. I knew if I went into full-blown labor at that point and delivered the baby, it would not survive.

After we had gotten Ellie and Landon into bed, I cautiously approached Andrew.

“Honey, I don’t want to scare you or anything—but I need to tell you that I’m contracting a lot today. A lot more than I have been, or should be, at this point in the pregnancy. I think I might need to go in and get checked out.”

The last thing I wanted to do was create another emergency for our family to deal with. But I couldn’t deny what was happening, with the knowledge I possessed.

After a telephone conversation with the on-call doctor, and ultimately being examined by him at the labor and delivery unit at our local hospital, I was placed on “modified bed rest” for the next ten weeks to quell the pre-term contractions that threatened to turn into pre-term labor. All I could think at the time was: *yeah, right*. Imagining my attempt at staying off my feet except for meals and bathroom privileges while my three-and-a-half-year-old and twenty-month-old children ran wild through the house, battling with each other, and threatening to tattoo the walls with a contraband Sharpie pen was enough to knock me senseless with laughter.

But such were the doctor’s orders, and so Andrew and I were forced to ask our parents for a significant sum of money to help pay for the full-time, in-home nanny who would care for our children while I sat around on my rapidly-expanding ass, hoping to keep our baby from being born dangerously early. It was a humbling experience.

At the same time I had to enlist the help of a colleague of mine to take the reins of my fledgling childbirth education program, in order to avoid shutting down the business all together.

Recognizing that things were amiss within our household, family members and friends encircled Andrew and me during the ensuing weeks, and sustained us through the thickness of such a hard time. Even as I battled the turbulence within me, I was loved over and over again by a large circle of women. Before we could get a nanny in place, mothers who had their own children to care for showed up at my home on a rotating schedule to tend to Ellie and

Landon, wash our dishes, and bring us dinners. This joint effort was largely coordinated by our priest, Valerie, with whom I would sometimes refuse to pray in my embittered state. The extension of support was further supplemented by my own mother, as well as Andrew's.

One sunny, early summer afternoon, my friend Betsy, who would later become a godparent to the child within my womb, along with her husband Matt, brought lunch to me at my home. Accompanied by two other young mothers from our church, over tomato soup, French bread and Milano cookies, the women bore witness to the confusing amalgam of anger and love that boiled within me, assuring me that not only would I be alright in the end, but that the baby I carried would survive this difficult passage of time unscathed. The love these women shared with me and my family struck at the barricade of my bitterness again and again until it finally began to crumble.



As a record-breaking, hot Montana summer wore on, I became more pregnant, irritable, and pent-up due to the bullshit bed rest I was supposed to be abiding by. Even with Cara, our nanny, on board, I was still summoned to intervene in the occasional squabble between Ellie and Landon, and the frequent soiling of the carpet Ellie, who was otherwise completely potty-trained, had begun to perform in rebellion of the new stress thrust upon our family.

With days now turning into weeks, I alternated between my bed, the couch, my rocking chair, and a chaise lounge on the front porch of our home, watching neighbors on our

cul-de-sac pack up for family camping trips and cross-country vacations. The sight of our khaki-colored walls and PB&J-camouflaging Berber carpet started to sicken me. I watched weeds take over my yard and noticed dust collecting on our double jogging stroller. I became an observer in my own household as Cara assumed responsibility for our children from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, allowing me to rest and keep the baby inside me for two more months, avoiding the perils that came along with a pre-term delivery.

Occasionally, I would hear Ellie refer to Cara as “Mommy” while playing house, and my heart broke for the joy of knowing my little girl was so fond of her caretaker, and for the agony of not being the one to whom she was referring.

Having made it through a long winter and no spring at all (typical seasonal patterns for this part of the country), my plans for daily outings to the park and other fun, summertime activities with my kids were put on hold. While Andrew occasionally got out on his bike, I sat on the couch reading or working on an obligatory Christmas stocking for the new baby (I had created home-made stockings for Ellie and Landon in the years prior). For variety, I would boot up my laptop computer, spending hours surfing the internet and writing journal entries that would become the seeds of this book. While Andrew drank beer, I sipped water or decaf Early Grey tea. As he worked in the yard, I sulked, napped, or offered bossy gardening suggestions from my post on the front porch.

I couldn’t help it; I was bitter about the unfairness of it all. Why did I have to be the one to sacrifice so much

for the sake of growing a family? Why wasn't there some way for the burden to be shared equally? Why, indeed. Contemplating this type of question and expecting to come up with a reasonable answer, however, was about as helpful as thrusting a hot poker into my eye, and so I became resigned to the fact that I would miss out on the majority of another summer.

I remained so loyal to the anger within me that even when Mother Valerie paid me several visits over the course of those weeks, I freely confessed to her my anger with God, believing He had let me down in allowing these series of pregnancy-related circumstances to unfold. Although never before having believed in a vengeful God, the thought occurred to me more than once: was I paying for the hateful prayers I had uttered earlier on in my pregnancy?



Bumping along an unpaved road on my way into town for a doctor's appointment, now less than two months from my due date, I enjoyed the liberating drive past miles of farm and grazing land. My frequent visits to the doctor represented a small reprieve for me from the confines of my in-home imprisonment. I passed a herd of cattle and spotted the all-too-familiar sight of a male cow mounting the back side of his female counterpart. As a lover of nature, this kind of thing normally would not faze me in any way. But as a bitter, uncomfortable, pregnant woman, the site of one cow potentially impregnating another pissed me off beyond belief.

"Yeah, just take what you think is yours!" I shouted out

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the window to the bull as I sped by, leaving a trail of dust in my wake.

As fate would have it, the very next day I witnessed a similar scene between two ducks near a drainage ditch. I was equally fit to be tied. If I could have been a fly on the wall of my own vehicle, I might have admitted myself to the funny farm for the pure embarrassment of damning a bull or mallard for such natural behavior. I'm sure, however, I am not the only woman who has wanted to spit fire at anything or anyone with a penis while uncomfortably pregnant. At least I can laugh about it now.