

Diary of a Pregnancy

By Sasha Sanders

THE FIRST TRIMESTER

OCT 21: Four months into a six month sabbatical, we arrive in London from New York and stay at friends in East Finchley.

OCT 29 – NOV 5: We go to the Costa Del Sol in Spain. Although we are unaware of it, it is in one of these two places that our first baby is conceived.

NOV 5: We return to London from Spain and stay with friends in Stockwell. It is around this time that Jane starts complaining of nausea.

NOV 7: Jane has an unexpected emotional outburst, causing us to fight and arousing my suspicion that she may be pregnant. Did I mention she has been complaining of sore breasts?

NOV 7 – 9: After each meal I ask Jane if she is nauseous. If she is, I have a private little happy moment. Also, her period is due and with each late day I become more hopeful. I experience a very short bout of manic depression when, after a meal, she says she is not nauseous, then immediately tells me her period still hasn't arrived.

NOV 9: We sketch these details out to our friend Mary, who happens to have a pregnancy test lying around, much as one would a thermometer, or Panado, or

cubes of chicken stock. The test is positive: there are two lines, not one, which means Jane is pregnant.

NOV 10: We announce our news to the general public, or immediate family.

NOV 13: We leave for Israel, a holiday the end of which cannot come soon enough, and during which Jane has several moments, of varying degree, intensity and duration, of unexpected and sudden emotion or tearfulness.

NOV 18: Jane and I make love for the first time since we found out she is pregnant. Immediately after, Jane goes to the toilet and sees that she has bled a little. I suggest it has something to do with intercourse, but she suspects the worst. Both of us anxious, concerned and mildly neurotic, we spend the next two days in a state of low drama, bringing my 60 year old cousin (who we are staying with) into the cast for something like support, which she does very well.

NOV 20: We see a gynaecologist who is from, of all places, Welkom. He asks us if the bleeding was “adjacent to intercourse”, conjuring up a picture in my mind of me and Jane lying in the missionary position, with a little blood lying in bed next to us under the duvet. I am tempted to clarify that it was after, not adjacent, but Jane and I are both too reassured to be smart-arses. I nudge her and she nudges me. The gynaecologist from Welkom does an ultrasound and shows us a tiny white stripe which he says is probably less than 3 weeks old, prompting speculation on my part that the baby was conceived in Spain, not

London. (New York, which was in the running, is now, unfortunately, disregarded as a possibility. I am of the opinion that both New York and Spain are far more romantic than London. Besides, if we go the naming route that the Beckhams did, both Brooklyn - after Brooklyn - and even Costa - after the Costa Del Sol - are better than Finchley or, god forbid, Stockwell.) Taken from the start of her last period, Jane is about 6 weeks pregnant. We set off for Jerusalem for, among other things, another small bout of emotional unpredictability.

NOV 24: We leave Israel and return to London. Over the last few days the nausea – previously a source of excitement, affirmation and even amusement – has become much worse, coming more often and staying for longer. Although Jane has yet to physically throw up, I should sympathise: my idea of hell would be to exist in a constant state of nausea. At any rate, travel has become less enjoyable.

NOV 25: Jane and I have a big argument. She is more angry and tearful than I have seen her in years, but when I suggest the pregnancy hormones have something to do with her emotion, I am told to take her seriously and not to invalidate her emotions by blaming the pregnancy. I am confused: it has always been okay to place some blame on PMS. At any rate, we have great make-up sex. For the record, there is no “adjacent” bleeding.

DEC 1: Because some days Jane is almost fine and other days she is horribly ill, and so that I can gauge and appreciate how she is feeling at any particular

time, we start a scale by which she can rate her nausea: 1 is feeling pretty good, almost okay. 5 is disgustingly wretched and wretched. Today she is 3.5, but after we eat it goes down to 3.

DEC 12: The cravings have started. Jane is making repeated mention of toasted bacon and egg sandwiches and – of all things – steak and kidney pie. The thought of kidney makes me want to throw up, although probably only 1 or 2 on the nauseometer. I am also encouraged by a conversation last night with my brother-in-law, a father of two, who says that women develop not just cravings for food, but also a rampant sexual appetite, especially late in pregnancy. Although I know that all women and all pregnancies are different, after a month of horrible nausea during which even a kiss good night is a rarity, the prospect of sex is rather pleasant.

THE SECOND TRIMESTER

JAN 8: Back home in Cape Town, the cravings have continued although their focus has now shifted onto liquids. Specifically, Spar Letta Sparberry or, as a second choice, Cream Soda. Stoney Ginger Beer also makes an occasional appearance in our fridge. Unfortunately, the nausea has also continued unabated. We try to console ourselves with the opinion that the worse the nausea, the healthier the baby, which we probably read somewhere but quite possibly made up. Baby literature is overwhelmingly available and alarmingly

alarming. One of the most famous and successful pregnancy books is more like a medical textbook, and causes Jane to believe that her foetus has not developed and is merely a sort of liquidy sludge inside her tummy. One of the symptoms is a stomach that feels like putty, which she is convinced applies to her. I reply that a putty-like stomach could mean anything and plead with her to put the book down. It is the first and last time the book is consulted.

JAN 13: We have our second scan. This one, unlike the unexpected one in Israel, is scheduled and is rather more enlightening. Completely unexpectedly, the kid is recognisably human in form and is thrashing about like a gymnast. Arms and legs all over the place, the thing won't stay still. We are delirious with excitement and wonder. The doctor gives us a crash course in biology as she measures here and there, checks for this and that, but all we hear is "fine", "fine", "normal" and "good". She also confirms dates which make it likely the child was conceived in London, not New York or Spain. So, not a fairy tale beginning after all. It seems we will not do as the Beckhams did and name the child after the place it was conceived. Also, we do not find out what it is, much to the displeasure of Jane's sister in the United States, who insists she needs to know for shopping purposes.

FEB 7: Jane phones me in a shock, saying she has realised why her nipples have been sore: they have quadrupled in size. This is somewhat disproportionate to her breasts, which are only two to three times larger.

FEB 11: Jane has become increasingly, alarmingly forgetful. This is worrying, considering the regularity with which she used to lose her keys even before she was pregnant. Now her cell phone is a regular victim of misplacement, as are larger items, such as the car. Keeping this diary strikes me as a futile attempt to convince myself that things are normal.

FEB 13: The night before Valentine's day, it hits me with undeniable force and clarity: Jane and I have somehow, slowly, subtly, and unbeknown to us, had our brains swapped. Previously a ruthlessly insistent romantic, she confesses she is totally disinterested in Valentine's Day. Meanwhile I, normally a reluctant observer of this annual event, have bought her chocolates and a massage. Also, I can barely keep my eyes open after 10pm or sleep later than 8am (all my life I have been a night owl and a late riser). Jane, for the first time in her life, is going to sleep later than me and struggling to get up in the morning. This pattern does not bode well for when the baby is born.

MAR 1: One day Jane is told "you're so small!" The next day, literally, she is told how huge she is. The transition from possibly fat to unmistakably pregnant seems to happen almost overnight. We realise quickly that, as with cures for morning sickness, every person you meet has a different theory about how Jane is carrying and what it means. We also realise quickly that they are all convinced they are right. By contrast, we experience none of that certainty.

MAR 21: Just when I thought there was a lull in the excitement and changes. My sleep patterns desperately want to return to normal, but Jane is having none of it. She is unable to sleep through a night, and if she can't sleep, dammit, neither will I. If she isn't flushing the toilet at all hours of the night she is tossing and turning, or reading, or holding me after one of many bizarre and vivid dreams. Apparently, her body is preparing her for the sleepless nights to come when the baby is born. Also, apparently, this normally only happens in the last month. It seems mother nature is kindly giving us some extra warning.

APR 4: Mood swings? Can someone tell me where the swing part is? Jane only has one mood, and that is bad. I am told it gets worse before it gets better. God help me.

THE THIRD TRIMESTER

APR 15: We are a few weeks into antenatal classes when the midwife shows us a video of a natural birth. It is surprisingly calm and quiet, and I don't feel at all queasy. When the placenta is shown, looking something like a giant raw steak, and we are told some parents like to eat it, that is when I feel queasy.

APR 22: In our next antenatal class we see a video of a Caesarean section birth. Contrary to all our expectations, it looks far more gruesome and messy than the natural birth. But this is only one of many things we are forced to

change our thinking about during the course of these classes. Another is breastfeeding: the midwife tells us that the World Health Organisation recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and some breastfeeding for at least two years. There is an eerie silence in the room.

APR 30: We spend a weekend away with my sister and brother in law and their two children, as well as another couple and their child. We are the childless couple, but it is still exhausting. I ask the others if they ever get used to parenthood. The answer is quick, decisive and unanimous: no. Knowingly wet behind the ears, I mention that I cannot understand how it can be possible for the mother of a newborn not to find five minutes to make herself a cup of tea. I am told that I will understand soon. We are now into the last trimester and after a lull during the middle months, we are getting excited again. But mostly what we are getting is scared.

MAY 7: We venture out to look at prams. The shop is filled with mothers who look as if they are in a supermarket: not only do they know where everything is, they also know *what* everything is. We, on the other hand, feel like it's the first day at a new school. As for the prams, we are more confused than when we arrived. The only thing we are more enlightened about is that this pram is going to cost us a lot of money. Possibly up to R5000, if we believe that nothing is too good for our little toddler. And it doesn't stop at prams. Clearly, parents are an absolute gold mine for marketers. Especially attractive are first time parents who don't know any better. Like us.

MAY 10: Pregnancy is not all bad. I have gotten lucky the last four nights in a row – at no insistence of my own, I might add. It does not matter that these urges tend to come on at 3 or 4 in the morning. I am suffering from the 7 month itch. Fortunately, so is Jane. Besides, sleep patterns have long ceased to have any pattern.

MAY 23: Have I mentioned how absent-minded Jane is? Tonight we went out for dinner at 8. We came home at 11 to find the bathroom tap running.

JUNE 1: It seems that getting lucky four nights in a row was, indeed, lucky. There has been very little action to speak of since then. I have to confess, though, that my wife is not all to blame. My libido has also gone AWOL. Apparently many husbands experience and exhibit some empathic pregnancy symptoms. In my case, reduced sexual appetite but heightened gastronomic appetite. Along with cravings comes a little extra weight. If I push my stomach out far enough I almost look pregnant, too.

JUNE 15: 36 weeks. The baby is 2.7 kg. We still don't know what it is. Our gynae says it is very rare for first babies to come early, but all we are hearing is stories of first babies that came two or three weeks before the due date. I have a gut feeling the baby is coming early, but my gut has been wrong before. Actually, it is usually wrong.

JUNE 26: Two and a half weeks until our due date. I am not nervous. We are both excited. The last few months of pregnancy have been the best for Jane, who seems to have enjoyed it more as it has gone on. Having said that, she wants the baby to come now. Enough heartburn. Enough Braxton Hicks contractions. Enough of not being able to sleep comfortably. Enough of going to the toilet for a few drops.

JULY 4: It's 11:30am when Jane phones me at work. She thinks her waters may possibly have broken. If you ask me, a gush of liquid that left a puddle on the floor is not "possibly", it is definitely. This is a funny thing about labour: women seem not to trust all the classic signs – backache, period pains, litres of liquid running down their legs. She tells me to relax but I still nearly have 2 accidents on the way home. Nothing much happens until about 9pm, and once it does happen it is quick – too quick for any drugs, apart from a bit of gas. Our daughter is born at 20 minutes to midnight. I can't help thinking of Stevie Wonder's song about his own daughter – "Isn't She Lovely" – and I am not able to listen to it now without shedding a tear of joy.