

PORTRAITS OF
Pregnancy

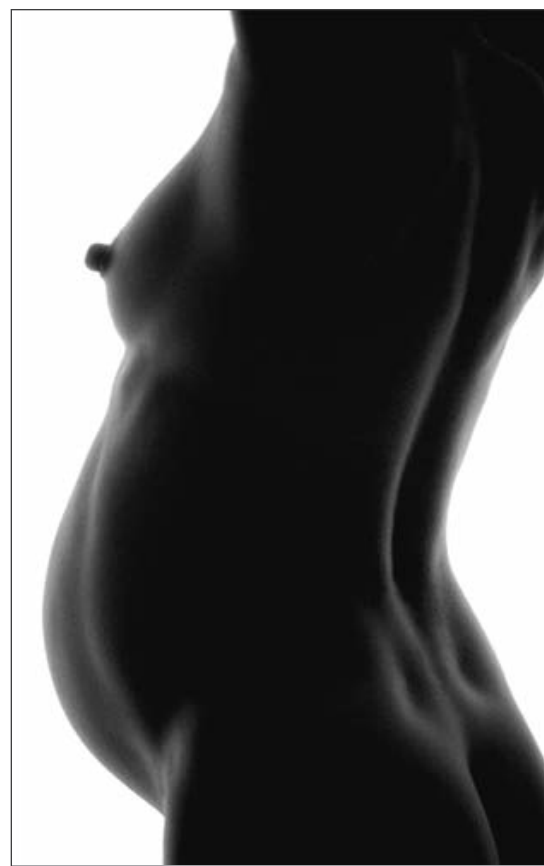
THE BIRTH OF A MOTHER



JENNIFER LOOMIS
and Hugo Kugiya



INTRODUCTION



*I*N 1992, AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-FOUR, I WALKED INTO ONE OF MY first photography classes with my old Pentax slung over my arm, and with no idea that photography was going to become my passion, my life, and my business. As I looked around, I noticed I was the only woman in the room.

The subject of the class was female nudes. As the teacher started to talk, a model posed against a black backdrop. With a single light providing shadow and contrast, she did a backbend then slowly moved into different poses. Amazed by the simple beauty, I couldn't take enough photos; I kept going, seeing only the shape of her, marveling at

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the simplicity of her form. I had goose bumps. It reminded me of the feeling I had when I first saw the Mapplethorpe images of Lisa (the female bodybuilder), the same images that I had been painting for the past few months. When I became aware of my surroundings again, I realized my classmates weren't feeling my enthusiasm. They were snapping the occasional shot, but I thought they seemed kind of bored.

The class took a break and when we resumed the black backdrop was gone, replaced by a chair on a stark, gray stage. Seated backward in the chair was my once-beautiful model, now dressed in ripped fishnet stockings, a garter belt and a corset. What's going on here? I thought, horrified. A glance at the syllabus quickly explained that the focus of the second half of the class was boudoir photography. I heard a noise and looked up to see nine male photographers in a frenzy, their camera's motor drives feverishly trying to keep up with their fingers. It was at this moment that my life changed. I realized there weren't enough women photographing women, as I comprehended the fundamental difference between those men and myself in how we viewed women's bodies. I went home and called all my female friends and asked them to pose for me. Thank God they said yes.

Every now and then, I am mystified by my success, incredulous that my full-time job is photographing pregnant women and their families. Because right after that revelation years ago, I, a motivated and industrious girl, did numerous informational interviews with professional photographers in the San Francisco Bay area asking them how to get started photographing nudes of women and subsequently pregnant women. Not one of them encouraged me. The only advice offered was, "No one is going to pay you to photograph them nude, and certainly not nude and pregnant. You should go back to school and study photojournalism. Then at least when you get out, you can get a real job working for a newspaper." I thought, "Yeah, you're right. Silly idea."

So I got my master's in Photojournalism from the University of Missouri. It was great. I used my camera to connect with people and tell stories that changed lives. I worked for several papers in the Midwest. I went to Japan and focused on the aging populations in nursing homes. I moved to Kenya and covered East Africa for CARE and numerous editorial publications. I traveled throughout Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania photographing women who were starting small businesses, HIV-positive prostitutes who were rebuilding their lives, and the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. My camera changed their lives, it changed the lives of my viewers and it changed me. I found a deep level of compassion, and I connected with my burning desire to make a positive impact on this world. I was happy, making a difference and eking out a living—albeit barely. Plus, I was still photographing nudes of women and pregnant women in my spare time. Then MSNBC.com asked me to join its multi-media team in Seattle and help build the website's visual offerings. It was a cutting-edge job, and I accepted the offer. But after three years working in Redmond Washington, I wasn't photographing as much as I had hoped. So I decided to give it up and start my own business. It was something I had always wanted to do. I got the confidence boost I needed to quit when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation hired me in October 2001, for my first big contract. My plan was to start a business telling stories on the web for non-profit organizations, using audio, editorial photos and video. So I refinanced my mortgage, borrowing \$14,000 against my house. I gave my notice at MSNBC.com on September 7, 2001—four days before September 11.

Like so many industries, my small business suffered after that day. For the next six months, my office was a quiet place. No constantly ringing phones, no hum of machines, no busy assistants sprinting around the studio. I had a lot of free time to think about ways to grow my business and, more urgently, pay my mortgage. I had always loved maternity photography, so I thought it would be a great idea to

do some of this while waiting for the big non-profit contracts to start up again.

I found there were no photographers doing this kind of work, or at least advertising this kind of work, in Seattle. At that point in 2001, there were also few pregnant women in advertisements or on magazine covers. So with no particular budget, I embarked on what I called my guerilla marketing project, putting up some of my beautiful photographs of pregnant women in places pregnant women frequent, figuring they would want to have those types of photographs taken of themselves. I was right. That once-quiet phone started ringing. But wasn't this work supposed to generate only part-time income?

To give a boost to my documentary business, I once again embarked on informational interviews, meeting with a videographer at NBC, who asked me, "hey, don't you photograph nudes of pregnant women?" Stunned that he knew about this, I said, "Yes, but please don't tell anyone." I didn't want any of my editorial or nonprofit clients to know, thinking it would be bad for business.

"I think this is a great Mother's Day story," the videographer told me. "Will you let me pitch it?" Reluctantly, I agreed and the story aired. Little did I realize, a baby boom was under way. And September 11 had brought focus back to the family for many Americans. My phone rang off the hook after that story aired and my new business, Jennifer Loomis Photography, changed its priority to maternity and family photography as the demand left me no time to photograph for my other clients.

Feel Beautiful

When I took that leap and went out on my own, I didn't consider the impact I would have on this genre of photography. I have now been capturing pregnant women on

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as beautiful.*

film full time for the past eight years, and have no regrets about leaving daily journalism. Each time I create a photograph that captures the exquisiteness and spirit of a mom to-be I anticipate showing it to my client who will often say, almost surprised, “Wow, I look beautiful.” This alone makes the risk of going out on my own worth it.

Having struggled with an eating disorder as a teenager, finally overcoming it at age twenty-one against most statistics kept on the subject, I realized how losing control of your body, for any reason, can be both a terrifying and liberating experience, if you allow time to truly see yourself. I had a lot of compassion for the women who came into my studio struggling with their new curves. I began to realize that pregnancy photography could help women see their bodies in a new way—as beautiful. If they could feel that way when they were pregnant, no doubt they would be able to continue to see their unique beauty for the rest of their lives. The more women I photographed, the more I heard the same thing. “You made me feel so beautiful.”

My business motto and subsequently the name of this book, Portraits of Pregnancy, was not the product of extensive market research. It came from my mothers, six years ago, after hearing it over and over again in many different voices:

“You make me feel so beautiful.”

“ I feel like I am the most beautiful pregnant woman
you have ever photographed.”

“ I knew, if anyone could do it, you could make me
feel and look beautiful.”

“ I came to you because I want to feel beautiful.”

“ I have had a terrible time during this pregnancy and I wanted
for one day to feel beautiful”

*Pregnant women
were rendered invisible,
pregnancy something to be kept secret and private.
This attitude prevailed even as I
started my business.*

There are so many more. For all of them, the photography shaped how these women saw themselves when they were as big as they will ever be.

A personal and a societal shift

Women today are engaging issues of body image with increased confidence, fueling a greater curiosity about pregnancy and its power in the public realm. In the past five to ten years, there has been a distinct societal shift; pregnant women are now seen in magazines and advertisements and on TV. NBC anchorwoman Campbell Brown, plainly and unabashedly pregnant, conducts a serious interview on national television not hidden behind a desk, but standing, her bulging belly in full view. Moms-to-be feel empowered to wear tighter, more revealing clothes and to show off their changing figures. But this was not always so.

When my grandmother was pregnant, she told me, people used to cross the street when she approached so they wouldn't have to pass her on the sidewalk. Pregnant women were rendered invisible, pregnancy something to be kept secret and private. This attitude prevailed even as I started my business. The women who came to me didn't tell their friends or family because they were almost embarrassed they were having photos taken of their bodies.

It has always been my mission to bring the pregnant body directly into society's gaze. When I was selected as a premier photographer for a show in Seattle featuring Northwest artists, I enlarged four photographs of nude, pregnant women of different races and hung them in the window of the gallery. Then, I sat on the couch in the gallery, watching people walk by on the street.

Most walked past, then came back, stopped and stared into the window, marveling at the pregnant torsos. Most who stopped to look were men who wore looks of confusion: She's beautiful, but she's pregnant; that body is beautiful, but it is preg-

nant. I was excited. People were stopping and returning to look at my work. The photographs were changing the way they saw the pregnant body.

The taboo of public displays of pregnancy was perhaps first broken in the pop-culture realm by Annie Leibovitz, whose pioneering but controversial 1991 photograph of a very pregnant Demi Moore graced the cover of *Vanity Fair*. Conversation about pregnancy started to extend beyond doctors' offices and into living rooms as Oprah Winfrey and others began to look at the expectations and misconceptions surrounding this sometimes mystifying nine-month period.

Celebrities like Demi Moore, willing to step into the spotlight with their pregnant bellies, first fueled this widening of attitudes about pregnancy. But all pregnant women, famous or not, are continuing the process, walking proudly, sensuously, reflecting confidence and power. My job is to simply show them their own beauty. And they see it, sometimes, for the first time.

We form opinions of our bodies mostly subconsciously, often in an imperfect if not inhospitable climate, absorbing the messages we get from our parents, our peers and, of course, the media. Rewriting that code can be difficult and requires a safe and supportive environment, one that I have strived to help create.

It is my hope that this book will celebrate the beauty of the pregnant form as well as the incredible transformations that occurred within each woman we interviewed. It is my hope the images and stories will cause all pregnant women to appreciate their bodies in a new way, that they may be able to garner strength from the words of the women who have undergone the deep transformation to mother. I hope that the book will teach others too, like those men who stopped to look at my pictures through the window. This is only the beginning of a larger change, led by many of these women, in how our society perceives the pregnant body. For when a child is born, so is a mother.

*It was
Tonya's first pregnancy.
All her preparation
left her unprepared in this fictional copy
for the exhilaration
she experienced with her
pregnancy.*



OUR LIVES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FILLED WITH LOTS of excitement and adventure, and this pregnancy was our next great journey. This was our first baby and the pregnancy was such a joyous and celebratory time for us. We loved all the beautiful changes in my body and had so much fun and so many good laughs talking about all the newness and changes ahead.

– TONYA





*Sarah made the journey
alone
shored with only the support
of her young daughter.
It brought them
closer together and helped build
her family.*

I WAS GOING THROUGH THIS ENTIRE pregnancy solo and many days were difficult to get through. But at the same time, I felt so empowered because I was doing this on my own.

I also made sure that during this pregnancy my daughter bonded deeply with her unborn brother.

I wanted her to feel like she was very important part of this process and her help was essential to make his coming to this world very special.

– SARAH

*Vicki's
first pregnancy
was an experience
of special intimacy with
the child.*

I TRULY FELT LIKE A WOMAN WHEN I WAS pregnant. This is part of who I am; this is what my body was made to do. I do miss the intimacy that being pregnant brought to my baby and me. During pregnancy, I had my baby with me at all times, no matter where I went. I could feel his movements, sometimes even sense his moods, and we were quite a team together. – VICKI



*As many as half
of all pregnancies end in miscarriage.
But as common as it is,
that doesn't lessen the heartbreak it brings.
Ariane miscarried not once,
not twice, but five times before she gave birth
to her son Scout.*

A

ARIANE

AS MANY AS HALF OF ALL PREGNANCIES END IN MISCARRIAGE. BUT as common as it is, that doesn't lessen the heartbreak it brings. Ariane Olshansky miscarried not once, not twice, but five times before she gave birth to her son Scout on April 1, 2008.

The first time I got pregnant, I was thirty-three and my husband Jordan and I had been married about a year. The great thing about finding out I was pregnant was that my sister, who was twenty-seven at the time, was also having a baby. Our due dates were just nine days apart. We both lived in San Francisco and were best friends. I couldn't imagine anything better than experiencing our pregnancies together.

My sister tends to worry more than I do, and ironically, she told me she was concerned she might have a miscarriage. I reassured her again and again that she had no medical reason to worry. I never thought that I would be the one to have a miscarriage instead.

It happened during the first ultrasound appointment. Our doctor told us there was no heartbeat. My husband and I were in shock. We just kind of looked at each other. I went to that appointment expecting to see my baby and I left without one at all. I had to have a dilation and curettage performed at that same appointment.

It was a loss, but it didn't break us down. It just made us want to try again. I'm



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I even ended up telling strangers sometimes.
I'm glad I did, because I found out
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I had no idea.*

an optimist and believe every setback is a lesson learned in disguise. Every visit to the doctor showed I was healthy. I talked a lot about the miscarriage to my mom, my sister and my husband. I even ended up telling strangers sometimes. I'm glad I did, because I found out just how many women have had miscarriages. I had no idea.

The second miscarriage felt like being run over by a truck because this time we had gotten to see the baby in an ultrasound image. And we had heard the heartbeat. Then two weeks later, the baby had no heartbeat.

In the meantime, my sister had a baby girl. When my little niece was born, it reminded me she was supposed to have a cousin born nine days later. Thinking about it was hard, but I was so happy for my sister. I didn't want to hate her or any other mother because I wasn't one yet. Plenty of other people have challenges too, whether it's diabetes or cancer. Mine happened to be pregnancy.

The getting pregnant part never seemed to be a problem. It always happened easily and quickly. I stopped sharing the news with my family though. I didn't want to drag them along on this roller-coaster ride. Of course, when they found out they scolded me for not telling them. "What's family for?" they said. "We don't want you to go through this alone."

After my third miscarriage, I started to see a fertility acupuncturist. At the same time, I did everything possible to make sure I had a good pregnancy. I ate right, took care of myself. I consulted a homeopathic therapist who specialized in miscarriages. But again, for the fourth time, I miscarried.

I decided to go see a high-risk pregnancy specialist, someone I knew through friends. And I also began to accept the reality that I may not ever be able to give birth. My husband and I looked into adoption. I've always been very supportive of adoption and it was something we might have done anyway.

Meanwhile, I hung on to the hope that I could see a pregnancy all the way through to birth. My doctor put me through the wringer, testing nearly everything that could be tested. I was almost hoping to find a problem so at least I would have an answer. I remember thinking, "please tell me I have a blocked fallopian tube so we can do in-vitro fertilization." But it turned out I was fine. Jordan and I continued to investigate adoption.

By then, I had a hard time getting attached to the idea of being pregnant. I didn't want to get excited or bond with my unborn baby. I was taking hormones and aspirin but was in disbelief that any of it would help. Despite the treatment, my fifth pregnancy ended in May, 2007.

This time I knew the baby was a girl. Knowing made it even harder because it all seemed so real. Until then, I could make myself believe that none of the miscarriages involved actual babies. Emotionally that helped me. The fifth miscarriage was the one and only time I knew anything about the baby.

After all my trips to the doctor, it turns out the one thing we didn't test was my blood.

It was the last thing we thought of. The next month, my husband and I went to see a reproductive immunologist for extensive testing. I learned that I had a few



otherwise harmless blood conditions that frequently resulted in miscarriage. At last, the mystery began to lift.

I was supposed to begin receiving treatment in a month to offset the blood condition. To take my mind off things, my husband and I left on a trip. After every miscarriage, I would take time to be alone and grieve the loss. My husband and I would always do something fun between each pregnancy. We would drive to the wine country, fly to Mexico with friends, stay active, get our minds off things. But before I could even start the treatment, I inadvertently got pregnant for a sixth time. I was told that because I had not started the treatment in time, the chances of a successful pregnancy were reduced by a third.

I assumed I would have yet another miscarriage. But I still started treatment mid-pregnancy to give it every chance to I could. During the sixth week of pregnancy, my worst fears were realized. I began to bleed profusely. I was tested the next day. The bleeding turned out to be a fluke. I was still pregnant.

It was a unique situation to go to the doctor's office and hear good news. For me, loss had become normal, but the miscarriages had become especially hard for my husband. We both struggled, but I had maintained a level of detachment that protected me. I also hung on to this fundamental faith that something was going to work for us.

Over the course of two years, I was pregnant, on average, every three months. It took a toll on my body. I gained five pounds each pregnancy. And because I was a high-risk patient, doctors told me not to exercise. I'm a control freak, and letting go of control was one of the biggest lessons I learned during those two years.

Throughout the sixth pregnancy, I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. Yet, to my amazement, my stomach kept growing bigger and bigger. I remember the

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joy I felt when I was able to go shopping for maternity clothes for the first time.

One day I felt the baby kick. But there was still this feeling of detachment, because it was so hard for me to accept the reality that I could actually give birth. I chose not to learn the sex of the baby. I've always wanted it to be a surprise, the old fashioned way. And with five miscarriages behind me, I definitely did not want to know.

We picked a name that we thought would work for either a boy or a girl. We chose Scout, based on the character from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Jordan and I both read the book while I was pregnant. I was excited about picking a name, but also nervous. If I miscarried again, I felt we would have to have a funeral, because now our baby had a name.

There was a tremendous amount of anxiety. We had a few little scares. At week thirty, I started to show signs of premature labor. I went on full-time bed rest. Five weeks later, I gave birth. Scout arrived five weeks early. His name means "someone who can find paths through unexplored territory." Suddenly his name had even more meaning.

The first time I saw Scout's face, I felt like I recognized him. But I wasn't in love with him immediately. I'd like to say I was, but it took about a day. I think I was still trying to get over the feeling of detachment that helped me get through the miscarriages. But soon, I was completely obsessed. It just took me a while to realize he was my baby, that it actually worked. It had really happened.

Whatever happens, Scout will always be that special baby. He's been healthy since the first day. He's my resilient baby. He endured all the shots, all the treatments.

He's a survivor. He's the one that made it through.

*Written to Bathsheba while
she was pregnant
from Drago, her husband
while he was stationed
in the
Middle East.*

*Y*OU HAVE SO MANY THINGS NO ONE ELSE WILL ever have. You have all my love now and forever. You have my admiration for being such an incredible person. You have my unending gratitude for the way you brighten my life. You have empty pages in the story of your life, pages I would like us to write together, filling them with memories we will make and stories that will travel beside us and carry us over whatever comes along. You have my sweet appreciation for taking my smile to places only my heart dreamed of and you will always have me. I thank God for you and blessing me with my children. I love you. — *DRAGO to BATHSHEBA*



*Our attitudes around pregnancy
are changing
and Izumi was developing
her own way
to demonstrate that.*

T

HE KIMONO I AM WEARING WAS GIVEN

to me by my mother when I was married.

I guess, in the old days, ladies in kimonos were not supposed to expose their expecting bellies in this manner. Here I was in the traditional kimono, releasing my belly in the light, fully embracing womanhood. Two things you don't see here are the little kicks I felt from inside and the loving presence of my husband who was watching me from behind.

– IZUMI





*Before she became a mother,
she was a TV newsanchor,
White House reporter and foreign correspondent.
It was a dream job but its demands
made even a relationship a challenge.
Still, she had always wanted kids.
In her late thirties, she and her husband finally
decided to try. But perhaps, she thought,
she had waited too long.*

KELLY

I WAS CONVINCED I WAS GOING TO BE JUST LIKE SO MANY WOMEN I KNEW who had problems getting pregnant. I was thirty-eight years old. I had a very stressful job.

In some ways I felt like I had it coming. I have always wanted to have children, but I had decided years earlier my career would come first. I was all about my career for most of my twenties and thirties. It was a lot of stress and a lot of hours, but that was the decision I made. Whenever I was around small kids, it was obvious I was very much taken with them. I remember my colleagues teasing me, saying, “tick, tick, tick.” But I never took it seriously.

I met my husband while I was at CNN. We dated for ten years, some of those years with each of us living in different cities. We finally got married when I was thirty-six, but we put off trying to get pregnant because I wanted to be married for a while before having kids. That, too, was a decision I made. So if it turned out I couldn't have children I thought that might be the cost of the choices I made. It's a horrible thought, but there it was.

That's why I feel so incredibly lucky. After about six months of really trying—the year earlier we were sort of trying but it's tough to get pregnant while covering a



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presidential campaign—I got pregnant. When Hattie Jane was born, I was thirty-nine. I had a very clear plan for how the first year with my baby would go. I was completely wrong.

No one could have prepared me for how I was going to feel once I brought our baby home. I expected to have her, and three months later, on the dot, go back to work. I was so surprised by the feelings of attachment I had, the incredible joy of being a mom. I remember thinking, “how on earth can I be away from her for twelve hours a day when I can’t stand to be away from her for just one hour to get a haircut?” I never expected that. I was wired to be this working person, a professional, a correspondent. That’s how I defined myself. Then I had my daughter and thought, “I love her so much, how can I ever go back to this other part of my life?”

What I learned is that you have to give yourself some time because after you have a baby you don’t know how you’re going to feel. Now, I look back laugh at the certainty I felt when I was pregnant. I was certain that I’d go on maternity leave and after three months be back on the air as if nothing had changed. In fact, something incredible had happened. I ended up staying at home with Hattie Jane for eight months. I left CNN and found a job with CBS News which offered a more family-friendly lifestyle.

Still, I had to make compromises. On my fourth day at CBS, I got a call from the office. I was told I had to go to Boston on assignment for two days. I cried. I hadn’t even left my baby overnight yet! I was convinced this working mom thing was never going to work. My husband had to talk me off the ledge. I can laugh about it now. But at the time, that sense that my job was pulling me away from my child was powerful and scary.

And then about six weeks later, still new on the job at CBS, I learned I was pregnant again. I didn’t expect to get pregnant so easily. I was sure it would take many months if it happened at all. Luckily, my bosses were very understanding. Still, I wondered how I was going to handle the demands of life as a network correspondent while caring for not just one but two little ones. After my second daughter, Lily Raya, was born, I stayed home for a little more than two months. I didn’t have the same issues about work with my second child. I knew that I could work and not feel any less of a mom. I knew that my daughter was not going to love my babysitter more than me. The year I spent taking care of my first daughter gave me a bet-

ter sense of what my needs were. I don't think I'd be as good a mother had I stayed at home permanently. I have tremendous respect for any mother no matter what choice she makes. At the height of my career, I don't think I understood why a mother would want to stay at home full time with her kids. I see it completely differently now, and I would never make that judgment.

My priorities are my family and doing good work. That means I'm not likely to stop being a correspondent, even if I have more kids. But that also means I can't run out the door and be on the road for three weeks chasing a story. Before I had children, I would have been on the road covering the campaign. I lived for that. But now, I'd be pretty unhappy if weeks had gone by and I missed Lily sitting up for the first time or Hattie Jane singing her first song.

A friend of mine once gave me some really good advice about balancing motherhood and career. She told me to imagine myself on a sailboat. Sometimes in life you have to tack more toward your family. Sometimes, you have to tack more toward work or life outside of your family. But no matter what, you're still on that boat. I like that image. Some days my life is about tacking more toward home. Other times when those family demands are not so present, I can tack more toward work. It's a wonderful piece of advice that makes me feel like I'm always moving forward.

Motherhood has made me feel more grounded as a woman. I'm not as much defined by Kelly Wallace the correspondent. Motherhood trumps that. I feel this confidence in who I am, this new sense of purpose that drives every part of my life. I like myself better at this stage of my life. I'm more in touch with myself and my priorities. I look at the world differently. Professionally, it enhances me, gives me a different view of a story. I feel more creative. I'm more willing to take chances. I have more energy. I would have thought I'd have less energy. But when you're forced to operate on all cylinders, you perform at a better rate.

I remember during the first trimester of my first pregnancy, Hurricane Katrina hit. Normally, I would have been racing to get to that story. My doctor said *she* could not tell me not to go. But I knew it wouldn't be the smartest thing. I didn't go of course. But I won't lie, I was conflicted and the assignment wasn't easy to pass up. But I've come to discover some things are just more important. And there will always be another big story.

*For Michelle pregnancy
was a way
to bring the whole family
closer together*

*M*IKAELA AND I NEVER FELT SO CLOSE AS
we did during my pregnancy with our
miracle baby, Matthew, who was conceived just six
weeks after the traumatic loss of our baby girl. We
felt so blessed by this pregnancy, we wanted to share
the joy of our new baby, son, and brother.


– MICHELLE





*She not just a reluctant mother,
she was opposed to motherhood entirely.
She was in her early 20s when her son was born.
By then, she had come a long way.
She had shed a destructive compulsion,
left home with nowhere to go
and survived for months living out of her car.
She fell in love with a plumber.
They got married and ran a business together.
She worked long days and never thought
about starting a family.*

ANNE



HAD SCARS, BUT HID THEM WELL. FOR TEN YEARS, I WORE ONLY long-sleeve shirts in public. But when I was seventeen, my mom peeked in on me while I was sleeping and saw all the scars on my arms.

Starting at eleven years old, I coped with life by cutting myself. Some people use it as a form of self-punishment, some as a way to relieve guilt or sadness. Cutting is something that demands your complete attention, so you can't feel any guilt or sadness.

For me, cutting was a tool and I used it when I needed it. But when I left home, I left it behind. I was free of other people's expectations. I didn't have to worry about letting anyone down. I had already done everything I possibly could to disappoint them.

After leaving home, I planned to attend community college, apply to Western Washington State University, major in biological anthropology, transfer to the University of Washington, and become a neurosurgeon. I got as far as applying to Western. I got in, paid the registration fee, but never enrolled.

*...She was diligent
about taking
her birth control pill,
but got pregnant
anyway
and gave birth to a
son, Samuel.
Having a baby was
even harder than she
imagined.
But eventually she
realized you don't have
a baby
as much as a baby
has you.*

Instead, I worked as a housekeeper at a hotel and lived out of my car, a 1991 Plymouth Acclaim. I parked at the public library, next to the police station. I showered at the YMCA. I kept canned food, candles and books in the trunk of the car. I used computers at the local college. Strangely, I really enjoyed it. This was the first time I felt completely free of any obligations or responsibilities. I could do whatever I wanted.

One day I interviewed for a job as a plumber's apprentice. During the interview, I was asked math and chemistry questions like what is the square root of nine, or what is the chemical formula for carbon monoxide. Even though I was homeless, I looked clean, wasn't a drug addict, and could answer the questions that were asked. I didn't know anything about plumbing but surprisingly, I was hired. Dave trained me in the skills of the trade and I learned quickly. We developed a friendship, which gave way to lust and eventually to love.

Samuel was definitely not part of the plan. I had always said I would never have kids. I wasn't one of those women who thought babies or small children were cute. To me, they were noisy, smelly, obnoxious, time-consuming, and expensive. So when I took a pregnancy test and saw a positive result it felt like I fell out of a tree. My head went a little bit fuzzy; my heart jumped into my throat. After that first shock of adrenaline wore off, I was a little bit frightened. I started thinking about all the hazardous work I had been doing that month.

I'd used glue and primer that were extremely toxic. I had breathed soldering fumes, and a heavy mirror had fallen off a wall onto my back.

When I told Dave, he was ecstatic. He is eighteen years older than I am, but unlike me, he had always talked excitedly about having children.

Other than the terrible morning sickness, I actually enjoyed being pregnant. I enjoyed the attention from strangers, and I especially loved the way Dave looked at me. I wore clothes that showed off my bulging belly. I had years of practice hiding parts of my body. Now, I was showing it off.

But my bliss suddenly ended when Sam was born. At the time, Dave had to work day and night. So when I came home from the hospital, I was all alone with a screaming infant and had no idea what to do. Sam wasn't the kind of baby who was easily

soothed. He didn't sleep peacefully. He cried loudly and constantly. I hardly ever slept and cried constantly too. How stupid was I to think that having a baby was a good idea? I wished I could just take Sam back to the hospital and leave him there. I wondered how Dave would react if I suggested we give up Sam for adoption.

All I could think was, "when is he going to stop crying? When is he going to stop peeing in my face? When is he going to stop spitting up?" When he cried, he was inconsolable. I made sure he was fed, that his diaper was clean. I held him, rocked him, comforted him. None of it worked.

One day, I just couldn't handle it anymore. So I put him in his crib, left him there crying, and went outside where it was quiet. When I came back five minutes later, he was asleep. It took me a while to figure out that Sam couldn't fall asleep when someone is holding him; it's too much stimulation. To this day, he doesn't like to be rocked to sleep. This never occurred to me. It never occurred to my mother or doctor either. Once I figured out how to get Sam to sleep, I started getting more sleep too.

Then at three months old Sam smiled at me. It took that smile for me to realize that he wasn't just a baby, he was a person. A person who will grow. He will go to school. He will like art and hate math, or maybe the other way around. He will collect interesting rocks, or toy cars, or perhaps both. He will grow into a man, have a career, a wife, maybe even kids of his own.

I suppose for some people, love just happens. For me, it has to grow. With both with my husband and my son, love was far from instantaneous. But quietly and slowly, love put down its roots and, in time, it bloomed.

Now I'm one of those women who sees a baby in a grocery store and gets all misty-eyed. I've become emotional in ways I never was before. It's like my brain has developed a connection that didn't exist until I had a child.

I don't hide my scars anymore. I don't think about them except when I wonder how I am going to explain them to Sam when he gets older. I'm worried about his friends coming over and seeing my scars, about their mothers being concerned. You can see my scars in the photographs. I like seeing them. They show how things used to be and who I've become.

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