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on the day you were born...

Of the many things I hope to pass on to my daughters, first among them is an arrival story—like the one my mother told to me.



I came into the world with a story to tell. Courtesy of my mother, my tale is a thriller, a farce, and a historical drama rolled into one. She relayed it to me so often during my childhood that I can reel off its details like the Pledge of Allegiance.

The story begins after a family dinner late in my mother's pregnancy with me. My grandmother served apple pie. She teasingly warned about indigestion. "When you go home tonight," she cracked, "don't mistake the apple pie for labor pains!"

My mother went home and did exactly that. This error in judgment cost her several hours, until the terrifying moment when she realized that the Time to Leave for the Hospital had come and gone. She and my dad would have to hustle.

Did my young, hippie father grab his keys and lead her to their car, replete with fuel and a thoughtfully packed overnight bag in the trunk? Of course not! He took a shower. Then he dressed in a three-piece suit. ("To meet the baby," he explained.) By the time he'd gotten ready, my mother's contractions had intensified. He would have to dress *her*.

At this point in her telling, my mother would shake her head and roll her eyes extravagantly at me. What outfit did he choose for her hospital trip? A mini-dress. Knee-high socks. And platform shoes, naturally.

The drive to the hospital was like a road-trip scene in an indie movie. They had to pick up not only my Aunt Barbara, a maternity nurse, but also my grandmother, who would babysit Aunt Barbara's children that night. When my grandmother got out of the car, she stood there praying the longest prayer that anyone has ever prayed. (Trust my mother on this.)

Then came the stop at the gas station, because the car's tank was a hollow, echoing cavern. After the fuel attendant had finished with the transaction, he offered my father the

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all about mom ● SHARING

station's giveaway item of the week: A commemorative glass could be theirs if they held tight while he ambled back inside the station to fetch it. My father was happy to wait.

Finally, following a nick-of-time arrival at the hospital, came the triumphant ending: me in the world.

Each time my mother recounted the events of that night to me, I soaked them up and learned from her story. I learned nothing less than who I was and how I fit into the world. On the one hand, I was a child so treasured that my arrival was worth describing again and again. At the same time, the story wasn't really about me; I only appeared at the finale. The lead characters were my parents and other family members. My narrative came out of theirs—their love, their humor, and their foibles. "You are precious and beloved," my mother might have said. "And also, you are not the center of the universe." Isn't that what every child needs to know?

Years later, when I met my future husband, Lee, and shared this story, complete with pie, platform shoes, and a commemorative glass, I waited for him to launch into his own saga. And waited. Apparently, not everyone knows his story. The circumstances of his birth were a mystery he'd never thought to ask about. He pulled out his phone and called his mother, an FBI agent's wife. She gave an account of her own, laboring ride to the hospital, escorted by a three-cop-car cavalcade (sirens blaring and lights flashing). Turns out Lee came into the world like a president arriving at a summit meeting.

It figured that his story was more riveting than mine, but it didn't bother me. The content is beside the point. My mother's memory of the day I was born is special to her and to me.

I was reminded of this on the day when my firstborn, Isabel, arrived. It goes without saying that I tried to be mindful of the details. How would my daughter's story unfold? I felt my first hint of discomfort in the middle of the night. I knew that I should let Lee get his sleep, but, oh, I was dying to tell him! At 5 A.M. I woke him to say that my contractions had begun but that we probably still had some time yet. "You can go back to sleep," I said. "How can I go back to sleep?!" he cried. He headed downstairs to pack the car and triple-check the position of the car seat.

Several hours later, we were both sitting on our living room couch, killing time. On our DVR, we discovered a marathon of *Entourage* episodes that we'd never seen. I hesitated, considering this entertainment option. Did I really want Isabel's story to begin with us watching a TV show about an oversexed movie star and his hooligan friends? No sir! But then a contraction came, and I needed distraction. *Entourage* it was.

My own story had begun with pie; my daughter's would kick off with Jeremy Piven. This wouldn't have been my first choice, but I knew from my mother's experience that you can't micromanage your child's entry into the world. I noted what I was eating (half a grilled-cheese sandwich with tomato soup) and what I was wearing (my lavender maternity T-shirt). At one point, we walked our dogs around the block and greeted our neighbors along the way. I didn't mention that I was in labor, and I remember thinking, "They don't know how important this day is!"

I couldn't be certain when we should leave for the hospital, and I paid attention when Aunt Barbara, still a maternity nurse, called to offer advice. She tried to discourage me from heading out too early, but my contractions overruled her. We left the house at about 8 P.M.

I checked in ten minutes later, at just the right time for an epidural (a blessed invention I'd already decided to take advantage of) and then painlessly labored through the night. The breaking news on CNN was about a hurricane making its way up the

East Coast toward us in New Jersey. While the hours passed, Lee and I tuned into the wind-whipped reporters. Early in the morning, just as the storm began to wane, jagged lines on another screen showed my contractions were intensifying. Soon my mild-mannered ob-gyn

arrived. "Push!" she coaxed. I tried, to no avail, but then an unbearable pressure urged me on...until, incredibly, Isabel was in the world!

When I repeat the tale, I don't end with my daughter's birth. At noon on the dot, the start of visiting hours, my parents appeared in the doorway of my hospital room. My mother asked for the baby's whereabouts, and when she heard that her first grandchild was in the nursery, she turned on her heel and made a beeline there.

Whenever I tell Isabel, now 8, about her birth, I shake my head during that part. "Grandma was so excited to see you, she didn't even stop long enough to ask how I was feeling!" I huff. And then we giggle. I love that story. ●

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A BABY'S VIEW OF BIRTH

Have you ever wondered what your l'il nugget will feel when you're in labor? Get a glimpse at americanbaby.com/being-born.