

Remember to Eat

Marjorie became pregnant on the first try only a few months after she and Eric married. A few months later, the doctor confirmed that she was having twins. This was a total shock to both Marjorie and Eric, since there were no twins in either family.

As a physician himself, Eric wanted to be a partner to his wife in the pregnancy and birth process. But as Marjorie began to look as if she were carrying an elephant, developing sciatica, swollen feet, varicose veins, and an overall sense of malaise, she kept reminding him that it was not *they* who were pregnant, but she.

It was daunting to order a layette for two and to cram two cribs into their small apartment as her due date approached. Marjorie often thought to herself that if she had known how quickly she would conceive, she might have waited until they bought a house.

As uncomfortable as she was, she was in no hurry to give birth. The thought of pushing out two babies frightened her, and she secretly hoped for a cesarean section. She had absolutely no idea how she was going to care for two infants at once, especially after hearing her grandmother say to her mother, “Our baby is having babies.” She was twenty-three and scared to death.

But Eric was having a field day. The hospital where he worked as an orthopedic surgeon offered Lamaze classes, and if a couple attended the program, the husband would be a partner—a coach to his wife during the birth process. Toward the end of the pregnancy, the couple attended classes together, which Eric took very seriously. Meanwhile, Marjorie kept hoping for a cesarean.

It was the hottest August on record in nearly fifty years, so other than attending Lamaze classes, Marjorie stayed on the red paisley couch in their air-conditioned apartment, watching TV, eating ice cream, and reading pregnancy books, which included all the unlikely complications that might occur.

About three weeks before her due date, on her second Carvel sundae, lying on the sofa, watching *McMillan & Wife* with Rock Hudson and Susan Saint James, she got up to go to the bathroom and felt a warm gush of water. She called Eric, who was at the hospital, and being no ob-gyn, he said: “Oh, it’s probably pressure on your bladder, but you better call the doctor.”

“Have you had a contraction?” the doctor asked.

“No, not yet.”

“Your water just broke and you’re in labor. When your contractions are ten minutes apart, come to the hospital.”

She quickly called Eric back to let him know that he should stick to his own specialty and come home right away.

“Oh, I haven’t had dinner yet. Have you?”

“No, but the doctor told me I can’t eat. Just hurry home in case I start getting contractions.”

Although the hospital was only ten minutes from their apartment, it took Eric close to an hour to return. While Marjorie waited for Eric to come home, she had her first contraction. She was starting to get angry—what could be taking him so long? Was it another patient issue or did he not understand the gravity of the situation? Just as her first contraction ended, Eric walked in with a bag from Katz’s Deli.

Marjorie groaned as she saw what he had bought himself for dinner: not a corned beef or turkey sandwich, which would have been quick and understandable, but a southern fried chicken dinner with french fries, coleslaw, green beans, and a knish on the side. For dessert, there was a very large piece of gooey chocolate babka.

“You might be in labor all night,” he said by way of explanation when Marjorie gave him a look. “Don’t you remember how they told us in Lamaze class that the husbands should remember to eat?”

“That’s what you got out of the class?” Marjorie asked incredulously.

“No, not just that.”

About six hours later, the contractions became more intense, stronger and more regular. At ten minutes apart, Marjorie grabbed her go-bag and the couple headed to the garage to get their car.

As they pulled into a parking space in the hospital parking lot, Marjorie began to get a contraction. Before she realized what had happened, Eric had taken off, leaving her alone in the car. Here she was, married to a doctor, in labor, sitting alone in the car. By the time he returned ten minutes later, she was in tears.

“Where the hell did you go?” she yelled.

“I went to get a wheelchair for you.”

Her mother always told her that Eric meant well, Marjorie reminded herself. She supposed he did, but he was not the world’s best communicator.

Once Marjorie was admitted and on the floor, the doctors announced that the labor was progressing nicely. They hooked her up to a machine, which registered the intensity of the contractions.

Eric focused on the machine. Each time his wife moaned and groaned, he remarked on the force of the contraction. But each time he said, “That one wasn’t so bad,” she wanted to smack him.

Instead, she cried out to anyone who would listen: “When can I have an epidural? I need one now.”

After about the fifth time, the nurse replied. “It’s too late, honey.”

“What about a cesarean?”

“Oh, you don’t want that or need it. Before you know it, this will be over, and you won’t even remember the pain.”

Adam was born at 5:47 a.m., weighing 6 pounds, 6 ounces, and at 5:58, Seth weighed in at 7 pounds, 1/2 ounce.