

Photograph by Swati Gadagkar



## As Big As It Gets

A first-timer on the whole expecting business shares her stream of consciousness on the flip side of successful parenting, even as she discovers that right here right now is where it begins

'But what could be more meaningful than empire line skirts?' floated around in cyberspace, on a G-chat ping with a friend who was, good-naturedly, suggesting ideas for this article (the wondrous joys of pregnancy fashion and thoughts on *Juno*, among them). I confess I did consider the former, in some earnest, even if only for a moment. (Been meaning to check out that discount on trendy maternity wear in that store). But then I checked myself on flippancy/frivolity quotient, patted my round-getting-round-as-I-type-this belly, and promised my unborn child that I would do better.

Hell, his/her mother could think of and even write something more suited to the occasion, something more serious, profound, memorable. Something he or she could read and be proud of even, several years from now. And that's when I imagined the cold sweats and had to postpone my deadline with the editor. Again.

Because this is pressure if nothing else. The expectations that were so... unexpected. Which come with being this person - a parent, a mother - you never really thought about. Or never really can, truly, until you're there.

Holding that stick that shows a confirming, life-altering dark line. Reaching for your first jittery ultrasound (Did someone say internal? Excuse me? Is that a probe?). At the gynaecologist's *so regularly*.

You suddenly feel so... responsible. Yes, already. Because you're taking those supplements, watching what you're eating (it must be of *value* else it's inedible. Who thinks like that? Sigh! Me!), how much you're walking, if you're resting enough, if you should do that squat 10 seconds longer in your yoga class (secretly wondering

why your bump is smaller than the woman deep-breathing-away next to you when she's two weeks behind you on the pregnancy calendar! Hmph!), if you're taking the stairs way too often, if the baby moved as much today as yesterday (and why do you think that is? An endless discussion, rest assured). And basically not watching *Inglorious Basterds*.

You realise, then, in a rare blessed nanosecond of clarity, you have become that person, truly - a parent, a mother. A *worrier*. ('You sucker!' says your past, not-so-long-ago self, the same one that found zippers perfectly reasonable).

Because there's no denying it - there is a life inside you. That moves and kicks and hiccups and everything. And can hear your voice (albeit distorted), and of those around you. Along with the sound of your blood flowing and your insides working. (And then they wonder why mother-child relationships can get complicated!). What you do, eat, hear, talk about, think and feel today, is headed a long way; it's all directly shaping someone. Literally. And not just physically.

Successful Parenting, then, it seems, hits you even before the first real contraction. Even if it's working in reverse: What will the child think of me? Will the child be proud of me, I have wondered and mulled over? Aren't these expectations too? I mean he or she won't be saying 'goo gaa' for several more months, and I understand that, but I'm still getting around his or her intricate thoughts to this article? When I thought I was so cool, on my good days, a Zen master of sorts!

Would it be too much for a child to know that the mother attempted to

make those terms she hears oh-too-much-of-prenatal, vaginal muscles, stretch marks, labour - sound sexy in a Joey/*F.R.I.E.N.D.S* sort of way? (Yes, for fun. And no, they don't, for those of you wondering.) Or that she totally tripped on her 'Pregnant is the New Skinny' shirt? Is there an appropriate time and place for a sense of humour? Or is it better if he or she knew that the mother looked at her own mother and had serious, lingering doubts about ever feeling that maternal, protective, selfless, concerned?

A rarer moment of complete comprehension, when it's all so clear, everything shines, catches me unawares at times. Soundtrack-played to the echoes of that John Lennon affirmation 'Oh my love/For the first time in my life/My eyes are wide open'. (Well, not really, but I do wish life had fitting, convenient soundtracks

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at times.) A voice in my head (and it's not my doctor's, husband's, yoga teacher's, mother's, friend's, maternity guide's, or even Lennon's; it's altogether divine intervention, I'd like to think) talks about going with the flow, laying fears at rest, being calm, and making the most of this time given to me - my blessed, yes, hallowed, bittersweet joyride of a pregnancy. (Sometimes a perfect, tall glass of freshly squeezed *anaar* and sweet lime juice has something to do with it. And sometimes, it's a baked cheesecake). This is a funny time, and it's also serious, the silly and the sacred, come together, in one big bump. And it's soon about to get bigger. Everything. And there's nothing to fret over, definitely not over the bizarre-ness of what defines 'success', because nothing comes close to this, the experience. Nothing ever can.

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*Pooja Pande.*  
*She works as a writer and editor in New Delhi, and is currently six months plus on the expecting business and finds herself a consummate pro one day, and a bumbling rookie, the next*