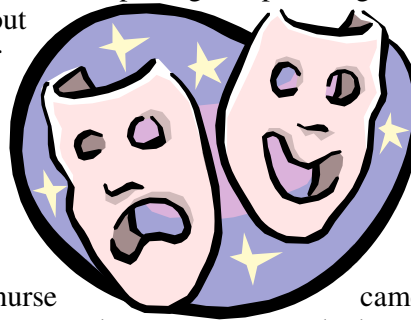


MY NEMESIS: LIFE-AT WHAT PRICE?

Continued from the October issue of Magna

... I spent much of the time at the first hospital feeling vulnerable, and not feeling that I could trust some of those responsible for nursing me. The general attitude that resonated was that several of the nurses in the acute ward did not understand my condition and thought that I was refusing to eat because I was trying to starve my baby. One nurse asked me with a rather condescending voice whether I was going to feed my baby and literally forced me out of bed to insist that I eat against the obstetrician's orders. Her features were reminiscent to the character in the Film of Fay Welden's novel, the 'She Devil'. I was afraid of her with her huge bulky overbearing figure.

I was constantly having 'baby' proverbially shoved in my face and could see that they were looking for some sort of recognition, reaction from me – poking and prodding. I was simply feeling so distressed that I felt like I was looking out from a distance through a giant mask. I wanted to be far removed from patient torture acute patient feeling them and their insensitivity and lack of empathy. I may as well have been in a chamber. The isolation that I felt in that room was demoralising and at times left me vulnerable.



The 'Fay Welden characteresque nurse came to change my sheets and threw the emergency button out of my reach. I had overheard the night nurse complaining to her that I had pressed the button several times that night for help! I then had to lean over after she had left the room trying not to topple the drip stand to pick up the emergency button pad after she left the room. There was also lack of confidentiality for the patient's details as they were discussed loudly outside my room (including my own details). I am sure that one of the patients discussed did not want that they were once a different gender publicised so loudly and I was fully aware of several of the other patients conditions before I left the ward! I found it unacceptably unprofessional and insensitive. Then there were the open complaints that certain patients were not wanted on the ward and should be relocated elsewhere. There was also the internal politics between wards for bed space. One individual had been discharged from the acute ward without the consultant's sign off and approval much to the consultant's fury. It was all quite a scene.

Then there was the cleaner who seemed not to realise that just because something looks clean does not mean that it's not infested with germs! And was caught out and reprimanded by her supervisor due to an over-full bin. So the following day a different cleaner was sent to thoroughly clean my room. All the internal staff shenanigans theatrically passing by in my view - but what made me angry was the irrelevance to my baby.

I had had my first scan and had seen the baby moving. The baby was lying transverse with her back to us and as the instrument was moved across my bump, it turned round and appeared to wave. It was hilarious and amazing. I thought, 'wow'. I had had some churning sensations in my stomach when the drip drugs were given to me, and I assumed it was the baby moving around. I hoped that she was not suffering the way I was. I had been told there could be a chance of miscarriage due to the drugs and I sat still and numb feeling quite angry with myself for being so active beforehand – gardening, long walks, housework, waking up early to make check up calls on relatives. I suddenly felt angry that I had been pregnant and hadn't put my baby and myself first; and there I was helpless with those expletive individuals also putting patient care secondary to their internal politics or just to have a gossip.

When Jason visited me, I told him what I was experiencing in the hospital. We had the door closed for privacy. Throughout my pregnancy he was my rock of serenity. He felt that the care was unacceptable. My drip top-ups that morning and afternoon were very late so I was dehydrating. I felt parched. The nurses were as usual gossiping outside my room and kept opening the door to my room, which Jason would re-close. Evidently, they felt uncomfortable about the door being closed. Jason complained about my overdue drip top-up and the junior nurse administered the drip so quickly into my veins that I almost passed out. Soon afterwards the obstetrician came to examine me and apologised. We were to be moved to another ward that same day. It seemed that the acute ward staff resented having other wards' patients in their beds. They didn't seem to understand the conditions that the patients had.

It felt like a relief to be out of that torture chamber of an acute ward. It was also good to have a view to the outside world from the window (albeit a busy main road) and to be able to talk to other souls. My bed was right by the ward entrance in full view of the security cameras which in a surreal way was reassuring. I didn't have to worry so much about underhanded abuse and neglect anymore. The Obstetrician transferred some of her nurses to our ward and the care I received from thereon was wonderful. I regained my energy and even was able to rise early to use the bathroom unaided.

The night nurse changed the drug in my drip after I explained to her how it made me feel. She told me that the strange sensations could be an allergic reaction and that I should have been offered an alternative. She also changed the drip feeds in my arm which had been there for days and should have been changed daily. My arm was very swollen around the needlepoint. She exclaimed that pregnant women need to be taken care of as they are very fragile and I certainly agreed with her. She also told me that she had had the same condition as myself and what to expect - that is that the vomiting could continue throughout the pregnancy and I may be readmitted for treatment. The condition is more common in African and Caribbean descent women. My legs were incredibly swollen. They were reminiscent to me of the elephant man's legs. My face was puffed up with fluid.

I told Jason that I had to get out of hospital – suddenly I felt like Alexander McQueen in film *The Great Escape!* The obstetrician visited me and apologised for the ward reshuffle and explained that until my tests were clear, I would have to stay in hospital. Jason returned home and waited for me to call with the results. My mind felt very fuzzy and it was hard to concentrate.

I was looking out onto the road after breakfast one day when one of the nurses approached me with a big smile and told me that my tests were clear and that I could return home. Whoopee! I phoned Jason and packed quickly. Well, the drama was over. I just had to eat one more hospital dinner before being officially discharged. I was given anti-sickness tablets (that later did not work) and Jason and I happily left hand-in-hand.

Well, many other things happened during my pregnancy including a swollen cyst operation on my ear, a viral infection which lasted for approximately six weeks, our car crashing into the back of a van resulting in Jason having whiplash, and yet more vomiting from disagreement with prescribed antibiotics.

I had about two weeks in the autumn when I felt great. It was soon after we had returned

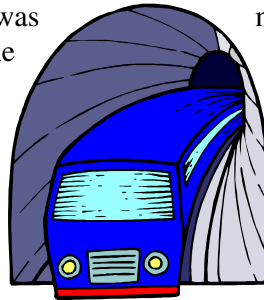


from a retreat getaway in Hampshire.

The hotel chef's cordon bleu cooking was fabulous and he adapted the menu especially for the pregnancy. The hotel staff were lovely and made our wedding anniversary feel special. On our return, Jason recreated the chef's menu for me. It seemed strange eating a three course dinner alone while Jason was on late shifts. He called from the office and I gave my compliments to the chef!

During those two weeks after our anniversary, I felt like a plum – ripe and juicy. I loved looking at my body in the mirror and stroking my bump. Nothing seemed to worry me those two weeks. My skin was perfect – soft, smooth, glowing; my nails were amazingly strong and long – so much so that I revelled in painting them. My hair was super soft and had grown long, and Jason exclaimed how I had a twinkle in my eyes. I felt very much alive – joie de vivre! I still did not try to do too much, but I managed to use the oven to heat up food which at the time was quite an achievement. I hadn't been able to cook for months. Even bending down to open the freezer and cupboard doors had been strenuous; and the colossal size of my bump and my weight straining my knees was a hindrance.

Towards the end of my pregnancy I was climbing the stairs on all fours and taking taxis to my hospital appointments. Jostling about on public transport (which I'd already been sick while on my way to my first antenatal appointment) was few yards made me breathless. Beanie (the myself had come so far and we were not efforts.



not an option and walking just a bump's nickname), Jason and going to jeopardise our

When I discovered that I was had worried that maybe I had left it too late peers go through IVF treatment and also fate. We took the less romantic timing route. Valentines was so over. March – damn there goes our Scorpio baby! It was misery. God, how did some of my peers cope with infertility. I was angry and upset – a whole lot of feelings. Chasing a career suddenly felt like wasted time and opportunity and waiting for the right financial moment to have a baby became nonsensical to me. It seemed that it might be a while before we'd have children or never at all. So we resigned ourselves to a potential childless existence and made plans for the future and resumed our normal daily activities.

pregnant, I was relieved. I after watching some of my partially resigning myself to January 2006 came and

And then strange things started happening when I returned from a trip abroad. I became clumsy –spilling things, dropping things. I was surprisingly full of energy at the start – we went out and enjoyed ourselves at the ballet, dined at our favourite restaurants and cheered ourselves up. I started aerobics classes and ironically was asked if I was pregnant and replied not to my knowledge. But the week after the class my stomach ached a great deal. I thought I was just a bit unfit. We were not expecting me to be pregnant after the former attempts and decided to wait a couple of weeks more to delay disappointment. I was so relieved and ecstatic when we confirmed that we were going to become a threesome. Initially, I carried on as normal, walking a lot, but the tiredness only began after a particularly long trip to harrow. For most people it is a long walk, but for me it

was quite usual. On that occasion, I tired easily and had to slow down. From thereon the pregnancy was a tough journey.

Having a baby changes a lot of things. Well, it's the loss of that empty feeling when one has everything that one could possibly want – a loving husband and an adorable child. If the house burns down, we can rebuild it, money comes and goes, but special people in our lives are irreplaceable, and that relentless chase of material things changed during pregnancy. Because I was lay in bed for much of my pregnancy, I had a lot of time to think and reassess my values and what was truly important, what I had perhaps taken for granted such as my health and mobility. I discovered during my pregnancy that I had to let go of lots of things such as vanity, money, greed, and 'pie in the sky' plans for the future, and stop regretting part of the past. I realised I had nothing, not even good health. All I had was the here and now and my mind which I desperately tried to keep healthy.

My body changed beyond all recognition to me my stomach was so far out the front almost to the end of my knees seated and heavy that I had to climb the stairs on my fours. Jason dashed home to do a double shift of cooking for and bathing me, as I needed to be supported to climb into the bath. Showers were not an option, I felt dizzy and out of puff to stand for long. I spent the majority of my pregnancy in bed, part of it in hospital, and partway through when we felt that things couldn't get any worse, Jason had a scare with a heart murmur caused by stress (not surprisingly). I thought, God take me not him. Again, I felt helpless unable to assist him. Towards the end of the pregnancy, Jason dropped a heavy drawer on his foot while trying to help me pack away the baby's clothes and spent a week working from home hobbling. We are jinxed, I thought. I sympathised then with the elderly and infirm. I then dreaded the thought of growing old and immobile as we were both at home that week.

We had been on the hellish journey of a lifetime. And I would definitely say that by a divine guiding hand the three of us survived. Eventually our precious small gem, Sapphire was born on Boxing Day. I hazily remember, a few moments after she was born, thinking how amazing and gorgeous she was lying there trying to lift her head under the heat lamp and staring at me staring back at her. It was hard to believe it was our baby. The operating team and midwife who looked after me when I was given the epidural did a fantastic job and thanks to their quick thinking saved our precious Sapphire who had been distressed from a prolonged labour, so an emergency caesarean was performed. I know some people were not so fortunate that Christmas.

When she smiles my life sparkles and most of the time her being here makes the nine months experience a distant memory. Although now and then I have flash backs – some of them are of the first few days after birth and returning home for the first time - but that's another long story!



Deli Vinyo Buckley-Keogh