

I truly believed that I was prepared for post partum depression. I read a lot about it, I knew the symptoms and I had a plan!

My journey was off to a rocky start; having miscarried twins only six weeks prior to finding out that I was pregnant this time, my hormones were already out of whack. Every day of this pregnancy, I was terrified that I would lose this baby too and I am not sure that I would have been able to handle that if I did.

My job at the time was quite stressful and unrewarding – it was not a healthy environment and I was being asked to do things that went against my moral fibre so I quit that job to follow my dream. The only problem with that was that I had to move to the other side of the country to study. By myself. Pregnant. With nobody on the Left Coast! I asked my doctor what the risk was that I would miscarry again. He told me that it was exactly the same if I were to stay home, NOT follow my dream and keep my feet up all day long. That was all that I needed to hear! I packed my bags and headed to the West Coast to study dog training!

Despite earning the nickname ‘Chuck’ (as in Up Chuck because I vomited at least 20 times per day) I adored being pregnant. I loved the way that I looked; I loved the way that I felt; and I truly loved that little human growing inside me every day. Up until that point, I was not a lover of children. Ok, I didn’t really like kids. I babysat ONCE in my entire life and I had NEVER changed a diaper. But I knew that I would love MY baby – I did have some concerns that maybe he/she – IT – wouldn’t love me though; but I didn’t stress over that – I was confident that it would work itself out.

Rjght around February 2002 – three months before my due date – I started developing a rash. It started on my back (right where I could not possibly reach it!) and moved to cover my entire body. Let me tell you – when you present at a doctors office with a crazy rash that I am told looks suspiciously like scabies people move far away from you! A few tests later and it turns out that it is NOT scabies (the gowns and masks come off) and I find out I have the ‘pregnancy rash’. No worries though, it goes away upon delivery – did I mention that was three months away?!

Fast forward to my due date – I have now scratched myself nearly silly and the only way to make it stop is to deliver this baby – he/she IT is coming OUT! NOW. I convince my doctor to induce me (and by ‘convince’ I mean threaten to peel all of my skin off so that new, rash-free skin will grow back); so I am induced, drip, wait, drip, wait, break water, wait, contraction, contraction, contraction...and thirty six hours later, I am headed to the OR for a C - section.. I had some concerns about having a section because my history – at the dentist at least – was that I did not freeze very easily. And sure enough, when I let a shriek out of me when my belly was cut, it was confirmed that I did not take to the freezing that well. The next thing I remember was a mask coming over my face.

That day I learned what ‘unconditional love’ and ‘love at first sight’ really meant. I mean, I was smitten! I had no idea that a person could love another person as much as I loved my child! This was going to be a piece of cake!

Later on that same day, after agreeing to let the nurses look after my new love so I could sleep, I went into anaphylactic shock requiring epinephrine. Where did THAT come from? Who knew?

After a few more days in the hospital, I was finally allowed to take my baby home. It was only when I got home that I started to get a little freaked out by this whole thing. Certainly not post partum depression – or so I thought – but a little concerned.

It was my first night at home that I experienced my first ever anxiety attack – something that I would not wish upon anybody! I woke up from a very sound sleep with a sense of impending doom and no matter what I could not figure out what I was afraid of! My heart was pounding, my hands were sweating and I could not sit still for a minute. I was pacing back and forth up and down the hall in my house trying to figure out what was terrifying me so much. It was 2 a.m. so my husband called my doctors office to leave a message to see if we could get in to see him. Luckily, he called back first thing in the morning and agreed to see me right away. One problem though: I had to leave the house in order to get there. I am normally a very social person, so being terrified to leave my house was terrifying in and of itself. Luckily though, I had still dodged that post partum depression bullet! HA!

I was finally able to get out to my vehicle, get myself onto the floor of it so nobody would see me and want to talk and see the baby, and go to his office where I then found out that I could not walk through the door into the office. The sheer terror was, well, terrifying! Luckily, he recognized immediately that I was dealing with PPD and helped me to understand that it can manifest in many forms and that he could help me. Which he did with a short cycle of anti-depressants to help me through this rough patch. I remain eternally grateful to him for this.

Thinking that I faced the worst of it and that I was on the road to recovery and super-mom-ness, I started walking outside with my baby; he was after all two weeks old! Shouldn't I be able to perform miracles already?

The first time I ended up back in the hospital was when my angel was two weeks old and I had taken my first stroll outside with him. After a glorious walk in the May sun, I sat down on my couch to nurse him when all of a sudden more blood than I have ever seen poured out of me. I ran to my bedroom and put my son safely in the bassinet beside my bed so I could find something to put on my bed before I laid down. I was fairly certain that I was going to die, but on the off chance that I did not, I knew that I could not afford a new couch AND a new bed! So I ran around my house like a madwoman to find something to protect the mattress all the while blood was running like a garden hose. I finally scooped up the baby and the cordless phone and laid down. Not wanting to bother anybody at the 9-1-1 office, I kept debating if I should call or not. I would dial 9, 1, then hang up. I did that three times but since the blood was actually spurting out of me and I was starting to get weak, I opted to call.

I will never forget the amazing EMTs who took me to the hospital that day. Despite traffic and road construction, they were able to start two iv's and get me to the hospital very quickly. I asked them if I was going to die, hoping that they would say 'Oh no, this happens all the time' but they looked at each other in a way that told me they thought that I was going to and said nothing.

After careful consideration, I refused a blood transfusion and to this day I have no regrets; but I did feel very weak for a long time afterwards.

Another two weeks went by and my goodness, my baby was a month old (I was still nursing – thanks to the help of Kim!) and he has only been out for ONE WALK! How will I ever achieve Super Mom status if I never take my baby out?

Out for a stroll take two! And just like two weeks earlier, after enjoying a glorious walk in the May sun, I sat down on the couch to nurse my baby when all of a sudden I saw exactly the same amount of blood I saw two weeks prior! Since this was 'old hat' to me this time, I did not call an ambulance, I just called my husband at work to come to take me to the hospital.

Again, I refused a transfusion despite having lost 3 pints of blood. I was told at the hospital that if I was 70 years old instead of 30, I would have been dead to which I replied, 'If I was 70 years old, I would not have just had a baby now would I?' You can't argue that logic can you?

With lots of help from family I started the journey to mending my physical self. A strict diet with lots of iron rich foods, lots of fluids because I was still nursing and slowly building up my strength helped me to focus only on how I felt physically.

Once all of the crises were over and I was confident that I was not going to haemorrhage every time I took a walk outside, I could start to figure out what my new normal was going to be. Of course I was not getting much sleep, I was nursing. Being tired always makes you sad, right? Right? That would explain it.

Then I noticed I started having 'dark' thoughts. I always loved my son, but I wanted to hurt him just to see what it would be like. I used to hold him and I would have a 'vision' in my mind of throwing him against the wall and he would stick to it and slide down. I didn't really want him hurt, but that vision happened so often that it scared me. Seriously, what sane woman thinks that of her baby that she supposedly loves? Fearing that if I told anybody, he would be taken away from me, I kept it to myself – terrified that I would actually do it one day.

One time I screamed at him and I will never forget; he was crying and crying and I yelled 'Shut the fuck up!!!' at the top of my lungs. Then RAN to my bedroom crying and rocking back and forth and hating myself for it.

There were many times that I put him in his crib and locked myself in my bedroom so I could not hurt him. I figured it was better to leave him alone and crying than to physically hurt him. I hated that I had to do that and swore that I would never tell – because surely I was the only one that ever did that.

I finally had to tell my husband that things were not quite right because him being a hunter, we had guns in our house and I was afraid that I would just blow my head off and even thought I did not want to commit suicide, I was afraid that I was going to. Now tell me if THAT makes any sense! It was like my body was completely taken over by a force that I had no control over.

I feel blessed that I never once stopped loving my son and I knew that I wanted to be around forever, so I at least had enough of my own strength left to make sure that he was safe and that I could not hurt myself; but I was terrified that I would lose that tiny ounce of control that I had.

When I had been living on the west coast, I met a lovely maternity nurse who worked at the Vancouver Maternity Hospital. She was also a midwife, so I contacted her via email to see if I was crazy or if there was something that could be done. (Heaven forbid anybody that knew me or my family found out my deep dark secret!) Since her brain was still working, she was able to do a bit of research for me and gave me a phone number of PPD counselling group in Vancouver who did in person and telephone counselling. So, unbeknownst even to my husband, I started calling a lovely lady in Vancouver who helped me realize that I was not crazy, could even be considered somewhat normal, and most importantly, I was not alone – other people have gone through this AND SURVIVED, with healthy children.

Soon my maternity leave was over and I had to go back to work – which was fine. I loved my job, despite it being an hour away from home. Plus I would be able to go back to teaching classes two nights per week. For sure I was healed NOW and almost at Super Mom status!

Until the day that I came home from work to find out that my husband had moved out. I guess the post partum depression was too difficult to handle. Lucky him, he got to walk away from it.

This might be what some refer to as a manic stage; I continued to work full time in a city an hour away, running a business, teaching two nights per week plus private lessons on the weekends, oh, and being the sole caregiver for a one year old baby!

It was then that I decided that maybe, just maybe, medication may be required. Oh, and a little therapy too!

Time, exercise and talking all combined with medication is what finally brought me through this ordeal. One therapist gave me permission to scream. Scream? What sane

person does that? Turns out, lots of us! Although I do recommend doing it in your car alone when driving on a deserted road. Or in your house if you are alone. Scream until you can't scream any more – it is shocking what it will do for you. And nobody gets hurt.

While my bout with post partum depression was terrifying, sad and all around horrible, I would not change my past. It has made me who I am today and not only did I survive – but I thrived!

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