

i get KNOCKED UP so hard

Let's start at the beginning. Pregnancy feels like you're a victim of a zombie attack. They ate your brains first, and you're the only one afflicted. You're not in control of your body, you lose your ability to think and remember things, and, oh yeah, you're blissfully unaware of what's about to happen to you. You're not fully gone yet—you still remember stuff, you still love your spouse—but all kinds of shocking and gross things start happening. The moment the pregnancy test screams *Pregnant!* a micro-size brass band starts marching in your uterus. Cue excitement, cue barfing, cue fatigue, and cue terror.

The most bizarre part of pregnancy is the first trimester when you don't look any different, and, if you're one of the lucky ones, you don't feel any different. You have to remind yourself that you can't eat sushi or join in at happy hour. It's like a fun little secret that nobody gets to know unless you want them



#IMOMSOHARD

to. You just get to field all the “Are you gaining weight due to gluttony or sloth?” questions.

Pretty soon, the second trimester rolls in, and the fun part starts: sharing the news, showing off a tiny bump, picking out cute stuff for the nursery. You are mobile, you are happy, you are glowing—and then slowly, steadily, the snow globe–size being in your gut grows to the size of an *actual* globe.

Finally, you hit the third trimester, and the magic starts to feel less like magic and more like pain. You can see the baby’s foot kicking through your stomach and feel a jab to your rib. *The call is coming from inside the house.* (And the house is your uterus.) Balance is an issue, you haven’t seen your labia in weeks (which is shocking because they have enlarged to cocktail wienies), your feet are fat, your thighs hurt, you can’t poop, you can’t stop peeing, and your boobs are veiny and leaking. It’s so uncomfortable that by the time you do deliver it feels like a gift that someone is asking you to shove that globe through your tiny vagina hole. Ah, birth. What a miracle. You are now a *mom-bie*. Welcome! You are now one of the walking dead.

KRISTIN

I was a ginormous giant during my first pregnancy. Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smelled the smell of a Cinnabon. And I ate many. Jen threw a baby shower for me, and we played this game where you run a ribbon around your midsection to see how big your circumference is, and everyone guesses the number. You guys, every single person guessed about ten inches less than my actual

number. It was quite a confidence booster. (Years earlier, my husband had made the same mistake when guessing my sexual history, and I'm actually fine with him being that far off the mark.)

My belly was so doughy. Finn had a real luxury condo thing going on in there. When I went in for measurement, my doctors kept using the term "macro-birth." When the doctor first said it, I looked at her like she was asking me to solve a long division problem in my head. I knew that "macro" and "birth" together did not sound awesome. "Macro" means big, and "birth" means something tearing through my vagina, so something big tearing through my vagina sounded, um, carry the one, TERRIFYING.

The docs had a hard time estimating just how big Finn was going to be when he came out, but my husband weighed eleven pounds, and his brothers each weighed twelve at birth. Their mom is six feet tall, so when they asked me at my OB if I wanted to try vaginal birth, I said, "I'm five feet eight. I'll try real hard, but that's going to be a big baby." I should've done that research before choosing a spouse.

I just kept getting bigger, so at forty weeks, my doctors decided we should probably go ahead and induce. I was like, "Great. That's not gonna hurt, is it?" Are you all laughing now?

A few days before the induction was scheduled, we had another appointment. On the way there, I told Colin, "Gosh, this baby's really kicking my chest." It was like a tiny Jackie Chan was having at it right under my chin.

Colin looked at me and said, "The baby is not at your chest, dummy. That's labor."

How did he know? Fair question. Colin might not have had a uterus (still doesn't), but he had read all the books about having



one and what happens when you fill one of those babies up with a mini-me. I had read exactly nothing about the miracle that is giving birth. Unless you count fifty “Body after Baby” articles in *Us Weekly*. I was that way my whole pregnancy, but Jen had read all the books, so whenever I had a question and Colin wasn’t around, I just asked her for the CliffsNotes version of what was happening to my body. I’d call her, and she’d say, “How are you feeling?”

“Well, I throw up a little bit every time I bend over.”

“Totally normal at this gestational age.”

And then I’d return to wondering just how big a person could get before you’d end up in a *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* situation. Then I’d go back to eating bagel bites. They were actually just normal bagels that I could eat in one bite. My seventy-pound weight gain is still a mystery.

I took a real “I’ll figure it out when I get there” approach to giving birth. I know there are hundreds of books and listicles that can prepare you for what to expect, but that kind of prep is just not my style. Plus, why research when people *love* to give free birthing advice? Everyone had helpful tips, even dudes. One guy told me to rub olive oil “on my holes.” He said it would soften the skin. No, I don’t know his name, but he does work at Trader Joe’s.

I don’t read any sort of manuals for the use or maintenance of motor vehicles or small appliances either. I feel like if you can’t figure it out by intuition and animal instinct, you just don’t need anything that is that complex. Some assembly required? No, thank you. I do not need to be mad all the time, so, Ikea, you can assemble that bookshelf your own self. I am not a carpenter. I paid for it. “Some assembly required” is why

I got married. If it were up to me, my whole house would be decorated with cube furniture and beanbag chairs.

But my husband is a reader and he's Irish, which is a perfect "some assembly required" combo. He loves to put things together, and he loves to know how things work. He likes to come at me with stuff he has read, and a battle of ignorance and education ensues. He'll tell me something like "Did you know that there are more bacteria cells in your body than human cells?"

Me: "That seems made up."

Him: "Nope, that's science."

He'd obviously done his reading about the contractions. When I got to the doctor for the checkup before my induction, they took one look at the monitor and said, "Ma'am, you're already in labor."

My doctor, who is so, so tiny—just super skinny and on a big day is at best five feet tall; I called her a "pocket doctor"—has been delivering babies forever. She came in and did a cervical check, which felt like she was tugging at my esophagus. Her arm was so far up there, I could taste her wedding ring. It felt like she was doing one of those veterinary maneuvers to birth a cow.

"Your tonsils are fine," she joked, and then they told me they were going to break my water.

When they did it, I was sitting on these pads, and fluid just kept coming out. I was looking at everybody saying, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," as if I thought someone was going to hand me a mop when it was all over and ask me to please clean up this disgusting mess. Looking back, I wish I hadn't apologized. I wish I would have been amazed at my body's awesomeness. "Look at all of that fluid dumping out of me. I am a pregnancy goddess!"



Anyway, then I labored *forever*. They put me on Pitocin, and it was the worst. I was having contractions every sixteen seconds with no epidural. My saving grace was my labor and delivery coach. I loved her so much. She was so calm, like a beautiful angel sent to remind me that I was not going to be the first woman in the world to have someone watch poop come out of my asshole while I pushed. She mattered more to me than anyone in that room—and my husband was there.

I tried to stay calm, but I knew that even though I was trying to keep it together, I actually looked like a sweaty landlord. I was very conscious that I was not my best self. There were so damn many people in that room. It was like a boy band rehearsal in there. Believe it or not, I am a little shy. I also don't like going to the doctor where the phrase "warts and all" can be applied literally. Usually, before I go to the OB, there's a lot of prep work. It's like going to an auto show. I clean it, polish it, and get out the lint roller. But because I had been counting on a few more days until I was induced, let's just say I was a little unkempt, and the whole team had full access to my problem area hairs. Finally, the pain got to me and I broke. My apologies for sullyng the labor and delivery room floor gave way to an angry growl, "You get that f*cking anesthesiologist in here now."

The doctor and the nurses were super calm as they told me, "Kristin, the anesthesiologist is helping another woman." At this point I couldn't stop barfing.

I yelled, "*WHY DOES SHE GET TO GO FIRST?*" Let's be truthful here. I believe my actual words were, "Why does that bitch get to go first?" which I regret. She was in pain too. But I'm positive mine was worse.

They slowly backed away like you do when you encounter a crazy person outside the bank as I demanded through a very tight jaw, "Listen, you get him in here. You get him in here *noooooowwwwww!*" This, by the way, was good practice for the way I would speak to my son for the first five years of his life.

Then the anesthesiologist came in. I'm not very good with needles and I'm not very good with pain. But my husband is *really* not good with needles and *really* not very good with pain. Colin was so freaked out. When they gave me that pillow to hold so that I could stay still while they jammed a Capri Sun straw into my spinal column, my husband, God love him, was very controlled. I just looked at Colin, as his face went from white to gray. I told him, "Get your head in the game, Sweeney. You don't get to pass out. You stay in this. Don't you go anywhere."

He started looking at me really hard. I could see a little pink come back into his face. But I could also see him sweeping the room for an escape. I told him, "I will get out of this, and I will murder you if you leave me right now." He stayed in there like a champ.

Suddenly, it felt like my back was burning. The epidural didn't work. They had missed. Bro, you had *one job*. How do you screw that up?

My doctor came in and said, "There's a problem," which I don't like hearing when I'm in line at Chipotle, so hearing it while I was on the verge of bringing life into this world did not sit well with me. But I didn't even have a second to spiral out because they hit the go button for a C-section. Instantly, I was wheeled into another room and shrouded in a pop-up tent, separating the upper half of my body from the lower half. I felt like a magician's assistant, and I hate magicians. I have no idea if



#IMOMSOHARD

Colin stayed upright during the surgery, those doctors wouldn't tell me, but a few minutes later, I had my perfect little baby boy. When I saw Finn for the first time, he had so much hair he looked like *ER*-era George Clooney—and he was so pink. And big. And perfect. But most of all when I looked at him he made perfect sense: *There you are, Finn.*

Afterward, there was a big part of me that was disappointed that I didn't have a vaginal birth. If I had just tried a little longer than *twenty-eight hours*. I wanted that experience so badly. I wanted to know what it felt like to push him out the way I was wired to do. It was terribly disappointing. But then I realized how silly I was being. I had a perfect baby, and I didn't blow out my vagina. (But I did blow out my cervix, so there's a little foreshadowing of my birth story about Eleanor.)

FYI, I still haven't read the manual. I just call Jen.

JEN

I've also been seated in section C. Twice.

You hear about celebrities scheduling Cs like they're no big whoop—sort of like you schedule a Brazilian blowout. But if you haven't had one, ladies, let me tell you, they are *brutal*.

The closest thing I can compare my son's birth experience to is an alien abduction. I boarded a sterile ship and was too scared to sleep for forty hours. These crabby green aliens kept coming in and shoving their gloved claws into my hoo-ha every half hour, while they had me hooked to all these machines and videogames. They denied me food or drink, tied me to a table,

sawed me in half, and ripped a parasite out of me. When it was over, they put this little miniature succubus on me that I'd have to take care of for the next eighteen years. And David Duchovny wasn't even there.

I tried to make a plan for my delivery persona. I didn't want to be one of those stereotypical women in labor. You know, like in the movies, like *Look Who's Talking Too*, where the couple is panicking in the back of the cab, and the mom is yelling things at her poor, beleaguered husband: "I'm gonna kill you! You did this to me!"

You know what? I didn't need to worry. It is not *at all* like the movies, because the movies last two hours and labor lasts two days.

Before we got to the hospital, I had been doing fine. As I was in triage, I could hear another woman screaming down the hall, and I thought, *Yikes, I do not feel like that.*

And then I went from zero to ten on the pain scale in less than a minute. I was just swallowed by pain. When things got real, I went silent.

I just stopped talking. My husband, Brit, was like, "Um, does it hurt?" He was trying to remind me to breathe, and I said, "It hurts between my neck and my feet, but I don't know where." I just blew all my fuses.

This came as a surprise. I've got a high pain threshold because I have an older brother. You'll only understand that if you have an older brother. You need to be able to take a punch without flinching. So I was shocked to find out that, twenty-four hours into labor, simply making eye contact with someone was enough to make me scream.



When at last it came time to push, my doctor was very old-school. He told me, “You can’t have your epidural while you’re pushing, because you can’t control your body.”

He had that right. If I could control my body, contractions would have felt like hugs from a baby panda, but instead they felt like someone was punching me in the face and the vagina at the same time.

I pushed for two hours, and it didn’t do anything. Now, I enjoy many things, you guys—a glass of merlot, a Stevie Nicks acoustic version, books about serial killers—but physical exertion is not among them. For me, pushing for two hours was the equivalent of doing one of those ultramarathons where they run barefoot for days, only everyone was staring at my vagina as I did it. I had no idea what they were seeing down there. I mean, I know from looking in the mirror that my nose can look kind of funny from the right side, but down there? No clue.

The doctors were using all kinds of tools: the speculum, the gloves, the occasional face guard, which, okay, fellas, was a little much, don’t you think?

They thought the baby might be sunny-side up. This awful woman, literally the worst nurse on the planet—I was fully prepared to write a strongly worded letter, but I was on too many meds—said, “I’m going to put your leg up on this thing, ’cause it’ll turn the baby.” She started to manipulate my legs like a physical trainer (note: all of my knowledge of what physical trainers do comes from the *Real Housewives* franchise, not from any real-life experience). Now, I’ve never heard another woman say, “My labor was pretty rough, but then I just threw my leg in the air and out popped the baby!” so as soon as she lifted my

thigh, I said, "This is not a thing that works. Because if this was a thing that worked, they would put legs up all the time, but in real life people end up having to do C-sections."

Suddenly, my midwestern roots took hold, and I was like, "Oh no, I'm being rude." I'm absolutely one of those women who would have died in labor in pioneer days because I would have been scrubbing down the larder with lye while I was laboring because I didn't want to trouble anyone, and then next thing you'd know, I'd be dead, with a baby half out of me.

But before I could say I was sorry for being rude, I let out a string of what people used to call cuss words in the '80s. It seemed that all polite bets were off. I went from "Sorry for my rudeness" to "Back it up. If I want ice chips, I better get some shit-damn-mothafuckin' ice chips. Please." (Of course I still said "please." I was in pain, but I wasn't an animal.)

I made that nurse go get my doctor, who, by the way, was passing kidney stones as I was laboring. If there's such a thing as method acting for doctors, this was it. He wouldn't take any pain meds, because he still wanted to be able to be on call. He came in, took a look, and then went, "The baby's fine. Keep pushing." I kept pushing, nothing worked. An hour later, he goes, "You're gonna have a lot more pushing to do."

Brit turned to him and asked, "When you say 'a lot more,' Doc, what does that mean exactly?"

The doctor said, "Well, it's like we've asked her to do a hundred of her best push-ups, and we're gonna ask her to do a hundred more."

Brit had known me for five years at that time, and as a keen observer of human behavior, knew I had worked out precisely



#IMOMSOHARD

zero times in those years, so without even checking in with me, he goes, “Can she have the C-section?” That was the closest I’d come to wanting to have sex with him in months.

They sped me down to surgery while Brit scrubbed up. They started my anesthesia, and I was already so tired I could barely stay awake. I was so excited but every part of me was exhausted. It felt like the prep and surgery took forever. The surgery team chatted casually, listened to a playlist on someone’s iPod and debated over who the musician was that was currently playing, and nearly ripped me off the table removing my new baby boy. *It’s Eric Clapton, you idiots*, I thought, too drugged up to speak.

And then I heard crying. A perfect, healthy baby. A tiny living creature who I could not believe they handed to me, trusted me with, and then let me take home. How reckless is that? I still can’t believe it sometimes.

I didn’t just survive an alien abduction. I freaking brought a new *human being* into this world. *I made a life*. A new little person who will have thoughts and feelings and heartbreak and will experience joy and wonder, and, it’s a blasted miracle. How do you like that, entire universe?

They wheeled his plastic, hospital baby holder next to me in recovery, and my arms ached to hold him. After that much work, I could only cry (and shake violently, evidently). I used all my energy to flop my hand onto the side of his crib. Believe it or not, and I will die remembering this moment, Dash reached up and set his tiny baby hand on top of mine.

He was a wish, and then there he was. I had no idea how much happiness that little bald ET of a person would bring me

I GET KNOCKED UP SO HARD

in the coming years, how many times my mind would be blown by his smile, or how watching him hold his sister's hand would make me feel better than any drug I'd ever taken. All I knew was that I had done it. I might have expelled enough liquids onto the hospital floor to require a hazmat team, but I made a baby. And I'm not apologizing to anyone.





