

# BECOMING DAD

A TRUE STORY OF ONE MAN'S  
TRANSFORMATION FROM CLUELESS  
HUSBAND TO INVOLVED AND  
NURTURING FATHER



**Free Pregnancy Section**



KELLY CRULL

# BECOMING DAD

*A True Story of One Man's Transformation  
from Clueless Husband to Involved and  
Nurturing Father*

KELLY CRULL



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PART I

# Pregnancy

5 WEEKS

## Pregnancy Test

“Do you want me to run down to the pharmacy and get another one?” I asked.

April shrugged. She sat down on the edge of the tub and looked out the window for a while, then buried her face in her hands and wept, her shoulders shaking.

I didn’t know for sure if we were pregnant. Could we trust this piece of plastic? It was disposable, but I was supposed to believe the results were permanent, irreversible, eternal?

Still, that punch-in-the-gut feeling was not doubt, but certainty. April was crying at the edge of the tub because pregnancy was no longer a concept, but a reality.

Five weeks earlier we had visited some friends with a house on the beach. Their two-month-old Tiffany was dangerously cute. She was a fat little cherub without wings. For the first time having a baby didn’t sound like the worst idea, and so, we simply decided to stop not getting pregnant. After all, everyone said getting pregnant could take years. We agreed that we wanted a baby, but we were far from imagining a child in our future.

We had been married for six years, and all that time people had been asking us when we would start a family. I began to believe we were late. Until today, that is, when we took the pregnancy test and all of a sudden we had no choice but to look at the world from a new point of view. I felt young again, but not in a good way. I was horrified at what we had done. I felt guilt and shame and irresponsibility like I was a teenage boy who had knocked up his girlfriend. My stomach swarmed like a beehive. “What are we going to do with a baby?” I thought.

We were not ready for a baby. We had recently moved to Castellón, a small village in Spain where we had no friends, which was no surprise since we were still relying mostly on our high



school Spanish. April was in the middle of a Master's degree in Peace and Development Studies, and I was not making enough money working from home as a web designer to pay our bills.

Maybe I had deliberately avoided preparing myself mentally for having a baby. I knew I would only be able to handle this pregnancy one step at a time. At first I was ready to try to get pregnant, and that was enough. Now that we were pregnant, I needed time to let go of the life I had, everything that was familiar and basic to me, for something unpredictable and even unnecessary. Most likely April and I wouldn't go to Spanish class together or go to the movies together or even get groceries together. We would travel less, go out with friends less, and have sex less. The list streamed through my brain like headlines at the bottom of a television screen. I suppose there was never a good time to have a baby because it would always mean trading in the life I already had for one I didn't know anything about.

I would no longer be the same person, April would no longer be the same person, and now we had everything to learn about the newest addition to our family.

8 WEEKS, 1 DAY

## Doctor's Visit

“**W**ait. Is this where we're going?” I asked. I came to a complete stop on the sidewalk.

“Right here,” April said. “Come on, we're late.”

I didn't move.

“You didn't say we were going to the gynecologist,” I said and nodded at the sign over the front door.

April sighed and put her hands on her hips. “Where else do you think a woman goes for a pregnancy checkup?”

Without waiting for an answer, she turned and walked into

the clinic. I frowned, shook my head, and reluctantly followed her inside as if I had just been asked to follow her into the women's bathroom.

April signed in, and the nurse pointed the way to the waiting room where a small crowd of women glanced at us from behind their women's magazines. My worst fear had been confirmed: I was the only man in this clinic. We took the last two seats in the room, and I felt like I was having one of those dreams where I was in a public place like the grocery store and happened to catch a glimpse of myself in a mirror only to realize I was naked. Frankly, I would not have felt less awkward sitting in that waiting room completely naked. Not that the women would have noticed. They were absorbed in their magazines.

The tingling in my fingers, my heart pulsing in my chest like an electric fence, feeling warm all over, shortness of breath, I recognized the symptoms. I was embarrassed. The feeling reminded me of being sent to the store to buy tampons for my wife or being convinced to wait in the women's lingerie section by myself while April tried on a sweater. I wasn't worried that someone we knew might see us and know our secret. After all, we only knew a handful of students at the university. I felt embarrassed because everyone in the waiting room knew the only reason a guy goes to the gynecologist is because there's a good chance the girl sitting next to him is pregnant.

I was making my debut as an expectant father, and now that I was here, I knew I wasn't ready to have an audience. I hadn't dared to think of myself as a father yet. In fact, if I had applied for the job—if that's how becoming a dad worked—I would not have been called in for an interview. I was young and unqualified with little to no experience. My own mother had told me I was "not particularly good with kids," as if it was common knowledge. I wanted to be a dad, but I wasn't one yet.

Meanwhile, April eyed the magazines on the coffee table until she found one she liked. She picked it up, opened it, and began to read.

8 WEEKS, 1 DAY

## Ultrasound

A few minutes later April was reclined on a hospital bed, and I was sitting in a chair next to her holding her hand. Both of us were watching over our doctor's shoulder as she clicked around the screen, took measurements of our little tadpole and dictated them to her assistant.

I was surprised. Not to see the baby, and not that the baby looked like a tadpole, but because I felt like something was missing.

Although I didn't think of myself as a father yet, the truth was I wanted to feel like one. That's why I was here. For a moment, it made more sense to imagine us in Bern, Switzerland where April was reclined on a sofa covered with elaborate tapestries and lots of pillows, I was sitting in a chair next to her holding her hand, and Hermann Rorschach, the great Swiss psychiatrist, was at his desk. He reached over and handed me one of his famous flash cards.

"What do you see on the card?" he asked. "How does the card make you feel?"

I stared blankly at the card.

"I see a tadpole," I said. "I don't *feel* anything."

I was looking for more than a tadpole on a flash card. I was waiting for something to kick in. I didn't know exactly what, but something very instinctive and paternal that would set into motion my great metamorphosis into the dad I would become. I expected to be changed by seeing this little person. I was counting on it, but nothing happened. I felt the same, like I was

watching a meteorologist explain weather patterns on Doppler radar.

“This isn’t working,” I said. I looked at the card again and shook my head.

Rorschach leaned back in his chair for a moment, stroked his mustache, and then he looked me in the eyes.

“Most of the time we don’t choose the important moments in our lives,” he said. “The important moments choose us.” He paused. “What matters is that we embrace these moments when they come along.”

Rorschach was right. I didn’t feel like a dad, but that didn’t matter. I couldn’t wait around for instinct to kick in. I wasn’t the pregnant one after all. Unlike April whose hormones were literally transforming her into a fully-functional baby-care facility complete with heated Jacuzzi and all-you-can-eat buffet, becoming a dad was a choice—less instinct, like grabbing a snack when I felt hungry, and more choice, like making myself get out of bed in the morning to go for a run.

I didn’t feel different. I didn’t look different. But I was choosing to be a dad.

9 WEEKS

## Sailing

Calling family and friends to tell them we’re pregnant has begun to feel like telemarketing. I spend weekends on the phone with a list of people to call and a script of what to say when they pick up. Maybe I should end the conversation by asking them if they would like to consolidate their student loans.

Because no one in Castellón knows we’re pregnant yet, I only feel like we’re pregnant when I’m on the telephone, like I’m somebody who dresses up in chain mail on the weekends and goes to medieval festivals.

I'm no good at keeping secrets either. The only way I've managed to keep my mouth shut when I'm not on the phone is to try to forget we're pregnant altogether, which seems counterproductive since in reality I need all the help I can get to believe we are actually pregnant.

So, April and I agreed to tell one person in Castellón. We chose Laurie, even though she is not family, and we have only known her for five months. Laurie is a mother, and if anyone would know how to make the pregnancy seem real, she would. Plus, she lives around the corner and sees April every day at class. No doubt she would remind us we were pregnant.

We met at a hot dot stand, and I don't think Laurie noticed we weren't eating our hot dogs. We were concentrated on watching her squeeze mustard on her hot dog when April broke the silence.

"We have something to tell you."

Laurie looked at both of us, then set down the mustard.

"We're pregnant," April said.

Laurie's face twisted into a pained expression, as if these very words had welled up inside of her a storm of emotions so unexpected and so fierce she could not brace herself in time.

We sat with our hot dogs and watched her giggle while she wiped tears from her eyes.

Watching a friend cry is not easy. I wanted to say something, but I didn't because I didn't know why she was crying. I knew she was crying because we were pregnant, but she also seemed to be crying as a mother, as someone who knew more than we did. She cried like someone watching the opera, or like someone reminded of a story that needed to be told.

I felt the winds begin to blow. Our sails bellied, and we were finally moving, gliding across the water, as if Laurie's tears had somehow launched us on our journey. We were no longer harbored in the life we had known up to this point, but sailing into the storm.

We needed Laurie, now more than ever. Not to remind us that this was real, which seemed obvious now, but to show us the way forward.

9 WEEKS, 3 DAYS

## Naps

I unlocked the door with one hand, rolled my bike into the apartment with the other, and after a flutter of helmet, keys, shoes and sweatshirt, found the place completely quiet.

“Hello?”

No answer.

“April?”

Still no answer.

I walked to the office where April’s desk was. No April. I put my head in the kitchen. No April. I checked the den. No April.

I walked back through the apartment to our bedroom and opened the door. The covers lumped together around what I could only guess was a human-sized kidney bean. Without a sound, I sat on the side of the bed and rubbed the covers over April’s back. Slowly she came to life, wriggling a bit, then turning over and pulling the covers down over her chin. She rubbed her eyes.

“What?” she asked. She squinted at me and then at the alarm clock. She pulled the covers back over her head.

I couldn’t help it. I laughed.

“It’s okay if you take naps,” I said. “You’re pregnant.”

She pulled the covers down below her eyes and looked at me suspiciously.

“But I have to write my paper,” she said. I swear she was pouting.

“It’s okay if you take a nap.” I repeated myself, realizing then that these words were becoming a daily mantra.

She took a deep breath, sighed, and stared angrily at the ceiling. I kissed her on the cheek, then leaned across the bed and turned off the alarm clock.

“I’ll check on you later,” I whispered. I left the bedroom and closed the door behind me.

10 WEEKS, 5 DAYS

## Baby Food

**N**o, I’m not referring to the goo that comes in jars. I’m sure there will be time to experiment with that later. I’m talking about the food my pregnant wife demands for the baby before the baby is even born. What she eats, the baby eats.

April’s requests are a royal decree. “In the name of our baby, The Royal Highness,” April says, “I request Stuffed Eggplant for dinner.”

Who can argue with an embryo?

April even sent me a link this morning to the recipe she had in mind. I thought she was busy studying at the university library, but it turns out she was looking up stuffed eggplant recipes. I had no idea a baby in the womb could have so much control over how we spend our time.

Two hours later, no exaggeration, and I had dinner on the table.

A banquet fit for royalty.

11 WEEKS, 1 DAY

## Pesto

**A** plate of warm pasta. The elegance of extra-virgin olive oil. The vitality of basil. The adventure of garlic. The nuance of pine nuts. And oh, bittersweet Parmesan sprinkled on top.

This is pesto.

Who says women are the only ones who have pregnancy cravings? I am living proof that men do too.

It's not difficult to find out what men crave when their wives are pregnant. They crave every food their wives stopped eating when they got pregnant.

I saw April get sick. I heard how she bad-mouthed her favorite foods. There's no way I'm going to eat those foods in front of her. Still, secretly, I crave them.

Tonight April's out. She won't be back for dinner. As I write these final words, the pasta is boiling on the stove, an open bottle of wine is sitting on the table, and that one special jar of my favorite pesto sauce is waiting for me at the back of the kitchen cupboard.

13 WEEKS, 5 DAYS

## Pregnancy Brain

**S**unday we had lunch with our landlords, Damián and Encarna. We sat around the table outside next to the pool while Encarna brought out the food from the kitchen. April looked so tired, I thought she might curl up in the shade of one of their lemon trees and go to sleep. April was so worn out, in fact, she couldn't keep her Spanish straight. She was beyond being frustrated. She was too tired to care, so she kept talking anyway, which was like listening to a drunk tell a story.

I wanted to say, "April's okay, really. She's got pregnancy brain. She'll just keep getting slower and more forgetful every day until the baby is born. It's an amazing phenomenon to watch, actually."

But I had better judgment.

This is all part of a longer story about learning languages. April and I have always learned languages together, even in high school. In almost every regard, we speak at the same level.



However, we have our differences. Without a doubt I try harder. I read books in Spanish. I rehearse Spanish conversations while I make dinner. I have a weekly language exchange with a guy named Marcos.

Still, April learns as much as I do. I suppose you could say April pays closer attention to details, but when it comes down to it, I think April just has better hardware than I do.

She's smart.

I remember one day having tea with our host mom in Amsterdam while April and I were studying abroad and learning Dutch. She looked at April and said, "You've learned Dutch very quickly. You must have a knack for languages." I was feeling pretty good about our improvement until I realized she wasn't talking to me. "Kelly, you struggle," she said. Much less inspired by this thought, she moved on to the next topic of conversation.

So, you see, I've been patiently waiting my turn. I realize taking advantage of my pregnant wife is not nice, especially when she feels dumber every day, reading articles like "The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy" or "An Introduction to Development and the Anthropology of Modernity."

Still, seeing pregnancy is a temporary thing, I can't see how it will hurt anyone if I enjoy a brief moment of intellectual superiority.

Seems smart to me, don't you think?

16 WEEKS

## Boy or Girl?

"Actually, I can't tell," the doctor said.

She took both her hands and pressed gently on April's firm stomach. The baby on the screen wiggled, even yawned, and settled back into a comfortable position.

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