

First Comes Baby, Then Comes Marriage? The story of a pregnant bride

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October 14, 2011

When I found out I was pregnant one fateful night following a frantic trip to Rite-Aid during my senior year of college, there seemed to be one overlying question:

Would we get married?

As anyone who experiences an unplanned pregnancy in a committed relationship can tell you, it's the question that everyone wants to ask. It's the elephant in the room, the words hanging in the air, waiting to burst out of the mouth of your parents, the grocery store clerk, your next-door neighbor.

It's the question that my boyfriend of four years, Ben, asked when he proposed to me on a drizzly fall day, the sun bursting out through the rain clouds the moment he dropped to his knees.

Getting engaged while you're pregnant is a bit like your parents congratulating you for running your junior high track meet – sure, they probably mean it, but in the end, they kind of have to, don't they?

I wasn't sure how I felt about anything. I had no idea how to accept the fact that I growing an actual *human being* inside of me, let alone deal with the fact that in nine short (long) months, I was going to become a mother.

My whole life had already changed, literally overnight. Did I really want to rock the boat even more by jumping into marriage?

The consensus among our small town was that of course we should get married – and soon. The pressure to wed felt overwhelming. People looked at us as if we committed the ultimate sin of getting pregnant out of wedlock, and yet, they somehow thought our getting married would make it all better – that even though the math didn't really add up, it would still be ok when I popped that kid out as long as I had a ring on my finger.

My mom was the sole voice of reason through the whole thing. She urged me to not to rush into marriage just because I was pregnant. She knew there would be doubts someday as a married woman, and she reminded me that I wouldn't want those doubts surfacing because of a baby.

Of course, I already had doubts – was Ben just doing his duty? Were we too young to get married? Was I ready for any of this? Did I even *want* this?

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There were other things too. Like the fact that I wanted my day. I wanted to feel pretty, not pregnant. I wanted to look at Ben and see my husband – not the father of my child. I wanted everything that came with the wedding – the champagne, the dancing, the carefree joy of the day.

A wedding is supposed to be the one day in a woman’s life that is really and truly all about her. The hair, the dress, the jewels – it’s all about the bride.

But in my case, it would be all about the baby.

And then there’s the fact that a wedding is more than a day; it’s a symbol of the perfect life that we all dream about – the beautiful bride, the loving first kiss, the start of happily ever after. We all want the fairytale wedding.

Pregnant brides are not the stuff of fairytales.

Eventually, I had to face my reality, which was that it wasn’t just about me anymore. I had a baby to think of. Worries and questions flashed through my mind as I considered getting married after the baby came: Would I rather have the pregnant body or the postpartum body? Who would watch the baby during the ceremony? Did I want the nurses at the hospital asking me which last name the baby would carry? Could I breastfeed in my wedding gown?

There were practical considerations, too – like the fact that my due date fell on the week of my college graduation, that Ben would still have a semester of school left, that we would be moving, job-seeking, and apartment hunting.

Then again, I knew on our first date that he would be my husband, the shy boy in the striped sweater across the restaurant booth, and we had discussed marriage plans before I found out I was pregnant. Would moving it up a year matter?

And part of me wanted to make a stand for myself and for all the young moms out there like me who still face judgment and hostility for our unplanned pregnancies. I wanted to show that I didn’t care what people thought – that I could be pregnant, get married, and remain happy all while wearing bridal white, thank you very much.

So I did it.

At five months pregnant, after two months of planning, I walked down the aisle. Four hundred guests craned their heads to look at me, not just to see the blushing bride or beautiful dress, but to see if I was starting to *show*.

Most days, I am confident that I made the right decision in marrying before I gave birth, but on other days, like when I see a bride who can actually fit into her wedding gown, I have my doubts.

I compare the non-pregnant bride's glow with my own experience, and I wonder about what could have been.

I never thought my wedding would turn out the way it did. I didn't think I would puke in the parking lot from morning sickness right before wedding dress shopping. I didn't think I would show off ultrasound pictures at my rehearsal dinner or that I wouldn't have a bachelorette party or bridal shower. I didn't think I would call my seamstress, crying and hysterical, when my wedding gown, *already let out twice*, tore completely down the side with hours to go before the ceremony.

I'd like to give you a neat and tidy ending here, but the truth is, I'm still not sure I did the right thing. Getting married when I was pregnant was hard. It was stressful on both sides of the family, it was rushed, I was exhausted and nauseous, and it felt entirely like too much pretending everything was "normal." I found myself wanting to stand up in the middle of the ceremony and shout, "I'm *pregnant!* Everyone knows it, so can we please stop pretending I'm not?" I paused at the part of our church ceremony when they asked if we would accept children into the marriage – how did they expect me to answer that?

In the end, I don't have an answer for you. I don't know what the right thing to do is when you are expecting and engaged.

But I can tell you this:

That sometimes, you can re-write the fairytale.

That sometimes, you get to dance with your daughter at your wedding.

That sometimes, all you can do is sip your non-alcoholic champagne, ignore your swollen ankles, and dance the night away.

Article Posted 6 years Ago