

Why Being Sentenced To Bed Rest For 2 Months Saved My Marriage

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When I was 20 weeks pregnant with twin boys, my husband Brandon and I danced around Disneyland celebrating his 32nd birthday. He looked at me with even more love, more admiration, and yes, more passion, despite my newly visible baby bump. I felt confident, carefree, and even sexy. Yet part of me feared that, with the intimacy-kill of pregnancy pains — and later, parenthood — our marriage would take a back seat to our boys.

That fear smacked me in the face one month later at a routine checkup when my doctor watched my cervix suddenly shrink during a standard ultrasound. Before I could process what was happening, a nurse strapped a contraction monitor around my belly. Even though I didn't feel a thing, zigzagging lines marked up the paper as it spat out the machine.

"We're admitting you to the hospital," said my doctor, holding my hand reassuringly. "Your contractions are less than 10 minutes apart."

That's not possible, I thought. My boys aren't due for another three months!

By the time Brandon arrived, I was already secured in room 484. The instructions were clear: Lie in bed. That one step, staff warned, was critical to my boys' health and well-being.

Easy enough in theory, but kicking my feet up isn't my forte. I rarely sit still for more than 15 minutes at a time, even when I'm working, eating or watching a movie. Frankly, I tend to juggle those activities simultaneously. What's worse, I'd been sentenced to one of the loneliest places on the planet.

In an instant, our relatively new marriage became a long-distance relationship. The hospital was 65 miles from home and 95 miles from Brandon's office. Because of the distance, I saw Brandon once during the week and once on weekends.

The first night he left, and every visit thereafter, Brandon gave me his worn t-shirt, so I could bury my nose in his scent as I slept. He called every morning, waiting with an aching heart as I delivered a progress report of our babies' growth, heart rates and hiccups.

Days blurred together as the four walls of my air-pressure-controlled cell closed in on me. While my husband shopped for baby gear with my mom, served as the honorary surrogate at my baby shower, and decorated our sons' nursery, I stayed on lock-down growing our babies. As my fingers swelled, I even had to relinquish my wedding ring, a symbolic reminder that our boys were already riding shotgun.

Like a prison inmate in a jail cell, I memorized the view from my hospital window. The shapes of the buildings, the windsock that marked the hospital's helipad, the glowing white signage became tattooed on my brain. But unlike a convict, spending 15 minutes "in the yard" wasn't a daily privilege.

Weeks went by without a breath of fresh air. Venturing outdoors was such an event that Brandon brought wind-up toys to mark the occasion. He took me to the hospital garden in a wheelchair, we each picked a toy, and then he pitted them against each other on the concrete to see which one would fall first. His toy won.

Our now-regular toy wars were followed by nibbling on weekly takeout while watching *Parenthood* on my 15-inch computer screen (it was bigger than the hospital room's TV). We talked for hours, like when we were first dating, minus any physical affection or canoodling.

He tried to finagle his way into my hospital bed, but neither of us could bear the cramped quarters. Hospitals make physical affection cumbersome and conjugal visits impossible. There was a giant rail on either side of the bed, with machines parked flush against them. When Brandon leaned over the rail to kiss me, he'd inevitably disconnect some critical tube, wire or cord.

"You're so pretty," he said, while lying on the makeshift couch a couple of feet from my bed.

"You're delusional," I replied.

I looked hideous. My skin was pasty, I didn't have the energy for makeup and my hair was straggly from not showering for two days. But I never felt more loved in my life.

Since he couldn't be with me daily, Brandon transformed my hospital room into a college dorm, complete with a mini-refrigerator, ceramic plates, bowls and utensils, and a twin memory foam mattress to make me more comfortable.

He hung pictures of us on the wall, posted a giant dry erase calendar (a visual reminder of how far I'd come and how far I had to go), and decorated my room with the corresponding holiday to remind me of home. And just when I could no longer stomach hospital food, he brought me organic produce, milk and home-cooked meals.

Being pregnant wasn't what I hoped or imagined, but as I lay there with my burgeoning belly, I realized I'd been given a tremendous gift. Not only did my hubby and I connect in ways that wouldn't have been possible without this hospital detour, but I was able to feel every movement from the little lives inside me.

Had I been up moving, walking or working, I might have missed those moments. I might have missed our boys interacting with each other inside my womb.

So while my pregnancy was more reminiscent of *Orange is the New Black* than Disney's Fantasyland, my babies arrived safely at almost 34 weeks, both weighing over four pounds and requiring minimal care in the hospital.

Now, each night as Brandon and I dance with our sons in our living room, my wedding ring secured back on my finger, I realize every struggle, every tear, every lonely night in that hospital room was time served to achieve a new level of intimacy in my marriage, and a lifetime of freedom with my boys.

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