

BrentGate

(the result of "inappropriate contact")

Yes, the Brain's have had their own scandal this year. Actually, it has currently been put to bed, but we are positive it will be demanding attention tomorrow morning (early). Ah, you gotta love little scandals. I apologize. I left out some possibly important information in our last Christmas letter (see "If You Build It, She Will Bake") and the rumors started flying.

Spending Christmas 1997 in Nebraska was planned, since we'd made so many trips to Illinois in 1996/97. However, Julie didn't plan to spend Christmas in bed, even if she was pregnant. (Yes, we *planned that as well!*) Although Julie dropped the bomb on me in early November, we decided to spread the news at Thanksgiving. As the time neared, though, some routine tests concerned the doctor, so we held off the announcement. (The doctor told her to eat lightly during the holiday, Yea right!) A few days later, Julie took ill. At first, we thought it was simply "Morning Sickness" (which she had preped for), but after 4 office visits for dehydration, 2 emergency room visits (I recall we spent New Year's Eve there), and a change in doctors, Julie's condition sprouted a name: Hyperemesis Gravidarum. (Although, we didn't lie when we told folks that the flu had hit the Brain household. I brought it home, giving it to Julie and relegating us both to bed for a few days) Medication was ordered to combat the dehydration and settle Julie's stomach.

By March, my bride was over her illness. The timing was great, because I was setting TV dinners on fire (I'm not sure if I overcooked them or just hated them by now). We stocked up the pantry, told everyone the news, and counted out blessings. To avoid the traffic, we delayed our Memorial Day vacation a week and I worked on the basement. A new stairway was installed, paint was applied, and carpet was installed. Since our new arrival was scheduled for late July, we opted for a small weekend vacation riding the Boone Scenic Railroad in Iowa in case we needed to make a mad dash back to civilization (not that Boone is in the sticks, but... it is). We rode the **Wolf Train** (air conditioned with a platform in back to view the scenery) and experienced a breathtaking view of the path as well as the ensuing hailstorm during our ride. The conductor gathered up tennis ball sized spiked stones for the kids on the ride. Upon our return, we starting moving the contents from the den downstairs to free up a room for the nursery. We also moved the couch downstairs into our new rec room.

June brought baby junk mail (about them, not from them) prepared childbirth classes (should be renamed to "not quite prepared"), and last minute preparations. We started planning the nursery and its contents, and I set aside time in July to redecorate the den to make it "fit for baby". At our classes, we practiced breathing. Watched videos (don't EVEN ask), and learned all the terminology.

After agonizing for months on nursery furniture, Julie and I visited BABY DEPOT (located in Burlington Coat Factory, which I still do not understand) In Des Moines, IA and found the perfect dresser and crib. However, we had to fight the salesman to buy it ("I'm sorry sir, but we can't sell you this unit. We can order one and you can come pick it up. No sir, we cannot ship it to Omaha, but you can drive over here and pick it up...") Finally, they broke down and sold us some merchandise. I was afraid they wouldn't want to take money either ☺. So, we returned from our mini-vacation with a nursery suite and carpet in our little S10 pickup.

The day of our 3rd class, Julie went to her regular OB/GYN visit and left with a caution from her doctor to take it easy for the next few weeks. She

gave permission to do a few errands and attend class, provided Julie rested in a wheelchair. So, we did some quick shopping for some living room furniture (to replace the hole in the living room left by our rec room couch) and

grabbed a leisurely dinner at Red Lobster. We then sped off to our class, where the topic of the evening was a tour of the maternity ward. Afterwards, we headed for home after a long day in town.

M*A*S*H was on when we arrived home, so we settled into our rec room and laughed through an episode. At that point (10:30 PM), things unraveled. Julie informed me from the basement hallway that I should call the doctor.

The doctor told me to grab our bag of packed essentials (the one we were planning to pack NEXT week) and head off to the hospital to see what was going on. I hurried around the house

gathering up stuff listed in the pamphlet, while Julie timed her contractions. (They started at 15 minutes). At 10:45 PM June 18th, Julie informed me that contractions were at 7 minutes and that we needed to be on the road **NOW**, so I zipped up the duffel bag and threw it into the truck. Upon arrival at Bergan Mercy, the on-call doctor did some initial tests and then told me to park the truck; we were staying.

Although it seemed like forever, Brent Harrison arrived at 7:50 AM on Friday, June 19, 1998. At 5 pounds, 3 ounces, he was 6 weeks early. The doctors gave him a clean bill of health and sent him to the nursery while we





moved to a "recovery" room (After viewing firsthand, I understand the terminology). Note that at this time, the crib was in pieces following its journey from Iowa, the carpet was rolled up in the hallway, the crib had no mattress, and the nursery had yet to be started (it was an early July project). Even worse, Brent had no car seat, since we were still looking, so I ran around town finishing our purchases so my son could come home (car seat) and sleep (crib).

Given our initial troubles with this pregnancy, we decided that post-arrival would be a much smoother ride. Someone should have slapped us. Brent's early arrival and pronounced jaundice (common in preemies) necessitated a "bili-light" be strapped to him. The light simulates sunlight, which breaks down bilirubin in a baby's system. It also makes your baby look like a shining "slow-worm", and it dehydrates. The combination of dehydration and Brent's inability to nurse well (his instincts were a bit underdeveloped) landed him back in the hospital for a few days. While there, they bulked up his 4 pound 1 ounce frame (doesn't sound like a lot, but it over 20%) and showed Julie how to help him nurse and pump milk for him.

After Brent arrived back home, he gained weight in a hurry. However, the hospital-rented breast pump left a bit to be desired. I came home one night to a sobbing wife, who told me the pump wasn't working and it needed to work **NOW**. So, as a loving and ever resourceful husband, I went to the garage, found a windshield wiper motor, sawed a few boards, drilled a few holes, unearthed a 12 volt power source (the friendly battery charger), and presented a homemade breast pump to my wife. I explained that this pump would **DEFINITELY** do the job (and possible more). My wife, bless her soul, either trusted her husband completely or was in extreme need, because she didn't hesitate to try my new construction. It worked! In fact, it worked so well that she starting freezing the surplus. Necessity surely is the mother of invention. A visiting home health nurse wants me to start manufacturing it for others to use, but I don't think I should start ANOTHER project just yet

Julie's mom came out the Saturday following Brent's arrival to help care for him, and my parents came out in late July to continue the help. My parents also gave us a superb gift: a night on the town without the boy. We planned our first "post-pregnancy" date as a quick bite to eat and two tickets to the movies. Unfortunately, someone ran a stop sign and ran into us enroute. I emerged mostly unscathed, but Julie tensed up upon seeing the darting car and suffered three broken toes and a cracked sternum. Since my parents



were still here, they extended their stay, Julie's mom offered to baby/wife sit, and I packed them both into my parents car to recuperate in Illinois. In another fit of necessity, my dad and I fashioned a makeshift wheelchair out of a dining room chair wired to my handcart. We have pictures somewhere. (Ask Julie how it felt to be wheeled around in a chair on a dolly)



I once again dug out the TV dinners, and I started looking for a replacement for our totaled Saturn. In typical male fashion, I zeroed in on some trucks, but I held off on a purchase until me wife and son returned (How thoughtful of me!). I tried to keep the house from falling apart until late August, when Julie and Brent returned home. Then, while Julie was recuperating, we started truck shopping. In late September, we ordered a 1999 Dodge RAM 1500 Quad Cab (No, Julie wanted it as well) with all the fixin's (My wife's direct quote: "Jim, since we spending this much on a truck, we might as well spend a bit more and get the rest"). I should reiterate that I love my wife (and her way of thinking).

About November, we started getting antsy for our new truck (Julie was not too impressed with the rear seats in the S10). I found out you can track your vehicle though Chrysler, so I kept tabs on its production. Then, when it rolled off the line, I tracked it via Union Pacific's web site as it traveled from Saltillo, Mexico to Omaha, NE. Finally, On November 6, we took delivery of our new Amethyst Dodge (it's dark purple. No snide comments!). I am sure Julie is broken up about not riding in the back of the S10 anymore.

Julie's parent's came up for Thanksgiving this year, which is where I started this letter, but Julie was able to enjoy it this year. Julie's foot has healed enough for her to walk without too much trouble, although the doctors warn that it may never heal all the way. We're praying it does. Brent now tips the scale at 15 pounds, 6 ounces and has decided that sleep is optional on some days of the week. We gave the S10 a new paint job (Emerald Green), put a topper on the Dodge, and started restoring "Ol' Blue" (Yes, we still own the Cutlass; can't seem to part with it). Brent has his nursery, the basement is nearer to completion, and Julie now has a radio in the kitchen (early Christmas present). We feel so blessed that 1998 brought us a new son, but you'll forgive us if we don't want 1998 to last much longer. We're just not sure what to expect after a year like this. (But, I can assure you that we won't be making any more major announcements like we did this year)

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

The Brains (Jim, Julie, Brent, Sherlock, and Watson)
<http://www.jbrain.com/>

