

Pregnant Before Practice

A law girl's bump in the road: clashing Indian and Canadian values

By Jasmine Daya



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(June 11, 2019, 11:50 AM EDT) -- I told my father first about my pregnancy, over the phone. His reaction: "Wow! I wasn't expecting that news. I thought you were going to tell me that you failed a course or something. You're old enough and married, so what is there to be upset about? Just tell me you are finishing law school."

Telling my mother about my pregnancy was another thing altogether. "How can you do this to me?" she said. "After everything we have done for you, how can you ruin your life like this? We sent you to the best private schools even when we couldn't afford it and now you are going to throw all of that away."

I'd known that my mother would be upset, but I had no idea that she would be this upset. I assured her that I would finish law school and soon start working as a lawyer.

My mother changed the topic and started giving me advice. "You will have to start eating healthy, balanced meals on a daily basis. Don't drink too much milk or the baby will be very hairy."

This was the advice she was giving me? Old wives' tales from India? Her tone was sad and her eyes held back tears.

Weeks later, my mom's sister and cousin provided more pregnancy advice at dinner. "First of all, you need to eat cucumber so your baby will be fair. And eat beets, because that will give him rosy cheeks. And grandfather says that a pregnant woman should never be deprived of what she craves or her baby boy will have a bent penis." Somehow I managed to avoid spurting carrot-ginger soup out of my nose.

Our families always seemed to argue about which parents to see. My husband's parents thought I should be with them at every possible moment. His mother had told me after we were married that I was now her daughter. I'd naively thought at the time that this was sweet. It hadn't taken long for me to realize that she was serious.

As a good Indian wife, I was supposed to sever ties with my family and only see them on occasion, when "permitted." I was supposed to move in with my husband's family and be the good daughter-in-law. I was supposed to attend every wedding, funeral, birth ceremony, family dinner, official function of the family's hotel business and family trip — with them and only them. If there was time, I could see my parents. This was the traditional Indian mentality, but I had no idea that my husband's family was this traditional until my wedding.

My in-laws' reaction to the pregnancy was classic Indian. My mother-in-law gave me a tight hug and whispered in my ear, "Thank you for giving me this special gift!" She held back tears and smiled at me as though I had helped her win a \$50 million lottery jackpot. A dinner with my in-laws turned into a family reunion in a matter of hours. The formal table was set with the good china and with Indian food catered from one of the most expensive restaurants in the city.

My mother-in-law put an orange dot — a Hindu symbol of commitment to the long life and well-being of a woman's husband — on my forehead. She knew that I didn't like these traditions and that the

traditional Indian mentality didn't work for me at all.

After the first ultrasound, I couldn't look at my husband. I knew I wasn't reacting the way I should. I had a healthy baby boy growing inside me. I immediately felt guilty. I knew some people tried for years to get pregnant and here I was annoyed by the gender of my first child. It just wasn't what I had planned.

Actually, nothing was the way that I had planned it. There was no pink and purple, no frills, no princess dresses, no mani-pedi dates — and let's not forget, no job and no future career plans. To make matters worse, I knew my in-laws were going to be more possessive of me somehow. It was their first grandchild and it was a boy. By Indian custom, this was huge. This would give them bragging rights among all their friends and family. Money could not buy the value placed on the first child or on the grandchild being a boy.

It's tradition that paternal grandparents choose the name of their first grandchild, especially if it's a boy. I wasn't certain if this was true; regardless, it wasn't going to happen in my case.

After I finished my last law school exam, I walked to my apartment in a daze. Normally after writing an exam, my mind would race with thoughts of the questions posed and the answers that I provided. I would pick up a textbook or call a friend to compare answers.

Law school exams were a bitch and a half, far worse than other exams I had written. The key to answering questions was to use the FIRAC method — facts, issue, rule, analysis and conclusion — and to write two- to four-page answers. Even though I could have answered most questions in one page, if I had done that, I would have failed. I found this frustrating because law school professors were usually academics, often somewhat removed from practice.

I wondered if lawyers actually used FIRAC. I had no idea at the time how useful what I'd learned at law school would later be in real life.

This is part two of a three-part series. Read part one here.

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