

# Here Comes the Sun: A Story of Love, Motherhood and Milk

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He came early. It wasn't time yet. I hadn't even shaved my legs. Keeping with the tradition of the second child treatment, we also hadn't purchased a thing. What size would he be anyway? Thirty-three weeks was too soon. Too small. Too tempting to traverse the torture chamber of Google and find out all the worst case scenarios that lay before us. Maybe if I held my breath and squeezed my thighs together like that soft pretzel I had just eaten I could hold him in a little longer.

I wanted my husband. I needed my mommy. I left the house a mess. I was impatient with my 6-year-old when I dropped him off to school. I had yet to even crack open the book that was supposed to explain to him how awesome being a big brother would be. And now the time had come.

When I entered the hospital for a check-up, I never imagined I'd be gifted a backless gown, a windowless room, and a new doctor. She was a perinatologist with a kind smile, but her pearly whites couldn't soften the news that the back pain I had been feeling was, in fact, labor. What's worse, I was having eight-minute long contractions that would intermittently cause my son's heartbeat to decelerate. It was at that point that he and I had our first, of I'm sure to be many, heart-to-hearts.

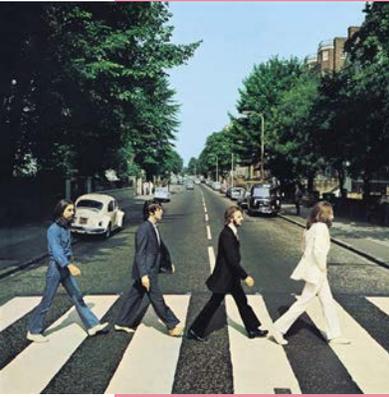
"Noah Alexander. This is your mother speaking. You will eventually learn when I use your first and middle name I mean business. Daddy and I need you to stay put for a few more weeks. I'll promise you the world in exchange for a little while longer."

In response, Noah gave me a firm kick, which I took to mean, "Yes, Mommy."

Prevailing parenting strategies advise against bribes as a way to motivate children. Nonetheless, I needed immediate results. As I cradled my belly for what ended up being a 13-day adventure, I went on to barter with my soon-to-be newborn. For every contraction he successfully survived, I waged anything from toys to trips to the Magic Kingdom all in an effort to will him to stay inside. Consequently, he endured countless bags of IV fluid and his heartbeat commendably withstood the waves of beeping monitors. His chosen name of Noah became the punch line for hospital staff and each shift change marked a new face peering in the door offering the rally cry of "Hold On Noah" or "Hang Loose!"

The doctors feared that at any moment his heart rate could drop, so we weren't allowed to stay in one of the lovely suites we viewed on the hospital tour. Instead we had to remain in the triage room mere inches away from the OR. The specialist even calculated the minutes it would take from crash, to cut, to get Noah to NICU. Our beachside California kid was set to make a splash of an entrance.

Meanwhile, Mommy was going mad. There were no windows in the triage room, and it was so small that, with arms outstretched, my husband could more or less high five all sides of the poorly painted walls. For a change of scenery, we would open the curtain and watch the chaos of screaming mothers, panting fathers, and running nurses. I'd join in as



The Beatles

"Here Comes the Sun"

Abbey Road

09/1969

Apple

they counted down each push, and then I'd wait. Their baby's first cry made my own eyes well up with tears.

Eleven days in, the requisite bed rest began to take its toll. Childbirth can cause shame in the most dignified of women, yet the bedpans and even the vomit my husband witnessed could not compare to the day I finally snapped. Tear-stained, I implored him to go outside and take pictures of the sun. The inability to differentiate between day and night marred my mental faculties and confirmed I could never survive above the Arctic Circle. I began to recall a commercial I had seen about Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD). I was convinced I had developed the condition ironically in the confines of a place that was supposed to keep me well. By the time my husband returned with shots of trees, blue sky, and the sun, I was singing at the top my lungs. In a tribute anthem to the panel ceiling above, I belted out and butchered The Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun."

Two days later, and with far less fanfare than I envisioned, the doctor came in and said, "we're taking him." At 35 weeks and four days, Noah was born to "Let it Be."

He was perfect. Still early, still small, but he weathered the storm and he survived.

The days that followed found my husband and I in a hotel suite near the hospital because we were discharged before Noah was. With round-the-clock feeding times and an unwavering commitment to breastfeeding I pumped and fed and pumped and fed, obsessing over every ounce of milk I could provide my child in his first days of life. In this case, I had indeed given birth to the milkman's baby; my husband was transformed into an overnight delivery service, racing milk to the NICU during the few hours I carved out to sleep.

He was in the middle of a late night milk run when he noticed the swollen bulge in my calf. Like shame, pain is a part of pregnancy, and of postpartum. So while my leg had been hurting, it wasn't going to stop me from being by my little one's bedside. It took two nurses, a social worker, and a phone call to my mom to convince me to have my leg scanned. Thankfully I did—it turns out I had developed a blood clot, and, if not treated, it could have moved to my lungs or worse my heart. I would need to take injections and medication until the clot absorbed. On the other hand, Noah was gaining by the day and was soon discharged home.

After a few more health setbacks on my behalf, the milk factory had to be shut down. Once again, Google offered up the grim news of all the things that could happen to my child if I didn't breastfeed him. What fate would befall him? What college would he attend? The probable doom was unthinkable. Unsolicited advice poured down like hail pelting my parental confidence. I couldn't shake the feeling of inadequacy. I couldn't shake the formula bottle. I, too, championed the Breast is Best philosophy, but what happens when what's best for most isn't an option for some?

As fate would have it I also began to find myself surrounded by what I liked to call the "lollapaBOOBza lineup." From doctor's appointments to playgrounds and shopping center food courts, lactating mothers were bearing their breast with revolutionary satisfaction. One woman went as far as to share with me how she breastfed all four of her children. She did so until they were four years old and even breastfed the last two in tandem because they are only three years apart. I couldn't help but picture her body as a fast food soda fountain, but instead of dispensing Sprite it spewed milk in all directions. While sitting next to the Olympic champion of breast feeders, I was handed the task of making my son a bottle of formula.

As I shuffled through the diaper bag, I almost began to retell our saga: "He came early. It wasn't time yet. I hadn't even shaved," but before I made excuses for something that needed no explanation at all, once again my liberation was found in a song. The radio station on the mall's loudspeaker bellowed my mother/son love story. "Here comes the sun..." The comforting lyrics reminded me how far we had come and admonished me for shrouding my bottle in secrecy. "Here comes the sun..." While she scooped up her 3-year-old, I boldly shook my powdered sustenance. In tandem, we sang to our little darlings, "It's all right" as the smell of soft pretzels wafted through the air.

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*A version of this piece was originally published on Role Reboot on July 29, 2014.*