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Memories filled with happiness

‘I would do it all over again, if that was possible.’ Bob, the owner from our cabin at Orcas Island, Washington, looks beaming to his farm. On the mail box stands B. Farm. Bob and his wife Diana have three children of our age. We expect there are already grandchildren at the look of the go-kart and swing in the yard.

Before we arrived at our cabin, we already wandered around the village. I am now almost nineteen weeks pregnant and that has not gone unnoticed. Bob points excited to my stomach and says he already saw how I glowed this morning. ‘And you too!’ he shouts to Mark.

The enthusiasm that my pregnancy evokes in people is endearing. ‘One in the oven!’ shouted a random passenger in Seattle. ‘I’ve got two kids, it’s amazing.’ In every row where I waited, from the pump station to the bakery, someone asked me when I am expecting. When I looked at two children that were being corrected by their mother at a parking lot their mother laughingly told me: ‘Most of the time it’s fun.’

I was warned beforehand for South American women. For their over-care and their advice: South American women would make a collective property of an individual pregnancy.

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‘Just say you’re fat: *gorda, no embarazada,*’ was the solution I got. It did not appear to be necessary. I blended in in Chili thanks to my winter clothes and because I was not that far in my pregnancy. Nobody touched me unrequested and they gave me no more than a warm smile in the bus. We got a very sweet pair of baby socks from the owner of our hostel in Valparaiso though, but the warnings that my pregnancy would lead to awkward situations were for nothing.

That changed in the United States. I spent the first few hours in San Francisco (finally!) in a maternity store. Now I showed thanks to my new fitting clothes. This led to various reactions. It doesn’t made me feel uncomfortable but happy instead. I know the baby will be welcome in our families, but to see the happiness from complete strangers is heartwarming. The tension of what is going to happen to us disappeared when people like Bob and Diane gave us a glimpse in the next thirty years. We become parents!

I did not receive any unwanted advice or hands on my stomach in America. I got a lot of happy, loving and enthusiastic reactions. I remember these strangers because of their own happiness, from their first pregnancy until later milestones. They recognized their own happiness and expectations they once had their selves. In thirty years we will do the same: enjoy the pregnancies of others and think back of our own experiences. But for the time being we have our hands full with this big belly.

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ZEN

When a friend came to visit me to see the baby, she said: 'you shouldn't want anything'. It's the best tip I ever got since Keet was born. And it wasn't hard to put this in action. I had maternity leave and there was nothing I must do. Keet had the same sleeping sickness as my husband and I sometimes have, so it worked fine when I accidentally wanted something to do in the time she slept.

But towards the end of my maternity leave I started to want more. And Keet too. Only not always the same. I really did not want that much. Just the simple things you do during your leave: cleaning, the dishwasher, writing e-mails, ordering pictures. And Keet wanted things like eating, being carried around, a clean diaper, sleeping and eating again, especially extra-long on the chest and not playing by herself. Before I knew the day was at its end and I had the feeling I had accomplished nothing. Anyway, I thought of the tip not to want anything and I tried not to stay frustrated. It is not that big of deal when the house is a mess and you have to order pizza again.

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You shouldn't want anything. It helps to think that way. Also at this moment, Sunday evening at eleven o'clock. Tomorrow I will going to work for the first time again so I want to be fit. And get some sleep. Keet doesn't. Keet slept at eight o'clock in the evening for the past two days, I was so proud. But this new rhythm wasn't for the long term. She doesn't want to go to sleep tonight. After a long time of crying, carrying and cradling she now wants to play. She sits in my lap in bed. She has my full attention and enjoys herself. Chatting, laughing. Quite fun actually. I try not to worry about tomorrow; it's not that bad to have less sleep for one night. Having a child is actually quite zen. It forces you to live and to enjoy the moment. And not to want another 100 things.

Good Lord. How often do I have to say that once I got back to work? Because I probably want a lot when I'm my old self again and must I be at places on time. Until now it was quite fine to live with a child, but now a new phase will start. With serious things. With work. And I still have the illusion that I can work one morning a week at home.

You shouldn't want anything. I'm telling now to myself that it isn't a bad thing when it doesn't work to work that one morning at home. That I can catch up the work in the evening. Or the evening after that. Keet can't help it she has a working mother.

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Going outside

A student in the bus. A grandmother at the cash desk. Italian tourist in the center of the city. A nice lady at the grocery shop. These people have nothing in common. Except that I saw them during my walks through the city with Keet.

At the end of September, when Keet was home for about a week, I started my expeditions. I started carefully and escorted by a professional (maternity nurse Donna), 500 meters to the local grocery shop. This was quite strange. Me behind a pram? Soon after that independently to the drugstore, but still careful and it felt still strange. Quite a thing for a starter. Think first: can I go out now or should I feed first? Than ask yourself: how are we going to do this? Keet in het travel cot or in the baby carrier? It's going to be the baby carrier. Vest on, coat on, hat on, baby in the baby carrier. That is one thing. Put on your own coat, take your wallet with you together with your mobile phone and your keys and go. I come outside with all my things but I get overheated outside because the temperature is much higher than our clothes would suggest.

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But the mission accomplished in the end. I even got home with the right groceries. Yet I notice a little disappointment: nobody said something about Keet!

I am an experienced hiker now. Moreover: walking with my baby has become my favorite hobby. And at this moment the belly carrier is my favorite Keet transporter. I don't panic any longer when I have to visit the drug store, it's now hiking with capital H. We spend hours together, Keet and me. And the student in the bus, the grandmother at the cash desk and the Italian tourist are all victims of my sudden and completely unexpected personal changes. Because as soon as someone makes a comment about my showpiece I'll go loose. Who says: 'Gosh, that's still a little one', can expect the whole story: 'Well she's three months already... She born too early and too small... But she already weighs two times her birth weigh...' etc. I just talk to everyone who looks at us. If they want it or not. Because since briefly I am unabashedly proud!