

by Donna Brown

Wayne and I had been married just a few months when I became pregnant. Pregnancy agreed with me: I was happy, healthy, and ready

I'm Not the Grandmother

to be a mother to at least four children. Young mothers of two children running off in four directions at once thought I was crazy, but I had always wanted to be a part of a large family. I stubbornly maintained that four was a good round number.

The pregnancy progressed with nothing more eventful than the usual disappearance from view of my toes. After what I claimed was at least a ten and a half month pregnancy, we were blessed with

our first child, a girl, whom we named Kay.

Shortly after Kay passed her first birthday, we decided to move along toward that goal of four children. But after nearly two years of waiting, there were still just the three of us. After a medical examination, the doctors told us that we were very lucky to have Kay. Other pregnancies were possible but not very likely, they said.

For the next few years we continued to be hopeful, but nothing happened. By the time Kay entered junior high school, I no longer thought about having other children. Our family was small but complete.

Not being a person who mopes around or sits and waits patiently for some future dream, I changed my life-style from being mother and home oriented to being a working mother with many outside interests.

Gray hairs have been creeping up on me since I was nineteen, but most people assumed that my hair is frosted. In fact, even Wayne had laughingly accused me of having it frosted a little at a time so he wouldn't notice. But even with the gray hairs I continued to look like a



*Having a child at thirty-six
does tend to lead to cases
of mistaken identity*

high school student until I was almost thirty.

Although it didn't bother me to look so young, I had always admired those slender, well-dressed, beautifully coiffed, sophisticated women that movies, television, and magazines have told us we should be. But for as long as I can remember, I have been the local nut-in-residence. I've laughingly told myself for years that I'll be sophisticated when I get to be thirty-seven.

While most of my friends were still busy with PTA and other child-related activities, I had already completed that phase of life. I had been singing in churches since I was fifteen, but as I progressed toward sophistication I began singing more and more, accepting requests to sing at other churches and on an occasional local television program. One by one people began asking me if I would teach them to sing. Encouraged by my voice teacher, I accepted the challenge of teaching.

When a fledgling opera company was started in our community, I auditioned for a role in their production of Puccini's opera, "Sister Angelina." I got the part of Sister Dolcina, a nun who was guilty, rather humorously, of the sin of overeating.

And so, I began one of the busiest, most hectic periods I have ever let myself in for. Besides working and teaching in our church, I sang at a university for a master class led by a young tenor from the Metropolitan Opera. I did two Negro spirituals as part of a whole evening of spirituals done by our young adult ensemble. I also did two songs for the annual Cerebral Palsy Telethon and the soprano solos in a church cantata. About that time, too, we also began rehearsals for the opera.

Also during this time, we asked Wayne's sister if our twelve-year-old nephew could come spend the rest of the school year with us. He arrived just as this bustle of activity was beginning.

With that kind of schedule, it was not surprising that I became continually tired and exceptionally sleepy. Then I got the craziest case of indigestion. It appeared every day after lunch, increased as the day progressed, and disappeared by the

next morning.

Wayne suggested that I might be pregnant, but like a replay of Sarah's experience with the Lord, I laughed at the thought. I continued the busy pace, but quietly watched for a sign that I wasn't pregnant. There was no sign.

When I gathered my courage and saw my doctor following the conclusion of the opera, the word was—only a little over a year away from reaching sophistication—that I was pregnant!

Being pregnant can be either wonderfully thrilling, frustrating, or frightening, depending on your point of view. To me, it was all three. Wonderful, because I still wanted those four children, and also because having a baby provided evidence that middle age really hadn't caught up with me yet. Frustrating, because of the fear of being silly and of having to redo my whole new life-style. And it was frightening because I was thirty-six, with a history of infertility, and because during my hectic singing schedule I had taken some medication to combat an allergy that brings on laryngitis.

As an avid reader, I knew that many children had been horribly deformed when their mothers had taken medications early in the pregnancy. And, too, the older the mother, the greater the possibility of mongolism. With these thoughts in my mind, I talked with my doctor about the pregnancy. He assured me that the medication I had taken was not known to cause birth defects.

Wayne was thrilled over the prospect of having a son. After living for many years in an all female household (Kay and I plus a female dog and two female Siamese cats), it didn't seem to occur to him that this baby could be a girl.

Kay had always wanted a brother or sister, but I wasn't at all sure how she would react to having a pregnant mother when she was a fifteen-year-old sophomore in high school. But she was absolutely delighted. Even the prospect of night-time screaming and dirty diapers didn't change her joy.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I broke the news to everyone else. Several of the young people at church thought I was kidding. One high school junior exclaimed, "But they don't even sit together in

church." (I sing in the choir and Wayne doesn't.)

After everybody was told about the baby, our family settled down for a long wait. My toes disappeared again as my body grew larger and larger. A couple of young married girls told me I was the best advertisement ever for *not getting pregnant*.

As I grew more clumsy, I had to quit my job as a church secretary. I turned in my resignation and started preparing an ad for the church paper requesting that interested, qualified secretaries apply. When I proofread it, I broke up with laughter. I had omitted the important word, "Position," and the heading read "Music-Education Secretary to be Filled." Considering that I felt and looked about as full as possible, I reworded the notice. When a replacement was found, I quit work and went home to wait.

I thought my pregnancy was going to become a permanent disability, but the time to go to the hospital finally arrived. As I was wheeled out of the recovery room, I heard one nurse say, "That must be her sister." Then came the reply "I was getting used to hearing—'No, that's her daughter.'"

Sixteen and a half years had passed, but as uneventfully as before, our second child, a son whom we named David, was born. The doctors had been right about the medication I had taken—David was a healthy child. I felt a deep joy for I could now say with the psalmist, "There is none like the Lord our God in heaven or on earth . . . who makes the woman in a childless house a happy mother of children" (Ps. 113:5-9, NEB).¹ At this point, nothing seemed to be able to shake my contentment.

A few weeks later Kay and I went shopping. I was so proud as I carried my new son. And then came the unexpected! The clerk looked at Kay and asked me, "Is this your first grandchild?" A few minutes later as we went into the grocery store, a man walked up to me, grinned knowingly, and cooed, "Oh, Grandma's got the baby."

"No," I replied, "I'm the mother, not the grandmother!" □

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