

THE GREAT ESCAPE

It's said that everyone remembers the birth of their first child. Ours is etched in my memory.

Janice had gone to bed early. There I was watching The Great Escape when there was a piercing scream from upstairs followed by a loud thump.

"Johnny!" I heard her yell. "I need you!" I leapt upstairs.

There was Janice, lying in a pool of water.

"My waters have broken." She was sobbing.

"Phone Joan the midwife! Get her to come NOW!"

I tried to calm her down.

"But you're not due yet."

"Please Johnny."

So I did, only to be told that Joan was out and would get back to me. There were no mobile phones back then. We were stuck. And Janice was literally stuck on the bed. I tried to move the wet sheet from under her, but she just screamed at me.

"Johnny, I think the baby's coming!"

I panicked then, I can tell you. I was desperately trying to remember what they'd said at the hospital. Something about keeping calm and not panicking!

"Keep calm," I said, in my best soothing voice.

She screamed back at me, "I am calm!"

The phone rang. It was the midwife and I managed to gabble what had happened. "Stay calm," she said.

"Aaarghhh!" yelled Janice.

"I'm not going to be able to get there. Have you seen outside?"

I glanced out of the window. Snow!

"Have you timed her contractions?"

"They're coming frequently," I replied, as Janice yelled again, this time with a suppressed grunt.

"If it's happening this fast, it'll be fine."

I don't know who was breathing more rapidly, me or Janice. She had started panting like a dog on a hot day.

"Aargh!" screamed Janice. "It's coming!"

Between her legs I could see this pale lump. The baby's head!

Joan was reassuring. "No need to do anything. Just support the head with your hands as it comes out."

There was a wounded animal cry from Janice as more of the baby's head appeared.

"Pant!" urged the midwife.

"Pant!" I shouted.

Janice panted. And then in a moment, it was all over. Our son slid out between Janice's legs.

"Now lift baby onto your wife's tummy."

Janice reached down to touch our son. Was he alive?

Then the magic moment when he cried. We were crying too.

"You're amazing," I told her. "I'm so proud of you."

"Don't touch the cord." The midwife was still there on the phone. "Cover your wife and child. An ambulance is on its way."

Janice had put our boy to her breast. His little toes were curled up in ecstasy.

"Hello son," she whispered, "I've been wanting to meet you for a long time."

And do you know, he opened his eyes and looked right at her.

There was a ring at the door.

"Congratulations!" The ambulance man beamed. "What's his name?"

"Noah." We both said it together.

"Ah," smiled the ambulance guy, surveying the soaking wet bed.

"I can see why!"