The Indestructible Pedicure

by Margie Ostrower

"What color would you like, Margie?"

"I'll take Rendezvous Red, Lisa! After all, the summer is here and it's time to bare the only non-swollen part of my pregnant body, my toes, to the world."

Little did I know that those two coats of polish would be my last contact with the outside world for some time to come. I was receiving the Indestructible Pedicure.

Two days after my nail salon visit, Memorial weekend arrived. I was six months pregnant and couldn't wait to parade around in my new summer maternity wardrobe. I begged my husband, Don, to take a picture of me in my new bright pink bathing suit. He said, "Honey, I'll take it next weekend!" Well, what awaited us beginning the very next day was a life-altering experience that would test our patience and strength, but ultimately bring us the happiest ending we could ever imagine.

"Call the doctor," Don said firmly when I said something just didn't feel right.

"I'm really nervous. What if something is terribly wrong?"

"Well what exactly are you feeling?" he asked.

"I don't know," I explained. "I've never been pregnant before. I just can't explain. And I have a little spotting."

The doctor's response to my call alarmed us. He said to meet him on the eighth floor of the hospital in the labor and delivery ward. We arrived at the hospital and saw the doctor. After an examination and an hour on a uterine activity monitor, we had the diagnosis. Good news and bad news. The diagnosis was preterm labor. That something-isn't-right feeling was contractions. I couldn't believe it. I told the doctor I thought they were just funny little Braxton Hicks contractions.
I had just completed twenty-six weeks of pregnancy, much too early to have a baby. The good news? The doctor said that with medication and 100% bed rest, I had a good chance of reaching term and delivering a healthy baby. The bad news was that if I were to deliver now, our newborn would fight for every breath, every ounce and every day, trying to survive against the odds of severe prematurity.

And so began the toughest fight of our lives.

I was introduced to tocolytic medications and the true definition of bed rest.

Tocolytic medications are a family of three drugs whose primary purpose is to quiet uterine contractions. Two of these drugs can best be described as intravenous coffee. They speed up the heart rate and pulse, and lower blood pressure, so that one feels weak and shaky all the time.

The other drug, magnesium sulfate, makes one feel like a rotisserie chicken. It generates intense body heat from the inside out, causes muscle aches, diarrhea, blurred vision and an overall comatose feeling. Quite a picnic, to say the least. The combination of mega-caffeine and stupor. I went from being reluctant to drink a diet soda while pregnant to gulping powerful medications. What reassured me was discussing these drugs with my doctor, asking tons of questions and learning that hundreds of thousands of pregnant women had healthy, normal birthweight babies as a result of this aggressive intervention.

I understood the medical task of "weighing the risks against the benefits". If my preterm labor was not treated my baby would probably not survive or suffer health problems that could last a lifetime. I was determined to do whatever was necessary to give my baby a chance for a healthy life.

I took all three of these drugs at one time or another throughout my ten weeks in bed, both in the hospital and at home. Home sounds like such a comforting place until you are confined to bed, making friends with a bed-pan and going ten days at a time without a shower. Bed rest meant a refrigerator at my bedside, three meals a day in bed, and really hating my sheets.
The days and weeks dragged on. Every Saturday marked the completion of another week, moving us closer to the thirty-six week mark, the point at which it would be much safer for the baby to be delivered. Don and I celebrated every Saturday night with a "birthday party." We shared a special dessert and even sang "Happy Birthday" to my belly.

I experienced so many feelings every day, every hour during my bed rest. I felt isolated as life in the outside world went on without me. I felt inadequate physically; why did it seem everyone else had normal pregnancies? I felt angry, as in "why did this have to happen to me?" I felt trapped; I would have been overjoyed just to have permission go outside to get the mail.

I was totally bored. I knew the cost of every item on the "Price is Right" down to the penny! I suffered through days of tears and frustration over my situation, worried about the baby and convinced this struggle would never end.

At thirty-six weeks, I was taken off medication. I thought I would feel terrific, but in reality I felt exhausted and uncomfortable as my body adjusted to the awesome task of walking. I left the house for the first time and Don took me baby shopping. I clutched those little stretchies and it began to sink in. We had made it! A gush of water sent us to the hospital. Twelve hours later, Mitchell came into the world weighing 6 pounds, 10 ounces. After a thorough examination, we were assured he was absolutely healthy. I couldn’t help flashing back to the day in my twenty-seventh week when I nearly delivered a one and a half pound baby. Instead I had a healthy, normal birthweight son who would be coming home with me. The fight had been worth everything.

I am sitting here watching Mitchell sleep. He is healthy and full of potential only because of the miracles of medicine and "confinement". I will never forget, never regret, what it took to get him here. All the challenges, sacrifices, emotional upheaval were such a small price to pay.

If you are in the middle of a high-risk pregnancy, your feet may not touch the floor all season. Therefore, I highly recommend the "Indestructible Pedicure". You may be looking at those toes for some time.
Mine has finally begun to chip.