

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a dirt path that curves through a lush green field. Several large, mature trees with dense foliage stand in the middle ground, casting shadows on the path. The sky is visible through the branches of the trees.

Gay **Bump and Take A Left**

How I Birthed a Baby and a Business
after a Huge Bump in the Road

Mary Kathryn Johnson

Say Bump

and

Take a Left

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To all the moms and dads who sacrifice to stay home and raise their own children: When it gets tough, please remember that you are part of a small, yet wonderful, responsible, global family, and we thank you for helping make the world a better place - one child at a time.



Chapter 1

The Bump

Oh My God, What Have I Done?!

Would you believe that I started a business because I fell and broke both my legs while I was 8 months pregnant with my second son? There it was, my ‘aha’ moment, and I didn’t recognize it as such until about 2 years after it happened. There was a lot going on at the time, so I use ignorance as my excuse. Unfortunately, the really important moments in life take me totally by surprise, and I become a little slow on the uptake. At least I finally realized it, and I acted on it. That free’s up a regret for some other dream I might leave on the shelf.

A great deal of skill was required for me to break both my legs at the same time. I’d like to say this was the result of a tragic auto accident, a harrowing ski accident or simply wearing 5” heels, but I can’t. A unique series of events which, if they happened individually would not have even caused me to stumble, combined at one precise moment with my size 11 feet to change my life.

One afternoon in early September, 2001, with the sweet smell of California Indian Summer heat, my three year old son and I were invited to my neighbor’s house to swim.

No, not September 11th, September 5th! I was lying in bed with my cast clad feet propped up on a pillow on that world-changing day of 9/11!

On September 5th, two days after my 38th birthday, we left the swim date around 4 p.m. so I could get ready for an evening meeting for my new job. I stepped out my neighbor’s front door, and my little, insignificant world tumbled into chaos - literally!

Now, I had been to my neighbor’s house plenty of times in the five years since we had moved to the neighborhood, but I had always entered and left either through the backyard gate or the garage door. My neighbor had two young children at the time, a boy aged 4 and a girl aged 5, and my 3 year old Evan played with them quite often back and forth between our two houses. He never went swimming without me, however. Because the kids had dried off to play with a new toy in the front room, this visit was unique in that we left like actual guests - through the front door.

This was my first obstacle.

The step from the front door threshold to the cement slab porch of my neighbor’s house is unusually high. Over 9” in fact, when the local building code requires a stair riser to be no more than 7”.

No, I didn't sue!

It may not seem like much, but those two extra inches made a huge difference in my landing that first step! Have you ever taken a step down the stairs and expected the bottom to be closer than it actually was? My stomach skipped just like my foot skipped that step!

Second obstacle - the three young children had also scrambled out the door around me. Kids this age don't wait patiently in line to march single file out a door after a raucous day of swimming. No, they are over-excited and exhausted at the same time, and not at all patient enough to wait for some pregnant old lady.

Since watching where I put my feet was almost impossible with the enormous baby hotel that had grown in front of me the previous eight months, I guess you could say this represented my third obstacle

Fourth obstacle - I was wearing sandals with a hard, cork sole.

No, they didn't have a heel!

Pregnant, wearing a bathing suit AND heels?! I'm not that stupid, or that young! I threw away those shoes the next day!

So, when I stepped out of the door, all four of these things contributed to the fact that I was a somewhat comical, if dangerous, Weeble-like pregnant woman.

Too bad I fell down.

My first step landed on the outside of my right foot. The sole of that sandal did not give, and allow me to somewhat gracefully correct myself. My foot snapped sideways onto the outside. I started to fall, and caught myself with my left foot, but stepped on the outside of that foot, too, landing on my ankle. This time, I heard a "pop". I proceeded to fall - not so gracefully so as to avoid taking any of the kids with me - down the remaining three cement steps, landing on my well-padded backside. There was a full 3 seconds of shocked silence. I dimly registered hearing a baby cry somewhere in the neighborhood. Yes, all the spectators to this new "Mommy Tumbling" sport were staring at me with wide, shocked eyes. I expected someone to put up their arms and yell, "GOAL!", but thankfully no one did.

My neighbor anxiously asked me, "Which one is it?" as I clutched my legs as best I could around my nearly full-term bump. To which I shakily replied, "Both!" The outside of my right foot, between my pinkie toe and my heel began to swell, as did my left ankle. Not a good sign. I was making a conscious effort not to cry like that distant baby so my anxious three year old wouldn't either. I carefully scooted myself, butt first, back up the three steps, and onto a bench on the landing, where I was urgently reminded that the first thing I was going to do when I got home was head for the bathroom.

Never again will I wait until I get home.

As my neighbor ran in the house to get the phone, I held myself like most little girls do when they have to go, but don't want to stop what they are doing. Bouncing a little on the bench, I

didn't care about decorum in front of the three unusually quite children staring at me. I did attempt to retain some dignity when my neighbor returned with the phone, however, by quickly moving my hand up to my swollen belly. This awkward movement was apparently not as successful as I would have liked, because she immediately asked me if I wanted a pad, "just in case?" So much for my feeble attempt to remain dignified.

Taking deep, calming breaths, I called my husband, Duane, and tried to explain to him why he had to come home early from work. He took this news as he takes all shocking, potentially dangerous life-changing news - with disbelief!

I know my husband's reactions well, because during our 27 years of marriage I have given him cause to display them all. Nothing in our lives together has taken what could be considered a "normal" path, so he should not have been surprised. In fact, one of my favorite pieces of literature is *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost, because I consider my life's journey to always be on the path that "was grassy and wanted wear". Duane describes our marriage as, "What would have happened had Romeo and Juliet lived", but the youthful, forbidden love story has been lived and told so many times that I'll leave it out of this one. If we do represent the non-tragic Shakespeare, the mythical Mr. and Mrs. Montague missed an amazing adventure!

Seven years after we were married, we split up.

Not because of any seven year itch, (although the words "seven year" and "itch" together have quite bizarre connotations), but because we went to different Universities to finish our undergraduate education. He went off to UC Santa Barbara, and I ventured off to UC Berkeley. We saw each other about once every 6 weeks when he flew home for a weekend. Those weekends were intense since we passionately studied each other in addition to the books. I would cry my eyes out Sunday night after dropping him off at the airport, and then prepare for life without him for another six weeks. I was not your typical UC Berkeley student . . . if there is such a thing. I was about six years older than 99% of my fellow undergrad's, I didn't party on weekends, I wore a wedding ring and I shaved my legs and armpits regularly.

The first frantic phone call for help Duane received from me was when we were on summer break during college in 1986. I was privileged enough to get a ride to the ER from the local Volunteer Fire Department Ambulance for this incident. I had sustained a concussion, many bruises and possible facial disfigurement when I was thrown from a horse, and kicked in the face by another horse during my summer job as a wrangler on a ranch in the small Northern California coastal town where we lived. I am VERY lucky in that the only lasting effect from this particular incident is slight nerve damage on the right side of my face. I only feel it when I get my teeth cleaned, something I hate more than anything else in life. I would rather experience advanced labor pains for 10 hours than walk into a dentist's office. But, if I want to chew anything harder than pudding for the next 30 years, I clench my bicuspid, and step into the torture chamber with my iPod connected head held high.

Speaking of labor, my first pregnancy ended at 8 weeks gestation with another frantic trip to the ER and a misdiagnosed Ectopic Pregnancy, but a miscarriage all the same. Again, my poor

husband received an unexpected phone call from me, only this time I was already in the Emergency Room. My second pregnancy ended with another miscarriage at 12 weeks gestation almost a year to the day after my first. I found out I was pregnant with my first son, Evan, less than three months after this pregnancy ended. (Duane says he will never trust me again when I say 'We're safe!') Every other woman in my family has had her first pregnancy before the age of 18, so I was almost convinced that since I started almost 20 years later my genetics dictated that I was too late, and my eggs and uterus gave up a long time ago. Thank God I was wrong, and genetics didn't dictate having kids before I was 18, family dysfunction did. Fortunately, I could overcome generations of family dysfunction easier than genetics.

Frantic trips to the hospital during pregnancy had become a pattern, and this third pregnancy didn't disappoint. I went into early labor, and was hospitalized for a week on drugs to stop it.

At my 32 week OB appointment, my doctor told me that I was in active labor, and she immediately hospitalized me. All I was feeling were period-like cramps, and with all the horror stories I had heard I thought, "This can't be labor!" It was, apparently, and I was unbelievably blessed that those cramps were all I felt until a month later when I was 6cm, and the Doctor broke my water to get labor moving along again. When the real labor hit, I realized that those labor horror stories were really sugar coated fantasies designed to lure stupid naive' first timers like me into thinking that labor couldn't be that bad!

That phone call to both my boss and my husband while I was drugged up to stop the labor was interesting to say the least. My boss at the time took the news in stride - just give someone else my responsibilities. My husband, however, went home and shoveled bark for 10 hours a day for the next four days. He would of course visit me every morning and evening, but the way he handles stress is unique - distraction rather than food. I was extremely hurt at first that he wasn't tearfully wringing his hands at my bedside all day as I lay in a drugged stupor trying not to have a baby. After all, that is what I would be doing if our roles were reversed. (Yeah right, like he would survive morning sickness, let alone labor!) It took me five years of sulking to realize that he did not shovel bark all day because he didn't love me. Quite the contrary, his bark shoveling was caused by his love for me, concern for our unborn child and his inability to control the situation and ensure our safety. He had to take control of SOMETHING, and the 20 yards of bark he had delivered the day before I went into the hospital was going to be shoveled into submission even if it killed him.

The poor man should have been prepared for this fall when I was 8 months along with my second son given my track record during pregnancy. Now that I write this all down, I am either extremely stupid, extremely lucky, or I'm doing penance for my youthful Juliet impression. I bet my mother would agree with the latter.

Even though this fall down my neighbor's front steps was scary, I was not at all alarmed about the health of the baby. I felt no tenderness, bruising or cramping around my abdomen. Since I knew my body very well during all my previous pregnancies, I knew that the baby was okay, and previous experience taught me that I certainly did not need an ambulance for my rapidly swelling foot and ankle.

After I had finally convinced my husband that he did indeed need to come home to take me to the ER, because I was not prone to any kind of site specific water retention that would cause only one ankle and one foot to swell to three times its usual size, I then had to call my boss and cancel my meeting. Oh My God! I had to call another boss!

This was actually much more difficult! As I said, this was a new job, and I had been employed only one month. This might be enough to instill fear for my job, but there is more. If you have been paying attention, you have deduced that this company hired me when I was already 7 months pregnant! The American's with Disabilities Act aside, I held out no hope of being hired by anyone while I was so obviously pregnant that I couldn't have hidden my huge bump with the most stealthily conceived camouflage maternity wear.

I was originally unemployed and pregnant, because in April 2001, I was laid off from my commission only Executive Recruiting job in High Tech. I was one of those Head Hunters finding jobs for techies during the last few months of the dot com explosion. I had also lost my previous management job early in the year 2000 to a merger between the second and third largest staffing firms in the U.S. at that time. All in all, the 21st century was beginning with the worst year emotionally in my adult life . . . until my second son was born of course! I thought my luck had finally changed when this innovative, barrier-breaking President of Blue Ribbon Personnel hired a 7 months pregnant woman to start the Executive Recruiting branch of her 20+ year old staffing firm. Not only did this amazing woman hire me, but she put me on salary, AND allowed me to work part-time occasionally from home! Going from unemployment, to commission only, to this was like winning the employment lottery, and I have remembered her treatment of me to create my own unique environment in my company! How could I let her and the company down on my first meeting after only a month?!

Well, gravity let me down, so there you go.

Forget emotionally, 2001 was also becoming my worst year financially, because at the time, I was the main financial support for my family. Since my first son was born in 1998, Duane and I shared the joys of raising him. Duane was home Monday through Thursday, and I was home Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I have met very few couples who have taken the Mr. Mom path, and I wonder if Romeo would have? Being Italian, I doubt it - I know, I am one. We had used our savings during my two previous job changes, and now I was out of work again with a baby due very soon. Disability certainly didn't cover my mortgage (which was thankfully lower than the California average) but at least it covered the groceries. The only logical option: Husband works Full Time while I sit healing my bones and finishing my baking. I kept thinking that there was some message I was missing with all the bad luck I was having with jobs, but I just couldn't figure out what it was - I guess I was a little slow . . . again.

This amazing new employer of mine didn't even consider firing me, thank God, they simply said I could come back as soon as I liked after I delivered the baby and my newly healed legs. My newborn son and I both attended the company Christmas party three months later. If you can believe it, I actually found clothing in my closet that not only fit, but coordinated beautifully with my black "walking boot"!

In hindsight, my boss' response to my phone call canceling that first meeting was my first taste of the sweet lemonade I had all around me in this sour situation, but at the time all I could feel was fear and depression.

The rest of that fateful evening of September 5th went by in a blur. I was clearly in shock, and still deluding myself into believing I had just sprained my left ankle and stepped on a rock with my right foot. I came crashing back to reality as if slapped in the face, however when the Emergency Room Doctor came into my room with my X-Rays and said in a bored voice, "Well, you did it good. You broke them both." I actually think my husband still thought I was overreacting until those words were spoken.

The Doctor proceeded to tell me that I had fractured the fifth metatarsal bone in my right foot and shattered, YES SHATTERED, the lower fibula as it goes into my left ankle joint. I had to be reminded of these details the next day (or actually later that same day since it was already midnight), because all I really heard were the phrases, "casts on both legs up to the knee," and "6 - 10 weeks," and "possible surgery."

That last one woke me up.

"What?" I yelled in surprise. "I'm sorry, Doctor, but I don't think you understand that this big bump is really a baby!"

He said something about surgery being possible when, "one is pregnant," to which I replied "Go #@%& yourself!", or something somewhat cleaner since my son was present. I asked him, "Why would I accept any risks to my unborn child by consenting to surgery without a life threatening, or at least permanently disabling situation?!" Dr. Boredom just shrugged his shoulders. My husband quickly agreed, when he saw the look on my face, that we would talk about it tomorrow with the Orthopedic Doctor.

A technician proceeded to fit me with temporary casts and we made an appointment to return for the real things later that morning, at our first of many return trips to the hospital during the next three months. Evan, was a real trooper! He never fussed once, and stayed awake even in the shocked silence of the 45 minute car ride home around 1 a.m. He will make his future wife very happy if he continues to be so intuitive to the women in his life. She better thank me!

My first question for the Orthopedic Doctor later that morning was, "How could this happen?! All I did was step out a front door!"

His response made total sense, but I had never heard of it having these consequences. Apparently, there is a hormone called Relaxin that is released toward the end of the third trimester of pregnancy that is designed to soften and loosen the pelvic ligaments and cervix to prepare for labor and delivery. This hormone is supposed to allow your pelvis to expand and stretch without breaking as the baby travels down the birth canal.

Unfortunately, this hormone circulates throughout a pregnant woman's entire system and softens ALL ligaments. As if to add injury to the insult of my clumsiness, when I took that step

out my neighbor's front door, my ligaments were too drunk with this hormone to do their job, and the weakest bones broke without the support of the ligaments staying tight around them. Since I had already gained about 30 pounds during the previous 8 months, those drunk ligaments had even more weight to try and reign in.

Why did I give in to those Starbucks Coffee Ice Cream cravings?!

The Orthopedic doctor suggested that we x-ray my left ankle again after the baby was delivered to see if the bones were healing properly, and decide then if surgery would be needed. (Fortunately, surgery was not necessary.) I chose pink and blue for the colors of my casts since we were still on that "road less traveled" by not finding out the sex of the baby. At home later that morning after the permanent casts were fitted, I lay in bed still in shock. I kept staring at these stumps covered in neon, with these 10 sausages pretending to be toes sticking out of them, and thought blithely, "Well, at least I just got my toes done." I couldn't hold it in much longer. When I was sure that my husband and son were safely on their way to the park, I let go, and cried like I haven't cried since the first time I saw the movie *Beaches*. My feeling of depression was more overwhelming than I could possibly describe.

"I can't do this!" I kept crying in anguish.

I was angry with myself.

I felt sorry for myself.

I had literally stumbled into this horrible situation.

Isn't that always the way the journey begins?!

[*Read Say Bump and Take a Left, by Mary Kathryn Johnson - Available on Amazon*](#)