

# *I Am These Truths*

by Sunny Hostin

## Chapter 7: Motherhood

Manny and I had been married about two years when we started talking about having a family. *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines seemed to have an article in every other issue warning how once you turned thirty-five, your eggs turned a corner and it would become more and more difficult to conceive. I was thirty-three and dreamed of having three, maybe four kids, so we started trying. But nothing was happening.

It's one of life's many ironies. You worry about getting pregnant before you're ready, a soundtrack that definitely played in my head given that my own parents were teenagers when I was born, but now that I was eager and ready for children, it was proving to be a struggle. We never used birth control during our marriage, yet I never got pregnant.

My primary care doctor sent me to a fertility specialist, an amazing physician named Fady Sharara, and we discovered that I had fibroids, benign uterine tumors that are particularly common in women of color. Dr. Sharara told me that there were several, of varying sizes, with some so big that my uterus had stretched to the size of that of a woman who was five months pregnant.

The fibroids on their own weren't enough to prevent me from carrying a baby. But when Dr. Sharara tested Manny, we found out that Manny's sperm were so overactive, they were literally knocking one another out. It was a double whammy that was going to make it really hard to conceive. Dr. Sharara said I needed to think about having an operation, known as a myomectomy, to remove the fibroids.

I was terrified. I'd never had surgery before, not to take out my appendix, not to remove my tonsils, not to fix a broken bone. And I'm very risk averse. Though I've traveled extensively, I'm usually anxious getting to where I'm going because I don't like to fly. I will zoom around in a go-kart at an amusement park, but I don't ride roller coasters. And because I don't feel like chasing away nightmares once I go to sleep, I avoid scary movies.

So the thought of being wheeled into an operating room put me into a full-fledged panic. We tried a procedure that involved "washing" Manny's sperm, to slow them down and increase the chance of my becoming pregnant. I did, twice. But my uterus was so misshapen by the fibroids, I miscarried both times. There was no choice. I had to have the surgery.

The day they gave me the anesthesia and prepared me for the operation, I started crying. On the way to the operating room, I even asked Dr. Sharara if I was going to die. I was afraid I would drift off to sleep and never wake up. But I wanted a baby so much, it was worth taking that chance. It was worth anything. It was worth every- thing.

Dr. Sharara later told me that it was one of the most difficult surgeries he'd ever done. I had twenty-six fibroids, the most he'd ever had to remove. He actually took a picture of them that I still have.

Though the surgery was successful, I was still likely to have a high-risk pregnancy given the condition of my uterus. Manny and I briefly considered using a surrogate. Years later, I talked to the actress Gabrielle Union on *The View* about surrogacy, since she and her husband, the basketball player Dwyane Wade, went that route to have their baby girl. But neither Manny

nor I were very comfortable with the idea. I really wanted to try to carry my own child, if there was any way I could.

We decided to try in vitro fertilization. I had pretty good health insurance working for the Justice Department, enough to cover one, maybe two cycles. Each would cost \$30,000.

There was no way to anticipate the emotional vortex we were about to enter. Each cycle takes weeks. I was injecting myself with medications like Lupron, to produce more than the single egg women develop in a typical, natural cycle. My doctors checked my blood repeatedly to see how the eggs were developing, and then before I ovulated, I had to undergo a surgical procedure to retrieve the eggs.

After that, the eggs were placed in a dish with Manny's sperm. If an egg was fertilized, an embryo developed, and it would be implanted inside my uterus. Again, there would be more monitoring as the fertility specialists checked for the amount of human chorionic gonadotropin I had in my blood to determine if I was indeed pregnant.

Your anxiety grows with every step, but so does your hope. And then, if the day comes that the hormone level drops, telling you the embryo didn't attach or survive after all, the cycle starts all over again.

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