

# daddydom calls

I recently drove 1,707 miles to California, grappling with a Ryder truck routinely tossed around by crosswinds and watching as gasoline prices shriveled my wallet. I tried feebly to find something decent on the radio, with two tranquilizer-addled cats and my darling Jennifer in tow, ready to start a new life in the Golden State.

We settled quickly into a beachside apartment and reveled in our decision to swap the swelter of Kansas' oven-baked summer for what may well be Southern California's motto: 76 degrees and sunny.

The first nine days were great. We went to the beach, scoured the area for hot spots, found the right coffee shop, befriended the record-store hipsters and caught the low-key vibe that typifies the Belmont Shore area of Long Beach.

Jennifer was to start her new job on Monday, and I was to get back to the task of waltzing with words for wealth. I had meetings planned, a couple of solid leads and some long-forgotten fiction to revise. I would read every day from 10 a.m. to noon at the sandy shores of the Pacific. The years-in-the-planning and bank-breaking Midwestern takeover of the Golden State was about to begin.

All that changed after we took a test on a sunny Saturday last month. The day started with my visit to the Los An-

THE UNEXPECTED NEWS OF MY IMPENDING FATHERHOOD IS THE COOLEST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO ME **BY MARK LUCE**

geles Coliseum to watch the USC Trojans battle the Kansas State Wildcats (my arch enemies as a Jayhawk). When I returned to our new pad, where Jennifer had patiently waited for the cable guy who never showed, we were hungry and a bit exhausted. We went to dinner and then we took the test that would change our lives.

It was a pregnancy test — and we passed,



much to our amazement, with two blazing blue-neon stripes. I'm going to be a dad.

Initially, I was slack-jawed. What are we going to do? Will we stay here or beat a hasty retreat to the Midwestern nexus of family, friends and support? What are the scrubs in the hospital made of? Can you slide on the floor with those slipper things? Can anyone speak through those masks over their mouths?

After that initial wave of questions, we burned up fiber-optic lines with calls and e-mails to friends, family and editors. We hurried plans to wed (finally) after four years of living together. Congratulations crackled over the cordless phone, zapped into the in-box of our e-mail account and left us feeling excited, grateful, terrified and more than a bit crazed.

Through the emotional insanity, return-trip logistics and the sheer shock at your world being turned upside down, I found a surprisingly rational refrain repeating in my normally hyperactive head, "This, by far, is the coolest thing that's ever happened to me."

That voice, despite its rather colloquial patois, kept me going as Jennifer quickly flew home to see the doctors and get some parental loving.

It kept me going as I re-boxed the apartment, shut off the utilities I had just turned on, got back in that big Ryder truck with two confused cats and drove 1,737 miles to Kansas City to begin our new life.

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