

Licence to Grill

Nine months of gestation equals nine months of interrogation

BY DOUGALD LAMONT

There are plenty of weird things about pregnancy. Sweeping hormonal changes. Nausea. Weight gain. Changes in hair growth. Searing gas pains. And it's been tough on my wife, too.

No one talks about it, but the first trimester is three solid months of secrecy, lies and deception. Before the maternity clothes, there's maternity cloak and dagger. You're paranoid and evasive, lying to friends and family, turning down invitations to smoky bars and parties, "just because." This starts to arouse suspicion: "Why aren't they going out? Is their transformation into yuppie drones complete?"

You can only put people off so long without jeopardizing your social standing. Eventually, you have to go out, which leads to the next red flag: turning down the booze. Well-meaning hosts, baffled by my wife's sudden resistance to liquor, redoubled their efforts to foist it on her:

"Can I get you a beer?"

"Just a cranberry juice."

"Juice?! We've got wine."

"No, just juice."

"You want vodka with that? We've got vodka."

"Just cran."

The host harrumphs to the kitchen. He's mulling. Ruminating. If he puts two and two together, the jig is up.

Once the first trimester ends, you can finally tell people. The relief is palpable. It's like the big moment at a surprise party. Except you've been hiding in the closet with the lights off for three months.

Most everyone is happy and excited, you're pelted with congratulations, best wishes, *mazel tov*. My father-in-

law said congrats for "doing a good job," which made me feel a little mercenary.

Then the ritual interrogations begin. The first questions are the dumbest. Two friends of mine, men of the world and aged 32, both asked, "How did *that* happen?" How do you *think*?

Then comes, "Were you *trying* to have a kid?" Etiquette books rightly say that an appropriate response to this question is, "None of your business." I suppose people were surprised we hadn't advertised our procreational efforts. "I didn't know you were trying," a few said. Why the hell should you?

We're not the only ones facing the inquisition. I swap snappy comebacks with my friend Ian, whose wife, Franca, is expecting as well. He's got a sackful: "We know for certain it's mine, but we're still not sure if it's Franca's."

For the obligatory, "Do you know the sex yet? Do you want to?" Ian's answer is: "Not until they're 12 or 13." My answer to this, too, is no: I suspect that for many people, finding out early means getting a head start on constructing gender identity, or at least the selection of toys, clothes and colour schemes for the baby's room. If you don't believe me, take a peek at baby clothes: blue for boys, pink for girls and pale yellow for don't-know-yet.

The next question is, "Have you thought of any names?" I reflexively say, "Rutiger. Whether it's a boy or girl." Most people say that will get him/her beaten up at school. I figure he/she can just tough it out. After all, growing up with the name Dougald didn't hurt me,



did it? Well, *did it*?

As we approach the official due date, the phone has started ringing. And ringing. It's like driving a station wagon with all your friends and family in the back shouting, "Are we there yet?" Everyone asks the same question: "Anything happening?" The answer was no yesterday, no today and no and no and no. When my wife starts ducking calls in order to catch some Z's, they assume we're at the hospital. My cell starts ringing. It's her dad: "Anything happening?"

Meanwhile, co-workers and near strangers now inquire about the ripeness of my wife's cervix, as if it were a tomato or a melon: "If it sounds hollow when you tap it, it's not ready yet. Put it in the window with plenty of sun."

A few friends have wistfully expressed a desire to be in the position in life that my wife and I are in. But I don't want to overstate it: It's not a generational phenomenon. As another friend put it, "I don't want kids. I can't even look after a dog."

I've already got a dog. Let's hope I do all right with the kid. □

Dougald Lamont writes and lives in Winnipeg. He is father to a brand new baby girl named Frances Sophia. The questions haven't stopped.