P.F.C.

AMANDA: I've always wanted to be a mother. I don't know if it's some female biological thing that happens, some kind of internal clock that wakes up one day and says "Today, you should get pregnant." The problem with having children, I think, is that when you plan for it, it doesn't happen. However, when you really don't want children, you somehow end up with them. How's this for a story? I know a man who is in a lovely relationship, has been married for 14 years to the woman of his dreams. Well, after 14 years, and 3 kids together, they decided that it would be smart for him to have a vasectomy. That's where the doctors go in and make it impossible for the man to impregnate anything, even if he wanted to. They had it all planned out for the weekend after his wife's birthday, which they would spend at Disneyland. And, when the day finally came for him to get the vasectomy, everything went as well as the doctors could hope. It was a perfect procedure.

Apparently God didn't get the memo. You see, on that lovely weekend trip to Disneyland, it seemed that fate stepped in and decided that it was time to play one of its practical jokes. 8 months and 2 weeks after the procedure, a healthy set of twins were born.

Our pregnancy wasn't planned. Of course, we were only nineteen with years and years ahead of us, there was no time for a baby. Thankfully, however, God didn't get that memo either.

Kids have the weirdest dreams. Not the "unicorns and flying panda bears frolicking across a candy land" kind of dreams, but wanting to be astronauts and princesses. You hear kids talk all the time about the kind of careers they want to have when they grow up. My son… wants to be Michael Jackson. You know, I never would have imagined that my first big battle, as a mother, would be trying to explain to my son why he could never go spend the night at "Neverland Ranch". He's so talented. And funny. He's always trying to make me laugh with some goofy little dance move. He reminds me so much of his dad. Not that his dad could bust a move to save his life; more that characteristic he has in him to want to see me smile. I don't care if he wants to be an astronaut, or president of the United States, or even Michael Jackson (well, the dancing/singing part of Michael Jackson) as long as he's like his father. Strong. Proud. Courageous. Everything Ramon would have wanted his son to become.

Ramon and I met each other in high school. You know those people who are always fighting for attention in classrooms- except, not for the right reasons? That was him. He had a certain air of… confidence, about everything. At just 14 he was sure he was going to play for the San Francisco 49ers. He'd go on and on about how he was going to lead that team to "The Promised Land". At 15, his life goals

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had changed completely. It's hard to imagine that it's already been over 10 years since 9/11. I remember being at school that morning, watching the news, and all of us scared for our lives. We were just in a small high school, in a small town, but still… we knew the impact of what was happening; Ramon more than anyone, I think. Not two minutes passed after the first tower collapsed, when he told the room that when we graduate, he was going to be in the Army.

At the time, it seemed like one of those things you say in the moment. You know, like when I get really mad at my sister- and we start a screaming match with one of us yelling "I'm gonna kill you". It's an empty threat… or, I mean, at least you hope it is. But Ramon was serious. All through high school, he never dropped the idea. When we graduated a couple years later, the first thing he did was sign up. I thought, for sure, that was it. For all I knew, he was going to go away and meet some army girl, and that would be all she wrote. However, after completing boot camp- and six months after graduating high school- he came back home on a two week leave. One week after he came back … he took me on a date to my favorite restaurant, "Rosemary's". It's a cool little Italian restaurant right around where we grew up. He looked so damn good in his uniform… he also looked pale. Well, the long and short of it all, he proposed. He did it in the most romantic way… he got down on his knee and said, "The entire time I was at boot camp, I kept asking myself- 'why am I doing this?' But the answer was waiting for me in the letters you kept writing. I know what I fight for, and I know that you are the biggest reason I do that."

One week later, we were married. I know what people say about being too young, and just waiting to see how it works out, but we just knew. For us, it was now or never- and we both wanted it to be now. So, I moved back to Colorado with him, on base, at Ft. Carson- and from there, I became an Army Wife! Hooah! It was the most amazing time of my life. In January, he got the orders we both knew were coming- he was to head off to Iraq in March. So we prepared, but we lived life as normally as possible. And when the time came, he asked me to go back home to my mother, so that I wouldn't have to be alone while he was gone. I'm not stupid. I'm not some silly little girl, who imagines the world is completely free of terror, or who doesn't know the risks associated with war, but that didn't stop me from hoping… from planning out our lives for when he got back from Iraq. I just want a family, and for Ramon to be here.

Soon after he left, I got sick. I figured that his being off to war gave me some kind of illness, missing him if nothing else. He called me once a week, like clock-work. And, on one of his calls, I had a special surprise to tell him about (alludes to stomach)… That was easily the loudest I'd ever heard him become, and no one would call him quiet. I could hear him say to one of his Army brothers, "Do you

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