

# Life <sup>in</sup> the <sub>the</sub> Passenger Seat

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Staff Sgt. Edward Szczepanik rolled out of bed around 4:30 a.m. April 4 and pulled on a sweatshirt and sweatpants. Tasked with driving the station commander of Ukiah, Calif., Army Career Center to Fairfield on this particular morning, Szczepanik (pronounced says-panic) thought he would return home around 5:30 a.m. and hop back into bed for a bit more shut-eye before donning his Army uniform for the day.

Little did he know that instead of a pre-work snooze, he would soon be delivering his wife's baby boy in the passenger seat of the family car.

The story could have easily ended in an uneventful manner — the baby being born in the hospital like so many other babies — however, on the previous night, Szczepanik's 7-year-old daughter, Jasmine, had crawled into bed to sleep with them. As Szczepanik's wife, Cindy Nakanishi, and Jasmine slept together, Szczepanik returned home and was getting ready to go back to bed, when Jasmine accidentally kicked her mother in the stomach.

"When she sleeps, she's like a little tornado bouncing around," Szczepanik said.

Cindy, who was jolted awake by the kick, suddenly felt like she needed to get up and use the bathroom. She then told Szczepanik that she thought her water had broke. Almost immediately, she started having contractions.

"I was listening to what she was saying and trying to figure out what was going on," said Szczepanik. "I was wondering, 'Is this the real deal, or is she just feeling something that is going to pass, or what?'"

He would quickly find out it was indeed the real deal, as Cindy suddenly started having very strong contractions.

"I started to get ready as if it was going to happen and woke up Jasmine. Usually, she is a very hard sleeper and difficult to wake up, but she pounced right out of bed, bright eyed and ready to roll."

Then Cindy's demeanor became more urgent and she told Szczepanik, "I think I'm going to have the baby!"

Szczepanik said he nodded and quickly began gathering

some things for the trip to the hospital, not understanding the full urgency of Cindy's statement.

"I was like, OK, the baby's coming — we're on the way — the hospital is close."

But he still wasn't getting it, and Cindy stated emphatically, "I don't think I'm going to make it! It's happening now!"

I said, "Oh yes you are going to make it — it's only like two minutes away."

She said, "No! It's happening now, now!"

Szczepanik said he began thinking about the first aid he's learned in the military.

"Hey, basic first aid I can do — I've even taken the combat life saver course — but there wasn't anything in that training about birthing a baby!"

Szczepanik tried to expedite the process of getting Cindy to the hospital. Jasmine was already in the back seat, wide-eyed, waiting to leave, but Cindy was to the point she could barely walk. Szczepanik picked her up and carried her to the passenger seat of the car, but there she became insistent.

"He's coming now! Right now!" she yelled.

Szczepanik said as soon as he removed Cindy's pants, the baby was already coming.

"By now my adrenaline was pumping and I went into action mode. I started telling her she needs to push. Within a matter of moments, she was able to push the baby out."



SFC MATTHEW CONKLING

Staff Sgt. Edward Szczepanik, his wife Cindy Nakanishi and their children Jasmine and Edward, who was born in the couple's car April 4.

All the while, 7-year-old Jasmine was in the back seat of the car watching the whole thing — making commentary like, “Oh, my God! Oh, my God!”

Szczepanik said he had Jasmine call 9-1-1, but she was so excited she wasn't able to communicate very effectively with the operator.

“Yeah, that call didn't go too well, from what I remember.”

Szczepanik said after the baby was born, he found himself on his knees holding his son for what he thought was just a brief moment.

“I was staring at him saying, ‘He's beautiful,’ and Cindy was like, ‘Hello, let's go to the hospital now ... can we go already?’”

Szczepanik took off his sweatshirt and wrapped the baby in it, then handed the child to Cindy. Since they were so close to the hospital, he said he was thankful he didn't have to cut the umbilical cord.

When they arrived at the hospital, emergency medi-

cal technicians were standing out front and were in awe of Szczepanik having delivered his wife's baby.

“It was actually kind of funny because they were standing there talking with us, but not taking action medically. Some were even making cracks like, ‘Better you than us!’”

Finally, a nurse came out and took charge. She got Cindy on a gurney and wheeled her into the emergency room. Once inside, it was determined that Edward Michael Szczepanik III was a healthy 8 pounds, 5 ounces.

Cindy was declared healthy, as well, with no complications, and was back home after just 30 hours at the hospital.

So after going through a once in a lifetime experience and performing the duties of an emergency room pediatrician, Szczepanik said it was amazing to deliver and hold his own newborn son.

What was the biggest down-side of the entire experience?

“Finding someone to detail the car was harder than birthing the baby!” he said.