

Witness

Category: Birth

written by Andrea Eisenberg | December 14, 2024

The birth was nothing she had imagined. Her baby fourteen weeks premature, grossly disfigured from a sacral teratoma and pelvic mass, and now her body revolting from housing this baby any longer. Her blood pressure shot up, her liver became enraged and her platelets malfunctioned as she developed HELLP syndrome. The severity of her symptoms along with the shape of her malformed baby that wouldn't fit through the birth canal necessitated that I perform a c-section. Her baby lived thirty minutes.

Hours later, when I went to check on her, my patient was still holding her baby wrapped in a blanket that hid all but his face.

She smiled when I walked in. "Would you like to hold him?" she asked me.

I was so shocked. I've never been asked to hold a patient's dead baby before. "Yes, yes I would," I stammered.

I bent down and scooped him up from her arms. So light and fragile. A bundle of life never meant to be. I found myself rocking like I did with my children when they were babies, as if I was soothing him. But maybe it was to soothe myself.

I looked back at her and saw the strength and courage of this woman who carried her child for months, knowing he most likely wouldn't survive, and yet loved him fully. We had had so many talks before this moment, about all the possibilities of the pregnancy outcome, and that most likely it would end like this. But you can't ever really prepare for the moment it happens, to see your hopes lost and reality give way. And then live that reality while others go on with their lives unaffected by this profound event you find yourself in.

So I looked closely at him, saying his name, and sharing in her birth story, another witness of this day.

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