

Birth.

“Lisa, do you understand what is happening?”

“Yes”

“I’ve called the Obstetric Specialist--she’ll be here soon”

“Yes”

“Hold on”

I close my eyes, willing the hemorrhaging to slow, to quit, to cease.

No such luck.

I listen to my new baby, in his daddy’s arms, crying heartily. I am all at once so happy so elated so fucking scared pleased don’t let me die I need to hold my baby.

“OK Lisa, hang on, Dr. Z. is on her way. I need you to listen carefully to what we tell you, OK?”

“Yes, OK”

The baby cries. What a little champion. Nine pounds and eight ounces of man-child. Even with his little nose bent over and slightly flattened-- looking like he’d gone a round with Ali or Foreman. But so beautiful that he must have won.

In his daddy’s arms he is safe, but Daddy paces, because he knows this is bad. Very bad. Worse than last time, when the little Champion’s big sister was born. That was highly controlled chaos. “Morbidly Adhered Placenta” was the verdict, the post facto diagnosis, the reason I was wheeled rapidly but smoothly to the OR next door, gently put to sleep and the offending tissue--once crucial to my baby, now a detriment to me--was forcibly removed from my uterus.

And when I awoke that time, I was re-stitched, cleaned up, my beautiful daughter was swaddled and sleeping peacefully in her daddy’s arms. Short of a little anemia, the event was soon enough forgotten.

Not completely forgotten. Just yesterday I met with the Obstetric Specialist:

“What are the chances of Retained Placenta again?”

She had delivered my first, and remembered that event.

“Well, I have to tell you, there is a chance it can happen again, but research shows only a small one-- less than 10%.”

“If it should happen again, is there any way we can get rid of it without the anesthetic and all that?”

“Well, how are you with pain?”

We both laughed, liking each other very well, understanding the pressures of being a Working Mom, and sharing many of the same experiences. Her kids only months older than mine. She doesn't know that I also take great delight in how sentences sound, coming as they do, in her soft Austrian-Canadian accent.

Then, when I was bearing down, pushing with all my might, trying hard to remember all that I had learned about Delivery, panting and groaning and straining, she had said, “Ze pooshing would be more effectiff wizout ze noise.” In no condition to see humour in anything at the moment, I did have the presence of mind to think “Oh, I am going to laugh about that later”. And we did, many times, whenever we thought of that pronouncement which heralded the birth of my daughter.

The joy and wonder is momentarily displaced, this time, and while I want to gaze in lovestruck awe at my new son, there is no time. It's not lost on me that all of this has happened in the dead of night. The small hours, when no good phone calls come, when quiet can seem malevolent and noise amplified beyond all reason.

I have lost a lot of blood.

I am in Grave Danger, although no one will say those words.

And then she arrives. My GP, who has not left her station, applying pressure between my legs, talking smoothly and calmly to me, assuring me that I Would Be Fine, waits for Dr. Z. to take over.

“Hi Lisa” she says in her gentle accent--it sounds like “Leeza”.

I open my eyes and grin.

“Sorry for interrupting your sleep-- probably your kids were letting you sleep this time”

She grins back and shrugs, looking purposefully unconcerned by the colour of the floor, by the sticky squelch of each step as she moves closer to me.

And still the baby cries. Still my husband paces. I hear his footsteps, too, stick...stick... stick...turn...stick...stick.

“Lisa, remembered we talked about this as a possibility yesterday? I need you to concentrate for a few minutes, and it will all be over, OK?”

“Yes.” And then I turn to my husband. “Please. Take the baby out. I can’t hear very well”

And he leaves the room, clutching our precious son. He leaves very quickly. He looks pale. Later, my GP would tell me she thought I had purposely sent him out because I thought he couldn’t handle what was going on. She said she thought I was very smart to do that. In fact, I had simply uttered the truth. I couldn’t hear over the noise of the baby, and I really needed to be able to concentrate. I knew it Was Crucial.

Later, I wondered about him leaving the room. He confessed to me that he certainly would have stayed had I wanted him to, but he was relieved when I asked him to go. It was all Getting a Bit Much for him, and he was glad to leave that room that was filled with medical personnel and my blood. I have wondered, though, in the years since, though I’ve never asked, was he afraid that he might not see me alive again once he stepped through that door?

I doubt it crossed his mind at the time, nor did it cross mine, but in later years, as I more fully grasped the fragility of life, that thought, and the accompanying cold trickle of fear, has made its acquaintance.

“I’m going to reach in and remove the placenta by hand, Lisa, when I tell you to, take a big breath of the Gas, and keep breathing. We don’t have time for anything else.”

God. She was so honest, so clear. My GP stood solemnly at her shoulder. How I loved them both at that moment. They knew what their job was, what my job was, and that we were all strong and perfectly capable women. We would Get This Done.

“BREATHE IN THE GAS LISA-- BREATHE!!!”

And I did. And all I felt was a largish Squish as the placenta left my body.

Of course I was relieved-- naturally--but I didn’t resent it, I didn’t blame it. Before the coldness overtook me, I asked if I could see it. The fickle great organ that had nourished and protected my baby, and damn near killed me.

“Wow.....it’s bigger than I thought!”

“Yes, that is definitely a Size Large” the nurse said.

I was so glad to see it there. Harmlessly on the table.

The nurse brought me another blanket: “She says she’s cold” sotto voice to the doctors.

More blankets, more reading of blood pressure and pulse.

“Can you ask my husband to bring the baby back”?

And I held him finally, in the moments before a combination of exhaustion and shock overtook me.

“Hello Little Man, I am your Mommy”.

The Beginning.

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