

*Abby (Baby)*

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By: Sandi C. Rectenwald

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Monday May 24, 1993

My dear little Abby, you would have been one month old today. I intended back in the very beginning of our life with you to write it all down, everyday thought about it, and today I'm finally starting; on your birthday.

Noah wanted to burn garbage in the wood-burner this afternoon. We couldn't get the old cards and letters to burn, so I got out some birthday candles from the "everything" drawer and began lighting them and throwing them in. I told Noah we should blow one out for your birthday and explained you were one month old today. I lit a candle from the others, held it up to Noah's face, and as he blew it out I noticed the color, pink. It only reminded me of the pink I'll be missing, and the ache I feel inside for wanting you! I long to hold your little head in my hand and stroke your temples with my thumb to calm your fear and pain. I walked down by your tree today, saw your remaining ashes, watered the tree, and just stared at it, remembering your darling little face.

On Mother's Day, May 9th, your brothers and Daddy and I came to see you in the hospital. I missed you terribly 'cause we didn't get to see you the day before due to a wedding Daddy and I attended. I opened up your isolette incubator to say hello.

The day before, Dr. Frank Maffei called, all excited, to tell us your skin was healing and your duct was beginning to close. It was great news! You would be tube fed again and begin to grow. We so wanted you to grow so there would be less fear for us!

When I said "Hi Abby," you opened your beautiful blue eyes in recognition, raised your eyebrows, and then wrinkled your forehead and lowered your jaw. I heard a tiny noise. You were crying! I smoothed the wrinkles with my thumb and spoke softly to you. Two

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more times you wrinkled your face to cry. I cried as I longed to set you free from the tubes and wires, and comfort you against my warm body.

I knew something was wrong. You were telling me that, plain and simple. You were hurting in some way. Just minutes before I had asked your nurse if you were able to cry with the breathing tube. She replied, "No," but I had heard you utter one little noise, a cry to your Mommy. I was also concerned because your heart rate was in the 120s from the 140s and though your nurse claimed that was normal, I knew something was wrong, and I was right.

On April 18th your Daddy and I were scheduled to play "We Are Remembered" at the annual mass this year held at the Sacred Heart Church in Shadyside. After using the bathroom in that basement, I noticed blood in the toilet, on my underwear, and more when I wiped myself. A gripping fear took hold of me. I put toilet paper in my underwear, made my way up the steps out of the bathroom, and told your Daddy, who was standing at the top, "I'm bleeding." He told me later he would never forget the look on my face!

Your aunt Linda, God bless her, drove me, along with Noah and Cory, to Magee Hospital. I was thoroughly examined by two doctors who said my cervix was bleeding, and it could be stress, and infection, or having been pregnant many times. I was relieved because the terror of losing you was unbearable! I was allowed to resume normal activities.

The next day was a Monday and I stayed home from work. Tuesday I went to work but felt something was wrong. I wanted to hold my belly up when I walked. Wednesday was a nice day. I had the day off and your Daddy had his first speaking engagement. He spoke at a convention at Slippery Rock University, the topic being "Physical Therapy". I was so proud of him! We went to lunch at the Iron Bridge, toured Wendell August Forge, and hiked briefly at Jennings Nature Reserve, followed by quick refreshment at the Log Cabin Inn before we picked up Noah and Cory at Marie's house. I felt good that day and Daddy and I were happy to have a day together!

That night I wore my purple flannel pajamas to bed. I had a dream that I was in labor at Sherwood Oaks, and many of my friends were with me. One of my friends, Ruth Connell, wanted to give me an epidural, but I argued that I never had drugs when I was in labor. Your grandma Brown told me later that she also had a dream that I was in labor and she was with me, at the same time I had my dream, 3:30 a.m.

At 4:00 a.m. I woke up and my p.j.s were damp. At first I thought I had peed them a little, but upon taking them off in the bathroom and smelling, it didn't smell like urine. I suspected amniotic fluid. I had heard women can leak fluid, and wasn't frightened, just a little concerned. I rolled up a bunch of toilet paper, put it between my legs, and went back to bed.

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At 5:00 a.m. I was again awakened; this time by a small gush of fluid filling the toilet paper. I immediately wakened you Daddy and told him. It was the beginning of our journey with you. I put the toilet paper in a baggy to show Dr. Teh. I called his answering service, and she reassured me that this happens and not to worry. Dr. Teh would meet me at the hospital at 7:00 a.m.

We dropped the boys off at Pam Walter's house at 6:15 and headed for Jameson. I had a pad on and didn't leak anymore. At the hospital, the nurses remembered me and were very concerned. We called for Pastor Ted right away and he was there at our side in an hour, praying and giving us comfort.

Dr. Teh examined me and was very upset. My membranes had ruptured, and he was angry that Magee Hospital had never sent him a report about my bleeding cervix, and had no idea this was going to happen. He thought that you were going to have to be delivered by him, and you would not survive. I had a sonogram and had only lost about 1/3 of the fluid.

Dr. Teh called Magee and they said they would take me and hope that an infection would not set in right away. An infection was inevitable, but if it didn't happen for maybe even a week, you would have a better chance of surviving.

As I was being taken out by the Noga ambulance crew, the nurses said they would pray, and to let them know what happened. That was the beginning of what would be many, many people praying for you and God's Will in your survival, and faith journey for Daddy, many others, and me.

Al DeCarbo attended me in the ambulance. He was one of the first angels sent to comfort me. At 22 years old, he was very talkative, and the two of us chattered away until we pulled into Magee's ambulance entrance. I had learned all about his plans, dreams, and hobbies, and he had gotten from me some sound advice on marriage (he was single), children, and the swiftness of life. Later on, after you were born, I wrote him a note about you. I do not think he knows yet that you're now with Jesus.

It was early in the afternoon on Thursday, April 22nd, when I was brought to Magee. Your Daddy had followed in the van, with us occasionally waving back and forth. I was examined, and out in a labor room. At that point you would not be 24 weeks in gestational age until Saturday, the 24th.

A series of what would end up being about a dozen doctors came in and out of the room. Daddy had a pretty comfortable chair by my bed and against the wall, which he could rest in. We were afraid of the unknown, afraid of early childbirth, of losing our little baby, afraid of the shock of seeing your wee little size, afraid.

We began to pray, to cry in between, and to pray. The doctors didn't give much hope. Some were positive but Dr. Bsot, or "Dr. Doom," as we called him, was negative. He said

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you might not even survive the birth. We forgave him for his negativity because we knew somebody had to be.

Our most prized angel sent from God came in the form of Dr. Lori Cook, our Neonatologist. She was sent in to explain to us all about "24 weekers" as we learned you were called, from the birth process and including the rollercoaster ride which would be your early life. She spoke with us for almost an hour and proved to be one of the kindest and gentlest people we had ever met.

She said you only had a 20 to 40% chance of surviving. You started kicking in me when I was only 3 1/2 months pregnant, so I knew you had a lot of spirit and a very good chance to survive.

Lori had a very comforting manner, and I felt she would play an important part in your birth. She said a Neo team would be present for the event, and we hoped she would be a part of them. We agreed that if there was a dim chance of your survival at your birth, than we would let you go. I cried as I asked questions of what the birth would be like, and she was so patient and caring. Grandma and Granddaddy Brown came to visit and many more prayers were said.

An infection was not yet present, so that evening Daddy and I were taken up to a room and checked in. A large chair made into a bed where Daddy slept. It was a very calm night. I was very restless and full of fear, and awakened often.

When daylight came it was Friday, April 23rd, I had started leaking amniotic fluid slowly. We had been told that the baby can make amniotic fluid with the urine it expels, but the membranes would have to seal off again, which didn't happen often, in order for it to sufficiently build up. The baby could make up to 2 tablespoons an hour if urine flow was adequate.

That morning I had a sonogram and there was very little fluid left. The doctor who looked at the sonogram was very compassionate, another angel, and he told us he would be praying for us. In his sincerity we knew he would.

Very early in the afternoon both Pastor Ted and our dear friend Elaine Wehr came to visit around the same time. Elaine brought pretty flowers, and Ted brought \$50 from the church, which helped us a good deal with Jerry's meals and other minor expenses. They were other angels to pray and spread the word to even others to pray.

When Ted and Elaine left, I began to feel uneasy like something was wrong. I was told that one sign of infection might be tenderness in my belly. I was beginning to feel achy and feverish and once again became fearful. I began periodically checking my belly by pressing on it.

I called a nurse around the middle of the afternoon and told her I felt feverish. I had a slightly elevated temperature and the top right side of my belly was now tender. The fear

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worsened. I was taken back down to the labor room for more observation. The infection had begun. Life continued to change.

I was given the choice of inducing labor immediately or waiting, which would have put both of us at greater risk. They advised the former, and that is what we chose. Pitocin began dripping at about 6:00 p.m. The heart monitor attached to my belly, sounding your every beat loudly began to scare me to tears. I had been told that you could die even during the labor, so I was in fear of the monitor stopping and not sounding again. Your Daddy and I asked if the monitor could be taken off but the doctor said no. The nurses were very kind and kept the volume turned down to calm our nerves.

Contractions did not begin for several hours. I had decided that I did not want to be brave due to the fear of the unknown delivery and what fate it held. I wanted drugs! Daddy and I did not want Dr. Doom to deliver you, and were happy to find he wasn't on call. Because of fear we wanted someone lighthearted.

Later in the evening when the contractions began I was given the drug Stadol in my IV. Todd, Jeff, Granddaddy, John and Heather visited that evening. The Stadol made me very goofy and talkative, and caused my speech to be delayed. Poor Todd and Jeff stood by my bed as I blurted out information about our experience thus far, plus some crazy personal events with Mommy and Daddy. They certainly got an earful!

When everyone left, close to Midnight, Daddy and I began to sleep. Throughout the night I had two more doses of an epidural. It was an almost painless labor. We slept soundly with God at our side. We were trusting that the delivery would go smoothly and without fear, and prayed earnestly for your survival. I was feeling sure that you would survive the initial delivery.

At about 8:45 or so feeling your feet coming down my vagina suddenly awakened me. When I initially was put into labor you were transverse. The doctor manually, from the outside turned your head down. Well here you were, coming breech! During labor you had turned yourself around and wanted to squirm down feet first! I knew you had spirit!

I wakened Daddy quickly and yelled for help into my call button. A very lighthearted doctor, who we prayed for, and staff came rushing in. He felt your foot, thought he might have to deliver right there and then decided to push your foot back up. I had no urge to push, you were just sliding out!

Everything happened so fast your Daddy and I had no time for fear. It was a great blessing and a gift from God that labor and delivery were happening this way! I was rushed into delivery, bed and all, as the doctor was barking out orders and calling for a Neonatal team to meet us in the delivery room.

Once there, another angel, in the form of a nurse, was at my left side. When I began to push, she quoted scripture to me about how God takes the old and makes all things new. I

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heard the doctor say that your head almost snapped. I gave several pushes and you were out and in the hands of the Neonatal team, it was 9:11 a.m.

A new person came to my left side. I couldn't make her out at first but it was Dr. Lori Cook. She quietly explained to me, "You know what we discussed we can't get her going. I can't get the breathing tube down, (and something like) there's no hope."

When you came out and the doctor said you were a girl, I wanted to do everything in my power to save you! I didn't realize the instinct would be so strong! I turned to Lori and replied, "Please try again!" When she walked back to your side I prayed out loud while holding your Daddy's hands, "Please help them Lord, help them, help them, help them." I wanted you to live! I could feel God's presence in the room, and I knew he would help. Lori soon came back over and said, "We got the breathing tube down and her heart going." I was praising the Lord.

*Comments by Dr. Lori Cook:*

*Early in my first year as a neonatologist, I felt really uncomfortable in making the decision whether to resuscitate a 23-24 week infant. I was often glad when parents wanted to "do everything" or "do nothing" because then the burden of deciding was not mine. Because of these uncomfortable feelings, I often asked "why me" when I ended up being "on call" when a consult I had done delivered with me on*

*I've grown since then. I'm somewhat more comfortable in the decision-making, but I've realized that none of this happens by accident, by being the one for the consult or on duty "during the delivery." I know that God is in control of it all and am honored to be His chosen vessel to be there. Looking at my diary, I see that on 4/15/93 I prayed that God would grant me wisdom on how to care for the smallest babies, and I now try to remember to pray for wisdom at each delivery.*

We didn't get to really see you. They whisked you out and I caught a quick glimpse of your tiny shape. The placenta does not know to detach itself from the uterine wall this early, so Daddy and I patiently waited with three doctors in attendance while our lighthearted doctor massaged my belly and gently pulled on the umbilical cord.

It took about 20 minutes, and then the placenta tore! He had to go in with his whole arm into my uterus and try to extract the placenta that was clinging to the very top. I'd heard horror stories of this happening but didn't believe it would happen to me! He went in three times until he succeeded! The last time I prayed out loud again and it worked! Luckily, the epidural was still effective!

It was done, you were born. I cried a lot for you. I had a little girl; a very fragile little girl. I never dreamed how much I truly wanted a little girl. I was picturing pink everything, and lavender. I knew the boys would be so excited they had a sister, especially Glen. It's

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what he wanted. Everyone we knew, especially my friends at Sherwood Oaks, wanted me to have a girl. And here you were. It seemed like fate that with all this trouble, you were a girl!

*Dr. Cook:*

*It is so evident, but at the time, I didn't think of how Abby was the first girl!*

Thursday May 27, 1993

In the recovery room I cried a lot. There were babies with their mothers and because I couldn't have you with me, I felt empty and heartbroken. I was a new mother without my baby to hold, protect and nurse. I nursed each of your brothers immediately when they were born, and my breasts ached to do so with you.

Lori Cook came to see us there and asked if we would like to be in a research study where they would try a new experimental surfactant drug to replace the lining of your lungs which were underdeveloped due to your age. We agreed to read over information she had given us, and later agreed that we would participate. The nurse in the recovery room, sensing my grief, asked if I might like to room in a different part of the hospital other than where the new mothers were. I agreed.

The room we were taken to was much smaller than the previous room we stayed in, and had no place for your Daddy to sleep. We also soon realized that we had never heard babies crying in the area of the old room, and we could have gone back there, but we decided to stay and make the most of our accommodations.

"Uncle" Todd, Elaine's husband, had left a bag of clothes and necessities plus his guitar for Daddy in our room. He had even bought him a new package of underwear!

Daddy had visited the NICU, or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, that Thursday with Lori Cook so he would have an idea of what you would look like in an incubator, all hooked up to life-saving mechanical devices. I believe he fell in love with you before he even saw you. Instinctively, like me, he wanted to save and protect you.

Not too long after we were settled in, he went to visit you, and upon his return announced that he was in love. You could see this new love in his whole being, and he wasn't afraid to express it.

I was afraid to see you for the first time. My fear was a result of my intense love and it was a fear of the unknown, the future, and your slim chances for survival. I cried easily throughout the first several days because of my acute longing for you, and the confusion my recovering body was experiencing. At each 12:00 and 6:00 I received IV antibiotics. I

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still felt the effects of the infection, and the epidural sight in my back was sore for several days.

The first time, Daddy took me down to see you in a wheelchair on that Saturday, I cried. It was all I could do! I was literally terrified of the monitors, afraid they would go off and you would be gone before my very eyes!

I only stayed for a few minutes. You were wrapped up in cellophane to raise your body temperature. I could see that you were a little fighter. Those arms and legs fought to push that unwanted plastic off your little body. Other babies around you lay very still, but not our Abby, you had arrived in the world with a feisty personality!

We received many visitors on Saturday and Sunday and Daddy escorted most of them to see you while I waited behind. Besides my fear, I was also very tired and not feeling well.

The second time I visited you I didn't cry right away, but soon a monitor went off and I let out a cry as I frantically back away in my wheelchair. The nurse came over, assuring me that it had only gone off because of how active you were! You set the monitors off with your lively movements! I shook like a leaf after that experience, but was glad it had happened, knowing now what to expect.

Dr. Francis Mimouni called us in our room Sunday morning to tell us how well you were doing after only 24 hours. The amount of oxygen you needed, and the rate were low for you being a 24 weeker! You required 40% oxygen at a rate of 16. Room air was 21%. Within the first week you were down to 25% with occasional increases. Because of your temper, when the nurses worked on you your got mad and your oxygen saturation decreased, requiring them to turn up your oxygen level. Many times when we visited you, each nurse on duty at the time would say, "Abby has a temper!" and then go on to explain how they knew. They became attached to you very quickly, and had much hope.

My love for you began to grow as I gradually began to become more comfortable with your environment, and was less afraid to touch you, talk to you, and become attached to you!

I loved listening to Daddy talk to you! He called you "Ab", and it stuck with me, too. He immediately, from the beginning, got right in there to touch you. Your beautiful, delicate, tiny hand would grasp his finger, probably not making it all the way around. You enjoyed grasping the breathing tube and hanging on to it. Your whole hand was almost the size of the top half of my thumb. Your palm rested against the tip of my forefinger as I massaged it with my thumb - a tender, gentle hand. I'm hoping you are playing cello in your great granddad Brown's orchestra with those long, slender fingers!

Friday May 28, 1993

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This evening around 8:30 a storm was approaching. I needed to shop at Giant Eagle and asked if everyone would like to ride along to see the storm. While walking down to the van, Glen said, "I think God made it rain to water Abby's tree."

Noah replied, "He wants us to remember Abby. I'm going to pretend that Abby is in our family." Dear little Abby, we are all feeling your presence, including Noah, who wouldn't talk about your death until recently, and now is making tender statements about you.

Earlier today Cory was looking at me. He asked, "Is Abby in your tummy? Is the baby in your tummy?" I almost cried. I explained to him that you were the baby and you were now in heaven. He looked at my tummy again and said, "Hi Abby!" My dear little Abby.

I had a dream the other night that you were sick and the doctor said we could take you home with us to die. They didn't know how well you would breathe on your own. We took you home and put you in a small box. When we awoke the next morning, you had grown some and were perfectly healed! We took you back to Magee and our old friends there were joyful, and eager to recheck you and experience the miracle!

What a wonderful dream! It felt so real, maybe because sometimes I wish our whole experience with your death was a dream, and you were still back in the NICU, healing.

It was time to start thinking about going home, which would mean leaving you behind. I borrowed an Egnel electric breast pump, was given equipment, and gave it a try. Daddy and I laughed so hard! I felt like a cow! I wanted to pump my breasts so you could be tube fed my milk, and so I could nurse you eventually. I was determined to persevere! I later rented a Madela pump in New Castle.

We met our social worker, Connie Nelson, and had a good cry with her. She turned out to be a very compassionate person who stayed by our side from beginning to end! Another angel!

We felt safe while we were still staying at the hospital. I agonized at the thought of leaving you behind! What a cruel thing for a mother to have to do and endure!

We planned to stay with Grandma and Granddad Brown for a while until I felt better. We were a little nervous about planning our schedule to visit you.

Leaving was painful. At the hospital entrance, I waited for Daddy to get the van. A new mother also waited for her husband, but she was holding her baby. I broke down and sobbed.

Glen, who is 8, had been so sweet when he met you the day before. I want to never forget his tender caring voice saying, "Hi Abby," and watching him gently reach to touch you. Noah, who is 5 ½, and Cory, who is 3, met you several days later and were both amazed. They asked many questions about your monitors, but were not bothered by them, truly

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seeing and understanding the real you. Even Cory commented on how small you were! I am so glad they have those precious memories!

June 3, 1993

When we left the hospital on Monday, the 26th, it was very difficult. Up until that point we felt safe because we were close to you. It was scary, knowing we had to somehow get on with our former lives, and also become a part of your life by visiting you daily in the NICU. We had to trust that you would be okay in the hands of the staff. Little did we know that you would become so well loved by them!

That evening, after settling in at Grandma and Granddad's house in Meadowlands, we went back to the hospital. We were met there by my friends from Sherwood Oaks, Karen and Tammy, and your aunt Carole, your cousin, Kelli, and her husband Mark. They all took turns going in to see you with us.

Throughout the next two weeks, while we stayed in Meadowlands, others would visit, Lisa and Gary Fox with Chuck and Pam Watterson, Jeff and Debbie Wiley, all from our church, Uncle Michael and Aunt Gretchen, and others. Our friends and family truly cared about you, and us and weren't afraid to show it.

Pumping my breasts proved to be a great challenge! I rented a Medela Medina electric pump from a home health agency in New Castle named, of all things, "Abby". I was not able to relax enough for my milk to readily flow. I was only able to get out a few drops at a time. I originally wanted to pump enough milk for your tube feedings but as the days went by and I wasn't very successful, I changed my goal to maintaining my production enough that I could eventually nurse you.

We were waiting for your heart duct to close so that you could be successfully tube fed. The duct normally closes at birth but in preemies it often doesn't. It must close so the blood will flow normally to the body. Digestion is not successful without proper flow.

You were treated with three rounds of Indocin in hopes that it would close. It closed once and reopened. You also were developing severe skin breakdown. We were told that you would not be a candidate for surgery to close the duct due to your skin condition and your size. Many people prayed that your duct would close so that you could begin eating.

Saturday, May 8th, the day before Mother's Day, was the day Dr. Maffei called to say the duct was closing and you would begin tube feedings again. How excited we were!

Friday, the 7th, we went back home to Sleepy Hollow. We felt it was time to go home so Daddy wouldn't have so far to drive to work, and so Glen could go to school normally... Your brothers were really missing being at home, so we were anxious to get back.

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On Saturday, Daddy and I went to a wedding and your brothers stayed with Aunt Judy. We were going to leave the reception early and visit you. The meal wasn't served until so late that we didn't get to see you. My heart ached to see you but I knew we should wait until the next day, Mother's Day.

When I attended Grandma's Mother/Daughter banquet at Houston Church, I met a young woman from there, Jane, who knew a Christian nurse in the NICU named Sheila Dillon. I wrote Sheila a note about you and left it for her. On Mother's Day she left us a beautiful note, taped to your incubator. She sounded like a very special person. She said she would be there Thursday and Friday and hoped to meet us.

Monday, the 10th, was a beautiful, hot day. Aunt Gretchen had agreed to watch Noah and Cory in the afternoon for a little while I visited you. It was to be my first trek to the NICU all by myself. I was looking forward to sitting by your side and stroking your head and delicate little hands.

The three of us stopped at Sherwood Oaks for a while in the morning to do some work there, had our lunch, and were on our way. The van was threatening to overheat on the way to Gretchen's. I made it there, deposited the boys, and made my way over to Magee. I told Gretchen I'd be back in the middle of the afternoon, about 3:30. It was around 1:30 at that time. Glen was to go to Pam Walter's house after school and I'd pick him up later.

I was also looking forward to using the big Egnell breast pumps in the special room they had for that purpose.

I was nervous. It was my first time alone in the hospital. I hoped it would be the first of many times spent with my little girl. I was determined for you to be one of the survivors!

I walked down the hallway to the "formula" room to pump first before I saw you. Dr. Maffei saw me coming. He hurried over to me and told me that things had changed in the last 24 hours and he needed to talk with me. We made our way to a small conference room where Dr. "Katie" Mcquillen joined us. I was terrified and started to pray.

Frank told me that you had an infection in your kidneys and were in renal failure. You had not peed since the night before. You were now in critical condition. He stated the facts but ended by saying not to give up hope. My heart began breaking at that moment. The first little cracks had begun.

I made my way back down the hall and to a phone. As I tried to dial I sobbed uncontrollably. My first visit alone was becoming a nightmare. Another angel appeared in the form of Erma, a phlebotomist. While I was in labor she had come to draw blood from each arm. She was a lively, petite, young, black woman who had a golden heart. She told us about her previous work with Hospice patients. She had sat with many people as they died. That evening, she had quickly become one of our heroes.

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Throughout the past 2 weeks, we would speak to her when we saw her. Now she appeared again. She stopped when she saw me crying and put her arms around me, asking what was wrong. I told her, and she said she would pray for you.

I phoned your Daddy and asked him to come right away, and Aunt Gretchen, who offered to come, and Pam, to let her know Glen may need to spend the night. Then I went in to see you, terrified of what I might find.

You still looked like your little, beautiful self. You were not as active due to morphine you were getting every 6 hours for possible pain, but you looked fine. I was told that Dr. Mimouni, who we'd never met, wanted to meet with Daddy and me when he got there.

Aunt Gretchen came and I was relieved to have her company. Elaine also arrived, primarily just to visit. Soon, Daddy came with Pastor Ted who had brought him. Ted, Daddy, and I went to the Conference room where we met with 4 doctors, 4 nurses and Connie, our social worker.

Daddy and I heard the worst news of our lives. Dr. Mimouni, sitting at the head of the table, said you were going to die. He said the fungal infection you had would take over your body and you could die anytime, or within a few days. Daddy and I were in shock! This wasn't supposed to happen! You were a fighter and everyone was "cautiously optimistic". How could you be dying! Before the meeting, before everyone arrived in the room, Ted, Daddy, and I had held hands and prayed for you. Now Dr. Mimouni was giving us the choice to take you off of life support and hold you until you died.

After the meeting we went to see you. You looked so good, your respirations and heart were good. We couldn't take you off the support. We were told we could stay in a hotel-type "nesting room". We said if you started to fail that night, the staff was to get us and we would take you off the life support.

There were many, many people praying for you in a multitude of churches. There were probably 20 churches at least, and many people had you on their prayer chains. Many people told us they felt they knew you. On a great purpose you served in your life was to bring people closer to God through their prayers for you. Prayers for your healing were offered up and down the east coast. What an awesome happening, and they didn't even know you.

The Catholic bishop had prayed for me the Sunday my cervix was bleeding, and the United Methodist Bishop stopped and prayed for you during a cabinet meeting. Oh, what prayers God heard on our behalf! I love you Abby! There will never be another baby who has touched the world quite like you have!

I asked Ted if he would baptize you. Dr. Mimouni, who is Jewish, and other staff asked if they could attend. We all processed to the NICU. In attendance were Ted, Daddy, Dr. Mimouni, Lori Cook, Connie, Gretchen, Elaine, several nurses and me. The lights were dimmed and Ted conducted the baptism. I will never forget the beauty and tranquillity,

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which surrounded us! God was there. I concentrated on the picture of Jesus taped in your isolette and prayed that he would be with all of us! None of us wanted you to die!

More company came after we were settled in the nesting room. Todd, Christine, who is Todd and Elaine's little girl, Jeff Wiley, Aunt Nancy, and Uncle Buddy. Lori Cook also joined us for a while. She was an angel who truly cared. She said she was there as our friend and not our doctor. We ordered pizza and pop, to be delivered. Jeff and Elaine had not given up hope. They were praying for a healing, as I'm sure the others were. It was a feeling of closeness among all of us! Love and friendship!

*Dr. Cook*

*On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, I was on call and was somewhat optimistic. Abby looked great. Her skin was healing so well. I had "gone off service" on Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>. I was devastated to hear the news about Abby's renal failure and that the Candida infection was real. There was a small sense of relief though that I was "off service" and would not have to play the role of physician and just that of friend.*

There was a lighted courtyard-type area outside the window, with skylights. When it grew dark outside, the lighting in that area made it appear as if it was still light out. It tricked us into thinking that it was earlier than the late hour we discovered. The time had flown and midnight had come upon us! We hated to break the spell in the room, but we told everyone they could go home.

That night was a restless one for me! I was terrified of every noise I heard outside the door. I was afraid you were dying and they'd be coming to get us. I would get out of bed and looking out the window, could see across the courtyard into the window of where you slept. My heart ached. I wanted to hold and protect you!

At 3:00 a.m. I called to check and you were fine. No change. The night left and a new day dawned - Tuesday, May 11th.

I was so afraid that Grandma and Granddaddy Brown would not get to see you again. They had been away in Kentucky. They loved you so! I had never seen my dad actually sob, until you were born. Your Grandma and Grandpap Rectenwald were in Florida getting ready to come north for the summer. They loved you deeply and felt they knew you, though they did not meet you! What an affect you had on people! We had also received about 50 cards when you were born from friends, family, and those who cared.

Monday June 7, 1993

It was Tuesday morning, May 11th. We had reached Grandma and Granddaddy Brown late last night. They weren't giving up hope. That morning they came to visit as did Drew

*Abby (Baby)*

Harvey, their District Superintendent for the United Methodist church. We all sat in the waiting room, waiting to get in to see you.

Connie poked her head in and said Dr. Mimouni would like to have a meeting again. We all paraded to a conference room by the room you were in. I was glad Dr. Harvey also came in with my mom and dad. It was a large crowd again, including doctors, nurses, Connie, and our crew.

Dr. Mimouni said that by now, the fungus, which was attacking your little body, was probably all through you and again offered to assist us in taking you off life support. He was such a dramatic person and sensitive in his description of what was happening, that almost everyone in the room was crying. He explained that because you were in renal failure, antibiotics necessary to kill the fungus could not be administered.

Your grandma asked if you peed again could antibiotics then be administered and he said yes. He also asked if we would like to have you and all your equipment in the nesting room with us until you died or we took you off the support. He said he didn't think that had been done before, though a nurse told Grandma that it had been done once.

My first reaction to the suggestion was fear. I'm not sure where the fear lay. I think it was fear of you dying in the middle of the night while there with us, or fear of hearing the heart monitor go off and how I would react!

I asked Dr. Mimouni at some point in the meeting what it would be like if the breathing tube were taken out. He said a large dose of morphine would be given and you would only gasp for air briefly. My fear of that was seeing you suffering while trying to breathe. Your grandma spoke up at the meeting saying that she thought it would be nice to have you in the room, and I found myself agreeing. It was settled. You would be moved when we were ready.

When the meeting ended I went with Dr. Harvey in to visit you. He later told Mom and Dad that he hadn't had the faith that you would be healed like the rest of us did. He did offer a beautiful prayer at your bedside.

*Dr. Cook:*

*Dr. Mimouni had sought me out and asked me to speak with Jerry and Sandi, in some sense, to persuade them. I had no real feel for what was "right" for Abby, not being sure that it was really time to take her off. I went to the unit. I saw them in the hall and just broke down. My heart hurt for them.*

Grandma, Granddad, Daddy and I went to lunch in the cafeteria, anticipating your move into the nesting room. We had become very excited. I was no longer nervous. It would be the closest feeling to being at home with you.

## *Abby (Baby)*

After lunch we went in to see you. The nurses asked if I would like to hold you before the move. I sat in the rocking chair while they prepared you. Your wires had to all be rearranged. They took the respiration off momentarily as they placed you in my arms. You were so tiny! I loved every bit of your 13 inches! Pictures were taken of Daddy and you and me. In one of the pictures, your eyes are open just a crack, looking up at us. I treasure all the pictures that were taken of you!

After I rocked you for a short time and looked at your beautiful face it was time to make the move. You were very relaxed in my arms and I felt you knew me well. It was difficult handing you back.

Daddy and I went back to the room to wait. We talked with your grandparents as the staff discussed your move back in the NICU. They gradually began to move monitors in. The beds had to be rearranged to make room for all of your equipment. Grandma and Granddad seemed restless so we asked them if they would mind buying your Daddy a T-shirt and me a shorts outfit somewhere. We thought they wouldn't mind having something to do.

After they left, Uncle John came to visit while they were moving you in. He stayed while you were moved in. The staff began to explain the monitors and how to reset them if they accidentally went off. We also learned how to call them on the intercom. A nurse and respiratory therapist would come in every hour. Daddy and I had no plans to take you off the respirator. We told the staff only if you suddenly deteriorated during the night.

The sound of your respirator was comforting. It was quiet in the room, very calming. We knew you could feel it, too. It was nice to open the door to your isolette and touch and speak to you. The week before, you had jerked suddenly in the NICU when you heard a monitor from another baby go off. It worried me that those noises were bothering you. Now, in the quiet nesting room, I was comforted in knowing that it was peaceful for you.

Tuesday, 6-8-93

When Grandma and Granddaddy got back, they had brought Daddy a beautiful new Polo shirt and socks, and me a pretty pink shorts outfit, socks, and a nightie, and some snacks. It was very generous of them!

They were anxious to hold you before they had to leave for the day so we asked a nurse if they could do so. Grandma held you first, tenderly and gently, as she softly spoke to and caressed you. It broke my heart as she told you to pee so you could begin healing. She had a strong faith at that time that you would be healed, and I didn't. I was afraid she was having false hope. Moments later, though, as I watched her love for you continue to blossom as she experienced you, I changed my mind. I began to think that I too should have more faith in God's healing power.

Granddaddy's turn was next. He only got to hold you briefly because the nurse felt you had been out long enough. As I watched you being lowered into his arms, he melted. He

*Abby (Baby)*

was in love. I felt badly that his time to hold you was so short, but later on he would continuously express how much that brief moment had meant to him both verbally and in writing.

It was quiet with just the three of us: Daddy, you, and me. We talked to you and touched you. I loved your beautiful little hands and stroking your sweet, soft temples. Your forehead had been silky against my lips' kiss when I had held you earlier.

We had eaten supper when Grandma and Granddaddy were here. They waited with you as we ate in the cafeteria. Now they were gone and the pulsating sound of the respirator was our company.

I became restless and nervous. It was early evening and I told your Daddy that I needed to get out and go for a walk. I went out the front door of the hospital and started to the right, up towards the tower entrance. As I walked along the sidewalk I looked up and saw a stained glass window. It was the chapel. I had been thinking of looking for it from our first day there, but hadn't. Now I felt drawn towards the tower entrance, to go in and find it.

Going in that door, I saw the gift shop straight ahead. I took a left and down the hall it was on the left. At the front was a table which served as the alter. On the table was a devotional book. I opened it to May 11th and read. All of it applied to the present situation. I had been so afraid to pray for a healing for you. In the scripture for the day was the verse, "Ask anything in my name and I will do it." I didn't pay attention to where it came from.

On a little table against the window was a prayer request book people had written in. I poured over it, reading the heart wrenching entries. It encompassed problems from the whole hospital, and brought to reality that Magee was not just the NICU, it was daughters with dying mothers, husbands with dying wives, women who were unable to get pregnant!

I began to pray for their needs as my heart went out to them. I read someone's note about how John 14 gave them comfort, and then I turned to the next blank page and began writing myself, writing a prayer for you. I poured out my heart to God, asking that if it's His will to heal you, then please do it. If not, then please take you gently. I filled a whole page!

Afterwards, I decided to find John 14 and read what someone else had found comforting. There it was! John 14:14 read, "Ask anything in my name and I will do it." It felt like the Lord had struck me with an obvious message. He wanted me to pray for a healing!

I immediately sat down in front of the alter and prayed. I opened my heart to God and became convinced that he would heal you. It was a power of belief and hope unlike any I'd ever experienced. I left the chapel with a renewed spirit. I was no longer afraid.

*Abby (Baby)*

*Dr. Cook:*

*I remember praying for healing, too. I just didn't want to, couldn't accept Abby dying.*

Later on, Aunt Carole and Kelli came to visit. They cried throughout the visit. It was very special because they were also able to experience you more personally, visiting you in the nesting room. We were filled with love for them, at their compassion and love for you and for us.

When they left, it was later in the evening. Daddy had not yet experienced the joy of holding your delicate, beautiful body. We asked the staff if he could, and they were very willing to arrange it. He is such a good Daddy! You were lucky that he was yours! He held you for a long time, quietly talking to and touching and kissing you. You had to have felt his love.

At one point in the day we saw Dr. Lori Cook. She told us that she heard we had our own private NICU! We were proud and thrilled that the staff would be so obliging in order that we could have precious, quality time with you!

Frank came by to see you and us and said you were a beautiful baby. He was a kind and gentle man!

I was no longer nervous about the upcoming night. I had shared with your Daddy my belief that you would be healed and I took comfort in that. The night before had been one of my worst nights of sleep, and I knew that tonight would be a night of comfort.

Your respirator lulled us to sleep. The nurse and respiratory therapist checked on you every hour. I occasionally wakened when they came in. I did not believe you would die that night, and the next day I would tell everyone. I found that it was the best night of sleep I had in months!

Wednesday June 9, 1993

Last Sunday, the 6th, Daddy and I went to see Billy Graham in Pittsburgh with Dr. Lori Cook and her husband, John. They are very special people and we would like to always be friends with them. She was a true angel sent from God to help us through a difficult time.

Friends of ours gave us two children's books in your memory and Lori took them to the hospital to be used in the NICU. One is paintings to the words of "All Things Bright And Beautiful" and the other a children's version of the 23rd Psalm with pictures.

Yesterday Cory asked me, "Is Abby still in the hospital?" What a difficult thing to explain to a three year old. I only wish you were! He later put a video on baby care in the

*Abby (Baby)*

VCR and said, "This is Abby's favorite movie." I wish it were! You would be over six weeks old. My heart is aching and yearning for my little girl. As each week goes by I keep thinking, if only you had waited till *this* week to be born...

Thursday June 10, 1993

On Wednesday the twelfth I woke up refreshed. Your Daddy hadn't slept as well as I had, but I felt great!

You were still alive and the room felt peaceful with the constant rhythm of your monitors. A nurse was caring for you and said that she'd heard you had peed in the night. We thought she was alluding to the fact that you had peed again so we asked if you had previously. She said you had just peed again. We were afraid to get our hopes up but asked her what that meant. She indicated that they would want to take a second look at you case. We became so excited that we couldn't contain ourselves. It was a scary kind of excitement!

I called Grandma and Granddaddy and they cried! They had been praying and had asked others to pray that you would simply pee! That simple yet important prayer had been answered! We were praising the Lord!

I couldn't sit still: I went up to the chapel, a little lighter than the night before and read the daily devotional. Of course it applied to the day once again and I prayed!

When I got back to the room, you were gone. They had whisked you away - away from the peacefulness of your surroundings with us in the precious nesting room. I felt badly for you that you would once again be pricked and poked.

Daddy and I were treated to breakfast in our room by the hospital. Soon afterward we heard a knock on the door. It was Dr. Mimouni, Dr. "Katie," Dr. "Scottie," a nurse and Connie. They all sat on the extra bed and the rocking chair and were so excited they were bouncing and giddy.

Dr. Mimouni said that we all knew you peed and they wanted to begin administering antibiotics and further tests once again. As they filed back out of the room, Katie said to the others, "Abby is going to be a star!" My heart soared!

A short time later, because Daddy and I were so nervous and so very excited, we decided to get out for some exercise. We took a walk all around the outside of the hospital, all the while talking with positive enthusiasm and hope for your future! When we rounded the corner to the front of the building, we saw Granddaddy walking towards us. He also was excited, more so than I'd ever seen before in my life.

*Abby (Baby)*

He couldn't wait to talk. He pulled us under the shelter of the building out front and told us he had a dream the night before. I now can't remember the exact details, but in the dream he was pulling you in a wagon up a road. He felt "he" represented all the people who were praying for you. There was muddy water flowing down the road. At this point, Granddaddy told us the muddy water represented death. He was trying to get you away from the water and took you, and I believe some other children, into a chapel. When he came out the water was still there, so he took you back in. When he came out again, the water was clear. At this point Granddaddy was sobbing uncontrollably and hugging Daddy and me. He said he felt the clear water meant that you were going to be okay.

He couldn't stop hugging us and we all ended up crying and embracing one another. It was a wonderful moment. I had never seen my Dad so full of love, and he shows love daily and readily. I will never forget that precious moment. Thanks, Daddy! I love you so!

I was very much convinced that the LORD wanted me to have faith that you would be healed, and I did possess that faith. But for one fleeting moment, I was afraid - afraid that if anything happened to you, my Dad also might perish. I did not allow that thought to linger.

I wanted to share with my Daddy the little chapel and my faith journey there. We went up there, the three of us, and I showed him my discoveries and what I had written in the prayer request book. He was in a hurry and couldn't stay any longer after that. He had come to the hospital just to tell us his dream!

Several days later we found out that your Grandpap Rectenwald also dreamt about you the same night. In his dream, he was talking with you and telling you that he was sorry he, and others, never got to meet you. Grandpap Rectenwald felt very close to you though he never got to see you!

Elaine came to visit. She was so wonderful and giving of herself and her time. She had fallen in love with you and cried right along with us through the whole experience!

Your cousin, Carey Harris, was also very affected by you. She came to visit several times and offered for us to stay at the Family House she managed in Oakland on the weekends if we needed to. We were planning on utilizing that wonderful resource. We felt very close to her. She is a warm, loving person. She wasn't afraid to touch you and talk to you!

Throughout the day, new tests were administered and antibiotics were given. We were claiming a miracle. You had been in renal failure for over forty-eight hours and your kidneys began functioning again. Doctor Mimouni had thought on Tuesday that your organs would be almost completely destroyed by now. You proved them wrong!

When we went in to visit you in the afternoon - I think Elaine was with me - Lori Cook approached me and said that she had been to the chapel and read my prayer. She cried

*Abby (Baby)*

and said that last night she had prayed to God that you wouldn't die. There was such a positive feeling with the staff rallying around your incubator in the NICU. Doctor Katie said, "I'm so glad Abby peed." Frank came to visit you! His motto was always that he was cautiously optimistic.

It was your cousin Trey's birthday and Grandma and Granddaddy stopped to see you late in the afternoon on their way up North to see Trey. We went to the gift shop with them and they bought you your one and only teddy bear. It winds up and plays "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." I looked positively at the little girl clothes in the gift shop. I pictured you wearing them someday. We put the bear on your isolette.

We took Grandma and Granddaddy to the chapel. I wrote down names of prayer requests for them from the book. We held hands and prayed for you.

Glen was missing us terribly. He had been staying at our very good friends the Walters' house; they had been very good to us but he really missed us. Noah and Cory were on an adventure going from house to house in the Rectenwald family. Glen asked if he could come and stay with us. Since you were doing better, we agreed that he could.

Jeff and Debbie Wiley brought Glen to stay late in the evening. They visited with you and us. Glen was thrilled to be with us! We had missed him also and were glad to have him! It was the end of another day. We went to bed happy and hopeful and slept well that night.

Saturday June 12, 1993

It was Thursday, May thirteenth, Uncle John's fortieth birthday. When Glen, Daddy, and I woke up, we wondered what the day would hold. It was a nervous but still positive feeling. We had breakfast brought to us again and Elaine brought me my paycheck early, which she had picked up at Sherwood Oaks.

When I visited you, Sheila Dillon came by and introduced herself. She was a very loving Christian lady full of much compassion. I felt I could open up to her and tell her my feelings about you. She was a very good listener.

Your skin was beautiful! It was healing perfectly with not a flaw to be seen! My heart soared to see your beauty. They had been spreading Lubriderm lotion on you with loving care. It smelled so good.

The three of us decided it was time to get out. We walked all the way across Oakland to the Mellon bank at Craig Street and then onto the Pitt campus. We ventured into the Cathedral of Learning and found ourselves going in to all of the nationality rooms. We had never been in all of them, even though I had spent my freshman year at Pitt. They

*Abby (Baby)*

were beautiful, in perfect condition. It was hard to pick a favorite. Our next stop was lunch at Roy Roger's.

When we got back, I went in to see you and they were giving you a head ultrasound. I would have to wait. We were sitting in the waiting room; I believe talking with Connie, when Doctor Mimouni said he wanted to meet with us to discuss the ultrasound.

We were feeling positive that your brain function was all right because they had been telling us all along that your brain waves were better than normal and you had no ventricular bleeding, which many preemies have. You were very bright and alert. No one needed to tell us that because it was obvious to see.

Now we were hit with another blow. We were led to a small room where x-rays were read. Present were Doctor Mimouni, a new Doctor Israel, Doctor Katie, and Connie. Your head ultrasound was displayed at different angles with different pictures on the screen. No one had to tell me that they didn't look like pictures of a normal brain.

Doctor Mimouni compassionately explained to us that the fungus had attacked your brain and had created holes in different areas. He urged us to take you off life support. Daddy and I were in shock. Along with the rest of the staff, we had been so hopeful. This was a literal blow to our hearts.

You were profoundly brain damaged. Doctor Mimouni said in his twenty years of working there he had never seen a brain so badly affected. Usually, a baby dies before the brain is attacked.

You had such a strong will to survive and it broke our hearts! My immediate reaction was to protect you. I asked if the brain could compensate in other areas. He felt it could not because of the distribution of the damage. He was a little cold-hearted. You were still our beautiful little Abby, struggling to survive. I couldn't give up on you and I told him so! He said maybe this was the sign we were waiting for to take you off of life-support.

I immediately felt, no! I did not feel the LORD wanted us to do so. The rest of your body still wanted to hang on! We were filled with pain once again, but this time it was the pain of knowing that we were losing your mind, your precious intelligence, your ability to think and reason - we were losing you!

Dr. Mimouni said you could possibly survive, which he really didn't think you would, but if you did you would be profoundly handicapped. I was not to be beaten! The number one thing in my mind was love. I had a drive in me to love you and care for you no matter what your condition. No one could take away that drive!

Daddy & I left the room shaken, very shaken. This had been a blow we had not been prepared for, but we knew we had to face and deal with it.

*Abby (Baby)*

Mark Dobson came to visit us back in the nesting room. It was great to see him! I took him in to visit you. We prayed! We appreciated his visit!

Elaine came while he was still there. Mark left some time after and Elaine stayed for a while. While we were all talking to Elaine and updating her as to your condition, Daddy became overcome with anger over the unfairness of the situation, and abruptly got up and stormed out of the room. We understood. We knew that Daddy loved you a great deal and was having a difficult time handling this terrible news.

Elaine and I went in to see you. At some point in the afternoon, I saw Sheila Dillon again and she had heard the news.

We had a solemn, tearful dinner in the cafeteria that evening. Daddy and I decided that if God wanted you to survive, we would take care of you. You were still healthy and active. We could not take you off the life-support. We would not end your life only because you were handicapped.

I had seen Katie, who had been so positive, and thanked her for her hopefulness. I didn't want her to feel bad for being so hopeful.

Aunt Janet, Uncle Tom, Aunt Linda, Uncle Bill, and Carey came to visit. We took turns taking them in to see you. They were very loving and compassionate and totally understanding. At that point we were still thinking hopefully of your survival. We arranged with Carey to stay at her apartment in the Family House over the weekend if we needed to.

Another day had come and gone. We had been experiencing emotions this week from every extreme that we didn't even realize existed! We went to sleep exhausted, totally unsure and unaware of the future! We left it in the LORD's hands! We certainly were experiencing having to live one day at a time!

Sunday June 13, 1993

It was Friday morning. Your Daddy decided to go to work. Breakfast was brought to us and Glen and I ate together. I was glad Daddy left because he needed to get out of the hospital and have some time to think.

In the morning, Dr. Mimouni poked his head in the room when Glen and I were in there and asked if we had felt any differently about our decisions regarding you. I said no, we would wait and continue praying.

Glen said he remembers Carey visiting in the morning. She was so concerned! The nesting room looked out over an indoor type of courtyard/waiting area in the floor below. There was a children's room there and we decided to go for a walk and investigate that area. We looked there and at other areas of the building we had not seen before. We also visited the chapel for our daily reading and prayer, and the gift shop. Glen had some

*Abby (Baby)*

money he wanted to spend. He bought a cute little yellow dinosaur, which he continues to love. Looking at it reminds me of you!

Elaine came to take Glen and me out to lunch, which we were really looking forward to. Before we left she said, "I want to see the little girl." Now, as I write that, my heart is aching because I want to see the little girl right now! There was so much love from Elaine in that statement. That is why I will never forget it or her for saying it. She loved you very much and gave us so much of herself. Thank you, Elaine!

The NICU was busy so she did not get to see you. Sadly, she never saw you again.

We went to lunch at "The Original" hotdog shop in Oakland, all the while talking of our love for you, no matter what your condition. Elaine and I both still believed that God could cause a miracle to happen and heal your little brain. We prayed and were imagining him filling in the holes in your brain. We left "The O" believing he could do that. She also took us for yogurt at TCBY.

When we got back, Elaine had to leave right away and couldn't see you. Glen and I went back to the nesting room. Dr. Mimouni popped his head in the door and said he wanted to see me; Glen stayed behind as I left with him. He said he wanted to talk with me because he had the results of another sonogram. As I followed him back through the halls to the X-ray room of yesterday, I was attempting to hope that he would have wonderful news, maybe you were better, were healing. By his quiet, urgent manner, I became filled with fear.

Dr. Frank and he sat with me. As I looked at new pictures and angles of your brain on the screen, my fears became realized - it was much worse today. Dr. Mimouni became very urgent with me to the point of rudeness in asking me to take you off of life-support. He said you were now a vegetable and all you would feel in your life was pain.

I knew he was wrong. You would always feel our love and the love of God. I became angry at his insensitivity!

He demanded to call Daddy at work and as he pleaded with him on the phone, Frank talked with me. He was upset at how Dr. Mimouni was treating me and let me know. He asked me how old I was and said maybe I should have another baby sometime. He was kind and though I thought I may someday - I knew a new baby would never replace you! He shared a personal story. As a little boy he would see his mother, the same day every year, lighting a candle and crying. He never knew why. Then one day he asked his father. He was told that his mother had lost a baby on that day, sometime before he was born. He had never known.

I appreciated Frank sharing himself with me. I would never forget it! I cried for a while as Frank brought me iced tea and comforted me. I was glad no one else was there!

*Abby (Baby)*

I walked out numb! I made my way back to the nesting room in a deep state of numb shock. You were going to die. My hopes and dreams were crushed and broken.

Glen was lying on the bed watching TV. I asked him to move over to the chair so I could lie down and he started to whine and complain. I couldn't handle it. I simply said, "I'm sorry, Glen," as I started to cry, turned around, and left him there in the room. I had quietly let him know that he had upset me, but I felt guilty leaving him like that.

I had to leave, I wanted to leave my life and hope that when I came back this horrible nightmare would have simply been a dream. I went in to the waiting room and sat, staring blankly. A soap opera was on and they were reading a beautiful poem at a funeral of all things. That broke me. I sobbed till I thought I might die from heart failure due to it breaking. I was hoping the ground would just swallow me up and end my suffering.

One of my angels, in the earthly form of Sheila, came to comfort me. She had seen me through the window of the Con. C unit and came to share her love. She wrapped me in her arms and I told her the latest news about your condition.

I poured out my pain. I shared with her about how hard it was that you were a girl. She said I would feel the same if you were a boy, but I knew in my heart there was more pain involved. I felt a female bond with you. It may sound strange, but I smiled each time I saw your bottom and no penis was there. I had rejoiced on Wednesday when I saw urine glistening on that area! Now my dreams were crashing in once again and this time I knew no hope existed. No matter what our decision, you would soon be gone. Sheila shared that she had three boys also, and once had a baby girl die. I was thankful she had shared that with me.

While I was grieving, several times Glen looked in through the door with a face red from crying. He was upset and wanted to see that I was okay. He always worries about me. I smiled over in love at him.

Grandma soon appeared. She came in and sat with us on the left side of me Grandma and Granddaddy had come to visit. I calmed down and thanked Sheila, telling her I didn't know what we would do. I did know we would continue to pray for guidance.

I took Grandma and Granddaddy each in to see you. I sat with you and held your delicate hand in my left hand, stroking your forehead and crying. I had been singing Daddy's lullaby to you since Wednesday or Thursday. It meant so much to sing to you. Grandma said I shouldn't sit with you like that too long, it wasn't good for me. It broke my heart for her to say that. You were my little girl and these were the last moments I had to spend with you, and it was only natural that I wanted to be with you forever. You would soon be gone. I forgave Grandma for her words because I knew they were just that, only words. I was her only little girl and she only wanted to protect me from pain, as I wanted to protect you. Later when I left your side, she apologized for what she had said. There was no need for an apology. I love you, Mommy!

## *Abby (Baby)*

Your little body lay limper and when I would gently lift your arms, you gave little response. When I tickled you feet, you moved, but I was told it was only reflexes. When I sang the lullaby the day before, the words were hopeful, of this earth. Now when I sang "time to laugh, smile and sing, walk and dance and run... close your eyes and let your dreams begin," I pictured you in heaven.

Back in the nesting room, Grandma and Granddaddy had brought hoagies for supper. Connie came in. I told her Daddy and I would go home for the night and come back tomorrow. She told us she would pencil us in to use the room on Saturday night. Daddy came and I filled him in as we ate a hoogie.

We packed our bags and went home to sleep and rest our weary minds. It was good to have Glen.

On the way, we stopped at Giant Eagle and rented *Uncle Buck*. We thought a light-hearted movie might help. It did. We slept that night wondering if we would be getting a phone call. Daddy heard a bee buzzing in the night and thought it was your monitors... I love you Abby! My little Ab.

Sunday June 13, 1993

This evening as I was writing this, that emotional entry about Friday, it took me about 3 hours and I cried throughout. Your brothers, especially Glen, were worried about me and kept doing special things for me. Glen even went and watered your tree. I was sitting in the white wicker chair in the corner of the kitchen.

At one point, Glen looked up and out of the window behind me. He stepped back, rubbing his eyes and looking puzzled. He exclaimed, "What? I must be seeing things. I saw Abby's face up in the sky!" When he told me that, I felt your presence and cried. I asked him to explain and he said again that he saw your face in the sky. There were no clouds. I believed him. He and I embraced and I cried as I expressed my love to him and thanked him for his special understanding. This happening was a gift from God!

Wednesday June 16, 1993

Saturday morning was beautiful on May 15th. You were born on a Saturday morning. It had also been a beautiful day. Yesterday was one month since you died.

That morning, your Daddy went to work. Glen and I stayed home and got ready to go back to the hospital. Grandma and Granddaddy were to meet us there at about 2:30 and Glen was going to spend the night with them while Daddy and I stayed in the nesting room again. I packed a bag for Glen and one for us. I was afraid to tell Glen what our

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plans were because I knew he wouldn't want to be away from us, so we waited till we arrived at the hospital. We did arrive around 2:30, the same time as Grandma and Granddaddy.

It was difficult. All of us were fairly quiet as we sat in the waiting room together before we went in to see you. *Uncle Buck*, of all things, was on the TV. What a strange coincidence! Grandma and Granddaddy knew your Daddy and I were struggling with our love for you and what decisions we should make.

Glen, Daddy, and I went in to see you. My heart was aching as I watched Glen's gentle heart reach out to you in pure love. He touched you and said, "Hi, Abby," to you in a tender voice. I hope I never forget him looking through the open door and speaking softly to you. There was a brother/sister bond there, which will be bound forever.

We explained to him that you were going to die and he still thought God might heal you. It was very hard for me to know this would probably be the last time he would see you in this life. He had known you, the little sister he always wanted, be it so brief and precious a time!

Grandma and Granddaddy visited you briefly. It was difficult for them! Grandma spoke very lovingly to you and she and I spoke about how lethargic you now were. Your little arms were limp and your face was puffy. I held your beautiful right hand in mine and examined it closely, gently massaging it. Once again I gently held your head. I hoped that you still knew me and I wanted these precious moments to go on. The LORD could have taken me then and I would have been ready and willing! I didn't want to be separated from you.

Granddaddy spoke to you lovingly. He so much wanted you to live! He continued to speak of how precious his brief moments of holding you had been!

Glen hesitated to leave with them but they planned to take him to the Pike Festival and the \$5 we had given him helped him to readily go. They were leaving knowing that we were staying, and none of us knew what the rest of our time there would hold! We got Glen's bag from the van. It was a solemn good-bye, but we knew we had their love and support!

Daddy and I went back in to see you. We both knew that our little Abby was no longer there. Your condition had changed. There was little response, and you were beginning to need more oxygen. I had been waiting for a sign such as that. Your increased oxygen rate was a turning point.

Walking down the middle hallway, Daddy didn't want to go to the waiting room and asked if we could talk in the courtyard. We both knew what the discussion would be. Daddy expressed to me right away that you had not looked well the past couple of days and he felt maybe it was time to decide on withdrawing the breathing tube. I painfully

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agreed. We said if the nesting room was available and Lori Cook was available to be with us, we would make that decision.

We went to the desk on the Con. side. Yes, we were still down for the nesting room. I had also told your daddy that I didn't want to go home that night no matter what occurred. He agreed. If we saw your death, I didn't want to go right back into the world immediately. I would need to adjust.

At the desk we also asked if we could get in touch with Lori. We had decided we didn't want Dr. Mimouni with us due to his abrupt rudeness the day before. Lori was on call that night! They got in touch with her quickly. I will never forget her smile as she walked towards us.

She asked if we wanted an update on Abby. We told her we knew how Abby was, we had seen you. We tried tearfully to tell her what we wanted to discuss. And she led us back to the X-ray room to talk privately.

We told her how we had come to our decision, even the fact that she, who we cared about deeply, was on duty. We told her about our recent experience with Dr. Mimouni and talked for a while about you and your beautiful little life! We told her we would eat dinner first and check into the nesting room.

In the Cafeteria, we commented on how it would probably be our last meal there.

*Dr. Cook:*

*I have a feeling I probably "disappointed" Dr. Mimouni by not being more supportive of his suggestions, but I felt that Jerry and Sandi just needed time to see what was right for them and Abby. These kinds of circumstances are so hard. I feel that we physicians should not make it so that families are pushed into doing something they don't feel is right. That would be far more harmful and damaging to the parent for the rest of their life than to the infant. Also, I feel that we need to approach it in such a way that the family never think that they decided to stop supporting their child, that they only are agreeing with us physicians that that option is best for family and child.*

Friday morning, 8:30 a.m. 6-18-93

I had looked forward to many meals!

They did not need to bring all of the monitors into the nesting room, just the incubator and the respirator. I had been watching your monitors closely while visiting you earlier that day.

## *Abby (Baby)*

One of the very nice staff nurses, she had red hair, was being very compassionate to both you and me. I asked many questions through falling tears. Dr. Mimouni had stressed to me how hard it was on the staff to be taking care of a dying baby. He said it was not fair to them for us to continue to let you live. He made us also feel as if they needed you gone for the space. Those comments hurt and bothered Daddy and me deeply! I needed to ask someone else if this was true, so I expressed these questions to that particular nurse; I also indicated to her that he was putting pressure on us by saying these things.

She was very firm in reassuring me that you were our little girl and no one had the right to pressure us into anything. She stated that it was their job to take care of all the babies and that all the staff felt the same. My reassurance truly was felt in witnessing the show of love towards you that she was continuing to give. Later, Lori would also tell us that there were sometimes empty beds for a period of time. They didn't need the space!

I was sitting at the parent courtesy phone in the hallway. I had called Uncle Buddy and Pastor Ted to ask for prayer in what we were going to do, and to spread the word. I was on the phone when I saw you being wheeled from the middle of the hallway and through the doorway into the nesting room. It was your last journey in life leading into eternity!

I wondered how the staff would feel, seeing you leave the NICU for the last time. We were happy to know that Kasey was your nurse for the night. She told us that on Monday when she heard that you were sick, she had hoped to be with you when you died. This touched our hearts very deeply. She had also told us that she hated to see this happen to us because we were such good parents. We were thankful that because she cared about you so deeply, she would also be with you.

*Dr. Cook:*

*The night that Abby died, Kasey and I had a brief talk about "God" and what we believed. She has a very general type belief – kind of like the idea of God wouldn't deny anyone who is nice...*

*Last week, Kasey and I had a two-hour discussion about faith and other things!!!*

Due to not being on monitors, your oxygen level was put at 100%. Kasey put a cute little preemie hat on you which had a pink pom pom and pink lettering which read "I'm a Magee Baby," tiny little pink booties, and a white T-shirt. She showed us a beautiful little smocked bonnet which ladies in a nearby nursing home make for the preemies.

Once you were settled in, they put you in my arms. I wanted to cuddle you unceasingly. You were so tiny and precious, a true gift from God, which had changed our hearts and lives forever. This had been both a journey with you and a spiritual journey for your Mommy and Daddy. We had placed you in the hands of Jesus for His healing touch, and now we were giving you back to Him. Each time I had visited you I looked at the picture

*Abby (Baby)*

of Jesus on the inside of the door to your incubator and fiercely prayed for your healing. This day, as I looked for the last time, I prayed that your journey would be painless and that He would be in our presence during this journey.

While I held you, the four of us - Dr. Lori Cook, Kasey Marks, Daddy, and I - talked and laughed. We took a walk through time back to when you were born, and told Kasey and Lori everything that happened and our feelings involved. I rattled on and on about our experiences, subconsciously knowing that the longer I talked, the longer you lived. Twenty-one days. It had been the longest twenty-one days of my life, filled with almost every emotion deemed possible! I was so afraid of the future, of readjusting to a life, which would never be the same!

As time passed, I began to run out of things to say! That's hard for some people to believe! I knew at some point soon I had to give you up. I had told Daddy earlier that I wanted him to hold you while you died. I was too frightened. He did not hesitate to agree, and this came purely from his love for you!

Lori read scripture, some favorites of hers, and if I remember correctly, the 23rd Psalm. It became evident that it was time to make a decision. Lori gently asked us if we were ready. We quietly agreed. I asked if we could pray together. We held hands, Daddy across from me, Lori to my right, and Kasey to my left. Daddy prayed first, then Lori, then me; Kasey cried, we all cried. We prayed that the LORD would be with us and give us peace, and I prayed that we would always feel your presence. We thanked Him for your life and that we were able to truly know you!

Kasey and Lori worked quickly. It was a blessing because I hardly had time to react. A quiet fear gripped my heart as Kasey injected several doses of morphine into your I.V., as Lori and Kasey worked at taking the tape off your face, which held the breathing tube in place, and as I watched. They had put a liquid on the tape to help get it off, but it was still tricky. Lori scratched your cheek in the process and felt badly, saying, "I'm sorry little girl."

Kasey brought out the bonnet. It was beautiful! She asked if I would like to put it on after the tube was taken out. Lori looked around at all of us and then performed the extubation. I quickly put the little bonnet on your head and tied it under your chin. I stared at your face, full of innocent beauty, a face I had never before fully seen. I wanted to absorb it and penetrate it into my whole being.

You began to turn bluish and I became frightened. I handed you over to your daddy immediately. He took you gently and began staring into your face and speaking softly to you. You had turned a bluish-gray color. Your mouth was open and soon you began gasping for air, briefly struggling. I was standing at your feet while your daddy sat holding you on my right and Lori stood to my left. My biggest fear was having to see you struggle with these last few breaths, and I was afraid. I was crying and soon panicked.

*Abby (Baby)*

I covered my face, turned toward Lori and expressed my fear that I was afraid to watch. She said I could leave, but as soon as she said that, I regained control, turned back to you and was again able to see your beauty and not the pain. Your struggle only lasted several minutes, and your breathing stopped though your heart continued.

Lori and I sat on the bed in the same spots we had been standing in. We quietly talked. Occasionally I would stand up and talk to you, kiss your face. At one point I told you to go to Jesus. You were no longer breathing but your heart was still with us, slowly, slowly stopping its once healthy beat. Lori would use her stethoscope every few minutes and each time tell us it was 100, 80, 50, etc.

Daddy continued to stare, telling you how beautiful you were, his beautiful little daughter. Daddy gave me great strength though his intense love for you. Kasey was in and out of the room, but each time she was in, she wept with us. As your heart grew weaker, she stayed.

At 9:05 Lori checked your heart and it had stopped. I had expressed earlier that I longed to see your spirit leave your body. I could not see it at that moment, but I could feel it. None of us could speak. A peace had enveloped us and filled the room, which could have only come from God.

I spoke, saying that I would like to sing a lullaby, which Daddy wrote, and I had been singing to you in the NICU. I now sang it knowing that the words had taken a new meaning. When I sang before, I dreamt of your life with me on this earth, now I sang of your journey and life in your eternal home.

"The day is long

But now it's done.

The night is dark and deep

You've worked and played

Hoped and prayed

But now it's time to sleep

Tomorrow brings another day

A promise of the sun

Time to laugh, cry and sing,

Walk and dance and run.

*Abby (Baby)*

Close your eyes, close your eyes

And let your dreams begin

Go to sleep, go to sleep

I love you!"

We knew that you were now wrapped in the loving arms of God! The peace, which we felt at your passing, was instilled in our hearts forever, and we would never be the same! With small fear I kissed you and you were still warm.

Lori asked if I would like to hold you. You were turning a beautiful color, like a porcelain doll, with creamy skin and pink cheeks. Kasey said she had worked at Magee for 16 years and had never seen a baby turn such a beautiful color; she said babies don't turn that color, they usually look awful. I held you for about an hour, continuing to look at you, unafraid of your little body because I knew you were no longer there, but afraid once again to have to give you up for good.

The peace continued to abide in the room as we quietly talked. I asked Lori and Kasey what would happen next. You would be bathed. I asked if it could be done in here so I could watch. And then you would be taken back to the NICU where we would see you in your old spot before you went to the Morgue. The thought of the Morgue and cremation at Beinhauer's, which we had discussed with Grandma and Granddaddy, did not bother me. You were no longer in the body. Your spirit was set free to always be among us and with God. When I had kissed your forehead the last time it was still silky smooth, but cool.

Saturday June 19, 1993

I handed you over to Kasey. She put you in the incubator to bathe you. Lori had told us that Dorian, the little boy next to you, had died. We had become attached to his family and we were praying for each other's babies. His mother's name was Tasha and the grandmother's Mary. They were a kind and sensitive family and loved him very much. He was doing very well up until that day, when he developed NEC around noontime. He was rushed to Children's Hospital and died there following surgery.

As you were being prepared, Lori gave me the Myers family's phone number and I called them. We all cried together. I told them I felt that Dorian and you were in heaven together. They are Jehovah's Witnesses and believe that Dorian will be back on earth with them someday. I am always going to picture him in heaven with you!

*Abby (Baby)*

Mary told me one day last week that when Dorian came home from the hospital, they would have a party for him and invite you! What a sweet dream! Dorian had very big feet and hands. He was darling.

When I got off the phone, Kasey said she would take you back to your space in the NICU where we could see you again and have closure. She wheeled you out.

When it was time, we walked back in to the unit, not knowing what to expect. There you were, lying on your back with your head facing right, towards us. You were covered with a blanket up to your neck and now, your face was discolored. You were still beautiful, and the coloring didn't bother me because you were no longer there. My little Abby was free! I felt very calm because of that knowledge. I wanted to touch your body once more; it would be the last time. I opened the door by your head and reached my hand in, briefly stroking your temples as I loved doing. I closed the door. Lori and Kasey had been standing by us watching. We gave them each a hug and thanked them for everything! I began crying as we turned to leave. Walking towards the door I briefly turned one more time to say my goodbye, and then we were through the doorway for the last time.

At the door to the nesting room I suddenly felt stunned with your presence washing over me, running through me, your essence is how I describe it. It was not my imagination! I did not conjure it up! I told your Daddy, as we stood in the doorway, that I had just felt your spirit in me. Thank you Abby, for that gift I will never forget!

The room felt empty, eerie. I was fearful as we lay in bed, trying to sleep. The darkness of the room was heavy. I covered my face with the sheet, afraid to look. I could still feel you there, not the essence from the doorway, more of a memory feeling. I was afraid I might see a ghost, not you necessarily, just a ghost. I'm chuckling as I write that. It seems silly now, but it was serious then.

Your last day was over. Our future without you was beginning.

*Dr. Cook:*

*I can't begin to describe this night and its effect on me. We talked, laughed, told jokes, cried, and prayed. In the midst, even in death, there was peace and beauty. The lullaby that Sandi sang was beautiful and made me cry. To see Jerry with Abby was so tender. His love for her could be felt. In my diary from May15th, I wrote "Lord Jesus, even over death you reign. Abby was with you all the way there."*

*What I felt the Lord wanted me to share was that my comments were to serve two purposes:*

- 1. To celebrate Abby's life.*
- 2. To praise God for His help to her and her family in this difficult time.*

*Abby (Baby)*

*Psalm 139 & 71*

*It struck me that God's word is timeless. These words had been spoken thousands of years ago and yet they spoke to me so clearly of Abby that:*

- 1. She was created a unique personality and a miracle to have one so full of life and yet so small.*
- 2. The days of her life were ordained by God and used to strengthen the faith of those who loved her.*
- 3. She demonstrated strength in a difficult time.*
- 4. She fulfilled the greatest purpose of man – to glorify God.*
- 5. She will praise Him in eternity.*

*The last part in the psalms about singing praises with the Lyre made me think of what Sandi had said about wanting Abby to be with Sandi's grandpa, playing the cello in his orchestra in heaven.*

Sunday, June 20, 1993

We awoke; empty, feeling like we didn't belong there. Daddy was very restless and wanted to leave before breakfast. We had told Janet that we would pick up Noah and Cory sometime mid-morning. They were staying at her house. Daddy got dressed right away and went out for coffee.

I was lying in bed still when I heard a knock on the door. We were expecting Lori before we left, so I assumed it was she. What a surprise to see Dr. Mimouni come bustling through the door! He plopped himself down on the bed right beside me! He gushed with sympathy and how we did the right thing. He was anxious for the autopsy. He asked if he could share your case and the results of your autopsy with other doctors and hospitals. You were unusual in how the fungus reacted by attacking your brain when usually a baby dies first before it gets that far. He said he is now going to treat this infection differently and protect the brain first. It was bittersweet for us. We were happy that more babies would live because of you, but we were anquishing over why it had to be you who lost your life so others would be saved! As I write this I am discovering new comfort. Didn't Jesus Christ do the very same thing? I must share this discovery with your Daddy!

When Daddy came back in the room I got up and told him about Dr. Mimouni's visit. Lori came soon after, when I was in the bathroom getting dressed, and shared some grieving information with us, and shared her sweet self! She was sharing her faith much more openly. I told her in few words that to be a Christian and a doctor could be a wonderful combination! She shared with us that she was to be a counselor at the upcoming Billy Graham Crusade. I had wanted to go to that, so we talked about going

*Abby (Baby)*

together one of the nights it was on. She also asked if she could attend your funeral. We were thrilled to know she cared that much about us! It had just been on the tip of my tongue to ask her if she would come, when she asked us! She also gave us a nice memoriam certificate from the hospital.

*Dr. Cook:*

*The greatest privilege I have as a physician is to meet wonderful people and be used to support them in a time of trouble.*

*I thank God for my relationship with Jerry and Sandi and for years of friendship to come.*

When she left our room, we were about ready to leave the hospital. We had found out Bill Hudson, a gentle and kindhearted man from our church had died two hours before you. This touched us, picturing the two of you in heaven together. The last two Sundays in church, your names were both in the bulletin as being in the hospital. I prayed for you at the beginning of your life, struggling to grow, and he at the end of his, struggling with cancer.

Walking out of the NICU and through the halls to the entrance, I almost felt like we were leaving you behind. When we stopped to leave our visitor's passes and ask a question about our parking we saw the now familiar receptionist. She said goodbye as if she would see us again, and I couldn't bring myself to tell her we wouldn't be back.

Kasey had given us a plastic bag with you personal items in it some of which were: your bonnet and items you had on the day before, the picture of Jesus, the paper blacks with the letter of your name on them which was displayed in the isolette, the teddy bear Grandma and Granddad bought you, and others. The t-shirt, bonnet, hat and booties all smelled like you. I put them to my face and inhaled. A couple of weeks later the smell had gone. I wanted to find what it had been and remembered that when your skin was healing, they were spreading cream on your body. I was at Ames soon after that and began smelling the creams. I quickly found your smell. It was Lubriderm. I bought some and have now been using it on my skin after my bath. It's a comforting act.

We went to Aunt Janet's house. Noah and Cory couldn't get enough of us. Cory looked older, and Noah, bigger. Janet made us a delicious breakfast and listened as we told our ordeal. She is, and Tom also, a terrific listener due to the loss of her own three teenage children, Billy, Robin and Brian, in a car accident. We stayed until the middle of the afternoon. We were anxious to see Glen also and then go back home. I was a lot for one day.

That morning we had called Grandma and Granddad and told them what happened. I told Glen over the phone you had died. He had such a pure faith. When he left the hospital with his Grandparents Saturday afternoon, we told him you were going to die and he

*Abby (Baby)*

responded by saying that maybe Jesus would still heal you. Granddaddy told us that he now felt that the clear water in his own dream meant everlasting life!

When we got to Grandma and Granddad's we talked briefly, and we all decided to go for a ride. Grandma and Granddad led us to Wheeling, W. VA where we got on a route which heads north through Ogolbay Park and ends up near Bridgeville, PA.

The ride was spectacular, meandering up and down and winding through beautiful rolling hills. At one point we were atop a hill for several miles, which gave the sensation of being close to the clouds. I began to think of you in the heavenly heights, wondering where it really was, and I suddenly felt your presence. I even told you hello. You were dancing around the billowing clouds against the sky of blue, which matched your eyes. Your presence was so strong it compressed us, and for a few moments we were not of this earth. Throughout the day I had been in a state of numbness, but now I wept.

After a delicious meal at a buffet restaurant with your grandparents, we headed home. I dreaded knowing that I had to go back to "normal" living, but I knew it would never be normal again. Our lives were changed forever, and we could never go back.

Thursday, July 22, 1993

I just finished reading a book called "Good Mourning" by Judy Gordon Morrow and Nancy Gordon De Hamer. It gives many accounts of pregnancy loss and loss of a baby and through it I have come to understand emotions I have been experiencing. One of those is guilt. Did I cause you to be born early through negligence of my health? There are questions, which remain unanswered. I must turn to the Lord for comfort and consolation and know that He will continue to be with us every step of our journey.

As I lay in bed that evening, I became consumed with guilt of a different nature. This guilt grew out of the knowledge that I had "played God" and made the choice to end your life. I had been driven by a fierce faith that the Lord would heal you, and I had given up. I expressed these feelings to your Daddy and that their intensity was a result of a simple fact. I was your mother. I was the one who gave you life, and now I had also taken it away. How many mothers have had to make that heart wrenching choice, for their very ill babies? Very few! Your Daddy and I are very strongly pro-life, and that is why the guilt is so intense! The Lord will surely have to wrap his arms around me and hold me close through this one!

The next day, Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, we had a funeral to begin preparing. One of our angels, Todd, and his helpers had mowed our grass and manicured Sleepy Hollow, our beautiful home. Beinhauer's funeral home was handling your cremation. They were

*Abby (Baby)*

very compassionate and would accept no payment! They normally charge about \$25 for a baby under one year old.

Two of our neighbors, the Smileys and the Daufens brought us food. When Alana Smiley brought us an enormous tray of cold cuts and buns, she gave her sympathies and cried. She had lost her mother and sister in a car accident as a teenager and knew what it meant to truly suffer. Andie Daufen brought us groceries. She had lost both parents and a brother recently and also grieved. I had just begun to be able to understand grief and loss. I quickly learned that it's better not to say anything. The wrong sentiments, though meant to be right are very hurtful such as, "It's for the best" or "It was God's will". When grief has hit you need a hug, a show of love, an "I'm sorry", and most especially, a listening ear. I'm finding that as time goes by, I need to tell others about you. I need to rejoice in saying, "I had a little girl!" It's hard for people to understand my continued grieving. You will be three months old in a couple of days and people are beginning to make comments such as "You're feeling better now, aren't you?" I want to shout and say, "No, I miss Abby, I want to turn back time and still be pregnant with her," but others are wanting my grief to end.

For a while I was numb with a dull pain. I had a good cry about once a day. Now the last couple of weeks my pain has increased as your due date of August 14<sup>th</sup> draws near. I desperately want you back, Abby, my precious little girl!

On Monday, we began to make your funeral arrangements. We planned it for Wednesday. Bill Hudson's funeral was also Wed., in the morning, so yours would be at 2:00 in the afternoon. A dinner would follow, provided by the church. Your Daddy planned the service. We called Lori Cook to ask her to read scripture and she generously agreed. Her participation would complete the journey of your life. Lori had inserted your breathing tube in the beginning, and removed it at the end. Now she would read scripture at your service to verify the importance of your life on this earth and in eternity.

We began receiving cards and letters from people, which continued daily for over a month. We received over 125 cards from people who loved us and had been praying for you. We knew your brief life had a purpose. It brought hundreds, maybe thousands of people closer to God through their prayers for you. We counted about 20 churches praying up and down the Eastern U.S. and those churches had told others... Through letters we learned of other babies like you who you have joined in heaven. Little Sean, from the Bradshaw family, died in January and that family was stunned when you died. Little Sean was due to be born May 15<sup>th</sup>, the day you died! Bob and Patty Boots lost a little girl, Erin, five years ago. We also pictured Dorian with you, and Joseph, Laurie Leikar's little boy who had died three years ago.

Monday, June 26, 1993

## *Abby (Baby)*

Laurie Leikar attended Houston United Methodist, your Grandma Brown's church. Several years ago when she was pregnant at 24 weeks, oddly, that was the time you were born, and she was very affected by that, she was told that her baby had a rare heart defect and would die soon after birth. She chose to continue with the pregnancy. Your Grandma kept me informed as to her progress. Each time I saw her I prayed that the Lord's comfort would be upon her. When Joseph was born he lived seven precious hours. Grandma baptized him at the birth and he was a beautiful little boy. I had great respect for Laurie and what she chose to endure. Like Daddy and I, she and her husband were able to hold Joseph and love him, and they have mementos and memories, which will forever be in their hearts.

Laurie and I were able to visit with one another at her home about a month ago, and we shared pictures and stories. She also had a plastic bag full of some of the same items, which yours contained, a hat, and blocks with his name, bracelet, identification cards, and others. I shared with her that your items had lost their precious scent, which had been yours, and she expressed the same thing. I told her about the Lubriderm. She talked with a nurse who had cared for Joseph and whom she had remained friends with, and that nurse told her the name of the cream, which Joseph had worn. It was a wonderful time of sharing for both of us and I am comforted in knowing that I have another who can truly understand. Initially, when she called me after you died, it was due to a letter I had written her about how she had been my hero and was with me, though she didn't know it, every step of the way through your birth and passing. I needed her to know the strength she gave me through her ultimate courage. I shared this journal with her which I had written most of, and allowed her to read it.

Your Daddy wanted to plant a tree in your memory. Grandma and Granddad offered to purchase it. It was not hard to choose, a beautiful White Pine, standing alone amongst a group of pines unlike itself, it said, "I'm Abby's tree". We looked no further and purchased it immediately. Daddy lovingly planted it in the yard on Tuesday, the day before your service, carefully straightening it and placing peat moss underneath. I planted pink and purple flowers within the peat, adding a feminine touch, which was yours.

The day of the funeral Grandma and Granddad picked up your ashes at Beinhauers. They had also provided a memorial book for visitor's to sign, thank you notes, little cards printed with your name and a poem, and a sturdy box for your keepsakes.

When I walked in the front side entrance to the church, there, sitting on a small table in front of the altar was a beautiful silver jar with a lid, and antique from my family. I was drawn to it, gingerly lifted the lid, and gazed down at a zip lock bag with your precious ashes. I tenderly pulled out the bag, opened it, and let my fingers feel their softness. Granddaddy approached and asked if I had noticed what color they were, glittering silver. How beautiful a tribute to a beautiful little girl!

I placed another small table in front of the altar and lovingly assembled your belongings including your teddy bear and pictures on it for everyone to see. As the guests began to

*Abby (Baby)*

arrive I was filled with emotion at the number that came and the individuals I was surprised to see. Four residents from Sherwood Oaks who are dear to my heart, Olive Tiller, Dick McCoy, Wallace and Leonora Cayard, showed their love and compassion with their presence. Ruth Ann Humes and Donni Weaver, dear friends from there, also warmed my heart with their coming. Most of the Rectenwald's were there, and my heart ached for your Rectenwald grandparent's who were still in Florida. We had received and outpouring of love from their church congregation. Marie and Vic, our babysitters, and Debbie and Lauren, their daughter-in-law and grand-daughter who we loved dearly, the Walters who helped so much, and many others... One woman from our church hugged me and told of her son dying at age 20, that she understood our pain!

As Todd played the prelude music on guitar, we waited for Lori and John Cook to arrive. I felt I needed her there to confirm your importance in your brief life. They had not arrived but we needed to begin. Just a few minutes into the service we heard the door and turned to see them walk down the aisle. We had really grown to love Lori dearly. She was an unusually compassionate person, a gift from and a result of her love for the Lord.

The funeral was beautiful! Besides the urn, the mementoes, and the music, we had also provided a centerpiece full of delicate pink flowers on the altar from Daddy and your brothers and me. Added to that was a beautiful arrangement of pink roses from some friends. The service was truly an acclamation of your precious life. Pastor Ted gave an appropriate message, people stood and shared their feelings, emotions, and memories of you, and Lori read some of her favorite scripture beautifully. The hymns were two of my favorites, "All Things Bright and Beautiful", and "Because He Lives", played by Velva Hildebrand. I will never forget how beautifully our friend, Jeff Wiley, sang Daddy's lullaby, a true tribute. So many loving condolences, so many loving tears, so many expressions of sympathy, which made to confirm the importance of your life. Your Granddad Brown had written a verse to be read at the service. He, emotionally, could not read it himself, so Ted read it. It's wonderful! It is written here, below.

**It has been said that Abby, in the brief part of her life she lived in this world, knew only pain. That is not so. She knew something far more significant than pain. She knew love.**

**Abby knew our love through our touch, our holding her, our speaking our love to her, and through our prayers. As we gave our love to Abby we could see her respond to us, and we could also see her responses revealed in those cold, unknowing, scientific instruments, her monitors. Abby had three weeks of that wondrous gift of God, human love.**

**Abby knew the love of God. She knew it in ways that I am sure only the very new and very tiny in this world can know it.**

**The pain is gone.**

**The love remains forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.**

Following the service, many people were able to come to the house for the ashes scattering. We assembled around your tree. Ted gave a brief message and we watched as your Daddy lovingly sprinkled your silver ashes around the tree and over the flowers. His love was evident in the expression of his whole being while performing this last act for his little daughter. We chose an evergreen for everlasting life, and I expressed this to the group after Daddy had completed his task.

Your ashes have great importance for me. I have found great comfort in visiting and watering your tree and separating the now abundance of flowers beneath to search for and gaze upon the glittering silver. Each time your Granddad Brown comes to visit, he goes to the tree and gives it a drink of water.

Lori and I walked together back to the cars. While I expressed to her our appreciation for what she had done through our whole experience, she told me that it was worth going through medical school and her residency and she would do it again, just to share this whole experience with us. This was an astounding statement I will never forget! She was a gift, which could have been only sent by the Lord!

Back at the church we celebrated your life with a meal. Lori and John had to make a flight to Florida and after they ate, we wished them goodbye. I was happy for them that they were to have a relaxing vacation!

Our dear friend Elaine had to work and came later to the dinner. She had missed the service, so I invited her to go to the sanctuary and see your things displayed there. We cried together as we once again relived our shared experience, one of hope and trust in God. Elaine was visibly upset and had been sure that the Lord would let you live. We comforted one another as we carefully looked at each item and placed them in the plastic bag. I couldn't tell Elaine why you had died but I could tell her why you had lived and the spiritual impact you had had on so many lives.

In the days that followed, the love continued to pour in through cards, gifts and memorials. I was consumed with writing thank yous.

An important family on my family was that of Bill Hudson, especially his wife, Dorothy. I wrote them an emotional letter telling of how moved I was upon knowing that you and he died on the same day, and that you were just a little girl and needed someone to look after you. I told them that I knew and pictured Bill doing just that! I received a couple of letters back from the family, one from his daughter, Lori, saying that I will never know how much my letter meant to them.

The Lord, through my grief, was giving me the ability to express His unfailing and never-ending love to others.

*Abby (Baby)*

Not too long after the funeral, your Grandma and Grandpap Rectenwald returned from Florida. We shared with them as they cried. We knew, though they had not been with us in person, their prayers and thoughts were always on you and us!

As the time continues to pass I am reminded of Magee Hospital. Lori and I are to have lunch together on August 5<sup>th</sup>, and I am to meet her at the hospital. It will be the first time I've been back. At least two people have donated to the hospital in your memory and your name is now engraved on a Cradle Roll list hanging outside the gift shop. I am anxious to see it and am thrilled that your name will continue to live on. Friends of our also donated two children's books in your memory, which Lori has placed in the hospital. Daddy and I are going to plan a time to hear the autopsy report. It's important to us to know more details of your disease and your fight!

I continue to pray for the survivors in the NICU whose families we met: the family of little Ryan Harris who we saw daily, and of Christopher Stone whose parents live far away and love him dearly. They have been surviving well! I am joyful for their parents and answered prayer. We had talked at length with Ryan's parents and all of us had said we would pray that the Holy Spirit would be a part of the whole NICU and grant His healing power. Our prayers have been answered in so many different ways, but most importantly, the Lord is still in control of our hearts and lives.

I will always love you my dear little Abby, and never a day will go by that you will not be in my thoughts. I continuously feel your presence surrounding me, often very strongly at unexpected times! Be with Jesus until that day when we will all be joined together again in His glory!

I Love You!

Mommy

Thursday, July 24, 1997 6:20 a.m.

My dear little Lori Teh,

I'm in love! What more can I say? You were born yesterday afternoon at 5:02 at 7 lbs. 1 oz., 20" long. Your Daddy and I are overwhelmed with emotion, to say the least! I have been immersed in prayer during my whole pregnancy. From the beginning, up until the very end, we could have lost you! I began spotting during the first few weeks, and had to use Progesterone suppositories, and I was very ill with Asthmatic Bronchitis during the second trimester. I almost needed to be on Prednisone, but the Asthma cleared up with

*Abby (Baby)*

God's help. Many, many people prayed for your safety! I didn't want to know what sex you were going to be, and I was in disbelief when you were a girl! Your Daddy needs a little girl, and so do I, but I'm happy for him! We love our sons dearly, but we need you also!

My labor was fast and furious at the end. I had been induced with Pitocin in the morning, and Dr. Teh told me that once I dilated to 5 cm, I could travel at 900 miles an hour. He was right! At about 4:30 the pain became unbearable and I was at 5 cm. Knowing I still had quite a distance to travel, and forgetting Dr Teh's previous words, I begged for an epidural! One was ordered but couldn't be administered until the proper Dr. arrived. I began to lose control, prayed for God's help and peace, and begged for more Stadol, which was the only medication I had had through the day, in my IV. I suddenly began to feel the urge to push, and they jumped into action turning the once peaceful labor room into a delivery room. Dr. Teh was not yet in the hospital and I knew I had to deliver you immediately. You Daddy and Erin and Kris, the two nurses, patiently coached me and encouraged me to hold on, but I told them that they were going to deliver this baby! As you were crowning and everyone was begging me to stop, Dr Teh sailed into the room. He did a quick cut, I gave about two more pushes, and out you came! Our wonderful, gorgeous girl!

As you were being cleaned up and checked, before I delivered the placenta, Dr. Teh held up the cord for us to see, and it was tied in a "true knot". He said you were a "miracle baby" because of the way the knot was tied, and that you could have easily died at about 24-28 weeks. I told him that many prayers had been petitioned to God throughout the whole pregnancy. As he stitched me up he kept repeating that you were "blessed" and a "miracle baby".

You have been named Lori for Dr. Lori Cook, and Teh, for our dear Dr. Pek Chiew Teh. They are both thrilled and we love the sound of "Lori Teh".

I have so many dreams for you, and now they will come true! You will play in our creek, climb up our hills, and ask about the gravestone with the little angel at the "Abby Tree". And one day you will ask if you can send your pink balloon to you sister in heaven, and I will of course agree, with tears in my eyes. And we will watch it ascend into the brilliant blue sky out of our sight, and we will know that Abby is sharing our joy.

But for now my Lori Teh, your brothers are hovering over you in awe, your Daddy looks on you with unconditional love, Jesus looks on you with His joy, and I, my dear daughter, am your Mother. Welcome to the world my dear little one.

A Daddy's Perspective:  
One Heart, Broken, Yet Thankful

“How can one life be so very brief, yet so profound that it changes the world?” This final line of the chorus to the song, *One Heart One Life*, written in memory of our dear daughter, Abby, conveys my amazement at the profound impact of this one tiny and brief life. Our precious baby lived only a few weeks, but her presence on this earth made such a lasting impression. She weighed only a pound or so but her legacy is gigantic. It is a legacy of love. No one who was close to Abby will ever be the same. But her story is not merely a tragedy. Her suffering, and ours, was real. But God's love was just as real.

The woman who bore and gave birth to Abby will never be the same. My wife, Sandi, is my hero. She was then and she is now. Sandi had brought our three sons into the world through natural childbirth. That pain ultimately gave way to joy. But she had also suffered loss due to miscarriage. She was and is a strong woman, a woman of faith. But nothing could prepare her for the experience of seeing her newborn daughter have to fight for her very life.

## *Abby (Baby)*

Even after the shock of the reality of Abby's condition wore off, Sandi had to deal with the constant tenuousness and fragility of her baby's young life. Parents of a premature infant are in for a wild and unpleasant ride, the doctors told us. They weren't lying. Sandi and I were on an emotional roller coaster – elated one day because of some positive signs, then suddenly in mortal fear as Abby faced some new health crisis. Yet Sandi remained strong throughout the ordeal. She was even able to give comfort to me. She remained dedicated to the care and well being of our other children. She received with gratitude the love and support of the hospital staff, our wonderful family and our friends. She was certainly grieving and afraid, but she refused to get wrapped up in her pain. Most significantly, she leaned on the loving arms of her Savior. And she loved her daughter, Abby in a way that only a mother can. As you have read in the pages of her journal, *Abby (Baby)*, this love has changed Sandi's life – an enrichment that, with God's help, has surpassed the pain.

The lives of our other children will never be the same. It was important to Sandi and me to have our three boys get to know their little sister. This of course was limited to visiting Abby in the NICU. But it was still a very precious time. Even our youngest son, Cory, who was only three years old at the time, remembers quite vividly, those visits – where we donned sterile gowns and latex gloves. I would hoist him up in my arms and he would hover lovingly over the tiny baby in the incubator. Our eldest son, Glen still lights a special remembrance candle in Abby's honor every Christmas Eve at a church where we sing. And then there is our 4-year-old daughter, Lori Teh, a gift from God given to us four years after Abby's passing. Lori is simply fascinated by the little sister she hasn't met, who is in heaven with Jesus. She often asks questions about what Abby is doing right now. Lori also expresses a longing, which is both endearing and spiritual, to meet her sister. And because of Christ, some day my children and my wife and I will see Abby again.

The lives of the prayer warriors will never be the same. One of the most amazing aspects of Abby's life and struggle was the profusion and fervency of prayer offered up to the Lord on her behalf. Believers from Pittsburgh to Florida were interceding for the tiny struggling Rectenwald girl. There were many, many dear people who prayed whom I will never meet this side of heaven. It is an awesome and humbling experience when so much prayer is being offered up to God for you and your loved ones. You might be tempted to conclude that their prayers were not answered, since our little one lost her battle for life. God's ways are often mysterious. We are not privy to the fullness of His plan on earth. But it seems to me that God's answer was that it was His will and good pleasure to bring Abby home to be with Him. Abby received the best possible medical care. We did our part by loving her and by remaining faithful. And God's presence was with us. God's love was so real to us during that time! It was a painful time, but it was a holy time. And through the years He has brought us comfort and healing.

Prayer changes us. I wonder if the good folks who lifted our daughter and us up in prayer became educated about and sensitive to the plight of premature babies and their distressed families. There are tiny babies struggling for survival in NICU's (Neonatal

## *Abby (Baby)*

Intensive Care Units) all across this nation and the world. They need all the prayers they can get! I have learned time and again, that one of God's specialties is bringing some good from the adversities of life. I trust that He has blessed and will continue to bless all of His servants who were touched by Abby's life. I thank God for the prayer warriors. And I thank Him that He works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

My life will never be the same. As a songwriter, I tend to write about my life experiences, usually penning a song fresh on the heels of the experience. But it wasn't until a year and a half after Abby's death that I was able to articulate my feelings in the song, *One Heart, One Life*. This particular chapter in my life was one that left me truly speechless. There was of course a profound sense of loss. And it seemed as though my own grieving process needed to be postponed so that I could remain strong for Sandi. But as time went by I began to reflect upon the amazing life that was Abby.

Life is mysterious. We, God's creatures, are privileged to collaborate with Him in bringing another life – another immortal soul – into the world! Being present at the birth of my children is an experience like no other – so powerful, profound and amazing. And even as I write this I look at the photos on my desk of my kids and I still can't quite believe it. The birth of my first daughter was no less amazing, her presence on this earth, although brief, no less significant.

I am constantly surprised by the endless power of love. I'll never forget when our second son, Noah, was born. I wondered if I would be able to love him as much as I loved Glen, our firstborn. How foolish and naïve of me! What I didn't realize is that God draws forth from us a love that we never imagined we had. Of course I was able to love Noah with all my heart (still do). Sandi and I love all our kids equally.

With deep love comes deep vulnerability. I was to learn this truth in dramatic fashion as I witnessed Abby's life-or-death struggle. Watching your child suffering is a gut-wrenching experience. I was her daddy yet I was unable to take away her pain. The magnitude of the trial coupled with my seeming helplessness put me in a situation that very nearly overwhelmed me. There was nowhere for me to turn but to God.

I'll never forget the afternoon that I happened somehow to be alone in the nesting room. I was sitting there, emotionally exhausted and in pain and fear for my daughter. The doctors had just given Sandi and me the shocking news that Abby's brain was being ravaged by fungal infection and that if she survived at all it would be in a severely handicapped, likely vegetative condition. I had reached the end - the end of my ability to cope, the end of my strength the end of my perspective, the end of my hope.

I began to pour out my heart to God. I confessed my sins. I begged for strength and wisdom. I pleaded for healing and comfort for Abby. Gradually I began to enter into worship and praise. With tears streaming down I worshiped God with all my heart. It was a devastating few minutes but it was a holy time.

## *Abby (Baby)*

The very next day, in that same room, I held my precious daughter in my arms after she had been removed from life support. We sang and comforted and prayed and watched our Abby draw her last earthly breath. I can't help but feel that God had, the previous day, been preparing me (maybe even preparing that room?) for the sacred moment of Abby's reunion with Him! It was tremendously sad day, but I will always remember it as a holy day, and that nesting room will always be a sacred place.

I guess it was the sacredness of the entire experience that prevented me for so long from writing a song about it. How do you do justice to a life with a song? As I said earlier, the odyssey had left me speechless. But in time *One Heart One Life* just seemed to flow out of me. I suppose it was a matter of healing and perspective. When I was ready to, I wrote the song, and I wrote of both the sadness and the joy that was in my heart.

I thank the Lord for that song! When I first sang it for Sandi it touched her deeply. And it has become a tribute from our hearts to the memory of our daughter and to the never failing grace of God. Sandi and I have been privileged to share the song at special memorial services at two Pittsburgh area hospitals and also in many church services. People have told us of how they have been blessed by the song, and of how it has helped them grieve and heal. God is good!

Our God proves time and again that He can and will bring good out of pain and adversity. Now the lyrics to *One Heart One Life* have been published in a wonderful book by Bernadette Keaggy called, *Losing You Too Soon*. Bernadette shares the story of the struggles and heartbreak she and her husband, legendary musician Phil Keaggy went through with loss of five children due to premature birth. They too have been blessed with grace and healing from the Lord, a grace and healing that has surpassed the pain.

Yes the tragedy and pain are real. Yes we wish things could have worked out differently for us - that somehow we could still have and hold our Abby. Yes we will always miss her the remainder of our earthly days. But also we know that we will see her again some day, in heaven, where she no longer suffers.

Suffering is real but God's love is just as real! Love never fails. Love is forever.