

## *When The Lilacs Bloom*

At the age of 25 I was newly married and pregnant, we were pay-check to pay-check, living in a funky little duplex in Eugene Oregon, but life was sweet. In love, and a baby on the way, this is what dreams are made of.

I had gotten pregnant as soon as we stopped using birth control, this came as some surprise, but at the same time we were overjoyed. My mom is a midwife so I was completely comfortable with the idea of pregnancy and birth, birth and babies run in my blood. Although I knew that sometimes things could go wrong I remember having zero fear, I trusted with my whole heart that come June we would be snuggled up with a newborn. What a special summer we would have.

A baby is considered term and ready to be born when you've been pregnant for about 40 weeks. Our story begins when I was 33 weeks pregnant. To set the scene, a 33 week fetus is about the size of a pineapple and if born would have a 98% survival rate, with some medical intervention. This is the time when people have baby showers, start setting up diaper services and fold and re-fold tiny socks.

One thing men sometimes do is go on a boys trip, a last hurrah before settling into fatherhood. My husband Ben did just that, hopped on a plane and headed to the San Diego for some surfing and friends. I was in full support and feeling good about a little nesting time on my own.

I pictured a relaxing weekend in our tiny duplex, maybe I would wash and fold baby clothes or lay on the couch and watch *Sex and the City*.

Ben returned on a Sunday and headed back to work on Monday. I vividly remember lying there in bed Monday morning and thinking to myself, "I don't think I've felt the baby

move for a while.” I wasn’t super worried but I called my mom and let her know my observation. She suggested I come over and we would listen to the heartbeat to reassure me that everything was ok.

I’m reclined and she’s running the doppler over my belly, “Hmmm... Let’s have you get on your hands and knees.” Sometimes changing positions makes it easier to hear the heartbeat. At some point I could tell my mom was concerned but she was remaining calm for my sake. “I think we should go ahead and take you in for an ultrasound,” she said.

She called Ben at work and said something to the effect of, “We haven’t been able to hear the baby’s heartbeat. Why don’t you come on home and we’ll take Meagan in for an ultrasound?” Ben raced home on his bike and we headed to the doctors office.

My mother is a very respected midwife so she got us in to see her doctor friend right away. No waiting and worrying in the waiting room.

I lie down on the exam table, beautiful pregnant belly exposed and the ultrasound wand is skimming around searching for the heartbeat. I am seeing my baby for the very first time. I haven’t had any ultrasounds until this moment. Dopplers give you the heartbeat, but there is no visual image. My baby is cute in the way ultrasound babies are cute: black and white and looking a bit like an alien. I’m hopeful; my eyes are searching for information from the doctor or my mom. Seconds felt like minutes, please give me something my eyes pleaded. Finally the doctor looked into my eyes and said, “I’m sorry, there is no heartbeat.” Those six words ring clear in my head, as if it were yesterday. It was seventeen years ago.

So what do you do when you’re 25 and you just learned your baby has died? I remember tunnel vision and a sense of collapsing in on myself, I think I was falling into my broken heart. My mom and Ben held me on either side, supporting me as we walked through the waiting room of pregnant women and back to our car.

Crying, holding each other with disbelief, followed by more crying. This went on for a while. Next we had to make a decision regarding when I would deliver the baby. The doctor said he was available the next day.

“We can induce you and you can deliver.”

I think he felt that might be the easiest on our hearts - you know - get a move on, take care of the situation with efficiency. He was a kind doctor. Well, something I have learned is that grief, in its unpredictable nature is not efficient, like making an appointment and simply showing up. Grief is wild and free.

My mom had the knowledge to know that there was no hurry and perhaps it would be healing for our hearts to take our time with the delivery. After a fetal demise one can wait to go into labor naturally. The baby is still protected in the amniotic sac and thus is not rotting or likely to cause infection. There is a simple blood draw every couple days to check clotting factors to assure that you won't hemorrhage while giving birth.

After learning of this option we decided we would wait for my body to go into labor naturally. We hugged my mom goodbye and headed to our favorite spot on the coast for the night. Going home to those baby clothes was not an option.

We checked into a room around sunset and all I remember from that night was crying. I would fall asleep crying and wake up crying, my pillow was soaked in tears. Sometimes I would wake up with my hand on my belly praying (and I don't pray) that this was all a mistake and that was a kick I just felt. I am positive that room has never seen the grief we asked it to hold that night. To this day, I recommend Ocean Haven but I tell people to pass on the Sky View Room. I'm sure the room is fine and has recovered but just in case, I don't want people to feel even a fraction of the pain we went through that night.

We got home from the coast and waited 10 days. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day there was some

concern with my blood so we decided it was time to go in to the hospital to be induced.

We checked into the hospital in the afternoon and Quinn was born the following morning. Maybe it was because my mom was well respected, maybe it was because the baby was dead so there was less worry, but the hospital staff left us alone to do our own thing. If a stranger came into the room I would have looked like any laboring woman. Moaning, groaning, and heavy breathing, with various amounts of clothing on or off depending on my mood. The labor was not a time of grieving, that time would come again. The labor was me finding my strength to work through things, get this baby born so we could keep moving down this road of unknowns. I didn't cry once during labor.

I was in a squatting position on the bed and when the time came I caught Quinn in my own hands. I then sat back on the bed and held and looked at my baby. She was warm and soft and didn't smell. Even though she had died she was still protected by the sac, which kept her from decomposing and becoming gross. She was anything but gross.

Quinn was not perfect, she had some physical deformities but she also had some beautifully formed parts, like her lips. Her lips were perfectly formed.

Quinn was born in the month of April when the lilacs were abundant. We buried her wrapped in Ben's baby-blanket from when he was a boy, laying on a bed of soft, sweet-smelling lilacs, in a cedar box my father built.

When the lilacs bloom, I can think of nothing more than Quinn. I'm not sad anymore. We have journeyed down the road of the unknown and Quinn taught us so many lessons along the way. We are parents of two beautiful children and they know mama loves lilacs and will bring me bouquets each year on their sister's birthday.

This is what dreams are made of.