

## Memories of a Birthday

A few days ago we celebrated our oldest child's birthday -- she turned 26 years old. Those 26 years almost seem like 26 minutes as I think back over them; but then, as I peel back the layers of memories across the years, I realize the true fullness of those days.

I remember when we were expecting this child. My wife had a reasonably calm pregnancy -- as pregnancies go -- and I remember we were both absolutely amazed as the baby grew inside her during those 9 months. I know, children are born every day -- this biology thing has been happening for thousands of years... but to us the entire process was miraculously beautiful -- similar to the glorious splendor of a sunrise or sunset -- possessing a majesty too wonderful for words to express.

As the due date drew near, I remember trying to learn all I could about helping to take care of a newborn. I looked forward to our new child's arrival with much anticipation -- and with a healthy measure of horror. Feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt crept into my mind: "What if I make a mistake? What if I do something wrong? What do I know about being a father? What if...?" We prepared ourselves in the best way we knew how. It reminded me of last-minute cramming for a final exam in college -- one for which I was woefully unprepared. We talked to experienced parents, took classes, read books. Our hospital offered a short series of weekly childbirth classes for soon-to-be-parents, so we made sure to go to them. Each week, I remember us eating pizza at a nearby all-you-can-eat pizza buffet on our way to class. The class was very helpful -- we learned a lot from it (also, I don't know why, but the memories of that pizza are still quite vivid to me as well). I remember learning how to coach my wife through the delivery -- mainly I was to remind her to breathe during the most difficult moments (as she breathes, she is supposed to say something like: "hee, hee, hee, hoo, hee, hee, hee, hoo"). I know, it sounds silly -- who would forget to breathe, right? But it actually works! Remembering to breathe has come in handy not only during the delivery process of each of our 3 kids, it also has helped numerous times through the years during stressful moments of parenting -- and the stressful moments of life in general! Remember -- BREATHE!

When the day finally came for our daughter to be born, my wife drove herself (and her mother) to the hospital -- I was at work. That is not exactly the way I had pictured it happening, but whatever it takes -- I suppose! A short time later, I met them at the hospital, and we began the process of birthing the baby. The doctor had told us the baby would arrive on Halloween, but apparently she did not get the memo -- she decided to hold off until the next day. I can't really blame her -- I don't think I would want people around the world dressing up in strange costumes every year for my birthday.

I remember after we got processed into the hospital, we were quite nervous. We were in a sort of a staging room for quite some time. It was just me and my wife in that room... and a TV. We were painfully near the arrival time now. We weren't really watching the TV (we had other things on our minds at the moment), but I remember "The Simpsons" TV show came on -- just as the baby's arrival was drawing near. After thinking about it for a moment, I got the nurse's attention and made her change the channel to the Cosby Show. I said, "I don't want my kid

being born during the Simpsons!” Such a small thing perhaps, but that would have been a bad start to a good thing!

It wasn't long until we were whisked into the delivery room, and things really began to move quickly! In a very short time, our daughter made her way into this world! The doctor and nurses (and all of us) sang a rousing chorus of “Happy Birthday” -- it was such a happy and emotional moment! I could not believe it -- I had a daughter! I held her in my arms for the first time. I was in awe -- I was thankful to God! And also I wondered to myself, “What have we done?”

Later that evening, things finally settled down for us at the hospital. We were assigned to a room. Nancy took a well-deserved nap, and our daughter was put in the Nursery with the other babies. I stood at the window for a while and looked at her -- and the other babies all lined up in front of the glass -- a glass smudged with the nose prints of countless curious siblings and grandparents. It was in this quiet moment I suddenly realized, “I'm hungry!” I decided to run down to the hospital grill to grab a quick meal. I remember walking down the halls of the hospital -- I was extremely happy -- I was on top of the mountain! As I made my way to the snack bar, I noticed other people there in the hospital -- some were in tears. These people were in the valley. One young woman was openly sobbing and being consoled by an older man -- I assumed it was her father. I walked on. I noticed others huddled in small groups and quietly talking among themselves with serious expressions of concern on their faces. I wished they could share in my joy, but they were in another phase of life -- a much darker phase. I was reminded that a hospital is not only a place of new life and great joy, it is also a place of sickness, pain, and sometimes death.

After a short stay in the hospital, it was time to take our daughter home with us. A nurse helped Nancy into a wheelchair while I went and retrieved the car from the parking garage. Our “family car” was a 1986 silver Nissan Sentra Wagon. We had already set up the baby's carseat in the car, and I drove around to the pickup point to meet Nancy and the baby. We finally got the little one strapped into the seat, Nancy climbed in, and we were ready to go home. Suddenly it hit me. I was not ready for this moment -- it was totally unexpected -- I have never been so nervous driving a car! Because of our precious cargo (our new baby), I felt like everyone else on the road was going to run into us, and I felt like I was going to run off into a ditch, or rear-end someone, or run a stop light, or ... my mind was racing! It was perhaps the most difficult 30-miles I have ever driven, but somehow, we survived -- and the baby arrived safely at her new home.

Thus began our entry into parenthood. As I said earlier, we were afraid we were going to make mistakes as parents -- and guess what? We did! We all do! There are things we wish we had done better through the years... things we wish we could re-do... things we wish we had considered... those moments are gone now. But one key thing we found in parenting -- never forget this: Love covers a multitude of shortcomings, and faith and prayer are so important! Turn the whole parenting process over to God. Trust in Him, follow His plan, do the best that you can, and you will be fine!

Oh, I almost forgot -- laugh a lot along the way too! And enjoy the trip!

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(Originally written: November 12, 2016)