

**A MONOLOGUE:
MY MOTHER WAS A SPACE SHIP**

BY

BETTE L. WATERS

Adapted from:
*My Mother Was a Spaceship:
Breaking the don't tell rule*



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A Monologue: My Mother Was A Spaceship
by
Bette L. Waters

Originally produced by
Performing Arts Foundation of Luna County
Deming, NM , USA

NOTES

This Monologue adapted from the book *My Mother Was A Spaceship: Breaking the don't tell rule*, has been performed successfully with the Narrator and one Storyteller, it is also crafted to use more than one storyteller.

Music before performance, during intermission, and curtain call is recommended, but permission to produce *A Monologue: My Mother Was A Spaceship* does not automatically include permission to use any music which is under copyright protection.

Bluwaters Press
758 S. San Miguel St.
Deming, NM 88030

www.bluwaterspress.com

This monologue and other papers/book on women's issues written by Bette L. Waters are archived at Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

CHARACTERS: Narrator
 Storyteller
 or
 Narrator
 Six or eight Storytellers
(some of the stories are short lending
to the use of various numbers of per-
formers)

STAGE: *Podium off to side for Narrator*
 or

*Narrator and storyteller perform-
ers can be sitting on stools. Stools
should be such that allows Narrator and/
or storyteller to rise and walk around
the stage.*

*If using multiple storytellers, each
storyteller is dressed in a differ-
ent color and enhanced lighting used,
e.g., storyteller with orange dress
has complimentary lighting and back
ground lighting.*

*Each new storyteller will walk on
stage as old storyteller is reaching
the end of story and spot changes to
new storyteller. (determined by Tech-
nical director)*

Average length with 15 minute inter-

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mission is 75 minutes.

NARRATOR:

My mother was a space ship. Hummmm!
Catchy title, yes, funny title, maybe,
serious title, absolutely. Think about
this.

Even when women have no reading skills
they have the connections of story. Ed-
widge Danticat says it so much better
than I, when she writes about her Hai-
tian mother's disappointment over her
daughter choosing writing as her pro-
fession rather than being a nurse.

STORYTELLER (1)

I remember thinking while braiding
your hair that I look a lot like
you mother and her mother before
her. The women in our family have
never lost touch with one an-
other. Death is a path we take to
meet on the other side. With every
step you take, there is an army of
women watching you. We are never
any farther than the sweat on our
brows or the dust on our toes.

It was their whispers that pushed
me, their murmurs over pots

sizzling in my head. A thousand women urging me to speak through the blunt tip of my pencil. Kitchen poets, I call them. Ghosts like burnished branches on a flame tree. These women, they asked for my voice so that they could tell you, mother, in your place that yes, women like you do speak, even if they speak in a tongue that is hard to understand [or to hear].

NARRATOR:

But do they speak of giving birth? No. Their voices have been silenced. Silenced by doctors' denials, silenced by medical ethics, silenced by money making corporations in charge of medicine.

The Ladies Home Journal in 1957 ran a series of hair-raising letters on the subject. They printed a letter from a nurse who said things like, "I have seen doctors who have charming examination room manners show traces of sadism in the delivery room. One I know does cutting and sewing without any pain killing drugs. He has a nurse use a mask to stifle the patient's crying." She goes on in her letter, "Great strides have been made in maternal care, but some doctors still say, "Tie them down so

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they won't give us any trouble."
At the time LHJ was swamped with letters,
doctors denying any sort of thing. Doc-
tor's wives defending their husbands,
"My husband would never do such things."

STORYTELLER (1)

The experience that raised
my consciousness in a dramatic
way took place in 1994 when
I was writing my first book,
Massage During Pregnancy. Nancy
Schroeder, a massage therapist,
had kept my stress level down
with regular sessions on her
table. Nancy was petite and
quiet. Her manner belied her
independent personality.

At the age of fifty, after
raising five children, she had
put herself through massage
school. We had a friendship
beyond her massage table, and she
had agreed to review my chapters
on prenatal massage.

We were working on the final
chapters at my apartment. Nancy
settled into my comfortable chair
and started reading. I was at
the computer. I glanced up from
the keyboard. She was weeping

silently. Were my eyes playing tricks?

"Are you crying?" I asked. "Good grief, you are. What's wrong?"

"These pages remind me of my first birth," she replied.

"Remembering makes you cry?"

"That's the problem. I have no memory," she answered.

Truthfully, I felt her tears were an interruption of the work we were doing. "One of those scopolamine births, " I replied dismissively, wanting to concentrate on the work at hand,

"I've felt a loss of something important all these years," she continued. "I went to a hypnotherapist two years ago to try to recall the experience."

Now she had my full attention. "What happened?"

This is the story she told me:

I remember—I know I said I couldn't remember—I was eight days short of being twenty years old. Norm and I had been high school sweethearts and married right out of school. I was so happy when I learned I was going to have a baby. I went to the library and checked out a book by Dr. Grantly Dick-Read. I felt

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that giving birth was a normal and joyous occasion. It didn't occur to me to talk to my doctor about the book.

My water broke on Saturday evening. I washed my hair, scrubbed the floor, and packed my bag. We got to the hospital after midnight, so we would not be charged for Saturday. We had no insurance back then.

I was not having any contractions, and I slept. In the morning, the nurse was apologetic about not feeding me. That was okay. I was not hungry.

Norm was then selling real estate. At noon he left to help with an open house. I went back to sleep. He returned around five o'clock, and I was still not having any contractions.

I decided my muscles had to be ready, so I started to push. This hurt. The nurse must have thought something was happening, but she didn't examine me. She ran out and returned with a shot. So far, I had not seen my doctor. He may have come by when I was sleeping. Not knowing what they were giving me seemed okay. After all, if my doctor wanted me to have some medicine, it had to be all right.

That's all I remember until much later. I have images of someone wiping the outside of my thigh and two nurses telling me to move onto my bed from a cart. "Oh, she's out of it," one nurse said.

They lifted me with the sheet under me and dumped me. Then, I remember waking up, putting my hands on my stomach and wondering where my baby was.

The lady in the next bed said, "Oh, you had a boy."

"Yes, I did," I answered, not really remembering. Then they brought in "girl Schroeder." I refused to believe she was my baby. They insisted. I checked the number on the ID bracelet against the one on my arm. They matched.

I didn't remember anything—not even that my baby was a boy or a girl. How much of a failure can I be?

I cried. It was like planning my wedding, clothes and church, people and party, and then not remembering any of it. I was so ashamed. I wanted to get dressed, take my baby, leave, and never let my husband see such a failure again.

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The doctor came into my room two days later. It was the first time I had any knowledge of him being there. "What happened? Did the delivery go okay? Why did I have to have stitches?" I probed, trying to fill in the gaps.

"You sure do ask a lot of questions," he responded, dismissing me as though I were a child, giving me no answers.

I went home. I felt so bad. Norm couldn't help me. I just sat, cross-legged on the bed, and cried. After days of this, Norm slapped me across the face to make me stop crying.

Having a baby should have been empowering. Instead, I was a failure. I could not watch television or read about babies for a long time. I still feel hurt inside when I think of any of this. I have never felt emotionally close to this child.

Two years ago I was hypnotized to see if I could remember anything. I did see a little baby with a red eyelid. I was happy with that little bit.

Tears were streaming down her face even though this event took place 37 years ago. "Why didn't your husband put his arms around

you and hold you instead of hitting you?" I asked.

"It would not have occurred to Norm to do that."

NARRATOR:

In the military hospital the next day, at the lunch table with the nurses Waters tells them Nancy's story.

Cuban-born Olivia was one of the nurses, in her fifties, with lovely black hair and a good-humored smile for everyone. Waters was amazed when she chose to tell the about the birth of her first child.

STORYTELLER ()

It is important for a woman in my culture to protect her virginity and her genitalia. I had made my doctor promise that he would not "cut me" at the time of the delivery.

I refused to take any kind of pain medication during labor. I was ready to push. The staff moved me from the labor bed onto a gurney and rolled me into the delivery room. I moved onto the delivery table. While lying flat of my back my wrists were tied to

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the table with leather-straps. My thighs and legs were strapped in the stirrups. The doctor strolled in and proceeded with his routine—numbing injections with xylocaine, cutting the perineum episiotomy, and delivering my baby.

At this stage of her story, Olivia was crying. She pounded the lunch table with her fist, swearing.

“If I could have gotten my hands loose, I would have killed that son-of-a-bitch for lying to me. He cut me! I was ruined; my husband would no longer want me. The bastard had lied to me, and he didn’t even care.”

“Did I talk to him later about how I felt?”

“No. It was too late. I hid my stitches from my husband.

“Did I talk to any of my family about this?”

“No! It was too shameful. You couldn’t talk about that kind of stuff.”

NARRATOR:

Over the next few weeks word circulated among the employees of the hospital where Waters worked that she was interested in women's birthing stories. Often, she would feel a tap on her shoulder and an employee would pull her aside to talk. An Operating Room tech, remembered the helplessness of having her arms and legs strapped down, crying, begging to have just one hand untied; Linda, a nurse, lost the experience of her baby's birth because of amnesia-causing-drug scopolomine, and in the next few days lost her uterus to an infection. Lorilee almost died because of undiagnosed diabetes, Jenny's life was at risk from undiagnosed toxemia.

These nurses, dedicated professional women, timidly asked Waters to listen to their stories—all describing a time in their lives when they felt neglected, mistreated, helpless, and misdiagnosed. The outpouring of these words from the nurses was a surprise and a shock. Waters assumed if you are in a profession of helping to birth babies, when your turn came around, your colleagues would provide the very best of care.

STORYTELLER ()

I was living in Kentucky and was a military dependent covered under Champus, the insurance for military dependents. Champus sent me to a civilian doctor. I didn't have any problems during the pregnancy until I went into labor at forty-two weeks. I had gained forty pounds, twenty of it in the last few weeks.

I thought I was in labor and had walked at home until I was sure the contractions were regular and strong. I called my doctor and told him what was going on.

His response was, "Get yourself to the hospital."

Once there, they sent my husband out of the room. A doctor came in to see me and he ruptured my bag of water. Later an intern came in and checked my reflexes. My reflexes were so hyperactive that I kicked her. I had a severe headache. The hyperactive reflexes and the headache meant I was close to having toxemia—a real danger in pregnancy.

Those were the days when they gave a full soap-suds

enema. I tried to tell the nurse about my headache. I thought she was crazy, giving me the enema anyway. When I had expelled the enema, they medicated me with scopolomine.

I had gone to the hospital about one o'clock in the afternoon. My husband told me I was in labor for hours and hours. He said the doctor came in about ten o'clock at night and took me to the operating room and delivered the baby by cesarean section. My husband signed the consent forms since I was under the influence of drugs.

I woke up in the recovery room. They told me I had a boy. I don't remember anything at all about the labor or the next three days. My husband took pictures of me holding my baby. I have no memory of anything. He said they gave me morphine every four hours, around the clock, for pain afterwards whether I needed it or not. I lost memory of all this time—a baby's birth that I do not remember.

I ended up having a staph infection, and a week later they performed a hysterectomy. I lost

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the memory of having my baby and a week later I lost my uterus and the ability to ever have another baby. I would never be able to give my son a brother or a sister. I lost everything. I still grieve over this. Sometimes when my child talks about a brother or sister, it brings it all back. We unsuccessfully tried to adopt.

I was going to sue the doctor and the hospital. By the time I realized how much damage was done, the army had transferred us to Hawaii. Also, as professional—I am a nurse—I questioned whether seeking legal damages was morally right.

NARRATOR

This was Tommie McNeil's third delivery. It was a military hospital in Germany. The doctor was an American military doctor.

NARRATOR ()

The labor was okay. I went in, they put me on the monitor and stuff and they ruptured my bag of

waters and then I needed to push.

I did not have any pain medication, and I remember not pushing in the room.

They took me to the delivery room, where I slid off the bed onto the delivery table. They put my legs in stirrups and strapped them down with leather straps and then they strapped my hands down. That is what caused me the most trouble, strapping my hands down. I said, "What are you doing?"

"Oh, this is routine. There are little handles here that you can hold onto when you are pushing," the nurse explained.

I pushed. I was in there pushing it seemed like forever, pushing while lying flat on my back.

"Turn my hands loose." I asked.

"No," the doctor said.

"Just my hands," I begged, "just my hands."

"Look, you are not pushing good enough. If you can't push better than this, we will just take you back to the labor room."

"Just one of my hands, untie just one of my hands."

"No," he replied and then ignored me. My husband was in

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the delivery room with me and he was freaking out. Basically, the doctor was saying you are a bad girl, you are not pushing good enough.

Finally when the baby's head started crown, the doctor said, "Look how big this head is," and delivered the baby. They never turned my hands loose. I was tied up the whole time, even after the baby was born.

I was mad. I was so mad. I wanted to hit this doctor. I was really angry because they tied me down. I didn't understand why they tied me down. My husband was angry, too. It was my third child and I had not been treated this way with my first two deliveries.

After delivery, they moved me to the recovery room, I told the recovery room nurse that I did not want to see that doctor again. I said if he comes back around, do not have him come to see me. A midwife came around to see me during the postpartum time.

NARRATOR:

Waters wanted to find out if the experience of birth shared by these women was limited to workers in hospitals, or perhaps common to women who worked in a military hospital?

Waters decided to expand the scope of her investigation. She began to bring up the subject with friends and casual acquaintances. The response was beyond imagination. It was like a dam had broken. Women with stories were everywhere—the shoe store, art class, computer operators, teachers, her daughter-in-law, and mothers of her patients.

The women cried when they told their stories. They swore when telling their stories. They shocked themselves, when they realized they accepted such treatment and never questioned anyone. Older and smarter, the women declared they would never accept that kind of treatment today.

Another surprise was the women had never talked about their experiences with family or friends. When asked why, they responded, "They would not understand." "I was trying to be a good mother." "I was too ashamed."

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With a small tape recorder, Waters went back to these women asking them to tell their stories again, this time on record.

Their stories—remembered as raw as yesterday—reveal hurt, anger, and rage. The hospitals that promised so much, subjected their patients to emotional and physical trauma.

Storyteller ()

I was 26 when I had my second birth. I was in New Jersey. New York was too far to go to get the natural childbirth with rooming-in and all that. So I went to the local M.D. who had treated my kids for colds and stuff in the past. He was known to drink a bit.

I had migraines throughout the pregnancy. My doctor made all the verbal overtures to help me with them, but, in fact, did nothing for them.

I had some bleeding in my third month. His best advice was, "Whenever you can do something sitting down rather than standing, do it sitting down. And

if you can do it laying down, do it." He was just a good old family doc.

When it came time for the delivery, my husband was saying, "You gotta do the dishes before you leave. Don't leave me with a sink full of dirty dishes." Then he rushed out to go to a drive-in movie. We already had one child. Finally at four in the morning, I called the doctor and asked him if he would pick me up on the way to the hospital, just kidding him. "No, I'll meet you there in the morning. You are not ready yet to go the hospital."

"Yes, I am," I replied. "I know; it is my second baby and I know what I am telling you." He did not want to listen to me. I got a neighbor lady to come and watch our child. My husband took me to the hospital. It was about 6 :30 in the morning. I told the nurse, "Please call the doctor, because I am going to deliver this baby in a minute."

"No, no, you are not. Doctor does not like to bothered before eight in the morning," she replied.

"Whether he likes it or

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doesn't like it, call him. I talked to him in the middle of the night and he said he would meet me here in the morning."

I don't know what she did, but I was in the labor room, and she told me I needed to take a shower. I said fine, and I took a shower. And I know I am going to have this baby any minute.

"I am going to get you an enema to speed things along," the nurse announced.

"You are not giving me an enema. I don't need an enema. I have not eaten all day and I am not taking a enema." I got into bed. I was upset that she wouldn't listen to me. She left to get the enema.

Suddenly, I am in a lot of pain. I yelled, "Nurse, nurse, please come back here; please help me." The baby just whished right out. I could see his head and his whole body between my legs. When she came back I was reaching to pick him up.

"Don't touch him," she yelled. She took my hands and pushed them under the blanket. She laid him across me. "Don't touch him. You have to deliver

the placenta. You are unclean.
Don't touch him."

I think a resident came in kneaded my stomach. Delivering that placenta hurt more than delivering the baby. The doctor came in laughing. "You remind me of a woman that I once played golf with. In the middle of the ninth tee we had to go back into the locker room, and I delivered her baby on the massage table." I didn't see anything to laugh about.

The doctor sent the bill for his whole fee. We refused to pay it. And then the hospital had the nerve to charge me for the delivery room, which I never entered. They told me they had to take the baby in there to clean him up. We paid the hospital, but not the doctor.

NARRATOR:

Elena says during her first delivery at a military hospital, she had to move from the stretcher onto the delivery table. And she simply could not do this. Her doctor picked her up and placed her gently on the delivery table. Elena was so happy with her birth experience, she

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went to nurse's college, so she could be part of this process.

STORYTELLER ()

After I went to work as an OB nurse I found things were different than my experiences. About half of the doctors were really hard on everybody, nurses and patients. The other doctors were excellent with the patients. Some of the doctors were harsh with the nurses, but were nice to their patients.

I was in the delivery room one day with this one doctor who had turned away from the patient to put his gloves on. He was having a rough time getting them on when the nurse said, "Doctor, she's crowning."

"Yeah, I know," he said. That was his attitude if a nurse tried to tell him anything. As he turned, the baby went poof on the floor. She hit the catch bucket with her shoulder, that broke her fall, and she hit the floor. The cord broke. Then, instead of being concerned about the baby and the baby's mother, he said, "Well, pick up the baby."

I picked up the baby, the other nurse suctioned her and put the bracelets on. The mother pushed herself up on her elbows and asked if the baby was okay. The doctor said, "Oh, yes."

I said, "The baby is fine." covering for the doctor. Under my breath I said, "That was not an accident, that was a shit-ass doctor, not paying attention."

There was an incident report. The nurse who was with me, said, "The patient was asleep."

"No," I insisted, "she pushed herself up on her elbows and asked about the baby." I remember today the mother's expression and her position so well.

I feel the mother knew that the baby fell on the floor, but she did not sue anybody. I felt the doctor should have received some reprimand for his irresponsible behavior. He was so superior; he did not have to listen to what a lowly nurse was trying to do to help him keep both mother and baby safe.

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STORYTELLER ()

We didn't have a car then. Earlier that day my husband and I had walked and walked. It was late in the afternoon because I remember the evening news on the radio. I had this pain that was different. I knew it was labor. We lived in Baltimore, so we called a cab. When we arrived at the hospital, my water broke.

I don't remember seeing anything. I know that the anesthetist was in the room, because I remembered seeing her when they first took me in the delivery room. I don't remember if they strapped me down. I only remember hearing the doctor say, "Well, you know how nurses are, they are always difficult." I can't imagine what I was doing that was difficult behavior. That remarks still hurts and it has been 20 years.

NARRATOR:

This took a terrible toll on mothers, their babies and families, but it also took its toll on nurses who were taking

care of the women. Twenty years later Ms. Waters received this unsolicited letter from a nurse she once worked with.

STORYTELLER ()

It had been a little over a year since I had graduated nursing school. Both my clinical practicum and first job had been in a large urban hospital where patients were treated decently, if impersonally. They had childbirth programs and accommodated couples. Except for some cesarean births and Intrauterine Fetal Demise, mothers were awake and aware. Fathers were permitted to be with their wives if they had attended classes.

In 1978, I began working at this hospital in South Carolina. I took a staff nurse job on the night shift. Often, I was the only nurse on duty in labor and delivery, with a nurse's aide.

Virtually all of the patients received sedatives, Demerol and Phenergan, scopolamine and Penthrane.

A few [patients] attempted Lamaze deliveries, but had few resources for education. Staff

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members mocked them for their choice, and bet on "how long they would last." Since no family members or coaches were permitted at the bedside, and nurses provided no labor support, most didn't last.

The first delivery I saw there, with the scopolamine drugged mother in four-point leather restraints, coach absent, a nurse anesthetist giving so much gas to put the patient to sleep that she was teetering on her stool from the vapors, and the doctor yelling for forceps, upset me so much that as soon as I could safely do so after the birth, I ran out of the room into the bathroom and threw up. Everything about the scene was Wrong, Wrong, Wrong.

All the babies required an injection of Narcan [a drug given to newborns to counteract the affect of the narcotics given to the mother] and oxygen gas given with a mechanical bag to help with breathing, called resuscitation. Often, they were blue, limp, and depressed, appearing dead to me.

One of the most vivid images in my memory is of the three or

four Allis forceps clamped to the woman's perineum to hold the edges of the perineum together, catching in the rails and frames of the stretchers and beds as the mothers were transferred to the recovery beds. In addition to the pain of having metal clamps instead of sutures snapped onto the fresh incision, the clamps were being yanked and twisted during the moves.

The use of the clamps saved the physician the time it took to sew her up. He took the new baby wrapped in blankets to the nursery. On the way he would stop by the waiting room and grandstand with the baby that he had just delivered, while its mother was zonked out and strapped to a delivery table inside the forbidden delivery room.

During recovery, we had to tell the mothers over and over that they had delivered; what the sex of the baby was; and the time and place. They were so sedated they could not remember anything from one moment of awareness to the next.

One young woman thanked me profusely for bathing her in

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recovery—care I thought was standard and part of “mothering the mother,” an idea put forth by Nurse Reva Rubin.

The most offensive treatment I saw was an obstetrician who lost patience with a scared teenager. She couldn't relax her legs when he tried to examine her, so he snarled, “Just lie back and relax like you did nine months ago.”

INTERMISSION (15 MINUTES)

STORYTELLER ()

The technology of today's medicine is so good that women can have babies even into their 60s. June, a 65 year old friend of mine had her baby a couple of weeks ago. I stopped in to see her new baby, and she suggested we have some tea first. I agreed. We are on our second cup of tea when I asked to see the baby.

NARRATOR:

“Okay, in a little while. Here let me warm up your tea.”

STORYTELLER

We continued chatting for another five minutes, "Can I see the baby now?"

NARRATOR:

"No, not yet. How's your tea?"

STORYTELLER

I take another few sips of tea and said, "Well, when can I see the baby?" (*Kind of out of sorts with her.*)

NARRATOR:

"We have to wait for him to cry. I forgot where I put him."

NARRATOR:

My mother was a space ship. Hummmm! Catchy title, yes, funny title, maybe, serious title, absolutely. Think about this. Everyone. Everyone travels from the souls repository to earth. Even if you are not religious, same travel. And there is absolutely no other way to get here except arriving through the safety of the bellies of our mothers.

The female is the ship's pilot up to a point. This space ship has its own

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built-in computer that controls the beginning of labor, our entry.

Claire's daughter, a twin, was pregnant and a patient at the clinic.

Patient appointments were assigned randomly to whichever midwife was in the office. The daughter had had several appointments earlier in her pregnancy, but this was her first appointment with Waters. The patient was accompanied by her mother Claire.

The daughter's history and assessment showed that she was progressing through a normal pregnancy. Waters asked the patient how she felt, and she answered, "Tell my mother that I am all right, and to get off my back."

Claire, a large, attractive woman, defended her behavior. What she was concerned about was that her daughter not experience what she went through giving birth. She explained that her daughter was a twin, and the pregnancy had been horrible. She was just trying to protect her daughter. Claire began to cry.

Ms. Waters asked her if she would be willing to tell her birth story. An

appointment was made and here is Claire's story.

STORYTELLER ()

I married when I was twenty-six. It was not really a good marriage. I was a Registered Nurse but not practicing, and was never going to practice again.

I remember well when I was told that I was pregnant. I thought I had the flu. I was throwing up, sick the whole weekend. I went to the ER alone. I felt so ill. It was a teaching hospital; and I was seen by a resident. The staff drew my blood, and didn't tell me much. Then the resident returned to tell me that I was pregnant. I could not believe it. I had wanted a baby all my life.

Before they discharged me, the resident came back and asked if these interns could look at my uterus because it was tilted. I was feeling sick, but I said okay.

About fifteen interns came in. They looked like my little brother. Looking at my uterus meant each one of them sat on a

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stool and looked up my vagina through the inserted speculum. Before I went home they gave me some kind of shot and I felt better. That was the beginning.

I told my husband that I was pregnant. He was supportive in the end, but at first he said we couldn't afford this.

We lived in a little apartment—no windows, no telephone, no TV. I was sick all the time.

I can remember standing over the potty throwing up, and him screaming at me that the chicken breast I had just eaten cost eight-two cents.

It was awful. I would crawl back to bed. He would leave.

For prenatal care I got assigned to the resident who had told me that I was pregnant. I had never had a baby, and he had never delivered a baby. We were both pretty scared.

He became like a surrogate husband. Every time I would go to the doctor, see him was my only happy time.

I lost forty pounds. You would think that somebody would have said, "What is wrong with this

picture?" But the staff just kept saying, "you will get over it."

I told the staff for months that there were two babies. "How is this baby kicking up here in my right rib and down here at my right leg at the same time?" Nobody listened to me.

"That's just a feeling," was the pat reply. I thought if I heard "just a feeling" one more time, I was going to hit someone.

I looked bumpy all around my belly—just a lumpy woman. Right after Christmas, I began to feel horrible again. Things were blurry. I was seeing stars, spots.

A couple of days before, I had walked about two miles to Texas Tech where my husband was supposed to be hanging Christmas lights. Of course, he was not there. My head was hurting. I ask one of the women at the college to drive me home, because I felt terrible.

The next day I had an appointment with my doctor. They took my blood pressure. It was 210/180 or something like that. He said go home and go to bed. So, I went home to bed. I was to

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be in bed all the time, except for five minutes a day when I could get in the shower.

It may have not been true, but I always had the feeling that had I had money, and gone to a private doctor, more would have been done.

I lay on the couch, day in and day out, and swelled. My church sent someone everyday with food. Without them, I would not have had any food; and someone would come and read to me.

In February, after over a month on my couch, I could not make any urine. I thought this is weird. So, I went back to the hospital. The hospital staff always acted like I was bothering them. I told them that something was wrong because I could not go to the bathroom. Now, I had gained forty-five pounds of fluid. I didn't look like the same person.

In the labor department, I heard this doctor screaming "Oh, my God." I could hear him throwing things. He was yelling at the residents, "Why didn't you call me? What is wrong with you? Admit her, admit her, get an IV

going, get mag-sulfate going."

He was a private physician, and was reading my chart by mistake, and couldn't believe what he was reading. He was an older doctor with a lot of experience. The residents were sitting there listening. Then he said, "Oh, this is not any of my business, I'm sorry."

As a result, the residents finally began to look at me, and listen to me.

Everyone was running around like I was dying—when I had been dying for a long time. The Texas Tech doctor overseeing the residents of this school, said, "Put her on the floor because she does not have any insurance. We will check on her every thirty minutes." The nurses came in every thirty minutes.

The staff did all kind of tests. I was a nurse, and I knew that the biggest danger for me and my baby was risk of having a seizure.

I could not believe the doctors would just put me in a room. They were doing all this Intensive Care stuff on me.

My eyes were so swollen I

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could hardly see. A couple of days after I had been admitted, I was sent to have an ultrasound. I said to the technician, "If you go over here, there is a head; and if you go over here, there is head."

I had been telling the clinic this for four months at least. "Oh, well sure 'nuff," he answered. And sure 'nuff, they began to worry upon discovering I had been right. I was pregnant with twins.

Two days later I stopped making urine completely. They had me on fetal monitors, two of them, all the time. A group of doctors came in. One that I did not know said, "Well, we got some news for you. We want to give you these steroid shots that will help the babies' lungs mature. We need seventy-two hours for the medication to work. But you might die before that," he said. "So this is your choice. You either take the shots and we will try to let the babies' lungs develop, and hope we can have some live babies. Or we can take the children now, because you are in renal failure. Do you know what

renal failure means?"

"Yes," I answered. "It means that I am going to die in about seventy-two hours if you don't get the babies out."

"Well, we don't want to lose the babies. So, do you want to do the steroids, or do you want to lose the babies."

This man was just standing there looking at me with all these little eyes on me—residents staring at me like I am not a human being. "Well, I guess I will try to give them the time they need," I answered. After all, I had gone this far.

Even then, they did not put me in ICU. They left me there with all my monitors. They gave me Lasix trying to make me pee.

But nothing came out, maybe a few dribbles at a time. They were running IVs in me like crazy. You could touch my skin anywhere and water would ooze out.

My husband was really scared, so he stayed with me. The elders from the church came in and gave me a blessing. I felt a lot better just from my faith. The doctors were not giving me a lot of hope.

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By then everyone was so darn nice, but I was so scared. One of the older doctors visited me every night in my room. He was in a white coat and he would tell me not to worry. He stood by my bed and told me that I was going to be all right—that the babies were going to be all right. I thought this was the nicest doctor that I had. I could barely see at this point, but I could hear him and I could make him out a little bit.

Then, I started vomiting. I felt terrible. A nurse with years of experience in labor and delivery came down to evaluate me. Yes, I was still in a room on the medical floor. She could not believe her eyes. She said, "I think she is in labor, we need to move her to the labor and delivery unit." She did not ask the doctors, she unplugged the bed and started moving the bed.

She sat by my bed all night. She knew me vaguely, but she sat there, knowing that I was seriously ill. Then the residents and their supervising doctor came and said they were inducing labor. I thought to myself with my blood pressure so high, this

was not going to help much.

A resident put me on a bedpan and broke my water, without telling me what he was doing. He just did it. Then he yelled, "Oh, God. I forgot to get an amniocentesis. My ass is going to get chewed if I don't get amniotic fluid to date the babies."

He told this nurse to bring him a spinal needle. He was going to search for fluid. He pushed the long needle up through my vagina searching for fluid with my babies up there. That was insane.

I did not know much at this point, but I did know what he was doing; he was covering his ass.

I started crying. He said, "You are out of control. We need to get a psychiatrist to come talk to you. You are just losing control."

When I look back at it now, he was out of control. He was scared. He did not know what he was doing. Because of his inadequacies, he could have killed me, and my babies. And instead of saying, "I need the chief to come down here and help

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me," he accused me of being out of control for crying.

The doctor put pitocin, (the drug to create contractions) in my IV and left. He told the residents to call him if they needed him.

No one ever came in my room. I had an overreaction to the pitocin where the uterus muscles clamp down and never relax.

I told my husband that something was really wrong. I felt like I needed to push. He went and got a nurse.

The nurse came into the room saying, "Now, you know you are not having babies yet." She looked at a paper strip recording the contractions and freaked out. No one had bothered to see what was going on. With what I know now, there should have been a nurse at my bedside at all times and at the very least a doctor in the hospital.

I was completely dilated and pushing.

My husband ran out of the room. They are rolling my bed toward the delivery room screaming at me not to push. I had always wondered if in labor

you would know to push. Well, everything in your body says push. I was trying not to, but I think my body knew my babies would be better off outside.

In the delivery room, everybody was in a panic. They called a neonatologist [baby doctor] who was in his office not in the hospital. He says, "Stall her."

I don't know how they got me from the labor bed onto the delivery table. They strapped me onto the table. I remember the left hand grip was broken and I could not pull on it. They tied my arms down. I was tied everywhere. I could not move. I looked up and there was a clock and a crucifix on the wall.

Fifteen people crowded into this little bitty room. But no one would look at me or talk to me. All they did was try to keep me from having my baby.

When I would push, they would push back on her head. It hurt.

I was so thirsty. My tongue was stuck to the roof of my mouth. I could not talk.

Now, I was a woman truly out of control—a tortured woman out

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of control.

I was lying there thinking if I could have just one drop of water. I got the word "water" out of my mouth. The anesthetist. looked down at me with this condescending look and said, "You can't have any water."

"Washcloth," I said.

"A washcloth, she wants a washcloth." A nurse handed him one. He stuck it under the hot water and slapped it across my mouth. I sucked that baby dry.

Finally my doctor showed up. No one had talked to me as yet. My doctor told me, "Everything is all right."

I thought, you jackass. I am laying here dying, holding my babies in. He told me, "We are going to have a controlled delivery. We don't want you pushing these little babies across the room."

When the first baby came out, they threw her in this little bed and whisked her out the door.

They did not show her to me. They did not say squat to me. I did not hear her make a sound. The doctor said, "The second baby is up in the birth canal,

so we are going to have to reach up there and pull her down. We are going to give you some gas because this is going to hurt." Like the first one did not hurt!

The doctor put a mask on my face. I remember I sucked on the gas eagerly just to get out of it. I was not out for very long, and it did not hurt so much.

There was a nurse over by the broken hand pull, and I pulled on her. She turned to me as if to say, oh, there you are, a human being after all.

Through the mask I asked, "Are my babies alive?" Everyone just froze. That team of monster people realized that I was a human being and concerned about my babies.

They held up my second baby. I had read this book about Auschwitz, where this person was given a picture of their child that somebody had brought to the camp. They had just a second to look at the picture, before it was burned, but they said that they could paint that picture for the rest of their life.

I looked at my baby for half a second. I took in every feature

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of her body. I could draw that picture today. She was perfect. She was little and she was squealing. At that moment, I felt like I could do anything.

I started peeing pretty quickly. They gave me something to drink. I was drinking like a crazy person I was so thirsty. But, I was still sick, and still swollen.

I wanted to see my babies. They told me I couldn't get up as yet. My blood pressure was still high, and they wanted me to wait until that night. When the nurse left, I said, "I am going to see my babies."

"You can't do that," my husband said.

"You wanna bet, after what I have been through?"

I had tubes coming out everywhere. But I went walking down the hall. My face was still swollen and I could barely see. But I felt my way down the hall towards the nursery.

The nurses looked up from their station. No matter what they'd said, I was going, if I had to crawl. They put me in a wheelchair and took me to the

nursery.

Crying, I washed my hands and went to meet my children.

They would not let me touch them. They were beautiful. They weighed 4 lbs 2 ozs and 4 lbs 6 ozs. That was pretty good. Their lungs were not normal, but pretty good. They were identical girls.

Later, the doctors told me they thought I was okay. The nurses took out the catheter and all the IVs. The nurses and doctors let me be, and my husband went home.

Then I began to see spots again, only much worse.

I was dying. I knew that I was dying. That was when the nice doctor showed up again—the one who stood at the end of the bed at night. He said, "Don't worry, you are not going to die. Everything is going to be okay." I felt a little better. I thought he was one nice man. Later that night, I had a seizure, and was again placed on IVs and medications.

Five days later I went home. I had to leave my babies at the hospital.

The day we took the babies

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home, I stayed with my mother. My grandmother had died maybe a month before, and my mother was un-packing boxes from grandmother's house. She lifted this old picture out of this box. I said, "There's the doctor!"

My mother asks, "Doctor?"

"That is that nice doctor that came every night to my bedside and told me that everything was going to be all right,"

"This is your grandfather," she said. "He has been dead for ten years."

NARRATOR

My mother was a space ship. Hummmm! Catchy title, yes, funny title, maybe, serious title, absolutely. Think about this. Everyone Everyone, travels from the souls repository to earth. Even if you are not religious, same travel.

And there is absolutely no other way to get here except through the safety of arriving through the bellies of our mothers. The female is the ship's pilot up to a point. This space ship has its own built-in computer that controls the beginning of labor, our entry.

We are saying the labor process that leads to the arrival of a tiny person on planet earth should be as important as a NASA launch and re-entry, receiving every ounce of protection available to support a safe entry.

STORYTELLER (1)

And if labor and birth were a NASA event, there would be a debriefing. You know an interrogation after the birth is over to obtain useful information. Information about how the process of giving birth has changed since the 80s, the 90s?

The drugs are different. Scopolomine is no longer used to wipe out memories. The labor room and delivery room is the same room. There are no leather straps. Our culture that says a good mother will suffer anything for the sake of her child can no longer excuse her abuse.

STORYTELLER or NARRATOR

The work of giving birth, as always, is the same.

And yes, the voices of these

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women telling their stories would be slanted, their stories would be messy, their stories would be straight, but they would not be:

I was ashamed

I was a failure

I was shouted at and accused of being out of control.

Their voices would acknowledge their gratitude for a system where they choose the tools of medicine they need. They would know they are safe. They would speak of the comfort of a cool hand on the brow, the encouragement from a nurse; they would speak of the joy of bringing onto this planet the lives of their children—you, and you, and you, and me.