



Life's Lessons

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I had a choice. I could turn into a bitter empty shell that would find any emotion difficult to bear, or I could become a stronger individual by learning how to love and live. We are given these choices when we are faced with personal tragedies. I choose to become stronger by learning how to love and live.

It was Sunday February 15, 1998. I was nine months pregnant and only ten days from my delivery due date. This was my second pregnancy. I had a daughter named Jesse who was two years old at the time. I was going to have a little boy, and he would be named Robert Gregory; Bobby for short.

Something was terribly wrong. I hadn't felt the baby move recently and I couldn't remember when I last felt him kick, turn, or hiccup. Was it Friday or Saturday? I just saw the doctor on Tuesday, and he said everything was great. I kept telling myself doctors know best. Denial is an incredible survival mechanism.

I finally decided to call the maternity ward at the hospital that Sunday afternoon, and I remember asking the nurse, "Babies don't move as much the last week before they are born, right?" The nurse replied, "No, that's actually a myth. Babies move a lot, especially after you eat, and even more so after eating something sweet." Well, that blew the last of my denial right out the window. I had a big fat doughnut in my hand at that exact moment. I told the nurse I was coming to the hospital after I called the doctor. I paged the doctor who was on call that Sunday and he said, "Go to the hospital. We'll find the heartbeat and you can go home." He was very curt, and I got the distinct impression I had just interrupted his golf game or something else equally important. I left immediately, while my husband packed the diaper bag for Jesse. They would meet me at the hospital in a short while.

I arrived at the hospital and tried not to run to the maternity ward. I was not prepared for what came next. As the nurses desperately tried to find a heartbeat, I started to silently cry. The nurses refused to say much until the doctor arrived to confirm their findings, or the lack of, in

this case. The doctor gave me the official news. My baby boy had died.

The doctor was astonished. He actually apologized to me for his behavior over the phone. The doctor proceeded to break my water, and he informed me that the baby had died either early Friday morning or Thursday night. How could this be? Today is Sunday! I am the mother! I should have known the instant it happened, and if I didn't know, what kind of mother does that make me? What did I do wrong?

I cannot begin to describe the incredible emotions and thoughts that flooded my entire being. I begged the nurses for drugs to numb the pain in my heart, and they gladly gave them to me. A good friend came to pick up Jesse and keep her for the night, while my wonderful husband stayed by my side. My mother was on a plane and somehow managed to make it from Massachusetts to Virginia in six hours. My husband and I then had to endure six hours before I could deliver my baby, and they were the longest hours of my life. Denial and drugs offered me an oasis, and incredibly, I was able to joke around. However, once the actual delivery started to take place, I turned into a blubbling idiot. I felt like my life had ended, and I hoped I would never feel pain like that again, but if I never feel that pain again, have I loved?

My mother arrived at the hospital one half-hour after I delivered Bobby, and with her help, I was able to hold my baby in my arms and say goodbye. It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life, but I will never regret it. Bobby was wearing a beautiful hat and a blanket that some sweet older people knit especially for babies that do not survive. I still have that hat and blanket today. The hospital also gave us a wonderful memorial package, complete with a castor handprint in a shell. The nursing staff was absolutely the best. I guess what I'm trying to say is... it could have been worse.

Bobby, my darling baby boy who never drew a breath, taught me how to live and love. I now notice things around me I never noticed before. The trees are greener, the sky is a more vibrant blue and flowers smell sweeter. I tend to be more patient and forgiving. I cherish my family's laughter and time together more than ever. The little bundle of joy that never happened taught me how to love and live, and for that, I will always be grateful.