

## The Gift of Love

A stranger can change your life. An act of love can come from a place you never expected. Through this one act of unexpected kindness, I discovered that one person's grief can lift another person out of depression.

My daughter died when she was 16 days old. She was born with Trisome-18, a rare genetic anomaly that impacted all her muscles including her heart and lungs. Our pediatrician had never seen a child with this anomaly. He told us that these children usually do not survive to be born full term and it was a miracle she survived the birth process at all. The miracle was she was with me for 16 days. The grief of her death was unbearable. But I pushed that grief deep inside and went back to work.

The last time I saw her was the morning she died. She was in neonatal intensive care in her high-tech crib/incubator. She died when I was not there. She passed in the arms of one of the nurses. She told me it was a peaceful death. I was grief stricken and angry at my daughter for not waiting for me. I wanted to sit with her to say goodbye. But the doctors, my husband and family would not let me see her or hold her. They said, "It was for the best." So, in the Jewish tradition we buried my baby in a plain wooden coffin two days after her death. This happened over 45 years ago. As I reflect on this today, I feel both sad and grateful to the stranger who gave me the most important gift of my life.

I thought I had moved through my grief. I thought I was OK. The irony? I now worked in Labour and Delivery. Not the same hospital of my experience, but one 500 miles west where I moved to help me start over after my devastating loss. Here I immersed myself in the happy families that were all around me. Five years passed. Being with happy families helped me heal.

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Then, my dear friend, one of the Labour and Delivery nurses who knew my story, changed my life.

I had finished my shift and was preparing to go home. My friend stopped me and told me that a young couple had just experienced a sudden death birth. Their perfectly healthy daughter was born tangled by the umbilical cord and died during delivery. There was no warning. It was devastating. Unlike my experience, our birthing centre had a quiet room where parents could sit with their baby and say goodbye. The medical field now knew that saying goodbye was important. It was a beautiful space where soft music played in a dimly lit room. Two oversized rocking chairs provided a comfortable place to rock the child and say goodbye. It was in this room where the miracle occurred.

I did not know that my friend told the couple my story. My experience. What did these strangers do? They asked to see me. Confused, I walked into the quiet room and this mother who had just lost her perfect daughter, stood up, handed her child to me and said, "Say goodbye to your child." I stood shocked. What did she mean? She wanted to share her baby with me to help me. Her husband nodded and they left the room. I sat in the rocker and started to cry. I rocked their child and said goodbye to mine. I don't know how long I stayed, but I can tell you I stayed long enough to let my grief go. I emerged from the room a changed person. I knew I would be OK. On that day, a stranger changed my life through a true act of love, in a place I never expected, and lifted the weight of my grief from my heart.

Every year on Kaana's birthday I reflect on this miracle, and I thank this mother and father. I never knew their names. I only know that they gave me one of the most profound gifts I have ever received. They changed my life, and I love them for that.