

# Reflections

Acts of Grace Foundation • Small Deeds, Big Difference

Volume 2 • Issue 2 • May 2010

## A Note from the Founder: Finding Nemo

It's funny how the most arbitrary things in life can impact your thoughts. Sometimes the most profound connections are made when we least expect it.

For example, the other day I watched *Finding Nemo* for the first time in several years. This time I was able to relate to Marlin much better than I did before. You may be wondering how this suburban dad of 2 could relate to a cartoon fish.

At the beginning of the movie, Marlin and Coral are talking about the nice neighborhood they live in, their place to live with space to grow, while lovingly gazing at their babies before they are born.



Their excitement and joy for life takes me back to August 13th, 2007 when my wife and I were expecting twin girls (which compares to Marlin and Coral expecting over 400 baby fish). We were overjoyed . . . life was good. We were excited to start a family and had a nice place to live in a good neighborhood.

That morning, Marlena wasn't feeling well so we decided to go check on our babies. We expected the visit to take less than an hour and thought Marlena may have to back off work and maybe (at worst) be at home on bedrest.

Instead, she spent the next 7 weeks on

hospital bedrest with the knowledge that our Twin B (who we had named Grace) had a very poor prognosis. Our goal was to keep Twin A from being born too early.

The birth of our daughters (Elle and Grace) on September 27, 2007 is another event that helped me relate to Marlin. Like Marlin, we were left with one baby to care for. Words can't describe how much we miss our beautiful Grace, nor can they describe the joy we experience daily with Elle (our Nemo).

So I sat on the couch with tears in my eyes and finished watching the movie with Elle. In typical, curious, 2-year-old fashion, Elle wondered why I was sad. I was reminded how blessed I am to have her in my life. I brushed the hair out of her eyes and gave her a kiss--revealing her lucky fin . . . a blue vein on her right eye lid.

Joseph Diederich

## Why Moms are Hospitalized

As families approach pregnancy, there is an expectation that things will move along smoothly and predictably. In the majority of pregnancies and deliveries that is true. However, in a small percentage of pregnancies, unexpected and unplanned complications may arise. In some of these situations the mom may need to be hospitalized for a variety of reasons.

In the last issue of Reflections, we explored two major issues that often lead to hospitalization for many moms: Preterm Labor and Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes. In this edition, we will explore two other common reasons: Third Trimester Bleeding and Preeclampsia/HELLP Syndrome.

### THIRD TRIMESTER BLEEDING:

Bleeding in pregnancy is relatively common, and often not serious enough to require hospitalization. However, there are a few of circumstances in which in-patient management is highly recommended. All of these circumstances involve bleeding that has something

to do with the placenta. The most common finding is placenta previa, which is an abnormal placement of the placenta in the uterine environment. Generally the placenta should "set itself up" well away from the internal opening of the cervix. When placenta previa is present, part or all of the internal cervical opening is covered with placental tissue. In a more rare occurrence, a blood vessel or group of blood vessels may cross the internal opening of the cervix. This is called "vasa previa." Another cause of third trimester bleeding is referred to as a "marginal abruption." This is a circumstance in which an edge of the placenta may have lifted or pulled away from the wall of the uterus, resulting in vaginal bleeding.

The difficulty with bleeding related to any type of previa or abruption is that it is very unpredictable. Once a woman experiences significant bleeding with a known placental problem, the risk of her bleeding again increases dramatically. This puts both she and her baby at risk for hemorrhage. For this

reason, moms with more than 2 or 3 bleeding episodes will be managed in the hospital until delivery. As in PTL and PPROM, we will very likely give betamethasone in anticipation of an early delivery.

### PREECLAMPSIA/HELLP SYNDROME:

This pregnancy-specific disease process has historically gone by several different names ~ toxemia, pregnancy induced hypertension (PIH), and more recently preeclampsia. A severe component or variant of preeclampsia is called "HELLP Syndrome," an acronym which stands for Hemolysis, Elevated Liver enzymes, Low Platelets. In the worst cases, this disease process threatens the lives of the mother and her babe(s).

We know preeclampsia is a disease of the pregnancy, specifically related to how well the placenta is doing its job. We also know that the more placental surface area there is ~ as in a twin, triplet or quadruplet pregnancy ~ the greater the risk of developing this complication of pregnancy. Preeclampsia

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## 30 Weeks of Grace

It was a routine Saturday morning in Denver when I had a small leak of amniotic fluid. I was 23 weeks pregnant with twins. The staff on call at Presbyterian/St. Luke's examined me and sent me home, declaring that everything was fine.

When the leak increased the next day, I returned to PSL. During the follow-up exam, our son's entire amniotic sac burst, leaving me soaked in fluid. My husband, James, and I were instructed on what to expect. A high percentage of these cases go into labor and deliver within 72 hours. Since it was too early in the pregnancy to be admitted for hospital bedrest, I would have to return home. If still pregnant at 24 weeks, I would return to the hospital for the remainder of my pregnancy.

I like to think it was sheer willpower that got us to 24 weeks. We settled into a room at PSL, relieved to be closely monitored. The staff taught me to do my own fetal monitoring three times a day as we made it to 25 weeks and settled into the PSL routine. Pool therapy turned out to be like a warm Turkish bath filled with the other antepartum patients. A group of us from points all over Colorado and Wyoming rapidly became regulars and rarely missed the twice daily outing. We cheered each other on like old friends and

recruited as many expectant mothers as we could up and down the third floor hallway.

Weeks 26 and 27 passed. Our daughter's own amniotic sac was cushioning her brother in a gift of life and extra time. Throughout the stay at PSL, the Acts of Grace bingo night

became a weekly highlight. The laughter and camaraderie sometimes made it hard to get through a round of bingo and was as medicinal as anything on the ward. Weeks 28 and 29 went by, and we started to set new goals for the length of the pregnancy.

The journey ended at 30 weeks on August 4, 2008 when I went into labor late on a Sunday night and delivered Ben and Lily

at dawn the next day. They each weighed two and a half pounds, but we had gained an incredible seven weeks. Another 10

weeks in the NICU would pass before we finally left the hospital for good. Today, the babies chase each other across the living room in fits of giggles, and the antepartum friendships endure on

e-mail with the cheering now for one another's 1-year olds. Acts of Grace reminded us to enjoy our pregnancies despite the circumstances, and I am very grateful.



Happy and healthy: Lily and Ben

## Why Moms are Hospitalized (from Page 1)

can range from mild to severe, and is classified as such by looking at a variety of signs and symptoms, both on the fetal side of the placenta and on the maternal side of the placenta. One thing we know for sure...preeclampsia will eventually get worse and the treatment is delivery. Because this disease is unpredictable, and if severe is life-threatening, many women are cared for in the hospital. If time allows, betamethasone is given to prepare the baby for early delivery. Mom is treated aggressively, as dictated by her signs and symptoms.

The Acts of Grace Foundation is dedicated to taking care of women and families whose lives have been turned upside-down by being hospitalized during their

pregnancies. Hopefully this gives you a glimpse into why a pregnant woman might be admitted to the hospital to monitor her and her babe.

Although the reasons for admission to an antepartum unit may vary, the common thread is the separation from family, friends and an everyday life. The gift Acts of Grace offers is that of community and belonging, compassion and empathy, caring and love... How very blessed are all of those touched by this work, including me.

Karen Zimmerman, MSN, PNNP  
Acts of Grace Foundation Board Member



Join us on the **SEVENTH** of every month by donating **7 dollars** to help pregnant women on hospital bedrest. Go online to [www.actsofgracefoundation.com](http://www.actsofgracefoundation.com), click on **donate now** and sign up for reoccurring donations. Sacrifice one trip to your favorite fast food restaurant or two grande lattes per month and help us purchase gift bags, ice cream, crafts, meal vouchers, and more!