

## A M O T H E R F O R L I F E :

# Getting through a crisis pregnancy

By Terri Henrickson

ALMOST 10 YEARS AGO I GAVE BIRTH TO MY FIRSTBORN SON. WHAT AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE. BUT THE MONTHS PRIOR TO HIS BIRTH WERE TERRIFYING. I WROTE THIS STORY TO HELP WOMEN WHO ARE OVERWHELMED BY THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES, FEELING NO HOPE AND CONSIDERING ABORTION.



Terri and her son Tristan.



Tristan, only a few hours old.

The doctor's office was just a couple of steps away. Trying not to be late, I limped to the door—I wanted to hear the baby's heart beat again.

The examining room was cool, causing me to shiver when the doctor came in. "So how are you feeling?" she asked, flipping through my file.

"Good, except for my back and leg," I said. My pain was brought on by hormone changes from the pregnancy. My joints were loose, which caused discomfort. You could hear crunching and snapping where my leg joined my hip.

The doctor then looked up and very seriously stated, "There's a cyst on the baby's brain. Severe mental retardation will occur."

### Shock treatment

My heart started pounding. I felt like I couldn't breathe. All the dreams I had for my preborn child seemed buried under the words "severe mental retardation."

"What would you like to do?"

Abort or continue the pregnancy?" She was blunt and cold. "Would you like to have an amniocentesis before aborting?"

I felt pressured to come up with an answer. "I don't know. I need to talk to Shawn."

Shawn and I had been together two years and all of a sudden we were expecting. We weren't married, but were planning on it. Once we found out about the baby, those plans took a larger significance.

"Well, there isn't much time. You're in your twenty-fourth week," she rushed. "I'll just have a nurse set up an appointment for the amniocentesis and possible abortion."

The amniocentesis could prove mental retardation, but it could also cause a spontaneous abortion. The needle would puncture the uterine wall and extract out a small amount of amnio fluid to be tested. I needed to decide if I would follow through with an abortion.

My eyes clouded with tears. I left the doctor's office and drove home.

### Life with Tristan

Tristan's life has brought me such joy. I see all that he is and look forward to all that he will become.

I vividly remember the prognosis "severe mental retardation," yet Tristan is one of the top students in his class. He loves to play team sports like hockey and soccer and has no physical limitations.

I have tried to instill good morals. He's learning that truth and kindness are ways of showing God's love. He's also the big brother of Chase, my second son, and proud of it. Chase looks up to him.

Like other boys, Tristan loves to draw semi-trucks and is very interested in the arts. His sketches amaze me.

Without Tristan my world would be empty. There would be no sound of his little "chipmunk chatter" laugh. No bright smile. No explanation of the ins and outs of greasing a semi-truck or what a single-axle jeep is. No dirty handprints on my walls and no oily miniature overalls in my laundry. There would be no hugs goodnight and no little prayers.

All these things I could have missed, but I haven't, because Tristan is here. Instead, together we are able to experience the disappointments and joys of life—all its sorrows and victories. How grateful I am for that.





*Now married, Terri and Shawn pose for a Christmas shot with their sons, Tristan and Chase.*

## Family matters

I gathered myself and told Shawn the devastating news. He was shocked. I began to sob again, and Shawn held me.

The next day I was called to the doctor's office. I still didn't know what to do. My spirit was desperately trying to fight the thought of abortion, but in my mind I attempted to justify the idea.

Then my heart fought back. I looked to the Lord for answers and stared at ultrasound pictures. At 19 weeks my baby had looked like a little person with all his organs. An earlier ultrasound at six weeks showed the baby shaped like a kidney bean. I remembered seeing something flashing on the screen. Then the ultrasound technician said, "There's your baby's heart beating."

I was so afraid to make the wrong decision, yet I couldn't see how having the baby would be any better. To make matters worse,

Shawn was terrified and threatened to leave me if I had a retarded baby. I was certain I'd be alone and my child would be in constant medical need. How could I possibly make ends meet and still be available to my child? I felt I was going crazy.

## Retreat, regroup

I needed a change of scenery. Shawn and I left our home town and traveled to the coast. The mountains and lakes were majestic, but they only took my mind off the baby for a few short seconds. The trip was rough, as my back, hip and leg were in pain, but it opened my mind's eye to God's divine intervention and peace.

We stayed with Shawn's friend Mike. I didn't know it at the time, but Mike's girlfriend Jen would become my silent prayer warrior. Jen also would become my confidant the day a nurse called, trying to pressure me into an abortion.

"How dare you talk to me like this? How dare you insinuate that I am not in pain, and how dare you pressure me!" I responded, outraged, before hanging up.

Raising a child with severe disabilities and doing it alone wasn't part of my original plan. I could have made the appointment, but I chose to continue the pregnancy, because—to my surprise—my love for my preborn child was stronger than my fears.

## Confidants

When Jen and I had a quiet moment I spilled the secret that Shawn and I were hiding. And I

felt so much better after talking about it. "I'll pray for you. It will all work out," Jen said. Her eyes were warm and sincere.

That evening I didn't cry as long or hard. I had peace. If the baby was to be mentally retarded—I was a mother for life—I would do my best and that would be enough. Thankfully, Shawn supported me.

We left Victoria, headed home to Dawson Creek and told our parents the news. Their hearts were heavy for us. I managed to get an appointment with Shawn's doctor (I was not going back to mine) and obtained a second opinion, which we should've done earlier.

"I looked at the ultrasound and read the information in your file. I've delivered babies with similar ultrasound readings. The babies were born healthy and without cysts. If the cyst is present at birth," he explained, "most likely the baby will only survive a few short days." His voice was soft and convincing. I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that whatever happened, God was in control.

Day after day, I tried to think positively. I prayed for my child, purchased baby clothes and a crib. I sincerely believed the Lord would give me a healthy child. On September 5, 1996, Tristan was born weighing seven pounds, 13 ounces and cyst free. In 39 weeks I had learned to follow my heart and trust God. I also learned not to let fear dictate my decisions and to always get second medical opinions. Even if Tristan had been born with a challenging condition, my happiness depended on bringing him into this world.

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