

Terminal Diagnosis - Precious Life by Terisa Morgan, Lenexa, Kansas

My name is Terisa Morgan. My husband Cory and I have been married for 12 years. Together, we have been blessed with 3 beautiful children, Alexa, 10, Chloe, 6, and Noah, 4. We learned in August of 2011 that we were expecting our fourth child. We were elated, and when we learned the baby's due date was on Easter of 2012 we thought it was a very appropriate date for new life.

The pregnancy was uneventful with the usual fatigue and nausea that comes with the first trimester, but I was feeling great in the second trimester as we were approaching Christmas and our screening ultrasound. It was during our screening ultrasound in our Obstetrician's office that some concerning features were identified in our baby. We were sent to see a perinatologist for a more in depth ultrasound the following day.

Upon first learning the news that our precious baby girl had Trisomy 18 we were devastated. We were told that, although there are a few children who do survive, this diagnosis typically is incompatible with life and that less than 10% of these babies survive their first year of life. Our options were laid out before us. We could choose to terminate the pregnancy or we could continue on with the pregnancy.

I was 23 weeks along in my pregnancy when the diagnosis was made. A couple of months before, I had been offered screening to check for genetic abnormalities such as Down Syn-

drome (Trisomy 21), and other less common genetic abnormalities such as Trisomy 18, 15 and 13. We declined the screening because knowing that our baby had such a diagnosis wouldn't change how we would progress with our pregnancy. We knew early on that we could never choose to end our unborn child's life at any stage in the pregnancy.

We were told of Alexandra's House, a Perinatal Hospice for Infants offering support to families experiencing a pregnancy in which the baby has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Alexandra's House has provided us with loving and compassionate support as we await the arrival of our Ella Rose.

We immediately reached out to our family, friends, and to our church community. The prayer support, meals, cards, emails and calls started pouring in for us. We were surrounded by Christ's love and an overwhelming sense of His peace.

Several people recommended different books that may offer us some support, but one book in particular, Letters to Gabriel, by Karen Garver Santorum was the one book that people over and over again were telling me I must read. Then, another mom from my children's school reached out to me with the story of the loss of her beloved baby. She told me that this book offered her so much comfort following her loss, and that she had a copy I could borrow.

I will never forget the night I first opened the book. I was immediately struck with an overwhelming feeling of guilt as I began to read about when Mrs. Santorum learned of her pregnancy with Gabriel, how she was in full contemplation, rejoicing and praying over the miracle of life within her. After having three healthy children and living out our busy lives with them, I had somehow lost that same appreciation I once had for the true blessing of pregnancy and the new life growing within *me*. Yes, I was happy and excited to be expecting our fourth child, but I was not fully recognizing our baby in fervent prayer and contemplation daily.

I was so affected that initially I didn't think I could read on, handing the book to Cory with tear-filled eyes and confessing myself to him. He helped me decide that I could and should go on reading. So I continued and was so blessed by the Santorums' story. I was not only reminded of how infinitely precious every human life is, but I was given a new sense of courage and hope. The Santorums fought for their precious Gabriel's life. Their fight inspired me to learn all I could about our baby's diagnosis, and to find ways to help her and fight for her life if needed.

Their story inspired me to still hope when you are told there is no hope. And even when life is cut short and tragedy overwhelms you, there is still that life and that blessing to celebrate, reflect upon and to thank God for. All is not lost.

And so, we have spent the remainder of this pregnancy celebrating the life we've been blessed with in Ella Rose. We've built a bunny for her at Build-A-Bear Workshop. We've seen her beautiful face, hands and feet in 3D/4D images. We've had maternity photos taken with her. We've shopped for her and prepared a nursery for her. We sing to her, talk to her, love on her and do we ever pray for her!

Some new friends we made through Alexandra's House had silicone bracelets with her name and the Scripture from Matthew 18:5 printed on them made for us. Another friend is preparing her baby book. We were gifted with the most beautiful linen baptismal outfit handmade especially for Ella Rose, complete with delicate embroidered pink roses. The gifts for Ella Rose have been especially meaningful to us as they strengthen within us our sense of hope and appreciation for her life, regardless of her diagnosis.

We have been so blessed and gifted by this precious child I carry. We have been reminded of the fragility of all human life. We have been made more keenly aware of the dignity of every human life from the moment of conception to natural death. Ella Rose has shown us that we must slow down and appreciate all of God's gifts for as long as we have them. And most importantly, our family has drawn closer to Christ as we put all of our trust in Him.

Although we realize that the statistical odds are not in Ella Rose's favor, and we have taken steps to prepare ourselves for losing her, we have not lost our ability to hope. We are praying for a miracle for her if that is God's will, but if it is not His will we know that He will give us the grace, love and support we need to persevere. And even if we do lose our baby, hope remains in the promise of eternal life with our Heavenly Father, where someday we will all be together again.



Shared Path & Encouragement

I recently had the opportunity to meet Senator Santorum when he was in Lenexa. The Santorum's have a 3 year old daughter, Bella, who has Trisomy 18. In anticipation of our meeting I wrote a letter to the Senator and Mrs. Santorum expressing my thanks for how much their story, and their book "Letters to Gabriel", have encouraged me, and thanked them for the strong stance they've taken in support of all human life. He showed such compassion and concern for our Ella Rose. He asked about how she was doing and what her sonograms looked like. He wanted to know if we had a team of medical professionals who were ready to support us in our fight for her life. It was so comforting speaking to Senator Santorum about Ella Rose, knowing that he has treaded the path we are walking.

