

A HUGE RESPONSIBILITY

by
Gina Bocanegra

The stench of cleaning agents and the blinding fluorescent lighting and the tugging at my bloody flesh was the final reminder of what had been imminent for the last nine months. The annoying stinging sensation of the doctor's jigsaw-like blade was the most pain I had felt during the whole operation, so far. Just when I wanted to reveal to the doctor and nurses all qualms and that I did feel slight pain, they either reassured me that the sensation at this level was O.K., or it simply went away.

I remember in the operating room this cabinet, this massive cabinet that had held medication, gauze, and other operating paraphernalia; it had seemingly endless boundaries and responsibilities against that exaggerated wall. At times everything was blurred and I just wanted to let my arms fall off the sides of the narrow operating table and drift into a hibernating sleep. The medication was strong.

I was barely able to hear Dr. Cone say, "I see a head and lots of hair," over the loud suction noises that were taking in any excess blood, I guessed, and the nurses exchanging words back and forth. And then I heard it, the wail of the world's newest cherub. I began to cry. "What is it, a boy or a girl?" one nurse asked the other. "The doctor says a girl!" she responded. My question was finally answered.

When I saw her for the first time, her face and eyebrows covered in a creamy white protective film and her eyes squinting under the unfamiliar blaze of light, I wanted to jump off of the table and hug her and kiss her and would have if I could, but the needle that stuck my backbone forbade me.

I demanded that Steven follow Ava Marie, my sweet fat little angel, with the movie camera. He was to not miss recording even one fraction of a second of his daughters' first minutes of life. While Steven followed my instructions on filming her I could tell the doctor was sewing me back up. I could hear Ava Marie cry every few minutes and I hoped that she was ok. As nervous as I was about her, Steven was about me. "Are you O.K. Gina?" "Yes, Steven keep filming," I said, annoyed that he asked and risked taking the camera off her.

A few minutes later the doctor told me I was going to be taken to the recovery room for a while, which was customary after a caesarean, and that Ava Marie would go to the nursery to receive her first bath. I gasped, and unwillingly agreed. I wanted her to stay with me.

The horrid pain from the surgery was finally evident as I laid impatiently in the recovery room annoyed at the stupid doctors and nurses for not allowing me to immediately offer my breast to my nine pound beauty. I was sure they were sticking her body with all sorts of needles by then and I wanted to hold her and give her comfort and protect her from those sadists.

Back in my room more upsetting news came. I wasn't able to see her for nearly three more hours "she has to be observed," they said. By an hour later the nurses in the nursery knew me by voice. "Yes, Gina, she's fine," they reassured me over and over trying to hide their slight ill feeling.

I couldn't take it anymore. I had to go there. What if she needed me? What if she's hungry? What if the nurses are mad at me for calling so much and take it out on her? "What if she gets switched," I yelled to Steven, as my hormones began adjusting back to normal. Despite Steven's suggestion of staying in bed I took a deep breath, clung to the side railing and let my mind drift away into the clouds. Seconds later I managed to sit up and eventually get off the bed and stand

upright. Then, feeling what seemed to be all the blood I had left in my body rush down to my six inch wound I reconsidered my actions but figured it would be more painful to get back on the bed than to keep going so I continued on in my search for her.

When I finally found the nursery, a nurse was already so gracefully bathing my fat little girl. I was jealous and envious but relieved at the same time that she was O.K and not crying. The nurse knowing that it would take me a while to get back to my room informed me through the glass window that in just a few minutes her bath would be over and she would bring her to me in my room.

About fifteen minutes later, the long awaited knock at the door finally arrived. There she was, swaddled in hospital sheets clean, fresh and awesome. She was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. My paranoia of her being switched at birth diminished, as this was definitely my baby. There was no confusing that angelic face.

As soon as I took out my breast and Ava felt my bare flesh she immediately shook her head in excitement of the feast that was before her. Steven, mom, my sister and my cousin all watched as she searched for her first gulp of milk. She latched on and immediate calmness overcame her and me.

It was then that I realized completely that this little baby that I created in my body would be dependent on me for the next eighteen years or so. I would be responsible for her. I would have to provide every single thing that she would need. Clothing, food, shelter, transportation, daycare and so on. How does one do that with the salary only a high school education can give? It's only feasible if I didn't mind being poor for the rest of my life, which was not an option for me. My daughter was not going to be poor.

I stayed home with Ava for one year and continued to breastfeed her. It took me about four months for my wound to completely heal and for me to be able to sleep on my stomach-- something that I hadn't done in over a year. When she turned a year old I happily enrolled in college and still continue to this day to excel in school.