

The Anatomy of a Mother's Tears

She asks me why I'm crying as I'm holding my newborn. I look into the concerned face of my 2 1/2- year old and wonder how to answer her question. I'm not crying because I'm sore or overwhelmed or sleep deprived beyond exhaustion. All those things are true, of course, but that's not why I'm crying. I'm crying because as I gaze at my newborn son, I'm remembering.

As I hold this child I remember holding our first son 11 years ago. I remember how young and clueless we were, first time parents trying so hard to do everything the right way. I remember that tiny little one bedroom apartment that was our home the first few months of his life. I remember how hard we thought our lives had become even though I could sit there holding him for hours at a time without interruption from other children. I remember how I used to feed him in the rocker we crammed in between the changing table and our closet. I remember the overwhelming love I felt as I held him, and it's the same way I feel holding my newborn now.

I remember a few years later, when our second son was born. I remember how we had moved into a real house and had space to spread out, yet every time I fed the new baby, my oldest was right there next to me. I remember "hosting" Easter dinner at our house when he was three days old, and everyone else brought all the food so I didn't have to do a thing. I remember the flexible schedule of two kids too young for school, and how we watched the 9:00 hour of PBS Kids every day for Clifford and Curious George, dancing and singing along at the top of our lungs to the theme music for Curious George. I remember the smell of his little newborn head and the feel of his smooth cheek when I kissed him, and it's the same smell and feel of my newborn today.

Fast forward a few years to another house and another new baby- this time a girl. I remember the euphoria I felt holding a daughter as I looked forward to the special mother-daughter bond. I remember her older brothers crowding around to look at her and kiss her gently on the head. I remember taking her to JCPenney for her newborn pictures when she was four days old, and buying fleece pajamas there to keep me warm during those night feedings in a cold Indiana winter when wind chills dropped below zero. I remember trying in vain to coordinate "rest time" for all three kids after the oldest was home from preschool and we had eaten lunch. I remember what I used to say to my new daughter every night as I put her to bed, and it's the same thing I say every night to my newborn now- "Mommy loves you, and Daddy loves you, and Jesus loves you most of all."

Another house and another baby later, I remember those first two weeks that passed in a haze because I had a terrible spinal headache. I remember how my six-year old son sat there on the couch holding her for hours at a time, never complaining, while I lay on the couch and read them the Great Illustrated Classics version of *King Solomon's Mines* or let them watch movies while I tried to sleep off my headache. I remember that we were in an Indiana heat wave, with five days in a row of record breaking temps. I remember bringing all four kids, including the newborn, to the baseball games for my oldest son, where we sat in the shade

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trying not to get sunburned. I remember the sweet little baby noises she made- the gurgles, grunts, and squeaks unique to a newborn, and it's the same noises my newest baby makes now.

But why, exactly, am I crying? I'm crying because my boys now know swear words and talk back to me, and my girls bicker and whine. I'm crying for the loss of innocence. And yet, although they've lost that infant innocence, they've also gained something as well. 11 years ago I could not have known that my son would grow into a confident 5th grader who rides his bike to school, makes it his personal goal to be the top **AR** reader for his class, and wants to play for the St Louis Cardinals someday. I could not have known almost 9 years ago that my second son would be the most energetic 3rd grader I've ever known, with a particular love for playing outside, yet underneath his boisterousness he has a soft side and a special place in his heart for his youngest siblings, whom he would protect at all costs. I could not have known 6 years ago that my new daughter would love art and stuffed dogs and have an incredible imagination that encompasses at least five imaginary friends. Two and a half years ago I could not have known that my newborn would grow into a bubbly, sweet toddler with an amazing vocabulary and a surprisingly astute sense of empathy for others. And as I gaze at my newborn today, I cannot know what he will grow into either. I cry because at the same time I miss the innocence of my children's newborn days, yet I am fiercely proud of the people they have grown into. And as their character develops further I will be privileged with a front row seat to see who they will become in their adult lives. But for now I'm content to sit here and stare into the cherubic face of my newborn.

"Mommy?" my toddler asks again, bringing me out of my reminiscing. I look at her and realize I haven't answered her question. Through my tears I smile and say, "It's okay, honey. Mommy's fine. These are happy tears. I'm crying because I'm blessed."

Ruth Meyers