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i did what when i was eleven?

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All the memories generically associated with one's sixth grade year do not in the least compare to the one experience that I had that year that will forever be ingrained in my memory.

Birthing a baby.

Let me immediately clarify that I myself was not giving birth to a child. My eleven-year-old self wanted nothing to do with boys or reproduction after the vivid sex education classes I had been forced to attend the year before.

The baby in question was my youngest brother.

My parents had always encouraged me and my four siblings to pursue whatever interested us, no matter how insane or irrational it was. I had a dream of being a baby doctor. Not just any doctor, but one who helped birth babies. I did not realize that those doctors had a more specialized title – obstetricians. My parents were completely thrilled by this new dream of mine. Why wouldn't they be? For two years I had been determined the only occupation worthy of my presence was that of a professional soccer player, so when my sudden decision to become a baby doctor was a relief.

I was under the impression that the process of birth was magical, quick and easy. When the doctors came into the hospital room, it would suddenly be time for a baby to arrive. The doctors might even have pleasant conversations with the parents as they helped to deliver the baby.

It's not that I was naïve. I knew how babies were born. My fifth grade teacher had gone into a lot of detail about the process, and in my sixth grade head I thought that I had the entire birthing process worked out.

It seemed a perfect job. Baby doctors got to be in the hospital room and help parents see their children for the first time. What more could I want to do with my life? I loved babies and helping out,

so this seemed the perfect job for me.

I remember the day my mom approached me with the radical idea. My older sister by sixteen months, Alex, and I had been sitting in the kitchen when she walked into the room. I don't recall where our dad was during this conversation, but I do remember that he was conveniently absent.

"Ryann," our mom said. "I know that you really want to be an obstetrician."

"No mom," I responded with a quick shake of my head. "I want to be a baby doctor; you know the kind that help to birth babies."

I could hear my sister stifling a laugh, but I focused my attention on our mom who was rubbing her massive pregnant stomach, which looked at that moment as if it was about to explode.

"Right, a baby doctor," our mom said with a smile. "Anyway, how would you like to be in the delivery room on the day that Mick is born?"

"Yes," I stammered back in my excitement.

I was so flabbergasted by what I had just been invited to witness that I did not truly think about what I had just committed myself to. The details were a blur, so I merely focused on the fact that I could brag about the fact that I had actually done what the doctors in hospitals do.

"Of course you're welcome to come too, Alex," our mom said, as I wiggled around on the kitchen chair.

I was so preoccupied that I almost missed my sister's response and her facial expression. Alex gave a weak smile and nodded before turning her attention away from me. Years later our mom described to us that she had known before even making the offer what Alex's response would be. At twelve and in seventh grade, Alex knew a little more than I did, which was maybe why she was not jumping for joy at the thought of witnessing a birth. But on the other hand, she was not going to let her little

sister show her up in anything, so she grudgingly accepted the invitation.

Once I calmed down enough, our mom explained the details of what we were going to do. Being as this was her sixth labor, she was well aware of what was going to happen and therefore extremely calm. She explained to Alex and me that no matter what day of the week this happened, she would make sure we were at the hospital.

That was when the waiting period began. I was excited that I was going to have a baby brother, but this new opportunity made the entire event seem much more intriguing. I could not wait to be in the hospital room and experience the real deal. I waited and waited, and then the day finally came.

I remember being told to get ready to go to the hospital on October 5th 2002. My stomach sank. I was actually going into the hospital to help birth my brother, and I knew nothing about how to birth a baby!

Now that I thought about it, what teachers had said about birth would in no way ensure a successful delivery. I suddenly understood that I was a six grader and nowhere near a certified baby doctor.

As all of those thoughts crashed in on me, I panicked. Backing out of the commitment and just visiting the newborn as usual a couple hours after it was born was the best option for everyone. The words "I can't" had even formed on my lips before I caught a glimpse of Alex. She was busily getting herself ready to go, and she had a determined look on her face.

I knew I could not back out. I had been the one who wanted to do this in the first place. I was the one who had been so insistent about wanting to be a baby doctor, and I knew that if I chickened out at the last minute, I would never be able to live it down.

I was going to be the doctor, not her, and there was

no way I was going to let her outshine me in my dream job even if we were only going to be watching the birth. I had made a commitment and I was going through with it.

I quickly got ready with my sister and rushed to the car.

I knew I was going to be able to keep it together. How could I be so nervous? I was not the one who had a baby inside of me that wanted to come out. What could go wrong when all I was going to do was sit quietly in a hospital room? In would be like school.

My sister and I were given sanitary paper robes to wear over our clothing to keep everything as clean as possible. Then the fun began.

The action had finally started after two long hours of waiting as our mom's contractions got closer and closer together. I was not a big fan of just sitting around while all of this happened, but I assured myself that when I became a real baby doctor I would not be forced to sit and wait this long. I would be going from one hospital room to another, helping the mothers to birth their babies.

Yet finally all the waiting paid off. A gorgeous young female doctor, as my mom described her, entered the room. When my mom had filled her in about the plan to let Alex and me watch the birth, Dr. Meshcat was very supportive. She even wanted to take it to the next level, and told Alex and me to scrub up.

Here I was, gloved up and standing next to the real baby doctor, telling myself that I was ready to go. I knew I could handle this, even if it was more than I had initially agreed to. I had eyed the baby doctor up and down and instantly made the assessment that I would look much better as a doctor than she did, which helped placate me.

My mom was lying down on her back with a white sheet covering her when the baby doctor said it was time to get the baby out.

Let me just say that when the doctor pulled

back the white sheet and made my mom spread her legs, I was not prepared.

I remember the initial repulsion at what I saw. I should not be allowed to see this. This person lying down on the hospital bed was my mother – but that did not stop the baby doctor.

I wanted to throw up. In no way was this experience what I had signed up for. I heard the doctor talk to my mom as I watched her begin pushing the baby out.

Blood stained the white sheets and I wondered why on earth the hospital would use such light colored sheets if they knew something like this was going to happen. It seemed like such a waste. Sweat dripped down my mom's neck as she gripped the hospital bed and pushed with all her might.

Alex and I were standing directly next to the doctor at the foot of the bed. To say that we got a full view of what was going on would be a gross understatement. I watched as a little slimy white thing that the doctor described as my brother slowly emerged from all of the blood, head first.

I was thoroughly repulsed. In no way shape or form did this come close to the magical vision I had associated with what baby doctors did. This was just plain gross.

Why didn't they teach this in sex education classes? I'm sure that if the schools made the entire sixth grade come to the hospital to witness a birth, then all of the boys and girls would stay very far away from one another for a very long time.

I did not want to be in the small hospital room for one more instant, let alone make this my career. All I wanted was to get out of the room. I did not want to be a baby doctor anymore. In fact, anything would be better than this job.

The same instant when I made up my mind that I wanted to do anything with my life other than what I was participating in right now was the moment the doctor decided was the perfect time to engage my sister and me in what she was doing.

“All right girls,” she said with her hands in the pants of my mom that I was trying to avoid looking at. “Why don't you two help me get this baby out?”

The doctor gave my sister and me a quick encouraging look. She did not seem to realize that I no longer wanted to help get the baby out. The baby could stay in my mom for all I cared.

But just then, a small noise emanated from Alex's mouth sealed both of our fates.

“Okay,” she said weakly as she slowly moved her hands down to the forbidden area.

I stared at her in shock. I could still run out of the room and attempt to forget this entire experience, but I knew that even fleeing the room would not erase what I was seeing now. I could stand back and allow Alex to be the sole helper but I knew if I did, I would never be able to live this moment down. And besides, it had been my stupid dream of being a baby doctor that had gotten us here in the first place.

I told myself that the faster I got down and helped to get this baby out, the faster I would be able to leave this horrid memory behind me forever.

In the end, even though both my sister and I were completely mortified at what we were doing, we stuck to our commitment. Both our sets of little gloved up hands were right down in the action with the doctor. We helped grab our baby brother and were consequently the first ones to see him, even before our mom and dad.

Though thoroughly shaken about the whole experience, I managed miraculously to keep my face poised well enough the entire time to fool the doctor into thinking that I was enjoying myself. The doctor even rewarded my bravery by letting me cut the umbilical cord that attached my brother to my mom. “Lucky girl,” was how she described what I got to do.

If only she could hear the sixth grade foul language I was yelling to myself as I tried to keep myself from throwing up all over my new brother.