

A pregnant woman on a tall bed. A woman with a glove on and a probe in her hand. Eight people gathered around the bed. The room is dark except for a lighted lamp behind the ultrasound machine, the screen of the monitor, and the screen of a TV. I am looking through the doorway from the opposite side of the hall. I can't see the eight people, but I know they are there and I can hear them. Despite the darkness, the room is filled with joy. There is constant chatter about what is on the TV screen. I can see the monitor of the machine. Some people might have a hard time making it out, but the family seems to have no trouble. I can tell what it is. After all, my mom owns the business, and I see images like these all the time. They are the images of an ultrasound. The whole family has come to see Brigid Valentine. This day is special for this family. Their baby has anencephaly. And John and Ariana, her parents, and their family have come to see her for some of the few moments they ever will, and their families have joined them.

I think about when the family first came through the door. They were early for their appointment. The parents have a two-year-old girl, Winnifred, who absolutely loves the balloons brought by the Students for Life chapter from St. Patrick School. I was expecting a certain measure of sadness when they came, but there was none. Everyone was happy. Thinking now, I realize why that is. They want to enjoy every moment. After all, that's what my mom puts on her Facebook page with pictures of customers, it is on a sign at her office, and that's what she had me put on their cake. Enjoy every moment.

I remember when my mom first told me about this family. It was at one of our "fifteen minute" meetings with Ralph Willemin (which, mind you, turned out to be three hours). We were discussing future plans and my mom brought it up. I was thinking that the Students for Life should do something for this, she said. We discussed it a little bit, and then came back to it after Ralph had left. We worked out the details and sent out the information.

"Does she have my nose?" That was John's mom. "Oh, she's beautiful." "She's hiding, she must be stubborn." "Say hi to Sissy!" "Hi, Sissy!" I can feel the joy just pouring out of the room through their words, every one of them filled with joy.

I also think about the joy when they came into the lobby for the first time today. I remember their two-year-old girl, Winnifred, (also known as Winnie) who was thrilled with the balloons. Watching her play with her daddy was amazing. They would blow raspberries on them, one at a time. Then John rubbed the balloons on her hair, making it stand up. Watching the whole family play with Winnie, giving her fist bumps and untangling her from the balloons, showed how much love was between these people.

They are done now. I get three pictures from my mom to put in the picture frame we bought. I set the frame by the cake and balloons. The family comes out, chatting amongst themselves. John cuts the cake. Judith and I talk with Cindy, the grandmother of the baby, Brigid. She told us thank you a couple of times, both times looking like she was near tears. She finally comes up to us to truly express her appreciation. She begins by telling us that she feels very passionate about everything going on in her family, and to excuse her if she tears up. She tells us about Ariana and John, and what they are going through. Now she asks Ariana if she can share with us CaringBridge. I will admit that I am curious to hear what this was going to be. She takes out phone and goes to a web address (with some difficulty; it takes her a few minutes). She shows Judith and I a site where one can put journal entries and photo albums. The site is specifically designed for people going through health journeys. She shows us some of the entries, at least where they are, and then lingers for a few moments on the photos in the album. The fact that she and Ariana were willing to share this with us touches both Judith and I.

In further conversation, we learn that this family is Orthodox. We share with them that we are Catholic, which I think they had picked up on, learning that we are from St. Pats. Upon learning our similarity, conversation opens to prayer a little more. Upon learning our similarity, we feel closer.

As I am sitting here, thinking back upon this beautiful family, I realize the strength it took for them to do this. Not only did they come to see their beautiful little girl, they also allowed us to make a celebration. They certainly did. There was zero negativity in the room. The only tears were tears of joyful sadness, but there was never negativity. I would like to thank this family for sharing their children with us. I know that what I have written will not make up for those who were unable to make it, but I hope it at least somewhat conveys the feeling of awe that gripped me from beginning to end.