

ON BEING PREGNANT

Life Experience

Sheilah Queen

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I stepped out of the Murphy Health Department, clutching a crisp, white document containing the findings of my last exam: six weeks pregnant. At home, we had a twelve-year-old daughter and two sons aged fourteen and sixteen. I couldn't believe at forty-years-old I was about to start a whole new chapter. When I broke the news to my husband, he took a deep breath and assured me that everything would be all right. Immediately, I remembered my discussion with a cardiologist several months before. Revealing Mitral Valve Prolapse, he mentioned his surprise that there hadn't been issues in my previous pregnancies. Another one could be life-threatening. I was afraid for my own health and wondered if this baby would make it to full term.

The first step recommended by my obstetrician was to make an appointment with another cardiologist, who performed an endoscopic exam. During the exam, a large scope was inserted into my body to assess the functioning of my heart, and to determine if it was safe to continue my pregnancy. Scared from the procedure, I drifted off from the anesthesia holding the hand of the cardiologist. He concluded that with regular check-ups we could expect a healthy outcome. However, I would need to undergo open-heart surgery six months after giving birth. My doctor advised me to get my check-ups at the high-risk clinic in Ashville and to deliver at Memorial Hospital. Since I didn't drive, the health department arranged for someone to take me to my appointments when my husband was working.

In the first months, there was concerns about potential cognitive impairment in the baby. Although a test was recommended, I was hesitant to proceed. Worried about any risk to the fetus, I sought advice from a Christian friend who was a nurse. She asked me, "Would it change anything?" I thought to myself, "No, this baby deserves a chance at life." Eventually, the doctors dismissed their concerns. Later, an elderly friend asked about the results. She tried to reassure me, saying that things would turn out fine, and to place my trust in God's hand.

My husband and I thought it best to keep my condition a secret for a few weeks due to the possibility of complications. However, our fourteen-year-old son discovered a note from the prenatal clinic and shared it with his siblings. At first, they were skeptical, as they thought their mother was too old to be expecting. Despite this, life continued as normal. I worked while they attended school. Our time was jam-packed with football practice, Friday night games, gymnastics classes, monthly 4-H meetings, and church. We were constantly busy. To be honest, I was relieved that the days flew by so fast. Choosing a name for our new family member was quiet the adventure. I had my heart set on Hannah, but the kids quickly voiced their concerns. They said school would be tough for her.

"They'll just call her Hanna-Barbera," they warned. After some back and forth, we settled on the name Rachel instead.

I opened up about my health issues to my Sunday School class. They were very supportive and soon everyone in the area knew. The morning I was admitted to Memorial Mission someone called WKRK radio station asking for prayer for me. We arrived at the hospital at 6:00A.M. After checking our ID's, the hospital staff hooked me up to monitors. When someone asked my husband if he was the father, he replied, "I sure wouldn't be here if I wasn't." Once they induced my labor, my heart rate dropped and the care team acted quickly to fix it. Twelve hours later, we introduced our daughter into the world.

She celebrated her birthday on October 24th, and now she's a proud mom of two beautiful kids. Reflecting on that day thirty years ago, holding my precious baby girl, I remember thinking that all the struggles I faced during those nine months were worth it.