

## The “I Shoulds”

By Tracey Crocker Rohnert

My last experience with miscarriage is filled with the feeling that there were so many things I should have done differently. And after two years I feel I should be all over it by now but I am not. These feelings linger over and haunt what should be the happiest time of my life as I get to know my new son. I should perhaps share these feelings with someone. But who?

Precious few people even knew I was pregnant. I was late in finding out myself and an earlier miscarriage taught me to be very cautious when announcing pregnancy. I was 18 weeks along when I lost this baby, a month shy of when I usually make my news public. I won't ever put myself in the position of having to face everyone from family to acquaintances like the librarian, with the news that I had miscarried. Maybe I shouldn't feel that way though, because I certainly lacked for support during my last loss due to this. And sometimes when I'm sitting with my sister and we're looking at my baby boy I long to tell her that there was another baby before that I lost. The feeling passes as I realize just how impassable a gap there is between us on that score now.

It was two years ago that I mistook morning sickness for the flu and because I was still nursing a one- year-old daughter, didn't notice I was pregnant until I actually felt movement. Or maybe I was denying it all along. I'm not sure. All I know is when I first found out I was pregnant I was devastated. I knew I wanted more children than the two I already had, but not this soon. I put my daughter in the backpack and walked along the creek with her thinking of how short our time alone together had been. Initially, I suppose, I even wished the pregnancy away but by the time we were walking home I was adjusting, thinking of how fun her first year had been and how much I loved her and how I would of course love the next one.

I didn't have very much more time with that baby, so I will always have to remember those initial negative feelings. I went to the doctor and because there was a question about fetal growth (I had gained no weight at 18 weeks), plans were made for a sonogram to be done. In the meantime no heartbeat could be found. This is the part that's hard to write so without going into it further: Let's just say I found out the baby had died. No one seemed to care but me about why it had happened and the doctor found the question trivial and came up with several "possible" explanations which included cord accidents and genetic abnormality but these were given just to pacify me. I know, I should have found another doctor. He and my husband and I got together to talk out our options. My choice was to wait it out. A part of me was still hoping that a mistake had been made. (When I had my first miscarriage I was sent for a sonogram afterward, and I hoped that I had been pregnant with twins and that they would find I still had a baby in my womb. They did not, of course.)

The doctor insisted that the only course of treatment was something called a Dilation and Evacuation. I wanted to wait for nature to take its course but that was ruled out because of the possibility of infection and, "Why put yourself through that?" Nor would he consider inducing labor. I went through with this surgery which left me initially feeling just grateful to be alive. There was no baby to see and I never got the courage to even ask the sex. I was

treated as though I had mental problems because this upset me so much, but nobody wanted to deal with the emotional pain that went along with all this.

There are little things that will forever bother me: The night before the surgery I lay awake hoping to feel the fetal flutters that had been absent for more than a week. When I got to the hospital my name was on a roster of patients who were having therapeutic abortions. I was given tranquilizers and pain medication by the doctor and I used those for two weeks to dull my pain. And I was guilty. So guilty. Maybe if I had gotten prenatal care sooner...I shouldn't have thought about not wanting the baby...And how could I want to die when I had two other beautiful children who needed me so? Was it belittling their existence to mourn the life of one who never lived?

I have this new baby now, and looking at him and loving him the way I do makes me sad for the baby I lost. I shouldn't feel that way, but I do. How selfish to want my five children when I have three who are healthy and perfect. Sometimes I wonder if this is an invitation to God to bring more tragedy to my family.

There is a light for me and it is all the wonderful materials of support I have recently been exposed to. They tell me that the only 'should' is that I should have gotten better after my loss and the rest of this is normal. I weep as I read all the other stories but then I am so grateful that you, the other mothers and fathers who have experienced this loss, give me permission to do so. That is perhaps the greatest gift of all.