



Birth Rights: A Tale of Prematurity

Leah M. Reasor

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Leah M. Reasor assures readers from the beginning that her twins, Marcus and Mirielle, did survive after being born seventeen weeks premature in 2004—but her nail-biting memoir will still leave them wondering how the twins will make it through a difficult pregnancy and their first two years of life. In a conversational tone with a no-holds-barred attitude, the author sorts through her anger and frustration as her high-risk obstetrician (the only one in her rural Tennessee town) overlooks obvious red flags. She also deals with the guilt she feels as she secretly wishes for a miscarriage to return her to her less complicated life, with only a preschooler and toddler to care for.

Once Reasor goes into labor, however, she becomes the twins' most powerful advocate. Although she is a nurse herself, she describes becoming overwhelmed by the myriad machines which provide her micropreemies with round-the-clock care in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU): incubators to maintain the babies' skin temperature and moisture, oscillators for the lungs, catheters in the umbilical blood vessels because the immature circulatory system cannot handle a normal intravenous tube ("the needle to establish the IV would have to be as thin as a hair"), bilirubin lights for the kidneys, heart monitors, and more. Borrowing from Dante, she reveals the four rings of NICU "hell," from respiratory failure to intracranial hemorrhage, "a tidy way of saying the baby's brain bleeds."

After making it through the emotional roller coaster within the NICU, including the near-death of one of her twins that makes her wonder whether the fight to keep micropreemies alive is worth their suffering, Reasor must tackle life at home with the twins, still with plenty of machines, as well as no help, severe fatigue, and the lingering possibility that the twins' lives could yet take a turn for the worse. At times she feels abandoned by God and that she is a failure as a mother, wife, and nurse. Reasor explains how she battled her way back from depression and exhaustion to speak up for her children's rights to obtain the care they needed, no matter the cost.

As the number of twins continues to increase in the United States, this stirring yet hopeful memoir serves as a guide for parents and caregivers of micropreemie multiples, with encouragement to learn from the mistakes and successes of Reasor's experiences. Parents of any number of preemies will discover the seemingly infinite complexities that arise from premature birth and the true miracles that occur in bringing to life and keeping them alive. Heartrending photos, such as a tiny hand gripping Reasor's pinkie finger, reaffirm these beliefs. The author also reaches out to the medical community, asking them to look at preemies and their families holistically and to find better ways to care for them. She wonders, "If we can make wireless connections with our Blackberries to the Internet, surely someone can come up with a remote wireless pulse oximeter and an earring for the probe. It's not that hard, is it?"

ANGELA LEEPER (July 1, 2010)

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