

Holding Elayna

This evening, as I do most days lately, I spent an hour holding my little granddaughter, Elayna, while she slept peacefully on my chest next to my heart. She was wrapped snugly in a blanket her Grandma made her and seemed oblivious to the quiet activity of the ICN where she is sleeping, growing, and healing in preparation for the day when she can join Brother Eli, Mom, and Dad at home. She is very tiny and silent lying here in Grandpa's arms. The nursing staff do most of the routine care so I have an easy job – I just hold her, and sing to her, and love her. Sometimes I tell her stories about her Daddy, long ago when he was small and sleeping, and how much I loved him then. I make up nonsense songs. I marvel at her tiny hands and feet and perfect little ears.

I am told that these little ones whose days are spent mostly with strangers and schedules need to be held and loved, to feel a heartbeat and hear a familiar voice, and that Elayna will grow better in an envelope of love. So I come every evening to hold her, if only for an hour, to tell her that her Grandpa loves her “an awful lot”. And, as often happens during that hour, the reality of her precarious but wonderful existence in this world, in her parent’s life - and by extension in mine, overwhelms me again. The ICN is a sterile environment and with both hands holding my precious bundle I can’t wipe my eyes, so the tears run down my face into my beard.

“Is everything all right?” my granddaughter’s nurse asks. I nod dumbly, mindful of waking Elayna, and unable to explain what I am feeling anyway. The nurse pats me on my sterile shoulder and moves on to more needy babies. I’m sure she has seen tears before.

ICN’s can be anxious places – after all, “Intensive care” has a reason, but these hours spent with Elayna are anything but. Yes, there are medical and developmental unknowns in her future. Yes, there may be days when surgery or separation or struggles will wrench her Mom and Dad's heart. But she will be safe. These things are certain: against all odds, Elayna was born and is alive and growing. She is loved lavishly by her parents and grandparents, and by God. She is sleeping in my arms.

I am holding a Miracle.