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From Broken to Blessed: My Journey Through Pregnancy

Raising a child as a single mother was never a part of my plan. I never imagined the ache I would feel of doing this without my child's father. I never pictured the nights of teething, temperatures, and runny noses. I also never imagined the depth of love you could feel for another human, the love I feel for my child. Curveballs are scary, but if we let them, they often times help us become the greatest version of ourselves. For me, that was the day I became a mother.

THE TEST (DECEMBER 2018)

It was my first semester of college. I held such an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. I was finally starting to see my life beginning to fall into place. At this point in my life I had a plan, goals, and what I thought to be a supportive boyfriend. I stood in my bathroom at home all alone and held the test in my shaking hands. I began praying to God that he would not let my suspicions become true. I just could not lose everything I had been working so hard on. I had taken many tests this semester, all progressively more stressful than the last. I had

actually just finished my finals. I was hoping for a peaceful Christmas break with my family. Glancing down at the results my stomach dropped as the test slipped through my hands tumbling to the ice-cold floors of my bathroom. All my hard work and plans seemed to go crashing down with it.

Staring at the positive pregnancy test on the ground my whole body began to tremble as tears slid down my face. *How would I get through this? How would I tell my family? How would I finish school? Was the man that I could hardly stand to live with really going to be the father of my child?* All these thoughts began to swarm my mind and I thought I was going to pass out. This was the first major curveball in my 18 years. The emotions that flooded me were foreign, and I didn't know how to process them.

I heard my mom walk through the front door and began to shakily stand up. I took a deep breath and immediately went to my mom's room and asked to speak to her. She did not know how to take the news. I saw a look of sympathy take over her features as she spoke. "I hope you know these next few years will not be easy". I nodded my head as she continued. "I'm not necessarily mad at you Hayley, I just wish that you did not have to go through this with someone who treats you like Joe does. Are we even sure he is going to keep a job and help you support the baby? I am worried about you having to go through this alone!"

My stomach began twisting as she voiced the same thoughts I just had been trying to process about the now father of my child. It did not seem real.

That night I entered a state of denial. I took a total of 4 pregnancy tests, hoping and praying that the first box had been defective. I could not possibly be pregnant! I was only 18! Not to mention Joe, my child's father, had not entirely been boyfriend material lately. The arguments had seemed to increase to almost daily. It seemed nothing I did ever pleased him, and

he would constantly look for reasons to pick a fight. I frequently made excuses for him. “Oh, it’s because he was in the foster system for so long.” “You should see how his adopted family treated him!” “He just needs some time and help to get back on his feet.” These had been the most recent excuses I had told my family.

The days passed, and my worries only continued to grow. Despite all the positive words and support I had been receiving my worries and stress only continued to grow. I had lost 20 pounds in the first two weeks. It was because of this weight loss that my doctors agreed they wanted to see me early. This was just the first of many problems that would arise within these hectic nine months. I felt like a shell of the person I used to be. I had no idea how I would make it through this new and unknown season.

I remember asking my mom to tell the rest of our family. I was too ashamed. Most of my immediate family had heard the news by Christmas time. Most of my family took the news well and all agreed that they would do whatever they could to help me finish my degree. School was something everyone agreed I should not give up on. Christmas, my favorite time of year, seemed to speed by me in a blur. The stress of what was happening and the constant arguing with my child’s father made the holiday season seem irrelevant.

The Appointment (March 14th, 2019)

I sat in the stuffy doctor’s office bouncing my leg as my nerves continued to rise. Excitement was coursing through my body. Today was the day I would find out the gender of my baby. In the weeks leading up to this appointment, I had finally begun to process the idea of becoming a mom. I had no idea one could feel so much excitement, worry, and love all at once. I

hadn't even met the tiny human inside of me, yet I loved this child more than I could express. Words fall flat in comparison to the emotions I felt in my heart.

A couple of weeks earlier I had downloaded a pregnancy app to track the growth of my baby all the way up to the due date August 15th. However, with this newfound excitement and information, I also began to worry. I worried about all the possible things that could go wrong. *What if I ate the wrong thing? What if the heartbeat just stopped one day? What cold medicines did the doctor say I could take?* I began to monitor every little thing that I put into my body. I became overly aware of all the stress in my life and the toll that it was possibly taking on my child. The what-ifs tormented me.

I was pulled out of my thoughts by the constant ding of my mother's phone. This had been happening all morning. My mother had taken the day off work to be with me, despite her hectic workload. She had been receiving calls and texts all morning from her boss and customers. She is a commercial loan officer, and her workload is intense. My mom, despite how selfless and constant she had been for me throughout this pregnancy, tended to always be engrossed in her work life. I knew she was there for me, but her distractions made me feel insignificant and emotional.

Where was my son's father? He was supposedly at home searching for his 3rd job this year. Despite how hard my family worked to keep finding him jobs he never failed to get fired within the first month of working one. *Was he really looking for a job like he had so profusely claimed to me that morning as the main reason he could not be in this waiting room with me? Was he on another texting app talking to other women like I had already caught him doing multiple times throughout our two-year relationship?* I tried to stop these ugly thoughts from swimming around in my mind, but it was almost tragicomic how I had somehow managed to trap

myself and my child in such a futile situation. It seemed the issues and obstacles that were present with my child's father were always someone else's fault, and I began to grow weary worrying for him. I exerted so much energy defending him, and my faith in his character was growing thin.

"Hayley Reagan!" The nurse called my name, ripping me out of my thoughts. I stood as my mother ended her phone call and together we followed the nurse to the back.

The sonographer entered the room and greeted us as she spread a cold gel over my stomach. I shiver as she begins the ultrasound. "Do you see that right there? It's a boy!" I heard her exclaim. An overwhelming plethora of emotions took me over as I tried not to cry. Relief surged through my body when I could hear the heartbeat and see my baby moving. Excitement was also starting to bubble at this newfound information on the gender.

The Sickness (June 2019)

I was currently hunched over the toilet heaving as all the contents came rushing out of my stomach. The smell only causing me to gag and more to come spewing out. To be honest I did not know if the morning sickness had started as a side effect of my pregnancy or as a side effect of Joe's departure. I felt broken on many different levels. My body was changing. My life was changing, and my heart was breaking.

It was only a week ago he had been screaming at me and shoving me to the ground outside my house over some insignificant argument that he had instigated. Looking into the eyes of this man that I had been best friends with growing up he was now unrecognizable. I had been in denial so long over the mental and now physical abuse I had been enduring from someone who claimed to love me so much, but now I could see it and I began to thank the Lord for him

leaving that night. As bad as it hurt to see him go, I knew myself and my son would be safer without him near us.

I remember the desperation in my voice as I begged him to stay. “Please don’t leave! River will be here within the next few weeks and I don’t want to go through this alone!” No matter how much I sobbed and begged him to stay he would not. He claimed that the stress of becoming a father and everything else had become too much for him. At the time I thought his departure was the worst thing to happen.

It was not until later that night that I received a screenshot from my friend. Apparently, he had posted some video on his social media of him drinking and taking drugs. He moved in with some convicted felons he had met through his past job and I did not hear from him for weeks. I spent the final weeks of my pregnancy adapting to this new idea of raising my son alone and the constant worries of how I would explain his father’s absence to him when he was grown. I wanted so badly to be a good mother. I wanted to be his protector, provider, and greatest supporter. I honestly didn’t know if I was strong enough to do it, but I knew I was going to try because I already loved my son more than anyone in the world.

The Birth (August 19, 2019)

I woke up at 7:00 AM to grab my overnight bag and head to the hospital. It was now 4 days past my due date and the doctors finally decided it was best to go ahead and induce me. I was definitely ready to get this baby out! It had been a long and exhausting summer, and I was growing weary.

My mother and I arrived at the University of Tennessee Medical Center around 8:00 am and they quickly got me set up in a room and started the IVs. I have never been a fan of needles,

but after all the tests and appointments I had undergone I was no longer scared of needles or uncomfortable with the feeling of being so vulnerable.

Around 11:00 am a doctor had come into my room and explained they would be breaking my water. This happened to be the start to a whole slew of problems. Apparently, River had already passed his first bowel movement. The doctors explained this could potentially be dangerous as he moved out of the birthing canal and could possibly get some stuck in his lungs. They informed me that 5 other nurses from the NICU would be present in the room during my birth.

I was in labor for 11 hours that day and faced many hardships. The medicine that was being used to induce me began to affect River's heartbeat and they had to take me off of it. Because of this the doctors had been scared of a natural birth and began to prepare for a Cesarean delivery just in case.

I was able to give natural birth to my son at 10:50 PM. It was the hardest yet most rewarding day of my life. We spent several days in the hospital. River and I both ran a fever for a few days but eventually began to improve. My family rallied around me, and I would not have made it through those days without them and their prayers. It was in that moment at the hospital, exhausted from labor, emotional from the heartaches I had been through, that I realized sometimes the curveballs in life give you the most rewarding moments.