

Challenges & frustrations

Mother sees God's hand in couple's journey to make a family

By Anne Lienemann

Our journey began on the altar, October 10th 1992, when we vowed in front of God, the priest, our family and friends that we would 'accept children openly and lovingly from God.'

Our first pregnancy happened on our honeymoon. The excitement was awesome. Hopes and dreams were immediate upon learning of this new life. We miscarried at six weeks. We were both devastated. I didn't understand it at all. It's supposed to happen that you marry, get pregnant, and have a baby, right? From there I went into mission mode. I wanted a baby more than anything.

Our lessons on earth take time and living life. I also learned men and women deal very differently with grief, especially miscarriages. Unfortunately we ended up getting good at knowing each others needs for healing.

We got pregnant again in 1994. All was going well. I made a trip to Ireland for a friend's wedding. Upon going to Mass one Sunday, as I entered the church, I blessed my tummy with holy water knowing at that moment something wasn't quite right. I also felt the hand of God holding us securely. When I returned home my husband and I went to the doctor for a regular scheduled appointment. The midwife could not find a heartbeat.

Tears immediately began to fall down my cheeks. She said: "Don't worry, sometimes the baby hides behind the placenta and we can't hear the heartbeat. We'll do an ultrasound."

I knew the baby had died. I believe he had died the day I blessed my tummy. They did the ultrasound and found the baby had died. We delivered by induction the following day. Conroy P. Lienemann was 20 weeks old gestation. We did not receive good care at the time and were told: "Well, try again."

We then found Dr. Paul Spencer, a great pro-life doctor. He was pro-active immediately. We found I was a carrier of a chromosome abnormality. We may never have kids, we were told, or it's a 50-50 chance whether the baby would be healthy when we conceive. We had two more miscarriages at about 10 weeks. I questioned whether I could deal with all of this.

We then were called to adoption. After 18 months of the process, we were getting a little girl from Korea. We knew of her for two months. We were told she would arrive in two weeks or less. Less than a week later on a Friday, our social worker called and said adoptions from Korea had been closed and she was not coming. My body felt almost like I was miscarrying. Saturday was a painful, sad day,

grieving our loss.

We prayed together that weekend and a peace came over us. Once again, the Lord's hand is so secure. There are no worries when we choose to remain close to Him.

Monday morning, my husband got a call from his boss. He offices from home. He came upstairs and by the look on his face I thought he may have been fired. "I just talked to Brent, he wants to know if we want to adopt his sister-in-law's baby.

The Lord placed Sean in our arms two and a half months later. Sean, upon learning of his adoption when he was about 3 and a half, looked at a picture of Mark and I holding him and said "there's me when God put me in your arms."

One year and one week later, we had Dan. Our first successful pregnancy! Less than two years later came Morgan. We miscarried two more times, back-to-back after Morgan was born. The second miss was after surgery I had from internal bleeding from a cyst rupturing on my ovary.

When Morgan was three, Emma was born — healthy and smiling! We were at a high risk clinic so we drove the doctors crazy refusing all of the tests they wanted to do. We got pregnant again and learned when I was 11 weeks, I possibly had ovarian cancer, and our baby did not look healthy and he would more than likely die within the next few weeks. So, we could terminate the pregnancy now. I said, "You want me to kill our baby? How is that going to help me?"

I was set up to have surgery during the second trimester, the safest time for the baby. I went in for another ultra-sound and the doctor said my ovary looked fine. The masses did not look cancerous and no

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surgery was needed. After being told the baby would not survive past the first trimester, the mental anguish was horrible. I thought 'I can't carry a baby another twenty weeks again and have him die.'

I grew close to St. Joseph during this time. I did a 31-day novena. Previous, I could barely do a nine-day novena, let alone 31, but I did it, only by the grace of God. One night after I had prayed I fell asleep. I woke up, gasped, and saw St. Joseph illuminated

in bright green looking over a cradle with a baby inside. I knew from that point on whatever our journey was, we were not alone and St. Joseph was taking care of this baby.

I believe our baby died on All Saints or All Souls Day 2005. (Mother's intuition.) We delivered by induction, Joseph W. Lienemann November 23rd, about 30 weeks' gestation.

Just when you think you can't handle any more, the hand of God scoops you up and holds you tight.

I had wanted to end my fertility when I had found out Joseph was not healthy. I had 11 pregnancies, my ovary rupture, an ovarian cancer scare, I was done.

I called one of my good friends who is a priest and asked him about me getting my tubes tied. He knew all we had been through. I'm crying at this point, and he said, no not by Church teaching. I really thought it was a no-brainer that the Church would understand our circumstance. I asked another friend who is a priest. Same answer. I went to one more priest. Maybe they don't really get it! Same answer. Through this last pregnancy with Joseph I anguished more over my fertility than anything.

So, back to the vows and that life journey thing ... Slowly through much prayer, tears and the Holy Spirit on double time, He placed many people in my life to help me understand and to accept the Church's teaching. Removing God from our marriage would not ease my pain, or make life yippy skippy!

He just held us so tightly for the past 14 years. Was I going to have Him surgically removed? Thankfully my husband is respectful of me and supports my choice. We are still on our journey — one day at a time.

Thankfully, because of the wonderful spiritually beautiful people God placed in our lives, we are still relying on God to hold us with His strong and mighty hand. When our kids ask us for another baby I can honestly answer, it is in God's hands. Our children learned a lot through our last pregnancy and I was amazed at how many lives our unseen Joseph touched in his short life of 30 weeks.

Praise God for His love and compassion! ■

*Ann and Mark Lieneman live in
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