

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

The unborn twins would not live.
The doctor advised an abortion,

by Jennifer Randall Hotz

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While the abortion debate remains largely theoretical for many people, it is much more than a political issue for me—it is deeply personal. I was faced with the abortion decision 23 weeks into my second pregnancy. On Feb, 9, 1995, an ultrasound revealed that little Madeleine and Margaret were joined at the chest, attached from below the breastbone to above where their belly buttons would have been.

My obstetrician urged me to “terminate the pregnancy.” I told him I would not kill my daughters; I wanted to give them the best chance at life that I could.

The next day, my husband and I went to a well-known hospital in Philadelphia in order to find out the condition of the girls’ hearts and other vital organs and to try to determine what could be done to save our daughters. Unfortunately, a fetal echocardiogram revealed grim news: their hearts were fused into one shared heart that had several defects.

Further tests showed a single liver and possible anomalies of the twins’ digestive systems.

A room filled with specialists advised us, once again, that abortion would be the recommended course of “treatment.” Once again, we told them that we would not kill our daughters. The doctors ordered bed rest for me, fearing that a pre mature delivery would leave the girls with no chance for survival.

Our worst fears came true. On March 21, I was taken to Philadelphia in active labor. Complicating my labor was acute polyhydramnios (an extreme buildup of amniotic fluid), gestational diabetes and a kidney infection. The doctors spent nearly a week trying to control my labor, but they could not get the contractions to stop. After two nights of intense back labor, we realized that we couldn’t prevent the twins from coming. They arrived by C-section at 1:17 a.m., on March 28, 1995.

As soon as Madeleine and Margaret were born, they started dying. They never cried. They only opened their beautiful blue eyes once, for my husband. Our pastor baptized them. The doctors felt that they could not save our daughters, so we chose to spend our time with them talking to them and loving them the best that we could.

What do you say to someone you have longed to meet for almost 30 weeks, someone who would need a lifetime to absorb your overwhelming love for them? We had a mere 43 minutes. I felt strangely tongue-tied, overwhelmed by my love for them and

frustrated by my inability to give them a lifetime of love and wisdom and nurturing in the brief time that we had with them.

I told them I loved them, and I was sorry things worked out this way. I told them to rest in Christ's love. I told them I would never forget them; they would always live in my heart, and I couldn't wait to spend an eternity with them in heaven.

Their hearts beat slower and slower, and then finally stopped. They looked as if they were going to sleep. They looked at peace. My husband and I held them the rest of the night, until the sun rose in the morning. My mom came to see her granddaughters, to say good-bye. I gave them over to the nurse at dawn, feeling that if I didn't release them then, I might never give them up. It tore out my heart.

Madeleine and Margaret looked a lot like my oldest daughter did when she was born. They had blond hair, blue eyes, their father's nose and their mother's chin. We found them to be breathtakingly beautiful.

Though I lost the chance to be with Madeleine and Margaret in this lifetime, I feel like the most blessed person in the world to have known my precious daughters, however briefly.

After we learned the extent of the girls' physical defects, we knew the odds were against them—we knew they would probably die. Throughout the pregnancy, I savored every moment I had with Madeleine and Margaret. If they woke up at 5:30 a.m. (as they usually did, like clockwork), I was up with them, talking to them, gently rubbing their arms and legs through my belly. They responded to me with animated kicks and punches, our early morning chat, the nonverbal dance of mother/child bonding. Who would have thought that a "night owl" like me would grow to love that magical hour before dawn, when life was not doctors and tests and dire predictions, when we were simply a family and daughters sharing with one another?

I would give anything to have just one second of that time back. Yet, despite the torment of losing the twins, despite all of the pain I went through to save them, it was worth it all just for the time I had with my daughters.

When I hear the pro-choice argument that abortion is "needed" for mothers who carry babies with abnormalities, I feel both anger and sadness. We do not have to help a dying child die. My daughters died peacefully. They died loved. They died in dignity. They received the joyous gift of baptism. I would not have taken any of that away from them, nor have made them endure the unimaginable pain of abortion.

When I look at the pictures I have of Madeleine and Margaret, I see two little girls loved by God beyond all human comprehension—who deserved a chance at life, no matter how small. I see two little girls who were painstakingly crafted by their Creator and who, at this very moment, are enjoying eternity with Him. I see two little girls who, despite their physical defects, truly were "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:14)

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