

Misty's Story

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND CARISSA'S LAW

When I was born in August of 1983, my parents were unaware of the challenges I would bring with me into the world. Immediately after I was born, they were given the choice to withhold feeding and allow me to die peacefully, or to force me to spend what little time I had suffering. The doctors said I wasn't expected to live through the night, so it was best to let me go. Being the people that they were, and given the fact that they had tried for so long to have another child after my brother, my parents refused that option, and I am forever grateful. I can't imagine what it would have been like to lay in an incubator in need of food, medical care, and love, and not receive any of it.

Instead of choosing to allow my natural death, my parents entered an unfamiliar, scary world of spine surgery, brain surgery, urinary catheters, IV's and more. Both of them afraid of what the future held, and my mother still grieving for the child she thought she was having, they tackled each obstacle as it came. I lived through that first day, and all the days after, because they stepped up and did what needed to be done for a little girl they loved deeply.

After I survived that first day, my parents were slapped with another expiration date; the doctors said I would I would only live a few more weeks. When I surpassed that, doctors gave me a year, and you guessed it, I skated right past that date too.



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Over the years, I've been handed many expiration dates, and I'm still here at 34 years old. So, why didn't I die when I was supposed to all those times? It turns out, the doctors were handing out outdated information about spina bifida. The truth is, most people with spina bifida are now able to live healthy lives well into adulthood. Many of us can be expected to have completely normal lifespans. But, because of outdated medical information, many of us are aborted or left to die in incubators as an act of "mercy," like I would have been if it wasn't for the brave and defiant choice my parents made. Early in my childhood, my parents divorced. My dad worked a lot, so many of my memories involving doctor visits and spina bifida involve only my mother. She and I made our way over the bridge in Galveston more times than I can count: for testing, therapies, surgeries, and check-ups. I remember her telling me of incidents where doctors would have her walk me up and down the hospital hallways with my tiny walker to strengthen my leg muscles. I would cry because I was tired and beg her to pick me up, and she would cry because she so desperately wanted to take my pain away. But, she let me fight through it because she knew it would make me stronger. People would pass by and make comments. "Pick up that baby! You are horrible! She is hurting!" But Mom knew to make me strong, she would need to let me struggle.



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Today, because she let me struggle, I walk independently, and I am fiercely independent in many other areas of my life as well. I know how to gain strength from my suffering and fight through obstacles. She taught me that. When I was still relatively young, she worked her way through nursing school, wrapping meat in a local grocery store, raising me—a special needs child, and my brother—a teenager, all on her own. Did she become a nurse because of my spina bifida? I don't know. But, I do know she was a nurse in our home long before she ever got her degree. She was well versed in catheters and leg braces, shunts and medicines. This was our normal family life. She was a natural nurse, without the paperwork that made it official. She dedicated her whole life after I was born to molding me into the strongest, most independent, disabled woman she could; and she succeeded. She took care of my every need until I was old enough to care for myself, and then she gave me the reins. So, when I received the emergency call early on June 28, 2011 that she was in the hospital, I did the only right thing. I ran to her side. She had suffered a heart attack on her way to work and, by miracle, managed to make it to the doorway of her job before collapsing against a brick pillar. A fellow nurse caught her and brought her inside, where her vital signs were found to be erratic. An ambulance was called, and her friend, and fellow employee, forced her way into the back of the vehicle with her.



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By the time I arrived at the hospital where she was transferred, she had coded (died) for 20 minutes and had been resuscitated. She was on a ventilator and laying there lifeless. We were told not to expect her to make it through the day. I was absolutely crushed. But, as she had done for me, I was determined to stay by her side until she gave up, or God took her home. It was over 20 days before I saw her eyes peeking up at me again. Those 20 days had been the hardest of my life up to that point, and I began to understand the faith that my parents must have had to stay by my side in those early days. I slept in a recliner in the waiting room every night. I became a fixture by my mother's side. I stayed with her, not out of some saintly daughter-hood, but because she had stood by me through the worst of times. It was my opportunity to finally give back what she had given me. Around day 20, doctors decided to try pulling her out of her medically induced coma to see if there was anything left of the woman we knew and loved. When they did, it took about 3 more days for the sedation to wear off and during that time I asked her nurse, "What if she doesn't wake up? Why is this taking so long?" She answered, "If she doesn't wake up, maybe we have to consider the idea that there is no one there to wake up." But, she did eventually show some signs of wanting to return to us.



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One morning, I walked in during visiting hours, and the nurse said to me, "Your mom is awake. Talk to her. Ask her if she knows who you are."

Scared, trembling, I approached the bed and stroked her hand. She opened her green eyes and looked into mine. I asked her if she knew who I was. She looked at me like I was insane and shook her head, "Yes."

She then asked for paper to write on, as she was still intubated with a tracheotomy. I fumbled for paper and a pen, then handed them over. What she wrote left me shaken to my core.

"I DIED." Yes, she had. She had been clinically dead for 20 minutes. We knew. But how did she know? The next few weeks would tell us everything we needed to know about how she knew she had died. She described seeing Jesus and how He didn't speak to her, but took her by the hand to a temple to see God. She told us she couldn't bring herself to go in because the environment was "too holy," and she felt undeserving. She described angels, and told us to "laugh at the devil," because he was no match for God and His glory. She told everyone who came to visit her that God was real, and she had been in His presence.

I believe her. I believe every word she said. The things she described, and the things she claimed to see, were out of this world and unexplainable.



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There is no other explanation for me, except that she had been in the presence of the Lord and had come back to tell us about it. So, when she took a turn for the worse and passed away on September 8, 2011, I grieved deeply. But, I was left with the peace of knowing, without a doubt, where she had gone, and that I would see her again someday. I watched life leave my mother's body, but I know now that she did not leave me forever. I will join her someday in the presence of our Lord, both of us healed and whole, in bodies that do not deceive us or hinder us, and she tells me it will be truly glorious.

