

## What Others Are Saying about Roxane Battle and *Pockets of Joy*

“Transforming pain into power is possible. In *Pockets of Joy*, Roxane shows us how to tap into our unlimited potential and keep our spirits rising.”

—Tavis Smiley

National talk show host

*New York Times* best-selling author

*Time* magazine’s “The World’s 100 Most Influential People”

“What a joy to read! Roxane’s charisma shines through every page. *Pockets of Joy* is a precious gift that has the power to inspire, nourish, and bless each reader. Read this book and be transformed!”

—Gregory A. Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP

Co-author, *Trust Your Gut*

“It takes people years to understand and find their passion. Many never find their own *Pockets of Joy*. Roxane Battle shares her journey and the path she chose to take as a single mother pursuing a successful career. *Pockets of Joy* will inspire and motivate you in making decisions to be happy and free. Her story is a remarkable one...it will not only enrich you, it will inspire you.”

—Pam Borton

President & CEO, Borton Partners

Speaker, author of *On Point*

Winningest coach in University of Minnesota women’s basketball history

“*Pockets of Joy* will remind you that you were born to be joy-full. Your joy-tank came full. Life has a way of burning the joy-fuel but it also provides opportunities to fill the joy-tank and keep it full. May you have many pockets and may they all be bulging with joy.”

—Sam Chand

Leadership Consultant

Author, *Leadership Pain*

[www.SamChand.com](http://www.SamChand.com)

"In this delightfully honest book, we cheer for Roxane as she makes difficult and wise choices in an effort to forge work-life balance. Her refreshing example in our success-crazed culture is an inspiration to women and men everywhere!"

—*Deborah Smith Pegues*

International speaker

Best-selling author, *30 Days to Taming Your Tongue*

"*Pockets of Joy* briefly recounts Roxane's divorce and her departure from television news, focusing largely on the next chapter of her life as a single mom. A deeply spiritual person, Battle counts her belief that things would and could get better among the reasons she was able to move on."

—*Caryn Sullivan*

Award-winning columnist

Author, *Bitter or Better*

"*Pockets of Joy* is for anyone who has experienced that deep realization that life hasn't gone the way they planned. It's for anyone who never expected to end up where they are. It's for anyone who's thinking about giving up. If that's you, then this is the book you need right now."

—*Kathleen Cooke*

Cofounder, Cooke Pictures and Influence Lab

"*Pockets of Joy* is candidly, beautifully written, and easy to read. It is Roxane's story of finding those 'pockets of joy' during an extremely difficult season in her life. Whether you're a single mom or not, you will find yourself quickly drawn into it, and learning invaluable life lessons along the way."

—*Janet Conley*

Pastor, Cottonwood Church

Los Alamitos, California



POCKETS  
*of*  
JOY

*Deciding to Be Happy, Choosing to Be Free*

ROXANE BATTLE



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

*Publisher's Note:*

Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

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## **POCKETS OF JOY:**

### **Deciding to Be Happy, Choosing to Be Free**

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To my parents,  
Burnie and Bessie,  
and everyone who has ever  
encouraged me to dream big.





PART I:  
THE POCKETS





# Introduction

## METAMORPHOSIS



*When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.  
So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will  
be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

—James 1:3–4 NLT

**S**ome years ago, while working as a news reporter for a television station in Minneapolis, I got the assignment of a lifetime: follow the trek of the migrating monarch butterfly to Mexico.

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Each year the monarch travels two thousand miles from Minnesota to overwinter high up in the cool mountains of central Mexico. The butterflies gather there and hibernate, hanging like enormous clusters of fruit from the boughs of fir trees, and if you listen closely you will hear the flapping of a million pairs of wings as they set flight, momentarily darkening the sky with their collective mass.

I and a talented photojournalist named Greg flew to Mexico, along with a seventh grade science class from suburban Minneapolis, and I got to witness all of this with my own eyes. Our destination was a little-known butterfly sanctuary positioned high up in the mountains surrounding the town of Anganguero, a tiny

village nestled in the slopes of volcanic highlands, some 280 kilometers northwest of Mexico City and deep in the heart of Mexico.

We climbed up the mountain, first on foot, then by horseback, as a constant trickle of monarchs fluttered about us much like a light shower of fluffy snowflakes, occasionally lighting on our shoulders and hair. The butterflies increased in number the closer we got to the top of the mountain until we reached a clearing in a forest of oyamel trees. There, monarch butterflies hung from branches like leaves by the thousands as far as the eye could see.

12 How is it that they prevail across trade winds, finding their way across continents and returning to the exact same spot each year, generation after generation? How could so much internal guidance be packed into such a tiny creature?

I interviewed our tour guide who told me that she, along with others in the Mexican culture, believe monarchs are the messengers of God. They are most certainly His creation, perhaps created to remind us of this one thing: perseverance. For without perseverance, the monarch butterfly would cease to be. From its beginning stage as a lowly larva inching along the ground, to a chrysalis-covered pupa, it transforms its entire being through patience and time, finally emerging to dry its amber-hued wings in the warm sunlight and soar freely above the earth as an adult butterfly.

Just the sight of a monarch reminds me of possibilities in the face of what might not otherwise be. Looking back over my life, it would be easy to simply state that my faith is what has sustained me through difficult times. And yes, much like the monarch, a

force greater than myself sustains my life. Yet unlike the monarch, whose metamorphosis is purely instinctive, without variance or choice, I have a choice and so do you. We have a choice to keep going or give up. To acknowledge the possibilities, to adapt to inevitable change, or to dig our heels in and refuse to grow. To let current situations determine future outcomes or to persevere toward what we want, toward what will bring us joy.

In the end we have our faith. And we also have a choice.

Imagine soaring freely like a monarch high above the earth, fluttering over majestic vistas, oceans, and plains. A sight it never would have seen had the monarch remained in its initial state.

As human beings we instinctively resist change. It brings uncertainty and, often, sorrow. It is more comforting to remain as we are than to seek or embrace the unknown. But I have found that if we are ever to find joy in life, we must be willing to face the changing circumstances of life with courage and a belief that, though difficult, it all works out in the end. That's the reason why butterflies are so very special to me. I have images of them on my stationery, teacups, plates, and pajamas, and you will find them floating through the pages of this book as a reminder to persevere, to press on toward that which you are destined to do despite headwinds and the uncertainty of the lengthy journey ahead.

Perseverance is an outward expression of possibility. Throughout my life, even from a very young age, I have always persevered in finding the glass to be half-full, not half-empty. For others in my life, maybe not so much. I just could never figure out

why my happiness apparently left some folks in my life annoyed. I remember singing in the church choir when I was around eleven or twelve. I had already discovered a love for writing and knew, after seeing Barbara Walters on one of her television specials interviewing some young starlet poolside, that I wanted to be a journalist on television. And so I was thrilled when our church choir was asked to be a part of my uncle's television show. One weeknight each month, a few select choir members including me and my four brothers would go down to the local ABC affiliate and tape four half-hour episodes of a religious television program. We'd sing a song at the beginning, my uncle the pastor would deliver a fifteen-minute sermonette, and we'd sing another song at the end. That was it.

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The program aired on Sunday mornings at 5:00 a.m. My mom, dad, and brothers would still be fast asleep, but I'd creep downstairs to the living room in my jammies wrapped in a blanket, and park on the floor in front of the television set with the volume turned down low, hoping to hear and see myself on TV. And wouldn't you know it, every now and then, between a "hallelujah" or "thank you Jesus," there I was on a tight shot, in a lime green polyester choir robe with billowing sleeves, just smiling and singing away, looking right into the camera. So much so, the choir director eventually moved me to the back row.

A few years later, while pursuing a degree in broadcast journalism, I found myself in front of another lens and painfully aware of how overt optimism can at times be misplaced. I was a freshman at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, taking an intro

to broadcast journalism class. My assignment was to prepare and deliver a mock weather forecast. The whole set-up was primitive to say the least: an outline of the United States drawn in chalk on a blackboard. Little light blue raindrops symbolized rain on the Eastern seaboard, and a yellow sun indicated a warming trend to the south. I wore a dark blue suit and a big smile, looked right into the camera, pointed to the map, and had fun pretending to be the weather girl. On the day of my critique, my classmates' consensus was that I appeared to be a bit "too happy" about the weather!

Years later during the early years of my television career, my bosses had varying opinions on my hair styles or clothes but all agreed on one thing. Again. Despite the fact that I could write well, had learned to read a teleprompter, and perfected the art of ad-libbing while live on location from a breaking news story, several news managers at the various TV stations actually told me that—get this—I *smiled too much*. I wasn't serious enough. Being too happy on the news was a problem, they said. I needed to be more serious. Or somber. Which was it? I guess having spent more than two decades on local television is testament to the fact that I eventually figured it out.

Yet to this day, for me, happiness is innate. An eternal optimist? Hopeless romantic? Pollyanna? Maybe all of those labels apply. To this day, I still believe that even in the midst of the muck and miry mess we call life, joy can be found.

Joy's precepts are perseverance, gratitude, and intentionality; practices that sustained me during a really crummy time in

my life. Yet, you won't hear me grouching. Instead, I've chosen to write about the sustaining power of this simple concept called joy. Imagine that—someone who has spent a lifetime annoying people with her optimism would go on to write a book about joy. That is exactly what I've done.

16 Like you, I'm on a journey, and this is my story—one I've never really shared publicly until now. Just like many of you, my life has been filled with both joy and heartache. I have done a lot and seen a lot and to be honest, I know I've been blessed—to live in the United States, to have gotten an education, to have succeeded at a profession, to have gotten married and given birth. Becoming a mother was the single most transformative event of my life. And within months of giving birth to our son, my husband and I divorced. The reasons are deeply personal and private. I want to be very clear from the very beginning that even though we divorced, my ex-husband was and continues to be an exemplary father to our son. This book isn't about our irreconcilable differences. Those are between us and, as such, will remain private.

What this book *is* about is the season in my life when I was on my own and overwhelmed with trying to put my life back together while I learned how to raise a child and navigate a demanding television career. A working, divorced single mom. That was me. For years. There were many days when I smiled in front of the camera and cried alone at night.

During those years, which I sometimes call my “time in the wilderness,” I learned a lot about myself, and I am now at a point

## Metamorphosis

in my life when I can share the very personal and intimate stories of how I found peace in the midst of my struggles. What I call pockets. Pockets of joy.

The kind of joy that causes your eyes to mist and wash over the hurt. The kind of joy that catches you by surprise and for a moment makes you forget, if ever so briefly, that you ever felt pain. The kind of joy that, in some ways, can't even be described.

Yet in the pages that follow, I'm going to try.



## P-A-I-N



*Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, **whatever things are pure**, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*

—Philippians 4:8

**S**he stood in front of the room with a piece of chalk between her right thumb and index finger. It was an August evening, around 8:00 p.m. Flecks of dust danced in the light as the evening sun filtered through the miniblinds of a first-floor hospital conference room filled with gray folding chairs. On them were seated a dozen or more couples, each woman six to seven months pregnant.

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“So,” said the instructor, “when you think about childbirth, what’s the first word that comes to your mind?”

*It took but a second, and the answer came almost in unison.*

“Pain!”

“Pain,” she repeated in a stubborn Texas drawl that had resisted a decade or more of living in the Midwest.

“P-A-I-N.” She wrote the letters on the green chalkboard. Underline.

Just as expected, the instructor thought. She'd taught these Lamaze classes for years, and each time she asked first-time parents that question, without fail, "pain" was the immediate answer. She turned and faced them again. Scanning the class with a chalky index finger, she asked, "What else?"

"Sleep deprivation."

"Yeah, no sleep," someone agreed.

Lack of sleep. Period. was now written on the board, underneath PAIN.

"Anything else?" she asked.

"How about stress?" someone ventured.

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"Stress, you think of stress?"

"Yeah, stress is a good one," said a young, soon-to-be dad wearing a red silk tie loosened at the neck of a starched white cotton shirt that had looked a lot better a few hours ago.

"Okay," she said, "stress." Stress was now up on the chalkboard.

"What else?"

The men looked at the women; the women looked at the men; then, between them, a murmur of consideration.

"How about medications?"

"Meds are for the pain, and we already said that."

"Yeah, you're right."

*“Well, gee, labor is part of childbirth.”*

*“Labor is painful.”*

*“And pain is already on the list, guys.”*

*“Oh yeah, right. Sorry.”*

*The instructor tucked her bottom lip under her upper front teeth. What she really wanted to do was bite her tongue. It’s amazing, she thought, how a roomful of total strangers can think so much alike. Then, trying to keep a straight face, and in a tone that was unnaturally high, even for her, she asked, “Anything else?”*

*One pregnant woman in the front row shrugged. Her husband leaned forward with his elbows resting on his knees and his chin resting in his hands. He studied the list on the board one more time as if he were a contestant on a quiz show anticipating someone to declare, “Final answer!” Satisfied, he leaned back and rested his hands in his lap.*

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*“That about covers it,” he said.*

*“OK.” It never fails, she thought.*

*“Look at this list. Pain. Lack of sleep and stress.” She made a chalky check mark beside each item on the list and then prodded one more time.*

*“Is anything missing?”*

*Silence.*

*“Think!” she said.*

*Silence.*

OK, *she thought*, just tell them.

*“What about the end result? What do you get for all the pain, sleep deprivation, and stress? What about that beautiful little bay-be?!”*

B-A-B-Y. Exclamation point. Underline. Underline. Happy face.



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I was one of those first-time, expectant parents. Seven months and 160 pounds. I would gain five more pounds for a total of thirty-five before it was all said and done. My feet had swollen so much that the only shoes that fit were white Keds sneakers with the laces undone. I walked with a wobble, slept on my side, couldn't see my toes, and had lost all recollection of what it was like to bend over. All I wanted, all the time, were Burger King Whoppers with extra mustard.

My white rayon maternity top was starting to itch, and the belly panel on my black stretch pants refused to stretch anymore. My legs were twice their normal size. I didn't know it at the time but would soon learn that I had developed preeclampsia, a form of high blood pressure during pregnancy, which caused protein to spill into my urine. In other words, my body was poisoning itself. There would be a scramble at the end to save me and my baby. I would go on maternity leave with bed-rest a month before my due date. Concerned for my health, my doctor decided I needed to deliver early, eleven days early.

I was just grateful the swelling hadn't affected my face. Most of the television station's viewers didn't even know that I was

pregnant, except when the cameras caught me on a wide shot when I was out in the field reporting. The switchboard at the TV station got calls from viewers trying to confirm the obvious. But, thankfully, I spent the last few months of my pregnancy in the studio, where the cameras went in tight and shot me from the shoulders up. Reading the news was an easy job for a pregnant lady, except when I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. to fill in on the 6:00 a.m. news.

I had endured months of morning sickness—scratch that—  
evening sickness. I loved food, especially dinner: sweet-and-sour  
chicken, vegetable stir-fry, moo goo gai pan, and yeah, a Whopper  
or two. Dinners started out with an almost crazed expectation of  
satiating my hunger but ended with a frantic dash to the bath-  
room and tears. I was so hungry all the time, but in those first  
few months, I couldn't keep anything down. We had long since  
abandoned eating out. Heartburn, weight gain, and fatigue had  
all visited me those last seven months and I was ready for it to be  
over. I had cried and complained, until that night at Lamaze class.

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Several people in the class were still holding on to white  
Styrofoam cups filled with melting ice cubes and watery red  
punch left over from the class break. The brownies and choco-  
late-chip cookies had quickly disappeared. The relish tray sat,  
picked over. A few of the moms-to-be, including myself, had taken  
an obligatory carrot stick or broccoli spear because, after all, we  
were supposed to be eating healthy. But what we really wanted  
was chocolate in any form. I took a sip of my punch and looked at  
the board, then looked around the room. It was something to see a  
roomful of adults staring at the chalkboard, looking guilty.

B-A-B-Y. Exclamation point. Underline. Underline. Happy face.

Of course, the baby, that wonderful bundle of joy. I was about to behold a miracle. Yet my husband and I, like the rest of the couples in the room, were filled with fear.

Fear of what was to come.

Fear of what we didn't know.

Fear of the uncertainty ahead.

Fear that led us down a path of negativity.

*It's going to hurt. We'll never sleep. How will we adjust?*

"What about the bay-be?!"

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Yes, what about the baby? What about the joy? That night in the Lamaze class I learned to start looking for the joy. Yes, there may be stress and pain, but oh, what joy.

The first time I'd hear him cry, or see him smile.

Hold him in my arms. Oh, what unspeakable joy. Hope-filled expectation wrapped in a blanket and smelling like Johnson & Johnson.

There in the midst of so many negative emotions were pockets of joy. All I had to do was look for them, find them and gravitate toward them, embrace them, celebrate them, and lock them in my mind to remember during the times when the joy would be so hard to find.



I checked in to the hospital and was induced at 9:30 on a Thursday morning. My son was born the next day at 11:30 a.m. That's right; twenty-six hours of labor. I was basically awake the whole time. At first all I felt were sporadic, tiny little pulses and I would try to catch a quick nap in between. But with each passing hour the pulses and the pain in my abdomen deepened. I couldn't eat anything except Popsicles. My husband, sitting next to my hospital bed, would unwrap a Popsicle, break it in half, hand me one half, then sit silently at the edge of the bed sucking on the other.

While some women have an easy time getting pregnant and having children, I did not. I wanted a child very much, but I would discover that I had inherited my mother's genes that presented reproductive challenges for us both.

I was born one month premature, in the middle of a beautiful spring day in May. My mother was admiring an upstairs bedroom that had just been repainted robin's egg blue. The shade seemed appropriate at the time. After three boys, my mother and father just assumed the fourth would also be a boy. And so here she was, all of twenty-four years old, doing what most pregnant women do a month before delivery: nesting. Preparing a nursery that had already greeted three baby boys. It had all become routine. Without a thought she reached inside a closet to rearrange what was there, and that's when it hit: a pain so excruciating it brought her to the closet floor on her knees. It was all she could do to make it to the window and summon her five-year-old preschooler, my oldest brother BJ, who was playing in the yard below.

“Mommy is so sick, go tell Mrs. Walker to come here right quick,” she instructed him. BJ made a mad dash to the neighbor’s house, and within minutes Mrs. Walker had my mother into the back seat of her 1958 Buick. The five-minute drive to Charles T. Miller Hospital seemed like an eternity, the pain growing worse with each passing mile.

My mother was rushed through the front door, into emergency, and delivery. A scant six minutes later, I was born.

Four pounds and nine ounces.

Mrs. Walker had called my dad at work to tell him a baby was on the way.

26 “It can’t be!” he had exclaimed over the phone. “The baby’s not due for another month!”

“I’m tellin’ you Burnie, the baby’s coming and coming now!” Mrs. Walker had replied.

My father left work, went home, showered, changed out of his work clothes into a suit and tie, and headed for the hospital. He missed the delivery, but was thrilled with the news that greeted him when he got there.

“Oh my,” said Dr. Hodgson, “we’ve got a girl this time!” Dr. Jane Hodgson had been there for the previous three births, as had the nurses. Three births, three boys.

Years later as my mother recounted the story of my birth, she told me how the nurse had laid me across her stomach and tagged

my feet with a plastic band matching the one my mother already wore on her wrist.

“A girl?” my mother asked in disbelief. “Let me see.”

The nurse held me up so that my mother could see the proof, and then they took me away. I was blue and had yet to make a sound. Instead of my mother’s arms, or a bassinette in the hospital nursery, an isolette, back then called incubators, was where I spent my first four days on earth.

One month premature and underweight.

My parents hadn’t seen me except for those few brief moments right after I was born, and they thought I was dead. My mother assumed the doctors and nurses were just sparing her the heart-breaking news.

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“When can I see her?” she would ask.

“Oh, she’s fine,” they would reassure her. “You’ll get to see her soon.”

“Is she all right?”

“She’s fine, just fine.”

The truth was that my mother may have been closer to death than I was. She lost massive amounts of blood in the trauma surrounding my birth. The doctors advised my mother that it would be dangerous for her to have any more children—but she did. My parents had another boy, my baby brother Nate. Four boys: BJ, short for Burnie Jr., after my dad; Walter, Robert, and Nathaniel,

all named after my uncles; and me, named after a model my mother had seen on TV.

I would grow up to look just like my father: fair-skinned, brown oval-shaped eyes, a square jaw line, and wide forehead with premature worry lines. My dad, a very tall man with large hands, was the first African-American with a master's electrician license in the state of Minnesota. While working as a department store janitor and at a meat packing house during the day, he went to night school for six years studying for his license exam. He got a near-perfect score and opened Battle Electric, a small storefront electrical contracting business located in the heart of the St. Paul's black community on the corner of University and Dale Avenue. Dad's contracting business is what put oatmeal and meatloaf on our table. I remember as a kid, my mom would take us by Dad's shop sometimes and we would look for the white bakery bag that sat on the counter in the reception area next to an hours-old pot of black coffee. My brothers and I would fight over what was left in the bag—a stale cake or jelly donut or leftover Danish.

Over time, as Dad's business grew, he'd add one or two more utility vans to a small fleet of white trucks with black lettering parked out back in the parking lot. When I was five years old, my dad moved our family from the city into a five-bedroom, split-level suburban home he built and wired himself. I heard several times growing up that the original deed for that corner half acre, dated somewhere around the 1700s, had stated that the land "must never be sold to Negros." Time and laws had long since changed, but I grew up under constant and shadowed reminders that being

black was not the same as being white. In fact, my father had made the decision to move our family to the suburbs because of school desegregation laws of the 1960s which required my brothers and me to be bussed from the city to attend suburban schools. My father decided that rather than being bussed to the suburbs, we would move there.

We were the first black family in the neighborhood. I grew up splitting my time between my white neighbors and classmates in suburbs and my relatives and black friends in city. My family would drive back to the city for choir practice on Saturday afternoons, and most Saturday nights you'd find my brothers and I at the roller rink working up a sweat to the latest disco tunes. On Sunday mornings our house was a flurry of activity as my brothers polished their shoes and put on suit jackets and ties. In the kitchen my mother would set out orange juice and fresh pastries she had bought at the bakery the day before. Then she would call me into the bathroom, brush my hair, approve of the dress I selected to wear, and my family was off to church. Every single Sunday morning, without fail.

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Sometimes after church, my family would stop by Porky's, a drive-in hamburger stand on University Avenue. My dad would order through a speaker and moments later a waitress in a pink uniform would emerge, carrying a red tray burgeoning with burgers, fries, and chocolate milkshakes. She'd attach the tray to the driver's side window. Dad would then pass out the grease-stained wax paper bags and each of us would get a chocolate milkshake in a brown and white-checked paper cup. Those were the best milkshakes in the whole world. I remember there was always a solid dollop of ice

cream at the bottom of the cup. My brothers and I couldn't wait to get to it. Being the only girl, I was usually seated in the front seat between my mom and dad. My four brothers were in the back seat of our green Oldsmobile 98. Once Dad had passed out the burgers, the Battles would go in. We threw down. The only sound in the car would be chewing and the crinkling of the wax paper bags and slurping as we made short work of those chocolate milkshakes. Sometimes my dad would grab some fries from one of us, or take a slurp from one of our shakes. Sometimes he'd take a bite out of my burger and I was delighted to share. He was my hero, a big, six-foot-four, handsome man with wavy jet-black hair who worked hard to provide for his family. I didn't know it back then, but the reason why he sometimes shared our burgers and fries is because he only had enough money to buy dinner for his family and not for himself. "Got enough," he would simply say. When we were all finished he'd place the empty cups and wrappers back on the red tray and ring for the waitress to come retrieve it. He'd then roll up the window, start the engine, put the car in drive, and we'd head back to the burbs, satiated and ready for a Sunday afternoon nap.

During the week I took classical piano lessons, creative writing, and etiquette classes. My brothers worked with Dad down at the electrical shop during summer break. In the fall my brothers played football and went to Boy Scouts back in the burbs. His senior year in high school, my oldest brother, BJ, was both captain of the football team and homecoming king. I was editor of the school newspaper, worked on the yearbook committee, and got the lead role in the fall musical. Back in 1979, my high school drama

teacher, whether intentionally or not, had made a statement by casting a black actress as the lead in *Hello Dolly*. The entire cast was white, except for me and my brother Nate in the chorus. My mother came to every single performance.

Even though my brothers and I often found ourselves the only black children in the room, my parents were determined to teach us life would not be limited because of the color of our skin, and that probably had a lot to do with their own childhood. My father was born in Mississippi. A preacher's kid, he was just fifteen years old when he met my mother at a church convention in Memphis. He was twenty and my mother was nineteen when they married. Dad spent a few years in the army in Fort Bliss, Texas, before he and my mother moved north to join all but one of his eight brothers who had all moved to St. Paul in order to escape the Jim Crow and separate-but-equal encroachments of the South. Out of fear for their safety, my grandfather wanted all of his children to move north. Stories from that time, like the 1955 brutal murder of Mississippi teen Emmett Till, added validity to my grandfather's concerns.

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My dad's oldest brother was the minister with the TV show and the pastor for whom a street in St. Paul is now named. He was the first of the family to come to St. Paul, in order to attend Bible college.

Years later, I learned it was *this* brother whom my dad brought to the hospital the night I was born to pray over me. My mom, dad, aunts, uncles, and church members all feared I wasn't going to make it and so praying was all that they could do.

Seven days later, the doctor gave my parents the all-clear to take me home.

And now here I was, three decades later, married and pregnant and about to give birth to a child of my own.



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As the hours wore on, the pain increased, and then all hell broke loose. At one point I sat straight up in bed, leaned over, and threw up Popsicle juice all over the hospital room floor as my body went into convulsions. The nurses had to prop me up and hold me still me while I scribbled what would have to pass for my signature on the release form approving an epidural. It was a mad scramble to save me and my baby. My body was poisoning itself and the baby had to come out. The room filled with nurses and my OB/GYN positioned himself at the foot of my hospital bed. My husband took my hand and told me to breathe deeply, and then everyone in the room told me to push, which I did. I thought it would hurt more than it did, but I guess that's why I had signed the form for the epidural.

After a few hard pushes my son was finally born. The nurse wrapped him in a blanket and passed him over my belly so I could see him. The first time I laid eyes on my newborn baby boy, he was staring right at me; our eyes locked and the bond was instant. He laid there in my arms, eyes wide open, looking up and cooing at me. He never cried. He literally came out of the womb smiling. The doctor and nurses gathered around and marveled at how beautiful he was. I looked up at my husband and was surprised to

see big, silent tears running down his cheeks as he stood looking down at his son. We had initially decided to name him Keith after his dad, but after some thought we agreed we didn't want our son growing up to be a "junior" or "the second." So we named him Jared after a name I found in a baby book and used "Keith" for his middle name.

My son and I spent the first night of his life together. He was in a bassinet beside me. The nurses were a little upset with me because I refused to put Jared in the nursery overnight; they kept insisting that I needed to rest, but there was no part of me that wanted to be separated from this beautiful tiny life I had just been introduced to. He was staying with me, in my room, period.

Keith had stayed as long as he could tolerate the small pull-out bed before leaving, exhausted, to get a good night's rest at home. Jared woke up every few hours that night making tiny little sounds, sort of cross between a chirp and a coo and a whimper. The nurses had showed me how to breastfeed, so I would feed him, change his tiny diaper if needed, and then wrap him tight in his blanket before putting him back to sleep in the bassinet.

The next morning Keith returned, rested, and sat with his son while I went to bathe and change clothes. I will never forget what the doctor said to me just as we were being released to go home. His name was Dr. Goldfarb, and he was an older Jewish gentleman with large hands and kind eyes. He examined Jared before our release and I stood there watching with tears running down my face. I had never loved anything as much as I loved my son. I

apologized for crying so much and Dr. Goldfarb reassured that it was normal with new moms and caused by all those pregnancy hormones still coursing through my body. Then he looked down at Jared and said, “He is the most important thing right now, not TV.” I would have taken offense if I hadn’t been in total agreement. It was as if God had spoken because that is exactly how I felt at that very moment. Little did I know then how those words would circle back around in the years to come.