The Eyes Have It

Deb Gauldin, RN, PMS

ABSTRACT

In this column, a childbirth educator considers the basis of her clients' fears and encourages readers to consider the roots of their own.

Journal of Perinatal Education, 17(1), 58–59, doi: 10.1624/105812408X267943

Keywords: humor, emotional state, fear, strengths, childbirth education

Some of the most important work we do as perinatal educators is to help women recognize their own strengths and abilities. With just a few hours of interaction, getting a true reading of our clients' emotional status and confidence level can be challenging.

A recent revelation in my own life brought back memories of a patient I cared for many years ago. The expectant mother—who was married, well educated, and in her 30s—attended all six prenatal classes with a smile on her face. Following the final class, she pulled me aside and spoke of how frightened she was about the pain she would feel during childbirth. The youngest of five siblings, she had always been called the “cry-baby” of her family. Apparently, the running joke throughout her pregnancy was the family's concern about her ability to tolerate a labor contraction, given the terror she displayed over removing a simple splinter during her childhood. Her uncomfortable laughter was no disguise for the self-doubt she revealed to me. Ultimately, she decided to speak in greater depth with a professional counselor, and she kept in touch with me.

I hadn't thought of “Crybaby” in years, until Cheryl and Colleen, two of my best girlfriends from back in junior high school, visited a few weeks ago. We were enjoying breakfast on the sun porch when something was said about my eyes. Suddenly, I was transported back in time.

You see, there were two boys who sat across the table from Cheryl and me during 7th-grade art class. I had a major crush on one of them. His name was Randy, and he had dimples. He would look up to find me staring at him with moon eyes. His romantic reply to my overtures was often something like, “What are you lookin' at?” I recall blushing profusely, quickly averting my eyes and returning to my art.

One particular day, Cheryl and I were working together on a project when Randy caught me staring at him as if he were Paul McCartney. He looked directly at me and said, in a matter-of-fact tone, “Your eyes are too far apart.” I averted my glance. “My eyes are too far apart?” I wondered.

That day became the first of many days I would stare into a mirror and scrutinize the placement of my eyes. Until that time, it had never occurred to me there was anything even remotely wrong with my eyes—or their spacing. I looked at photos of myself next to “normal-looking” people. I even used a ruler to compare my eye spacing with that of my sleeping younger sister. Clearly, my eyes were normal. Yet, even into my 40s, I found myself putting HIPPA regulations to the wind as I peeked to see how my eyeglass-frame measurements compared to those of the previous patient.

So, here we were some 30 years later, reminiscing about Randy’s comment when my husband looked up from his newspaper. He had heard the story before but, for the first time, asked, “What exactly were you two doing when Randy said your eyes were too far apart, Deb?”

Cheryl recalled, with a chuckle, “We were making a paper-maché pig. You know. We had wrapped pieces of newspaper around a balloon form, painted it, and were adding little legs, a curly tail, and a face.” It was then that it hit us. Randy had been talking about the eyes on my pig! All these years, and it was the pig! The pig, I tell you! How long had I been impacted by a comment that had nothing to do with me? It was the placement of the eyes on the paper-maché pig, all along!

The woman who thought she was an incompetent crybaby happened to present in labor on an evening when I was working. What a privilege to witness the birth of her beautiful child! Her birth was the picture of deep inner and outer strength. She was astounded to witness her own power and her own truth. How long had she been impacted by her family’s misjudgment? By the way, she did cry—but the tears were tears of joy.

What erroneous messages are *you* carrying around? I encourage all of us to reflect upon and to take immense pride in the many ways we help our clients discover their own strength and truth.

DEB GAULDIN is a childbirth educator who travels nationally presenting keynotes and workshops. Her CDs and tapes contain humor and songs about pregnancy, childbirth, and the adjustment to parenthood. For booking information or to purchase Deb’s recordings, call 800-682-2347 or visit her Web site (www.debgauldin.com).