Deb's Last Column, But Not Her Last Laugh

Deb Gauldin, RN, PMS

ABSTRACT

In this humor column, a perinatal educator defines the term “rusty labor and delivery nurse” and passes the torch to a new generation of talented practitioners and columnists.

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Registered nurses Katy and Deb Gauldin.

Recently, some 33 years after my own graduation from nursing school, I proudly pinned my daughter, Katy, during her nursing graduation ceremony. Much more than pushing jewelry through fabric, this was truly passing the torch to a new generation of bright, dedicated, compassionate nurses.

I couldn't help but reflect upon how professional speaking had taken me from the bedside to busy airports, from prenatal classrooms to recording studios, and from charting to cartooning. Exciting adventures—yet I find myself further and further removed from delivering hands-on patient care and perinatal education.

Never has this been more evident than it was a few months ago. My dear friend, Diane, had prepared for a home water-birth attended by a nurse midwife and a doula. I flew in to care for her two older children and to share in welcoming the newest baby brother. It had been over 10 years since I attended a birth, and I was thrilled.

A day after her due date, Diane woke me during the night. Her contractions were growing stronger. The midwife and the doula were on their way and were expected to arrive in approximately 30 minutes. The linens were warming, and Diane's husband, Rob, was readying the hot tub. The look on Diane's face was one I had not forgotten. This was the furrowed brow and flushed cheeks of a woman experiencing transition.

I suddenly felt like Prissy from *Gone with the Wind*! I had been trained using a medical birth model. The only water-birth I had ever witnessed was on film! “Where are my gloves? I have no fetal monitor! How far away is the midwife?” I thought to myself.

“Breathe. That's better. Breathe,” my dear friend coached *me*.

Rob eased Diane into the hot tub, and she leaned forward, resting on her knees. Aware she was already feeling a strong urge to push, I rolled up my pants legs and climbed in behind her. “Is she crowning yet?” I wondered, as I reached awkwardly forward and under to feel for the bulging perineum.

“Oh, my. She’s only 4 centimeters! This can’t be. She’s nauseous and trembling. What in the world is wrong?” My mind raced. A split second passed before I realized just what I had been assessing—and it *wasn’t* the vaginal canal!

Most normal birth attendants would calmly lean farther forward and, with great relief, detect the baby’s crowning head. I did this. I even did it calmly. But at the very time I felt the head presenting through an obviously fully dilated cervix, I relived the moment I calculated the poorly effaced, 4-centimeter dilated anal sphincter. “This,” I laughed to myself, “is *the* definition of a rusty labor and delivery nurse!”

Matthew’s entry into the world was a beautiful birth. I can close my eyes and still feel the weight of Diane’s head and shoulders resting against my thighs as she and Rob cooed and caressed their sweet and perfect son. I can also recall the sense of relief I experienced when their doula and, later, their midwife arrived.

What a profound privilege it is to do the kind of work we do, to play any part at all. It seems fitting that this is my final column for *The Journal of Perinatal Education*—how precious to have reconnected with my roots and to have been given the grace to laugh at myself. Like Katy’s pinning ceremony, it is time to pass the torch, or, in this case, column on to one of you.

It has been a pleasure sharing one another’s journey over the past 13 years. I will always think of you with deep appreciation and affection. Keep laughing and keep in touch!

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).

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