

A Handful of Tears

By Freddi Dogterom

It was the classic David and Goliath picture. The giant of a man slung to his knees by the actions of a tiny boy.

My husband Glenn did not have the experience of having children of his own. Instead, when we married he became a stepfather to a fourteen-year-old son, Christopher. Not an easy task, but one he put his heart into and did very well.

Three years after Christopher married we were waiting with great anticipation, the arrival of our first grandchild. We both adored our daughter-in-law Pauline but she and Glenn shared an especially close and loving bond. I was thrilled at the idea of being a grandma. I knew that I would love this baby to the ends of the earth – no matter what. Glenn was riding on my excitement. He was happy but really could not see what the fuss was all about. A baby was a baby – big deal! He would wait until the child was old enough to “do something”, like hiking.

By coincidence we were visiting their city the Friday evening Pauline went in to labour. There was no question of us leaving to return home without waiting to see the result.

All through Friday night we tried to sleep and waited for the telephone to ring. All day Saturday we waited with only sporadic reports that “things were progressing slowly”. By Saturday evening Glenn was getting worried about his daughter-in-law so we trekked off to the hospital. We sat in the labour suite offering prayers and encouragement, massages and sandwiches. Glenn was in agony. He could not stand seeing his daughter-in-law suffer. He was very uncomfortable with the whole process of birth and delivery. To make his time more productive he was put in charge of timing the contractions, a job he took very seriously by calling out, “OK – get ready, the next one should be starting in 30 seconds!” This wasn’t very helpful so it was decided that I should take him home to rest.

Again, all through Saturday night we slept fitfully and woke up Sunday morning, worried. There had been no phone call. We decided to go to church before heading back to the hospital, figuring that we needed to call in all the assistance we could. By now Glenn was nearly beside himself with worry and starting to mumble about taking matters into his own hands.

Arriving at the hospital around noon on Sunday, we found that things were not going that well. There were some problems and potential complications. After a short visit to the labour suite, we planted Glenn in the waiting room with the dual task of praying and watching the clock. He needed to keep busy.

Pauline’s mother and I visited and supported our children and each other. The big bustle started and extra nurses and doctors arrived very quickly – things weren’t

apparently going very well and we were asked to wait in the hall. The two mothers clutched each other and waited – hardly daring to breathe. Finally the frail cry of a wee baby was heard and we both rushed to our husbands with the news. The baby was here at last! And that is all we knew.

Within moments, Christopher poked his head around the corner. “Hey mom, come here!” I rushed over and there he was holding a bundle. A tiny face peeked out and I met my grandson for the first time. I was in love! Chris quickly showed him around the circle and then dashed back to his wife – to introduce her to their son – whom she had not yet met!

Twenty minutes later all of the grandparents were invited to Pauline’s room for a family gathering. Each Grandmother took her turn holding the wee one – well several turns in fact. I thought my heart would explode with the love that filled it when I held the tiny bundle. Pauline’s dad Frank, took his turn – he was an old pro, this was number twelve for him – and then he offered the baby to Glenn.

“Oh no,” he said backing away, “He’s too little I might break him! I’ll just look from here.” Baby made another round of the Grandmothers and back to Frank. The poor child was being passed around like a football!

“Here Glenn, it’s your turn.” Frank said while in the act of passing the baby over. Glenn had no choice but to accept the package or risk dropping it.

The moment the bundle hit his arms his long legs began to fold uncontrollably. Fortunately there was a chair right behind him, waiting for all six and a half feet of brand new Grandpa to collapse upon it.

Grandpa Glenn was powerless under the onslaught of love that rushed through him. The warmth of the tiny boy’s body unleashed every bit of love his heart contained. Little Rylan’s 19 inches had complete control of his Grandpa’s 78-inch frame.

Time seemed to stop as we all turned to stare. Big rugged Glenn cuddled the baby in his arms like a pro. The tears were streaming down his rugged face uncontrollably as he gazed into the wizened, wrinkled face of his new grandson. One tiny fist worked its way out of the blanket and a giant tear plunked into the palm. As the wee fingers closed around Grandpa’s tear they also closed around his heart.

An unbreakable bond formed that moment. With a handful of Grandpa’s tears, the circle of love was complete. Grandpa will love you from the beginning to the end - forever.

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