

# In the Waiting



ONE MOM'S QUEST FOR FINDING JOY AND FAITH  
DURING HER DAUGHTER'S TBI RECOVERY

Natalie Godfrey

*A raw and truthful look at one mom's emotional and spiritual struggle during the darkest and hardest time of her own life while her daughter fought for hers.*

## **In the Waiting: One Mom's Quest for Finding Joy and Faith During Her Daughter's TBI Recovery**

By Natalie Godfrey

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# One

I sit on the cold, hard sidewalk of the hospital frozen with fear, not knowing where my girl is. No one at the hospital will give me any clear answers, only that she isn't there but possibly on her way. I need to see my girl I need to see her smile at me and tell me she is going to be ok. I need to know that in a few days, we will be able to get her out of the hospital and move on and put this awful night behind us. I know that if I could just see her, see her eyes, they will tell me if she is going to be ok. Her eyes spoke with a thousand words that her voice can't. I just need to see my girl.

I sit here on the sidewalk, listening to the noise in my head, the noise of my own loud breathing, the loud pounding of my heart, the loudness of my own fear, the loudness of muffled silence.

I sit here feeling hopeless, feeling lost.

After what feels like the world's longest minute, Rodney texts me that he has found Taylor, she is in an ambulance that is next to the helipad. It is an ambulance I saw sitting there, but my brain can't compute or connect two rational thoughts together to wonder if that was even her in there. My motherly instincts are misfiring in all the wrong directions, and here is Rodney, being the strong amazing dad that he has always been, taking the situation into hand and getting things done, after all, this is his baby girl, and he isn't about to let anything else happen to her if he could help it.

I try to stand up to join Rodney across the parking lot, but my legs are too weak and shaky, so Mason helps me up to my feet, he wraps his arm around me, and we walk together toward the ambulance as fast as my trembling legs will take me. As the helicopter is landing, the paramedic explains to us her dire situation and that she will be transferred to the helicopter in just a moment. He says that we will be able to see her for the briefest of seconds, because every second counts.

I hear all that he has said, but everything just seems like a very loud blur, so much of the chaotic noise from the high-pitched chopping of the helicopter, to the roaring of the ambulance's engine, and then to the words being yelled at us to make sure we could hear over it all. All the noise is swirling inside my head like a brown toxic sludge, I can't focus, all there is, is noise, noise, noise, and then suddenly, it stops...because there she is.

She looks so peaceful on the stretcher. Time freezes for me, gifting me what I need to soak her essence into my soul one last potential time. Everything is quieted, and all there is in this moment is her, just quietly sleeping as if she were home, safe in her bed. I don't pay regard to the blood or to the glass shards embedded in her hair and skin, I give no attention to the cuts, burns, and bruises on her, I only see her sweet face. I see her long eyelashes that I envy. I take in every detail of her porcelain skin that holds all her freckles that I love so much, including the little cluster on her forehead...those are my favorite.

The fleeting moment disappears, and the noises of the ambulance and helicopter return back to their collective chaos when the helicopter paramedic asks us, *"Where do you want us to take her?"*

We have no idea! We didn't know that was an option.

The paramedic then asks us, *"Indianapolis or Fort Wayne?"*

Rodney looks at him and asks, *"Where would you take your daughter?"*

Simultaneously, the paramedics from the helicopter and ambulance tell us, *"Fort Wayne!"*

Rodney very adamantly replies, *"Then take her to Fort Wayne."*

The chaotic noise still is deafening, but nothing is louder or more painful to my ears than when the paramedic says to me in the most ominous tone, *"Make sure you give her a kiss."* as if it is a warning that it is going to be the last kiss I will ever give her.

My heart wretches and screams 'NOOOOOO!' but my legs hold strong while I lean over to her. I can smell her skin. I can smell her hair. I know as I press my lips to her warm, soft forehead, underneath them are my favorite cluster of freckles, and in this very millisecond I feel the rush of the past 18 years' worth of kisses come flooding into my mind; the first kiss I gave her in this very spot on the day she was born, the hundreds of kisses that took away her boo-boos, the kisses that celebrated her tiny wins and her biggest victories, the thousands of kisses goodnight, the millions upon millions of kisses that were continuously given to her as tiny gifts of my love between the two of us.

It is in this instant as I kiss her, I silently beg, *'God, please, PLEASE don't let this be my last kiss to her!'*

The hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life was this moment right here; having to say goodbye to my child, not knowing if she will be alive by the time the helicopter lands at the hospital in Fort Wayne.

And then...they take her from me.

I want to shatter apart into a thousand tiny pieces to match what is happening to my heart, but I can't. Begrudgingly, Rodney and I internally say our goodbyes to her, and we run home to throw a bag together, and rush up to Fort Wayne.



Before we get out of Kokomo, the phone calls to the family have to be made. I am trying to brace myself for whatever words I need to say, because I really didn't know how to say them. How do I start the sentence? Do I blurt it out or do I ease into it? How do I tell my extremely ill dad that his granddaughter may die before he will? I take a few deep breaths, I muster as much strength as I can, I dial the numbers, but as soon as someone picks up their phone, I lose all my composure.

Aside from our family, one of the hardest phone calls I must make is to one of my best friends, Sandra, not only because I know this will break her heart, but her husband is one of my pastors and I need him to know what was going on...just in case we need him. The thought of calling my pastor because my baby girl is dying, and we might need his pastoral care, is unimaginable and almost unbearable. Part of me thinks that if I don't give it breath then it won't exist, and then everything will be ok, but the rest of me knows better. It's strange though, as I hear myself speak, none of this feels like it's happening at all.

As horrified as they were to hear the news, true to their characters, which are so full of love and compassion, they jump into action and in a tone that cannot be refused, they tell me they are going to meet us at the hospital in Fort Wayne. I am simultaneously relieved and scared to death. After their call, I know I can't bear another one, so the dreadful texts begin. I need as many prayer warriors as we can get. I text every single person I have a phone number for.

Rodney and I spend the next two hours driving in near silence, barely saying a word to each other, I mean, what do we say? We are so scared, but we don't dare say aloud our worst fear, we just hold each other's hands and cry together as we hurry along the interstate, in what seemed like the darkest night that ever existed. The only thing that really breaks our silence is when we stop for gas. Pulling in the station, right behind us are Sandra and Morgan. I get out of the car and go to her for one of

her locally well-known bear hugs, because if anyone can hug this tragedy away, it will be her.

Her warmth and gentle strength from her hug are like a tourniquet to my bleeding heart, and she softly whispers in my ear, *"I love you. I love you. I love you."*

It's a thing she does when no other words can suffice, but she knows deep within her that it is all that needs to be said, and all I need to hear right now.

Once at the hospital, we are greeted by security and told the Chaplain is on his way. We are then immediately advised to not freak out when he comes to get it us, that it's standard procedure in a trauma case for this type of a meeting, but let's be real here, it still is freaking us out. Once he greets us, he takes us upstairs. The three of us sit alone in the surgery waiting room, Rodney, me, and the Chaplain, who is trying his best to comfort us, but his words don't match his eyes. His words are kind and supportive, but his eyes seem to know something different, as if he knew something that he can't tell us. He continues with his job, comforting us with prayer, conversing with us about menial things so we don't dwell in our dark thoughts. The minutes eventually change to hours, and I can't wrap my head around the thought of her never coming back home with us, so all the sounds of the Chaplain's words turn into a white noised blur before they enter my ears.

*'Why doesn't this feel real?'* I question myself.

The noise in my head quickly silences when a doctor comes to tell us that Taylor has severe brain trauma, and it doesn't look good. A noticeably short minute later, the Neurosurgeon comes to explain to us that Taylor needs immediate surgery, and how he will have to drill a hole into her skull to put a pressure monitor inside her brain. He also explains to us that there is a good chance she won't survive the surgery, let alone the night. The surgeon then hurriedly turns on his heels to get my girl into surgery. I lean back into the seat and the blurred noise resumes in my head, all while still not comprehending that this is really happening.

My brain can't decide if I need to cry, or feel sick to my stomach, or slap myself awake from this stupid dream. I look at the clock, I look at Rodney, I touch his leg, his arm, I feel my own leg...yeah, this feels real, but it's not computing to rationality.

An unofficial description of emotional trauma by most counselors is: You might feel numb, or cry, or rage. You might just sit there, emotionally unable to move. You might dissociate, and feel like nothing around you is real, or that it's actually happening to someone else.

Yeah, that's me.

My thoughts turn to Mason. Oh, my poor Mason. My heart is aching for my sweet boy too, who must wait outside in the parking lot because current hospital Covid rules forbid him from coming in to wait with us. I know he is terrified of losing his sister, and the fact that I can't scoop him up, and wrap my arms around him, and tell him everything is going to be ok, even if it is potentially a lie, is nearly unbearable. I want both of my children with me in this moment, and I can't have either one. We need to be together as a family, because if she dies on the surgery table...I can't even say it. We just need to be together, period.

I hate this for Mason, I hate this for us, I hate this for Taylor. I feel like I need to scream; scream at the stupid hospital rules, scream at covid, or scream at the universe, something, but I honestly don't think I have the competency to expend anymore of myself, for fear of entirely losing all my crap.

I am nearly completely broken.

After about an hour goes by, a nurse comes to the waiting room and tells us Taylor was moved into STICU (Surgical Trauma Intensive Care Unit) and we could see her. It is the biggest relief to my heart to hear, because it means she made it through surgery, and all my legs want to do right now is to run to Taylor, but I will settle for the quiet slow walk from the waiting room to her room.

At Taylor's door, we get the run-down on her injuries:

- severe brain trauma, bruised and bleeding with multiple hemispheric tears
- subsequent compression of the brain
- large open wound of scalp
- bruised and collapsed lungs resulting in lung failure
- fractures of multiple ribs
- severely lacerated and bruised kidney
- fractured sacrum
- closed fracture of vertebra
- multiple fractures on her hips
- broken pelvic bone
- multiple abrasions and contusions across her body
- internal bleeding



Taylor is in a coma and the prognosis doesn't look good, we are told again, as if we had forgotten since the first time we were informed. Or the second time. The nurse also warns us what to expect when we go in; low lights, lots of machines, sounds, the way Taylor looks, most importantly we cannot talk around her or to her, we can't even touch her.

We brace ourselves, take a deep breath, and enter her room.

Her head is partially shaved and there is a rod sticking out of her skull, her sweet face is swollen and covered with burn marks, torn skin, and blood. Her neck is braced, and there are tubes and wires connected and inserted everywhere on and in her. Rodney and I slowly stroll near her bed, but we don't get too close, then we quietly continue over to the far side of the room to sit on the couch. We sit here together, holding hands and stare at her, soaking in every image of her that we can, just in case these are the last moments we are ever going to get with her. I can't believe I am actually sitting here having to think about these things.

We find out her spinal column shows no sign of injury, which is good because that is a chance she may not have any paralysis, but she is extremely critical and there's a good chance she may not survive, they tell us one more time. All I know is, paralysis means one less thing to worry about.

I look at all the cuts and bruises all over her skin, and I quickly do the mama math in my head of the number of kisses it will take to make her feel better, and it is a job I am more than happy to toil over, but it will have to wait until I can touch her again. I don't want to do anything to risk increasing her brain activity which will cause more brain pressure. Her brain. Her amazing brain that astounded me every day because she was so smart, so funny, so kind. Wait, why am I using past tense?! Ugh! She's not gone, she is here, and she can and *will* be amazing again. Right? Right!?

I keep thinking to myself, *'she just needs to heal and then hopefully in a week or so, we can take her home to continue getting better. Just a few weeks, and this will all be behind us.'*

We have so many unanswered questions that are compounding every awful thought and feeling. Every time we ask a question, the only answer we are given is, *"We don't know"*, and after hearing it over and over and over again, we truly feel like we were going to explode because of all our confusion and the chaos of events and words swirling in our heads. I am so aggravated by hearing those infuriating three words, that I swear on all that is holy that if someone says it again, I will gather up all two ounces of strength I have left in me, and I will drop kick someone across the room!

Later, I feel horribly for thinking that about Taylor's trauma team, because we will come to learn that they are the most amazing people in the world who will care for us so tenderly at the most dire and horrific time of our life.

Rodney and I both are trying to meld with the couch in Taylor's room as we silently listen to the doctors and nurses talking in their quiet muffled voices, and we watch them, working diligently, trying to figure out the best course of treatment to get her brain pressure down, to relieve her pain, to attempt to stabilize her, etc. It is like the humming of a bee colony, a soft melodious hum that gives out a kind of peaceful white noise, because in my distraught and distorted mind, I think if they are busy working on her then that means she is still ok enough to be worked on, they aren't giving up on her.

We don't dare make a sound here on the couch in hopes the doctors and nurses will forget we are here. We are the hushed watchers of the swarm, holding hands so tightly, and silently praying within ourselves to God for mercy for our girl. Everything really does feel like an out of mind and body experience. This absolutely and unequivocally does not feel like reality.



It's nearly 5:30 AM, and I text Mason to continue giving him updates as we have been all night already, and after some exchanged conversation and knowing how tired he is, I tell him it's ok that he and Caitie should go home and try to rest. It wasn't long after I sent that text that the bustling of the caretaker bees starts to decrease, and the beehive becomes increasingly quieter, with the exception of the puffing of the ventilator, the various beeping's of the different monitors, the clicking of the medicine pumps, the gurgling and popping of the SCD's (sequential compression devices; to help with blood flow in the legs). I have no idea that these sounds will echo in my head for weeks and months to come. They will be sounds that become a sort of comfort to me, because these sounds are coming from machines that are keeping my girl alive, so as long as they are whooshing, and beeping, and popping, my heart will stay calm and steady, for the most part.

By 6:00 AM, one of Taylor's nurses hesitantly asks us if we were told anything about visiting hours. We tell her nothing was said to us, and that we are staying as long as we are able to until we are kicked out. She very sweetly and politely explains that it's time to go, she hated to say anything to us because she feels bad knowing we are going to be so far away, but we tell her we understand, granted we hate it, but we do understand.

We once again begrudgingly yet silently say our goodbyes to our girl, we blow her kisses, and then painfully walk out of her room, not knowing if she will make it or if we will ever see her alive again. What a heavy, heavy feeling.

We get into the car to drive home as the sun is coming up.

As before, barely a word is spoken between us. More ugly thoughts invaded our heads, like *'What now? What if she dies and we aren't with her'*, *'What if she wakes up and we aren't there with her'*. These are thoughts that neither of us wanted to think, but we both knew we were thinking them. We *had* to think these thoughts because what if...?!

It is a very sorrowful two-hour ride home. As Rodney drives, I stare blankly out the window through my plethora of tears that once again find their way out of my heart and down my cheeks, and I watch as the morning sky turns from night into an iridescent peachy-pink color, and just like the morning, it dawns on me...today is Rodney's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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