

He was Born in 2004

Graduate

5415

He was Born in 2004

My young children and I had police escort us to a domestic violence shelter two nights prior, and I reluctantly took them to school this morning. It was my attempt at normalcy. For years I was told they would be taken from me, and I would never see them again. Nevertheless, I had to work and trust nothing would happen to them. So here I was, dropping them off and heading to the office.

Scared, exhausted, alone, and working as a victim advocate in a district that had no other Spanish-speaking advocates at the time. I was often called out by special request for non-crime related incidents. My ability to communicate with Spanish-only speakers in a heavily occupied migrant community was a huge burden-turned-blessing.

A baby had died of natural causes, the mother, hysterical, called police. Since there was no crime, there was nothing they could do, and no need to call an ambulance as there was no life to save. At this point, the baby, four months old, was dead. The parents were unable to communicate with police, so I was called.

When I arrived, the baby was in his crib. He looked like a precious little alien; water on the brain was the term the dispatch used. The top half of his head was extremely swollen, eyes closed, and his miniature body tucked with care.

The family was living with several other families in a small rundown house. I was overcome by a stench. It smelled like the plumbing had backed up, and the garbage cans hadn't been emptied; and even though it was noon the room was exceedingly dark. There must not have been air conditioning. It's possible there was no electricity. That was, and still is, a common hardship for many migrant families.

I had no idea what to do or say. I wanted to appear strong and confident so that the mother would feel like she was in good hands with me, so she didn't have to be strong in that moment.

I don't recall what I said; I don't even remember what I felt. I held her tightly as she cried and thought about how I would call local funeral homes to inquire about donated services for the baby. I knew it was critical, with the heat of the home and no resources, the baby's body needed to be buried soon.

In a city not yet fully prepared to deal with this poor scared family, there wasn't much I could do. There wasn't a support group, or a community outreach established for this. I had to get creative but accept that I might fail in my attempts to help.

Mom cried over the crib; I touched the baby's little belly to show care and respect to this tiny boy. All I could offer were comforting words in her language, my arms, and the shared experience of human suffering.

He's with me often. This baby, hair neatly combed, dressed in miniature corduroy pants and shoes with a little plaid shirt. His chin, nose, eyes, and ears so beautiful, while everything else above his brows was swollen beyond what life could sustain. He was on a white mattress in his white crib in this darkened wood-clad room. Darkness everywhere, yet the crib was immaculate and light, as was he.

It was impossible to carry it all, my crisis, and the crisis of strangers that I needed to love. These experiences of advocacy, this being one of many, were so heavy while my own life was also in chaos. Even so, it was the chaos of my life that brought me to advocacy in the first place.

This work was a daily reminder that we are in this together, people, men, women, victims, survivors. My issues placed into perspective, as I was reminded daily of my capacity to resolve conflict, handle crisis, create solutions, and find light.