

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Becoming a grandpa and the transitions of life. For years, I’ve wanted to be a grandpa. At the same time, I didn’t want to put any pressure on either of my two-adult daughters to start a family until they were ready. After all, at the end of the day, they are the ones who have to raise my grandchildren.

On August 29th, in Colchester, England (about an hour north of London), my oldest daughter, Natasha, gave birth to a gorgeous bundle of life whom they named Annika Katarina.

For weeks, we were able to see little Annika on Skype, through our computer—one of the marvels of our always-advancing *technological age*. However, recently, we flew to England and on October 24th, we were able to see her in the flesh and shower her with our hugs and adoration.

I had forgotten how much two-month old babies sleep (close to twenty hours per day). However, to my amazement, what I had *not* forgotten was how to care for and attend to an infant. It was like déjà vu all over again, a thirty year flash back in time. Almost immediately, it seemed, I was changing pampers, feeding Annika her bottle of warmed mother’s milk and, in general, responding to her every need.

I’ve always believed that it *takes a village* to raise a child and my spouse and I are delighted to be a part of Annika’s village.

The miracle of child birth. Child birth continues to be the most amazing unfolding—how these adorable human infants come into the world so completely formed, everything in the right place (thank God), from the complexity of their eyes to their tiny finger nails.

At its best, the birthing process is a singularly phenomenal event, utterly humbling and joyous. These infant ones are bearers of the same genetic pool that gave us life. And always, they remind us of the sanctity of life. In them, we see both our past and our future—the recurring traits that are carried on through them, along with the new features to which the creative process points.

Life is indeed a gift, a miracle of the creative hand of God.

Grandchildren and life transitions. Over the last three years, both of my beloved parents have died, leaving, unavoidably, a trail of sadness in my heart. For me, it has been reassuring how my little granddaughter’s birth has helped to soften the loss of mom and dad.

Throughout my daughter’s pregnancy, I wondered if this would happen. We receive a hurtful loss at one end of our lives (our parents can’t live forever) and we’re the

recipients of a wonderful blessing of new life at the other end. This sense of life's transitions is unmistakable.

We come into this world as child and grandchild and move on—if we choose to marry—to spouse, parent and grandparent. I remember the reassurance I felt as a child, with my two sets of grandparents living in neighboring, small towns about ten miles apart. Our frequent visits were a joy and a source of heart-warming memories.

As an adult, I soon learned how fortunate I was to have all four grandparents alive and so nearby at the same time. Hopefully, over the next few years, my daughter and her husband (both Political Science professors at the University of Essex, north of London) will find their way back to the states so I can *grandpa* Annika on a more regular basis.

Hopefully, too, as Annika grows up, she'll have a sense of her grandparent's love—the love that provides a reassuring foundation for life's many challenges and unfoldings.

In remembering my parents and in anticipation of many more years as Annika's grandpa, I'm reminded how life's transitions are built into the fabric of our common life. Within the heart-beat of the transition lies the whole gamut of human experience—all of life's ascendancies up the mountain of joy, along with its moments of periodic sadness in the valley.

Somewhere in the midst of it all lies the meaning of life and all of its attendant feelings and passions.