

My Faith Testimony – Susan Shanno 4/29/12

Many of you know that I am blessed (most of the time!) to be part of a very large family. I am the eldest of 7 children and I have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. We all live in Bergen County and gather together for special celebrations and holidays. Our family has shared many joys and sorrows over the years, and today I would like to tell you about two of them.

About 21 years ago my sister Janet was eagerly anticipating the birth of her first child when she went into labor during her 24th week of pregnancy. The doctor told Janet and Carmine that there was no possibility that the baby would survive. Imagine everyone's surprise when a tiny little girl weighing only 1 ½ pounds started to cry as she entered the world. Her name is Emily, and after many months in the NICU at St. Joseph's Hospital and problems such as meningitis (twice), heart surgery and a shunt in her brain, our prayers and the prayers of our congregation were answered and she came home. Emily will be 21 in 2 weeks, she's fine, and she is indeed a miracle child.

Four years after Emily was born my brother Jack and his wife Diane had their first child. Dan was 2 weeks overdue, and when he was born there was a birth accident and his brain was deprived of oxygen for too long. As a result Dan, who is now 17, suffers from severe cerebral palsy and is wheelchair bound. Dan has never been able to talk or communicate in any way other than the smiles we so enjoy and the sounds he makes when he is in pain or unhappy. He has never tasted food and is tube fed through a button in his stomach. He requires 24 hour care, which is provided by my brother and sister-in-law, who, fortuitously, is a nurse. When Dan was born, Jack kept saying, we've had one miracle in our family, maybe we'll have another one. Some would say that God let us down because there is no miraculous end to this story. Recently, Dan's severe case of scoliosis, a curvature of the spine, was impinging upon his organs and causing him much pain and difficulty breathing. The necessary surgery was dangerous, and in fact, only 2 surgeons were even willing to consider it. In February Dan had 12 hours of surgery to implant 3 steel rods to help straighten his spine, and the doctor repositioned his organs. Once again, our congregation prayed for him, and once again our prayers were answered. Dan is back at school, a full 2 inches taller in his wheelchair as he sits up straight, and he is no longer in pain. Some may say that Dan is not a miracle, but when he smiles as he watches his favorite movies and baseball games, I would disagree. He brings his family such joy.

Our entire family was together again last night to celebrate Dan's sister's 14th birthday, and as I looked around the group, I knew without a doubt that I see God's face in both Emily and Dan. If they are not proof of God's love and presence among us, then I don't know what would be. We are blessed to have them as part of our family.