

Early Arrival of My Second Child

Expansion of our Family

by Jill Pickett

Warren and I were shocked when I went into labor six weeks early.

Leonie was 18 months old, and we had very little in the way of a support system, just two recent friends who had their own little children. And, to complicate matters we were not in our own home. This was not the right time! Warren called our neighbor, Sylvia, who had a girl the same age, to take care of Leonie while he took me to the hospital. After examination I was given some pills to try to stop the labor and sent home.

It was 1979. We lived in Evanston, Illinois, and were housesitting for a couple that lived nearby, taking care of their two elementary age boys while the parents went on vacation. We got the boys off to school in the mornings; I walked to pick them up after school and we took care of dinner, baths and bedtime. They were sweet boys. I remember being astonished at the immaculate planning of the mother: she had precooked all of our dinners which were labeled and in neat rows in the freezer. The dinners just had to be thrown into boiling water.

After two days I had to go back to the hospital to stay. Our baby was determined to come into the world. Warren went back and forth, sometimes driving through heavy layers of snow. It was February in a winter of record snow.

When he was not visiting, Warren was taking care of Leonie and the boys until the parents came



The Pickett Family at home with their new baby boy, Christopher.

home, missing the last few days of their ski trip.

I spent one night on my own in labor. I can't believe that it was not hard, nothing like my first labor. I was miraculously able to sleep between contractions. Warren arrived just in time, just after 9:00 a.m., on February 15th for the birth, an easy delivery. We did not know if we were expecting another girl or a boy. I think we were both delighted to have a boy. In spite of being so early, Christopher Caryl Pickett was almost seven pounds. He seemed just perfect in every way. Warren always thought the doctor projected the wrong birth date.

Since I had gestational diabetes, Christopher was taken away from me fairly soon after I held him. He was then carefully monitored in ICU. I was sent home the next day. I felt odd, wrong, to leave him at the hospital, with several tubes in his little body. I was afraid that it would interrupt my bonding with him. We visited him in the ICU twice a day. I felt strange to be visiting, gowning up to see him in his incubator, with all the wires and beeping from mon-



She could not possibly understand at 18 months how life had suddenly changed and would never be the same, but it was clear that she was reacting to the changes she had already experienced.

It was a joy when Warren's mother,

pher was welcomed into the playgroup where my friends helped hold him and cuddle him, so that Leonie could have a little more attention from me than at home. Sylvia's daughter Myra and Leonie played well together, parallel play of course! Sarah had an older daughter, Ilana who loved to hold my new baby, and a son Mark, a little younger than Leonie, who played with the girls.

We three mothers took turns to host the playgroup, setting out toys for the little ones and coffee for the mums. When my friend Mary visited from England she came with me to a playgroup. She could not believe that we even tried to talk while dealing with these little toddlers and a baby. There were such constant interruptions. "You never even finish a sentence!" she remarked. I always loved seeing things freshly through Mary's eyes.

Leonie was Christopher's favorite person to watch. She was a proud big sister.

itors. We put our hands through the opening in his incubator, so that we could touch him, and I could give him breast milk that I had pumped, through a tube. I wanted him to come home. He developed a little jaundice and went under UV lights for a couple of days. It was very different from my first birth experience, when I could have my baby with me the whole time.

Finally Christopher was able to come home, so we could begin the real bonding with this beautiful baby.

I will never forget my feelings of rejection when Warren brought Leonie to the hospital to bring Christopher home. Since she was not allowed inside we met in a corridor near the exit. She had short, blond hair, a little corduroy outfit that I had made, she was just so darn cute and I had missed her. How could I bear the fact that my dear little girl outright ignored me now? I had to force myself not to take it personally. She was letting me know that I had not been there for her for a few days. Plus I was holding a baby. She was dethroned.

Mildred, came for a few days. She was loving, and very experienced, having raised eleven children of her own. She could give Leonie the extra attention she needed, hold Christopher and change him, and help with meals while I was recovering and Warren caught up a little with work.

All too soon Mildred had to

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return to Kansas. She had helped us adjust to the unexpectedly early delivery of our second child. Fortunately we had set up the crib and everything we needed in our bedroom.

Our small family thrived in Evanston. While Warren was happy in his postdoctoral position at Northwestern University, I had joined a playgroup with my two new friends, Sylvia and Sarah, whom I had met in a park. Christo-



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