

## The truth about my late-term abortion

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Elections are supposed to be about real people — and not the ones whose names appear on the ballot. They are supposed to be about all of us, the policies that will impact our lives in tangible ways and the choices we make about the country we want to be.

But this year, we have watched a major candidate for our country's highest office demean and slander whole categories of American citizens. We have watched him make offensive, outrageous claims about real people and real decisions that everyday Americans face. People like me. Decisions like mine.

What sent me to my computer to write is late-term abortion. As I heard Donald Trump talk about babies being “ripped” from their mothers' wombs, as if ending a pregnancy is a reckless, irresponsible afterthought, my outrage poured down my face in angry tears. In those moments, Trump, who has never been pregnant and presumably has navigated this far in his life without undertaking any difficult, gut-wrenching, gray-area decisions, used my own pain — deep, deep pain — to advance his political agenda.

But his words won't tell my story, so I'll tell it here. I don't often speak about this experience. And I've never written about it until now.

The late-term abortion I chose was the end of a dream. The pain was so real and so consuming that navigating my way through the grief, I never thought that I would have the happy, healthy family that I do today. It was one of the most agonizing experiences of my life and a true lesson in the reality that life is not always as clear-cut and obvious as you might think it is.

When my oldest son was a little over a year old, my husband and I got the news that I was pregnant with a second child, a girl. Chasing a toddler while juggling a job and all-day sickness was no picnic, but I was excited about the new addition to our

family. As is the case with not-first pregnancies, I handled most of the doctor's appointments on my own — I knew the drill. Everything seemed to be going well; the baby was active and present in family conversations, her big brother slowly acquiring the language of siblinghood, the lively discussion of her name a frequent topic.

Until ... until ...

Until one routine appointment toward the end of the pregnancy when the doctor looked and looked at the sonogram images, was silent for too long, then told me to hang on — she'd be right back. The moments that followed were filled with one doctor after another entering the exam room, looking at the sonogram screen, then retiring to the hallway and whispered conversation with my doctor. I kept asking what was going on, but nobody would tell me anything. As I sat there in the cold company of beeping monitors, my heart beat so fast and I felt so afraid.

And then all the doctors came in the room together, stood around the bed, and told me that my baby was severely developmentally compromised; that she would die at birth, if not before, after a very short, excruciatingly painful few minutes of life; and that continuing the pregnancy to full term would be very dangerous for me.

"It's your choice, of course," they told me. "You can terminate the pregnancy and deliver the baby now, or wait."

I went home that night and cried, like I did for months and months after that day, but I never had a second thought about the right thing to do. For me it was important that the baby not experience pain, and that we have a little ability to say our goodbyes in as safe and loving way as we could. It never even occurred to me that someone else — the government? — would have anything at all to say about my own gut-wrenching grief. I didn't know how we'd survive the loss, but I did know the right course of action for me, my baby and my family. And the ability to move through that goodbye as a full participant was an important part of just surviving during an inconsolable time.

So, Mr. Trump, when you denigrated my experience with your political strategy, I was angry. I take issue with your characterization of my grief as a clear-cut morality test. The words you chose to use did not in any way reflect my experience of a terrible rending the day my heart broke.

I wish I never had to live through the loss of my child, but I am forever grateful for my personal decision being just that: mine. I had a choice, and I chose to make the hardest decision and carry the pain of that decision with me for my whole life to ensure that my child didn't suffer. Others may characterize that choice as they wish — even presidential candidates seem to be doing that. But it's my conviction that every woman deserves that right in a situation where there are no easy answers, no pious pronouncements, no political solutions that could ever, ever fix the gaping, aching emptiness in her arms.

If Trump's words made you feel certain — or maybe even a little bit smug — that his position is the right one, then please consider my story, allow for another narrative and, at the very least, reject the political strategy of impugning motives without hearing real people's stories.

Then join me in building an America where every child has what she needs, every little one has arms to hold him tight, and everybody's story is honored for the holy humanity it reveals about each one of us.

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