

## Our Baby

As a young child I always enjoyed staying with Dad and Granny Brooks. They were wonderful grandparents who lived close by, and since I was the only grandchild, that gave us a very special relationship. It was always a special treat to visit them, and it was an extra special treat to get to go upstairs with Granny and look at all the treasures that she kept in her trunk.

She would always tell me stories about the items she kept in the trunk, such as pictures of her family, old letters from loved ones, my father's scribblings as a child, and her Sunday school literature from Bethany Methodist Church. One of the stories that I loved best was the one she told when she very carefully took out an envelope on which she had written "Our Baby."

Without shedding a tear, but with tremendous love in her face and voice, she would begin to tell the story of how she and my grandfather had looked forward to the birth of their first child. Then she would explain to me how things did not always turn out as we hope or even pray for. She would tell me, in very simple terms that my childlike mind could grasp, about the death of that baby. "The cord wrapped around her little neck, and she strangled. No one could save her"—that was the explanation she always gave me.

After telling me that it was all part of God's plan, she would then open the envelope and show me a piece of white fabric. My grandmother was the best seamstress in the neighborhood, and I was well aware of this because of the beautiful dresses I had hanging in my closet from a very young age. She would tell me how, in the days before the birth, she was so excited about the anticipated arrival and how she passed away the time by making beautiful little gowns for the new baby. With tender loving care she would take that piece of fabric and tell me she chose the gown made from it to dress the baby for burial. She also had a pressed rose in the envelope that she told me was from the flowers on her baby's grave. There was also a poem cut from a newspaper, which I never really understood until I was much older.

After carefully putting everything back into the envelope and the trunk, we would take the half-a-mile walk to Freeman Cemetery, where the baby was buried. It was there that she would tell me how heartbroken she was, how three years later my father was born, and how happy she and my grandfather were. Then she would tell me that some forty years later, another little girl was born into her family, which made her very happy and her family complete. Granny and I always held hands walking back home up that gravel road from the cemetery, and I knew we had a special bond, for I was that little girl.

Marilyn Brooks Hammonds

