



**One woman's journey to reconcile beauty  
amidst tragedy**

# *Delivering Hope*

**AWARD WINNING SHORT STORY  
BY TAMMERA MART**

## Delivering Hope

I grabbed hold of my abdomen as it tightened. This was more intense than the “false labor” I’d had days earlier. Excited, I knew I’d soon be holding our first baby in my arms. I grabbed the phone and punched in my mother-in-law’s number, hoping to give her plenty of time to get into the city. Since this was her first grandchild, we wanted to share the experience with her.

“Shelly, turn on the television,” my mother-in-law said, her voice somber.

I picked up the remote and clicked it on, then watched in horror as the scene in my front yard unfolded.

I banged down the phone and hurried to the roof of our twenty-eight-story apartment building. My mother, who had already come to help with the baby, followed. A mass of onlookers crowded together, staring in disbelief at the inferno one mile south. Several people took pictures, certain that if they did not lock in the is moment, it would seem too far-fetched to believe at a later date.

“I’ve got to go wake Ryan,” I told Mom.

I rushed to the elevator and took it down to our second-floor apartment. When Ryan and I returned to the roof, we found Mom sitting on the ledge in tears. She’d just witnessed the second plane crash into tower two of the World Trade Center.

“Planes were hijacked,” someone said.

We stared, confused, wondering what would be hit next. Amidst the unfolding tragedy, my joy of giving birth had transformed into a deep fear. In mere minutes, the world had clouded over and became a dark, terrifying place.

I stood beside Ryan and watched the towers as they collapsed into a dense cloud of gray that moved toward us as if in slow motion, like the effect of some massive movie explosion. I prayed that two of our dear friends had made it out alive.

Later that afternoon, my husband, mother, and I walked ten blocks south to my doctor’s office for a scheduled appointment. The walk took on a nightmarish quality as we watched people trudge north up Park Avenue. Hundreds of men and women in dust-covered suits and

shoes, their faces dusted white plodded toward their homes. At least forty ambulances and fire trucks passed, sirens blaring, all from Long Island, three hours away. The realization hit me that these firefighters and paramedics had volunteered to enter one of the United States' worst disasters ever. I sat down on the curb and wept, then pulled myself together enough to finish our walk.

Later that evening, after we returned home from the doctor visit, we learned that both our friends had survived the tragedy, along with several of their coworkers, all had been called away from the WTC to a meeting in midtown. Still, we knew of at least twelve acquaintances unaccounted for.

Two days later, on September thirteenth, my contractions intensified enough that I knew it was time to go to the hospital. No taxis were operating through that section of Manhattan, so again, the three of us began the ten-block trek. The contractions grew closer and stronger, forcing me to periodically stop and rest. People looked at us forlornly and sympathetically, perhaps assuming we were searching for someone. They couldn't know the emotional angst that surged within me.

Our beautiful city looked like a war zone. Debris littered the streets and sidewalks. Parked cars covered in gray looked like stone statues. People everywhere wore looks of despair as they sought missing loved ones. I cried inside for those people and for the victims, but at the same time, I felt a secret rejoicing. I was on my way to give birth, to meet this baby I had anticipated for months. Then, without warning, my heart would nose-dive as I wondered what the future held for my child, for all of us.

We walked past bars overflowing with people. They weren't celebrating, though; they were just huddled together, quietly sharing the sorrow and contemplating the reason for this attack on innocent lives. At First Avenue, we paused near barricades that blocked the street. When we saw that many people were wandering around carrying locks of hair and dental records, we knew they were waiting to get into the morgue.

Closer to the hospital, another intense contraction forced me to stop.

"Are you okay?" and officer approached. "Are you looking for someone?"

Again, my distress was mistaken. I looked at him, trying to mask the pain. "No, I'm in labor." I breathed heavily, the birth pains coming faster.

The officer quickly produced a wheelchair. My husband hurried, pushing me toward the hospital, but at the entrance, the line for blood donors stretched out the door. Carefully, we weaved our way through the crowd only to find every birthing room full. Another contraction came, and I knew it was time. Instead of the comfort of a birthing room and the familiarity of my doctor, I was prepped and gave birth in the operating room at the hands of a doctor I hadn't met.

I'd imagined it so differently. Where was the happy celebration, the looking forward to the future for my husband, our baby, and me? Ryan sat next to the bed while I held Noah in my arms. Other couples in the hospital did the same, swimming in an ebb and flow of mixed emotions: joy over the lives we'd brought into the world, yet unable to tear our eyes and our minds from the tragedy outside the hospital windows.

"It's bittersweet, isn't it," I said to Ryan as I stared into my newborn son's perfect little face, "that amidst all this tragedy, the most beautiful miracle has happened for us."

Although he remained silent, I knew Ryan agreed by the gentleness in his touch as he placed a finger in Noah's tiny fist. Today, I think of Noah's birth as a symbol of hope—a bright spot to look toward during dark times. Just as new growth rejuvenates the earth after a forest fire, so too do I now see my son's unfolding life as a beautiful part of a better tomorrow.



Dear Reader,

I first learned of this story through a letter that crossed my inbox. I just had to speak with this mother and learn more about her incredible story. I found her in New Jersey where she was temporarily staying with her in-laws, wondering if the air would ever be safe enough to take her baby back home to NYC. We shared a beautiful conversation by phone. I was most fascinated with the conflict warring inside her. She had wanted to be happy but was so, so sad for the grief unfolding around her? She and her husband learned how to embrace hope as life dealt a cruel blow. A reminder to us to never give up. Hope surrounds us in the worst of times.

This story was first published in Melody of the Heart Ezine and then again in Cup of Comfort for New Mothers Anthology where it won first place and became the lead entry. Because of the gap in time, names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.