

*In this age of Alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) testing, targeted ultrasound, (both of which can be very helpful) and "wrongful birth" litigation and "search and destroy mentality" (both of which are anti-life), Elissa would be recommended for intrauterine destruction by many in our discipline. But go back to 1993: She was her mom's first pregnancy. Prenatal course uneventful. Labor at term complicated by a bad fetal heart tone (FHT) pattern and meconium. Emergency Caesarean section (CS) was done. I was stunned to deliver a beautiful girl baby with basically no legs. Severe caudal regression syndrome. Totally unexpected. Good APGAR. What do you say to the mother and dad? (Maybe you have faced a situation like this.) I just prayed "Oh, Lord, give me the right thing to say, and help me not to say something stupid to these parents who are in shock!"*

*I'll let Elissa's mom continue the story in the note I received in June, 2010 with her high school graduation announcement:*

"Dear Dr. DeCook,

When I delivered my daughter back in 1993, she was born with a neural tube defect (caudal regression syndrome), and you were very supportive and helpful for my husband Ed and I. Things were not too certain for her when she was born, but I thought I would give you a great update.

Elissa has just graduated from high school (at 17, a year early), and she graduated in the top 8% of her class of 650. She will be going on to study Biology in the pre-vet program down at the U of Alabama. She will also be playing on the wheelchair basketball team. Currently U of A's team is the reigning National Championship team for both 2009 and 2010. She is hoping to attend Vet school at Auburn, and possibly play on the paralympic wheelchair basketball team in the future.

You told us when she was born that she was a gift from God, and that things would work out. Little did we know that night at the hospital how true all that was. I just wanted to let you know all about Elissa, and to thank you for all your support and care. I have enclosed a picture so you can see how beautiful she turned out, but more importantly she is beautiful on the inside where it counts.

Thank you again for everything you did for us back on March 11, 1993 and may God continue to bless you and use you to forward His kingdom. Thank you."

*I was blown away. Birth defects happen, since Creation is flawed. But God is up to the task of "making beauty from ashes." Elissa is that beauty.*

*3 weeks later, the family came here to visit grandfolks. I got to spend 2 hours face to face with Elissa. Here is a lovely 17 year old girl who is poised, confident, and looked me straight in the eye as we talked. And she is a committed Christian. It was a deeply moving experience, as well as a delightful experience. As I drove home, I could only think of the story in John's Gospel of the man born blind. "Who sinned," they asked, "this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Elissa displays the work of God in her life.*

*I encourage you to not buy our culture's (including our medical culture's) demeaning view that if the baby is not "perfect," it will be a burden, and the mother should consider aborting it, killing it before birth. God has much better plans. "His power is made perfect in weakness."*

*Dr. Joe DeCook*