My Arrival

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Not many people know much about the circumstances of their birth. My Mom had five children over the course of 10 years but talked about my birth the most. At the time of my birth, my parents were living on a 40-acre farm near Lizton, Indiana, about twenty-five miles west of Indianapolis. My mom had issues with her earlier pregnancies, so she chose to deliver me at Colman Hospital for Women in Indianapolis, the best women's hospital in the state.

It was already a cold, stormy December in 1951. My parents were hosting a holiday party at their house when the word of a big ice and snowstorm came over the radio. The old-timers at the party also predicted a big storm. They finally convinced my parents that they should leave for the hospital just to be safe, as I was due any time. As the party broke up, my parents left my Dad's Mom at their house with my siblings, Mary Anne, fifteen months old and Louie, three years old.

The storm hit just as they left the farm that evening. Weather records show that it was major storm with freezing rain that was part of an Arctic blast. They thought they could reach Indianapolis before the county road became impassible. About halfway there, out in the country, they slid off the road and wrecked the car. They had no choice but to walk and try to flag down any of the few cars out that night. It was becoming a fierce snowstorm. And then Mom went into labor.

Few people were out that night in that weather. My parents finally managed to flag down a car headed toward Indianapolis. Once they were in the car, my Dad mentioned that my Mom was in labor. The driver insisted they exit the car and left them in the storm on the side of the road. It happened again. The second car to pick them up also quickly put them out when he realized she was in labor.

Third time was the charm, but they did not have room for my Dad. They drove off promising him they would get her to the hospital. They left him in the growing storm to walk back to the farm. At that point, he realized that he had lost a shoe in the car wreck and had to wrap his foot in his scarf. He made it back to the farm where they were snowbound for a week. By the next day, the temperature dropped to eight below zero.

Mom made it to the hospital and began a difficult delivery. After four hours of trying, I was born at 12.21 am, December 15, 1951. However, I was delivered with my umbilical (nuchal) cord tightly wrapped around my neck. My Mom said the doctor had trouble cutting the cord as it was very tight and tangled. After he was able to cut it, she said she

watched him put me over his knee as he “worked and worked” (my Mom’s words) to get me breathing. After what seemed like an eternity to her, I screamed.

We were snowbound in Coleman Hospital for a week. Someone (I’m not sure who) was finally able to take us back to the farm. My Mom, with me in her arms, was greeted at the front door by my Grandmother with her suitcase in hand. She did not speak English and just got in the car and went back to Indianapolis. In my Dad’s version of their snowbound week, they all had a wonderful time. My Mom quickly realized that my Grandmother had burned all the dirty diapers and left her with no diapers.

I survived the trauma of the nuchal cord strangling me at birth. When my Mom went in a just over a month later for her first check-up with me, the doctor said “Janie is doing fine. And more good news, you are pregnant”. Mom said she cried and cried. Patrick Joseph Luzar was born November 9, 1952, 10 months and 28 days after my arrival. We have been close ever since.

Later in life, I was employed at the IUPUI campus in Indianapolis. The William H. Colman Hospital for Women was still standing as part of the campus, repurposed from the IU Medical School into Coleman Hall, an academic building. Touring the sight of my birth and near death was a strange experience. I could not help but think of the people who put us out on the side of the road, in labor, in the middle of a snowstorm. I thought of the doctor who put me over his knee and “worked and worked” on me to get me breathing. I said a silent thank you to him and I have remained a bit skeptical of the inherent good of people all my life.