

## Alyvia Wright Elliott - Testimony

Claudette Elyse Elliott was born on November 29, 2012 at 38 ½ weeks old in Shawnee Mission, KS. Time of birth 11:30am. Time of death 11:30am. She was a chubby-cheeked, button-nosed, wavy-haired beauty. She weighed just three ounces shy of TWELVE POUNDS. No wonder I could barely walk almost the whole last trimester. She was perfect in almost every way. Ten toes. Ten fingers. Eye lashes for miles. But Claudette's heart was broken, enlarged to be exact. We had only found out about this the day before.

Surreal is the only word I have to describe the day she was born. We named her Claudette, in honor my mom Claudette who died six months previously. After deciding on the name, I looked up its meaning: "dies young." Well, that was true for my mom, but lightening doesn't strike twice, right? We added a strong middle name to offset the grim meaning, "Elyse". It means "God's promise". We had no clue how fitting her name would prove to be.

I decided I did not want to take pictures of her. I mean why would you want to remember such a horrible day, right? But November 29, 2012 with all its tragedy is the most beautiful day I have ever experienced. It had all the markings of any other birth: family, friends, cries, excitement. As soon as Claudie came out, I was scared to hold her. As my husband gently handed her warm body to me, I knew I would never be the same. She was there! Her soul was present. I lost it. The last 24 hours had been a blur and filled with confusion, but then a large dose of reality smacked me in the face. My child was dead. I was holding my child...and she was dead.

It was too much for me to take and I tried to numb my pain with details. Some details any mom handles after delivery. PICTURES! I changed my mind. I wanted pictures and lots of them. So thankful that a friend was wise enough to call Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, a photography agency that does professional portraits of your child that has died at no cost to the family. OUTFIT. What did I want her to wear? I had known this for months so it was a no brainer. VISITORS. My family and friends all held her. No one was untouched by her presence.

Other details were things only a mother who has lost a baby will understand. What funeral home? When should her body be taken for the autopsy? Do we let her brother Henry, 4, and sister Amelie, 3, see her? We decided Henry would and Amelie shouldn't. I will question that decision for the rest of my life. How do we say goodbye? Still haven't figured out that one, so I decided I just wouldn't.

Then there were questions that came in the days following. What flowers? What colors of flowers? What should the funeral look like? Who should speak? Is the house clean? When should we have the funeral? When will I be discharged? Will I need a wheelchair for the visitation? Should we do it now or wait till after my father has recovered from his quadruple bypass? Yes, that's right. My dad suffered a massive heartache while writing his granddaughter's eulogy in my hospital room. Losing both of his Claudette's was too much for him to bear.

I had dozens and dozens of questions. I was so confused. So tired. I didn't know how to navigate this new found trauma, while recovering physically from the Cesarean. I was guided ever so gently by a grief coordinator our hospital provided. She answered each question. We were told after her birth we could have a birth certificate but it was basically just something the hospital would provide for us as a memento. No real legal value. I nodded. Never remembering what became of that conversation.

Days passed. Her funeral passed. Her headstone came. We were drowning, emotionally, physically, and financially. I had not been able to work my long 12 hour shifts as a transplant nurse because of the difficult pregnancy. After Claudie's death, the thought of returning to a hospital to work right away was too much for me to bear. We needed monetary support. I had remembered seeing in a work email that my company offered something called a Hope Fund for situations like these. I called. I was told all they would need was a birth certificate and death certificate. I called my husband to ask if we had the documents, not remembering what had happened weeks earlier in the hospital. We had nothing to present them.

It was the first time I realized it was like in the rest of the world's eye she didn't really exist. I started to think about how she would never show up on documents and no one would ever realize after we were gone that she even was here. This catapulted me into making sure everyone I came into contact with knew of her. I started a Facebook page, "In Loving Memory of Claudette Elyse". I started a grief blog. I started a project, "Kisses for Claudie" wherein random acts of kindness in her name were performed. I spoke her name often and loudly. I honored her as only I knew how and try to make sure every day she is proud of her mommy.

And as each day goes by she teaches more and more about life and love. The most important lesson she has taught me is EVERY LIFE MATTERS. Claudette Elyse is our daughter. She is Henry and Amelie's baby sister. She will hopefully one day be a big sister to our adopted child. She is a granddaughter. She is a niece. She is a cousin. She is a HUMAN BEING. Having a Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth won't bring her back, but it will help her be seen as just that. No less. No more.

My name is Alyvia Elliott. I am Claudette Elyse's mom. I am her voice. I, and the 1 in 130 moms who give birth to a baby that has died, will NOT stop saying our baby's names. We will not sit down. We will not stop fighting for our children, because THEY MATTER!

Thank you for taking the time to ensure our children's lives count.