

# Story of Elijah's birth, surgery, PICU experience, and healing with CranioSacral-based Integrative Attachment Therapy

2009: Elijah's story told by his mother, Julie. As always, thank you to Elijah, Julie and their family for allowing me to share their story. It is a powerful story and as always, I am blessed to have been a part of their journey. I call Elijah "Miracle Boy". He will be seven years old this December and he is an amazing, healthy boy.

2004: Elijah was born at home in water in a planned homebirth. He weighed 11#2 oz. His mother, Julie, shares her experience of Elijah's birth and then the experience of learning that he had congenital heart issues that required two surgeries in the first weeks of his life. She shares her experience of working with me with Elijah to heal from his surgery and PICU experiences, and to restore their attachment. Elijah, his sister, and Mom are also featured in a newspaper article about my work at <http://web.archive.org/web/20070324021133/http://www.itsthebabysbirth.com/pjs.htm> that you can find on google cache. I am very appreciative of the honor of being a part of their lives and for them to share their experiences so I can share them with you.

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## Introduction

When Janel asked me to share Elijah's story I said of course! How could I not? The work we had done together had made such an impact in our lives with Elijah. It seemed wrong to even consider not sharing our process with others. In truth each time I sat down to give life to Elijah's story I found myself a bit overwhelmed. Where do I start? How does one put on paper the evolution and awareness that came from our trauma work with Janel?

Slowly I worked on the story and slowly it evolved. I decided I would just start at the beginning. I met Janel when my first child, my daughter Mika, was an infant. We found we shared a passion for birth work, we attended doula training together, we both had a background in counseling, and I was very interested in her craniosacral and birth trauma work. My husband, Adam, and I had birthed Mika in the hospital and it was a very traumatic yet equally amazing event! I'd wanted Janel to work with Mika to help her process her birth trauma but the circumstances weren't quite right. Janel did a lot of traveling and I lost touch with her for a while. Then when I was almost due with Elijah two years later I accidentally got in touch with her again. I had no idea how much that was meant to be. Let's just say I no longer believe in coincidences!

## Elijah's Birth

After Mika's birth we knew we wanted to make some changes if we were blessed with another child. The biggest change we made when preparing for Elijah's birth was that we chose to give birth at home with a Certified Nurse Midwife. We had

taken Bradley childbirth classes before Mika's and found them immensely helpful but I needed more help with relaxation so we chose to take HypnoBirthing classes. I had also become a doula and childbirth educator after Mika's birth. I went into my second birth much more educated about birthing choices, how the body functions during birth, relaxation techniques and helping provide an atmosphere in which I could labor and birth my baby that was best for our baby, myself and our family. For us this was at home and our homebirth enabled us to give birth to Elijah in the gentlest way we possibly could - surrounded by the love of family and friends.

Elijah's birth was awesome! His issue wasn't birth trauma. His trauma came later. My eighteen-hour labor that progressed so gently that if I hadn't known better (from my first birth and from being a doula and childbirth educator), I would have seriously doubted that I was really in labor until I was nearly complete! Adam and I took two naps together!!! Yes! Naps during labor... and I am not talking early labor. I was at 6 cm before the first nap and eight cm before the second one. I had heard of women being able to do that, but I never thought I would be one of them! I dozed soundly and surges just kept going.

I entered a birthing pool for the last three hours and Adam got in with me. The surges intensified (uncomfortable but not painful) until he was born. It just took more effort to remain focused and relaxed, so I listened to my relaxation tapes and rocked in the soothing water with Adam. I found as soon as I started to tense up an area, pain would sneak in and as soon as I relaxed again the pain would vanish. I felt my baby move down the birth path. I felt my water break about

forty-five minutes before he was born. I was aware of my baby's every move and feel I was able to connect with him on a very deep level even before he was born. I did not push but relaxed and breathed through the surges and let my body move my baby down. I pushed the last few contractions as his head was born and then realized he was stuck because he had shoulder dystocia. It was a scary few minutes at the end but our midwife knew exactly what to do. I feel I was able to stay calm and focused on what she told me to do in order to get him out because I was already so relaxed and calm. After he arrived, we were amazed at how big he was! 11 pounds 2 oz & 23 inches long and I had no tearing!

It was an absolutely amazing experience. It enabled Adam and me to work as partners in birthing our baby. I felt like I was really able to connect with my baby on a much deeper level and was much more conscious of him and his descent into the world than I was during my daughter's birth. I am just sad I didn't know how to give my daughter the beautiful birth her brother had.

### Elijah's Diagnosis, Surgeries, and PICU Experience

We spent the next two days in such joyful bonding with our new baby. On day three of life during a routine newborn exam with our pediatrician, Elijah's gums were noticed to be a bit dusky. His doctor thought maybe his PDA (the heart valve that is open during pregnancy but closes soon after birth) hadn't quite closed yet which wasn't a big deal at his age. Elijah had no other signs of a heart defect but our Dr. recommended we have a pediatric cardiology consult just to cover our bases. By divine intervention, we were able to get an appointment that

day. To make a long story short, Elijah ended up being diagnosed with multiple congenital heart defects and would certainly die without surgery to correct them. Talk about having your world turned upside down!

Although he was doing amazingly well when the diagnosis was made, the cardiologist admitted him to the ICU in order to monitor his status until the corrective surgery could be made. Unfortunately as the staff worked to provide intervention, he became stressed and began to fail. It became a vicious circle ... the more they tried to stabilize him, the more stressed he became and the more he slid downhill. Before the night was over our baby would be in emergency surgery fighting what seemed to be a losing battle for his life. The rug had completely been pulled out from under us.

Elijah beat the odds and survived the night and began to stabilize. He underwent two open- heart surgeries and multiple other procedures. We were initially told to expect a stay of four to 6 weeks in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit based on his condition that first night. But, Elijah exceeded expectations at every turn and he went home in a little over two weeks from that first day! The deciding factor in sending Elijah home was when his surgeon noticed that his vital signs were consistently more stable when he was being held skin to skin with his mommy! Elijah's greatest risk factor was infection and the care team felt his risk was much lower at home. It was truly a miracle. We were told this daily by the staff. We were also surprised to hear several staff members credit Elijah's gentle birth to helping him recover so quickly. Elijah didn't need to recover from his birth so he

could put his energy into healing instead. A great example of how a baby is born DOES make a difference!!!

We brought home a fragile hurting baby who was wary of being hurt and we were nervous wrecks! Because Elijah was still very fragile and had to be monitored constantly, he had also become very defensive. Diaper changes were horrible! As soon as he realized we were going to change him Elijah cried and we cried! He had developed a severe yeast infection in the folds of his neck and in his groin area due to all the antibiotics and diuretics he was on. The skin on his groin area was literally sloughing off and had to be so painful! It was horrible!

As a mother it was heartbreaking to want to help and comfort your baby and to be rejected because he was afraid of being hurt! I have never felt so helpless! I felt like that ICU stay had saved his life but had driven a wedge in our bonding experience. We did all we could to help overcome that break. We co-slept with him, carried him skin to skin around with us and when he was healed enough to tolerate the sling, we took turns wearing him all day. Thank goodness he was able to maintain breastfeeding! That was our one way to connect and that I could provide comfort to him. Slowly we made progress but I knew more could be done. I knew Janel could help us make the extra progress that was needed to fully process what had happened and to help us reconnect. I talked to Adam about working with her and he was fully supportive. I contacted her when Elijah was about 8 weeks old. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made!

## Our Experience of CranioSacral Focused Prenatal and Birth Therapy

Trying to explain to someone about what Janel does exactly and how her work is done is very difficult. There just aren't words enough to explain what goes on in a session, but I'll try.

The first time we met we went over in detail what had happened to Elijah from the beautiful birth, the PICU experience and all that had happened since. She had absolute respect for Elijah and talked to him. She asked him if she could hold him and told him exactly what she was doing as she did craniosacral work with him. She followed his movements and let him move as he wanted to. She in no way made him move, she simply supported him as he turned or moved a body part or pulled a foot or hand back, etc. as he "told his story" and she helped us process it as our feelings and memories came up. Many people believe that tiny babies can not communicate. I beg to differ! Elijah made it perfectly clear what he was saying through his body language!

Each session she did this and each session we learned something new that helped us help Elijah and helped us process the trauma with him. She was able to help us look at things through Elijah's eyes which was priceless! For example, one session as they worked together Janel sensed that something about his feet was concerning him. In pursuing further we remembered that he had been pricked numerous times a day on his feet in order to get blood glucose readings to check his blood sugar! No wonder when anyone came up to him and tried to touch his little feet (as even strangers often will do to make contact with babies!) he got

upset and quickly pulled his feet back. He was afraid of being hurt! We realized we had to not only be more aware of this and how it affected him but also do a better job of advocating for him. When people reached for his feet we were able to gently move him out of the way or just plain explain to them that he'd had his feet hurt in the ICU and didn't like them touched. People were very understanding and quickly Elijah over came his aversion to having his feet touched!

Another example was when we discovered why diaper changes continued to be so difficult even after the yeast infection in his groin area had cleared up. Janel helped us remember that every time he'd had a diaper change, the nurses had also checked IV's and arterial lines in his groin & chest area, had checked chest tubes, changed surgical tape holding tubes, adhesive heart electrodes, urethral catheters, given medications, etc., and it had been painful to him! Think how painful it can be to have a band aid removed & he'd experienced tape change multiple times a day. No wonder he still hated diaper changes! We just did it to him and he expected pain! We were able to recognize this and make sure that when we changed his diapers we told him what we were going to do and we made it the most positive experience we could for him! Within a week Elijah stopped screaming and within a couple of weeks he actually started enjoying our diaper changing times!

A third example was the day he cried. Now you may think this odd but other than diaper changes (when he all out screamed!) Elijah didn't cry. He fussed and squirmed but never really cried! We found that very disconcerting. Babies cry. It's how they communicate. But when Elijah started to cry, he quickly stopped or just



fussed so that we knew he needed something but he never all out cried like a typical baby. Something about it just didn't feel right. That day Janel held him and was doing craniosacral with him. As she did this, we talked about how he'd been on the ventilator and Adam and I could tell Elijah was crying, but he couldn't make any sound. Every time he started to cry they'd sedate him to keep his heart rate from rising too much. It was such a difficult moment for us ... watching Elijah helplessly lay there trying to communicate his needs & feelings to us but being unable to do so. I shared how frustrated I'd been not even being able to pick him up and to comfort him. Earlier, I told her how I knew that ventilator was keeping him alive but how I'd cried myself and wanted to rip it out of his mouth!

Janel helped me tell Elijah that it was ok to cry now. That his heart was strong now and he could cry and that we could hear him and would meet his needs. We apologized to him for his crying being silenced in the PICU. Suddenly he began to cry! You can call it coincidence if you like, but he cried. And cried and cried! I've never heard a tiny baby cry like that before! It was a long soulful cry and had such grief to it. It sounded like a much older person crying! It sounded like a much older person crying! It was the first time he'd shed tears too. As difficult as it was for me to let Elijah cry, I also realized that he needed this opportunity to fully express himself and be allowed to cry. Janel supported me too and led me in what to say to him since I was crying too! We acknowledged his pain, his loss, his grief and encouraged him to cry if he wanted to. We told him it was ok. He was safe

now and very loved. It was such a profound moment of connection! He cried and then fell asleep in Janel's arms, and he had such a peaceful look on his face"

I could go on and on giving examples! I'll leave you with one more. One session she was working with Elijah and we were talking about his surgeries. He became upset and as much as a three-month old can he began frantically reaching for her finger. Once he grasped it, he settled down. When she disconnected him and we continued to talk he did it again. He'd done this before but it wasn't until then that we made the connection. When he was in the ICU after his surgeries I wasn't allowed to hold him. With all the lines, ventilators etc connected to him he was almost completely covered! The only way Adam and I could connect & soothe him until we could hold him again was to hold his tiny hand with our fingers. We did that for hours at a time, standing by his bed! With Janel that day we realized just how important that connection and contact was for him; and, to this day, when he's upset we let Elijah grasp our finger and it helps soothe him! It was such a great thing to be able to make that realization and to find a tool and resource that we could use to help our son when he is in an emotional crisis and needs support!

Each session with Janel helped Adam and me feel more connected to our son and I know Elijah felt more connected to us too. We quickly over came our bonding issues and now you would never know there had ever been a concern. Elijah is now the happiest, sweetest child. He wakes up with a smile on his face each morning ready for what the day may bring. I truly believe he was able to overcome his difficult start with Janel's help. She not only helped us look at Elijah's behavior through his eyes but helped us learn to problem solve in order

to figure out what may be behind his behavior. The greatest gift she helped us give Elijah (and our other two children also!) is to be strong advocates for him! When he can't speak his needs or isn't sure what they are, we now have the skills to know when to step in and advocate for him, to better protect him and make sure others respect his needs and individuality and now we aren't afraid to do so either!

Janel, we thank you and Elijah thanks you too!

To schedule a consult with Janel visit [www.JanelMirendah.com](http://www.JanelMirendah.com)