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Teri Rizvi

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Thursday March 28, 2024

Mr. Eli

By Teri Rizvi

At your first birthday party, your Uncle Ali took one look at your blue frosting-smearred face and exclaimed, “Eli, are you full of pizza, blueberries, cupcake — and love?”

When he learned of your impending birth, he and Aunt Emily made plans to move from Brooklyn to Cincinnati to be closer to family, but we *know* his motivation: he wanted to be in your life and watch you grow up. Over the course of your first year, Uncle Ali tagged you with a string of endearing nicknames. “Aren’t you ‘Mr. Walk About Town?’” he asked as you grinned behind your baby walker.

He called you “Mr. Wave to the Crowd” after you began waving good-bye on family Zoom calls. Other nicknames: “Mr. Four Teeth,” “Mr. Little Hands,” and, as a nod to your fondness of hummus, “Mr. Chickpea.”

We all called you “Mr. Eli,” though your Daddy preferred a more respectful moniker. “Where are you going, Sir?” he asked as you crawled through the escape hatch in your oversized playpen to greet your Mommy whenever she walked in the room.

Your Mommy — the love of your life — called you “Bebe.” In a show of her devotion and care for you, she pumped breast milk for two hours every day to ensure you had the best nutrients for your early growth and development.

That’s 730 hours at the pump, a full month. Talk about love! You smiled, your eyes twinkling, whenever you saw her. She’ll always be your person.

“Eli loves Mommy, his pacifier and me, in that order,” your Daddy once joked. He may not have been exaggerating. In a hilarious moment, you once sat in your playpen with a pacifier in your mouth and one in each hand.

Daddy worked long days as a physical therapist during most of the week, but he relished spending Mondays with you at home, what we dubbed “Daddy Day Care.” You went on nap strike most days at your day care center, but if Daddy played the soothing “Brahm’s Lullaby” on repeat on his iPhone and gently rocked you, you’d sleep in his arms for hours. He dressed you in a Dayton Flyers shirt on game days and installed a basketball hoop in your playpen, where he sprawled on the floor and showed you how to shoot buckets.

You won’t remember those moments as you grow older, but he will — and he’ll always treasure that precious time you spent together.

Your family — Nana and Grandpa, Apa and Aba Jee, Uncle Ali, Aunt Emily, Uncle Alex and Aunt Lauren — loved to give you bottles and snuggle with you. Your great grandmother, Nancy, could always make you laugh, and, in a touching scene, your great grandfather, Jack, cuddled you in his arms after your baptism, just like he did his own eight children. For your first Christmas, you posed with your cousins, Ethan and Jacob, in matching red pajamas by the twinkling tree. You and Jacob amused yourselves by crawling in and out of an empty box, ignoring all your new toys with their flashing lights, bells and whistles. Like the Swiffer duster at home, you had found the best toy.

In a whirlwind year full of milestones, some moments stand out in our beautiful scrapbook of memories. As early as two months, you slept mostly through the night. You rolled over between four and five months. At eight months, you crawled, following your parents around like a puppy. You pulled yourself up at nine months and peeked over the top of the playpen. A hearty eater, you ate nearly a can of green beans at 10 months. At 11 months, you sat and bopped to the music of a stuffed elephant who flapped his ears and sang, “Do your ears hang low? Do they wobble to and fro?” At your birthday party, you cruised around with your walker.

Always curious, you adored people watching. You would stare intently at other diners in restaurants until they turned and smiled at you. “He’s the nosiest baby,” your Daddy told them apologetically.

Inquisitive. Adorable. Playful. So many adjectives describe you, but one tops the list.

“He’s a happy baby,” your Mommy said at your birthday party. “Eli’s a very happy baby.”

And he’s full of love.

— Teri Rizvi

Teri Rizvi is the director of the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop at the University of Dayton, where she also serves as executive director of strategic communications.