

My daughter and I met The First Lady. We were one of 112 invited guests to the East Dining Room for a state dinner. It happened, didn't it? It did. I have the pictures to prove it, so it must have.

The event organizer cautioned the children to savor every moment – warning them that it would all be over too quickly – “like your wedding day.” 56 bewildered 8- 12 year olds didn't understand the reference. I did. Grace is 12. In another dozen years middle school, high school and college will all be behind her. I need to be cherishing every moment with her – like a wedding day.

The next morning when we were preparing to leave the hotel lobby, I caught a glimpse of my daughter in the mirror. In that reflection, I saw a hint of the woman she was becoming. She moved gracefully, and carried herself with such aplomb although her nerves were tight. As if it happened in slow motion, she turned back to look at me, and the memories of her fragile infancy flooded over me. I wanted to travel back in time and tell my former self about this future moment in Washington D.C. Touching her fingers as they gripped my pinkie in the NICU at Children's Hospital at Ruby would translate into her reaching for my hand before they announced her arrival at a state dinner. Her tiny expressionless features would someday reflect pure joy and pride in herself. I wanted to squat down next to my 37 year old self and whisper, “You are right. She will be fine. Hold on to your hope. You'll be walking the halls of the White House with her sooner than you know.”

You see, Grace was born at 32 weeks, just as we lost her twin, Nicolas. Every time a doctor gave us another warning about what could happen to her, I would respond, “She'll be fine.” During those snowy weeks in 2004, I hung on every moment with her. I was singularly focused on Grace's survival. Given that we had lost our son unexpectedly and without cause, I wanted a guarantee that Grace would be fine. No one else would give that to me, so I offered it to myself. When it was quiet, and I sat alone next to her, I would whisper, “We are going to be fine.”

We cannot know what life has in store for us. We might not take another step in terror or we might race ahead in anticipation. We can only know this moment. It wasn't possible for me to know what lay in store for Grace. I couldn't yet recognize her quiet leadership, or know the depths of her sincere empathy. I hadn't yet sampled her passion for cooking or been barraged by her litany of questions. Still I had faith that we would be fine.

Catching a glimpse of her at that moment brought tears to my eyes. We were not only fine, we were boarding a bus to go to The White House. My daughter was taking me to meet the First Lady.

I do not know what comes next. It doesn't matter. I know Grace is empowered to make our community a healthier place for everyone, and I do not doubt that she will achieve that goal in some measure.

What I do know is that *every* moment matters. Losing Nicolas was losing the future, but losing Nicolas made me acutely aware of the miracle of Grace, indeed the miracle of every child, in every moment – whether she is getting ready to meet The First Lady or not.

Grace's story might give hope to all the mothers holding babies in a NICU somewhere or to all the parents grieving the loss of an infant child. I hope you allow that whisper, "We are going to be fine," to become a roar. Your fear and anguish will become your blessing before you know it. I hope you cherish every moment.