



It looks like a regular teddy bear, but the Comfort Cub is something more. Romi Galgano / Union-Tribune photos

A weight lifted

Comfort Cubs help fill the empty arms of mothers who haven't a child to hold

"I don't know

any other

way to explain

it. I felt called

in some way

to do this."

**Marcella
Johnson**

By John Wilkens
STAFF WRITER

Maybe all you need to know about Marcella Johnson is that she was once in the cast of "Up With People." She finds the silver lining in any cloud.

This was some cloud. Six months pregnant, the Encinitas woman went in for a routine ultrasound and learned the baby was going to die. The diagnosis was Osteogenesis Imperfecta Type II, a malady that makes bones break easily. It's so rare the doctor had to look it up in a textbook.

Johnson and her husband, Matt, listened to the options. The boy, already named George, could die any day. If he lived to term, he could die during the delivery. And if he survived the delivery, he would die shortly after.

There is no way to prepare for news like this, no way to get your mind around the idea of life and death surfacing at the same time. One day you're talking about birth announcements and the next you're planning a funeral.

There is no way to imagine, either, what it is like to wake up every morning not certain whether this child you are carrying has survived the night, not certain until you put the

flamenco jazz of Nova Menco on the CD player and the baby inside starts dancing.

And then you can breathe a sigh of relief and carry on the sad march to the inevitable.

In their prayers, the only miracle the Johnsons sought was for George to be born alive so he could die in their arms. They worried he might suffer, but a doctor told them all babies run on pain-blocking endorphins for the first 15 minutes. After that, the doctor said, there's morphine.

George Gabriel Johnson arrived at 4:12 p.m. on April 11, 1999. He died at 4:27 — exactly 15 minutes later.

"He didn't live 12 or 13 minutes where we may have felt denied one precious moment with him," Marcella said, "and he didn't live 16 minutes where we may have worried that he suffered and felt pain for even one minute."

"We felt blessed beyond belief to be able to meet our son, to hold him in our arms, and look into his big blue eyes and tell him that we loved him."

She had found her silver lining. It wasn't the last one.

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SEE BEARS, E3



Marcella Johnson holds her slumbering youngest child, Elizabeth. The logo for her special bear is in the background. Romi Galgano / Union-Tribune