

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Darlene Kriesel: "I Raised Her"

Darlene Kriesel · Wednesday, June 17th, 2020

I Raised Her

I did not deliberate for days and days
over what would be my baby's name
while she kicked, tossed and turned, then
slept in my womb while I caressed her
through the skin of my belly,
comforted I could protect
her because she and I
were still part of the same form,
yet full of wonder on what she
would become; would she have
my short nose or her father's
long one? Would her eyes be
deep set or burst forward with
the curiosity of a scholar?

I did not do this so that one day
her name would be listed
under those of the dead.

I did not part my baby's hair down the middle,
smooth pink lotion through each section,
grab 3 handfuls of hair and twist and smooth,
twist and smooth until I got to the end, grab a tiny
black rubber band, pull it open with my teeth,
wrap it 3 times around the end of her
hair every day until, at the age
of twelve, she begged to do it herself,
for you to bust open her apartment
door, because you can't read or you can't see,
or you can't listen to directions, or you declared
you were going to kill somebody black tonight, and
unload eight bullets into her promise, her
dreams, her right to be on her couch and
do nothing but breathe.

I did not go to JC Penney's
when she was thirteen and in between
sizes, hushing her cries
with cheers of "You are beautiful"
and "Those pants fit, they just need a little
hem," trying to build her up and crush
the pre-teen awkward hate she'd unloaded
onto her body.

I did not do this for you to come
crashing through her fortress
of plans laid and unknown,
into her protected space
where she was free
to bring her knees to her chest
in thought or open
up like a beautiful
brown canvas full of
laughter and wonder
and tear holes into her body
I helped strengthen to love
itself and whose body she did love.

I raised my daughter
To live.

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