

BLOOD: The Gift of Life

By M. Regina Cram

I was still chuckling as I left the Red Cross blood drive today with my two younger children in tow. As I'd gathered our coats, someone had turned to me and said, "I hear you have four young children. Why do you give blood?"

"Are you kidding?" I laughed. "When I donate, the volunteers watch my children for me, they feed me, they tell me how wonderful I am, and I get to put my feet up for 20 minutes. It's a great deal."

Left unsaid was my other reason for giving, the reason which still chills me when I allow myself to remember. It was 18 months ago at what was supposed to be the routine delivery of another healthy Cram baby. My obstetrician used to joke that his coffee was still hot after he delivered my babies. But this baby was different. Just moments before birth, something went terribly wrong. I suffered a rare amniotic embolism which collapsed my blood's clotting system.

As the baby made her rapid appearance into the world, medical personnel scurried around with worried looks and hushed voices. My husband stood by helplessly as he heard, "not much time...extremely critical...prep more blood....can't promise we can save her..." Grueling hours later, after emergency surgery and transfusions, he heard the sweet news that I was one of the lucky ones, one of the 14 percent who survived this complication. It had taken the speed and skill of eight doctors, and the availability of 25 units of blood to save me.

A year and a day later I became eligible to donate blood again, and I could scarcely contain my excitement. My husband was baffled. How could I explain it to him? Somewhere out there are 25 people who bared their arms, flinched for a brief moment, then watched (or didn't watch) as a pint of their life's blood was freely offered. All they received in return were some kind words and a cup of coffee from Red Cross volunteers.

Those 25 people did not donate because it was convenient. They had to leave work early or juggle a carpool schedule or miss dinner that night. It's not that they had nothing better to do. They donated blood because they knew that their pint of blood could make a difference, and maybe even save a life.

Mine is the life they saved. You'd never know it if you saw me. I am just another overwhelmed mother who looks healthy and exhausted, but those 25 people helped to ensure that a baby will grow up knowing her mother, that a young father could bring his wife home to grow old with him. Somewhere out there today, in some hospital corridor, is another terrified young husband, or parent, or sister, or friend, desperately hoping that his loved one survives, and that loved one looks an awfully lot like me.

So I gave blood today, and my toddler and preschooler came to watch to see if Mama's blood is red, just like last time, or if this time it is green. They got bandages on their arms to match mine, and stickers, and a glimpse of the gift of life. We ate cookies and drank our milk, and I left with a little less blood and a much fuller heart. You see, I gave blood today, and all I felt was good.

American Red Cross Note: This article appeared in the July 1993 issue of *Welcome Home*, a periodical published by Mothers at Home. It is appropriate for all of us to pause a moment and consider Regina Cram's message. Yes, blood is our business, but it is also a lifesaving gift. We need lifesavers. Please give blood. This article is reprinted with the permission of the author.