

# The Miscarriage Secret

I barely knew anyone who'd had a miscarriage... until I experienced my own.

[Caitlin Seccombe Lubinski](#),

I've been carrying a secret. It is a heavy, invisible secret that moves drunkenly around my mind. It's a secret that is hard to talk about with anybody but my husband. It's a secret that has become

It's the miscarriage secret.

And as soon as somebody finds out about my secret, they tell me theirs. Never have I traded secrets with so many near-strangers. "I had two of my own," the older nurse putting an IV in my arm tells me. Then she gently moves the hair from my forehead like I'm her daughter.

When my husband leaves work for a doctor's appointment and doesn't come back that afternoon, he has to explain to one of his colleagues. His colleague understands the miscarriage secret. He tells my husband his own and says to treat me kindly because this secret is something I will never completely forget.

I was 11 weeks along when my husband and I saw the ultrasound tech's face tense up. I read the news in her body language before I could comprehend the silence that reverberated throughout the room in the absence of a heartbeat. The sadness met us forcefully. We wondered at the pain we felt for the loss of someone we never knew.

As I experience the grief of miscarriage, I am struck by the hush-hush method with which our culture treats an extremely widespread women's issue. In some ways, I'm grateful for the privacy granted me. In the first few months, it was an extraordinarily painful thing to talk about—even with my closest friends.

Paradoxically, the quietness associated with miscarriage has opened up an unforeseen community of support and love as people gently step forward to share their experiences with me. There's dignity in the confidentiality, and there's the freedom to mourn in this newly found private community.

As I see it, however, a few problems arise when we keep miscarriage private, away from the larger community. When statistics stop matching experience, our concept of reality becomes disjointed at best. I'm a 28-year-old, educated woman, and I knew the statistical chances of having a miscarriage were significant—one in five known pregnancies for my age group end in miscarriage, and a far higher percentage exists for women in their 30s and 40s. But the truth of cold numbers often fails to dislodge long-held beliefs based on personal experience. Because I knew of only two women who had miscarriages, I still thought of miscarriage as a rather exceptional case, like the chances you have of breaking your femur if you decide to go skiing. They exist—but you only know a few people in your lifetime to whom it happens, and it certainly would never make you think twice about getting on the chairlift.

Miscarriage, it so happens, is nothing like a freak skiing accident. It touches many more women than we realize. I think that if we girls and women and boys and men grew up with a more open sharing of the grief of miscarriage, then the loss, when it happens, would not seem quite so alienating. That loss might feel for women more like a natural part of life, the sharing of a common grief that is held by a large population of women, rather than a shameful, clandestine breaking down of your body that must be hidden from your healthy counterparts. Miscarriage might seem more expected, a bit more like a sorrowful version of your first period, that tremendous and poignant initiation into the mystery and community of womanhood.

It's difficult to say that women should be more open about miscarriage. I feel hypocritical and determined at the same moment. I still have not shared my miscarriage with very many people—nor do I think it was appropriate

or necessary for me to do so during my time of mourning. There is grace and mercy for periods of grief. But with time, I want to organically share my experience with the people I know. I want to push past the uncomfortable looks of the uninitiated and not take personally the awkward subject-shifts of well-meaning people when I bring up the topic of my miscarriage.

Whenever I do try to talk candidly about it, I feel certain people around me freeze. It's okay that they don't know quite how to respond. Looking on someone else's grief always feels intrusive, especially if you haven't experienced that particular brand. I want to start to view that discomfort as a reflection of strong cultural norms rather than as a cue about the inappropriateness of my desire to share my experience.

Imagine if we moved to the same comfort level with talking about miscarriage that we feel when someone talks about a really bad car accident they once had or the death of a grandparent. What if we accepted miscarriage as an open topic for discussion? Isn't it odd that we haven't? Think of the many important women's topics we make an effort to discuss more openly: breast cancer, sexual harassment, abuse, and infertility, to name a few.

As I write this, I acknowledge that women's experiences with miscarriage vary greatly. I was still in my first trimester when I miscarried, and it was my first pregnancy. But the grief was significant for a time and church worship was difficult. Something about so many pregnant women gathered in one place and so many happy children trooping forward as the church prayed for them, and something about the rawness I felt as I watched the Lord's body break for my broken body, something about all of these elements overwhelmed me. In the first weeks I had to walk out of church early on a consistent basis trying to hold it together until I breached the front doors. My husband followed with my coat, and his comforting words, but the feeling of shame that I couldn't keep from crying and my panicked pride that someone may have seen my emotion embarrassed me.

Imagine if, as Christians and as women, we could more openly acknowledge the burden of miscarriage. We could at least talk about the guilt a woman feels when a beautiful newborn baby causes her to weep, and perhaps through the dialogue of a community, that guilt would lessen as it revealed more candidly the processes of grief women who miscarry walk through. Worship isn't just for those who rejoice. It is also for those who mourn—both secretly and openly. Perhaps this secret grief, though, needs a bit more air and light. Perhaps it needs the freedom of expression that we assign to other forms of grief, so that after sharing and receiving our stories of miscarriage, we can see clearly enough to reach out and tenderly remove the tendrils of pain that grow on each other's hearts.

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