

## Losing Thomas & Ella: A Father’s Story (A Research Comic)

Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower<sup>1</sup> 

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**Abstract** “Losing Thomas & Ella” presents a research comic about one father’s perinatal loss of twins. The comic recounts Paul’s experience of the hospital and the babies’ deaths, and it details the complex grieving process afterward, including themes of anger, distance, relationship stress, self-blame, religious challenges, and resignation. A methodological appendix explains the process of constructing the comic and provides a rationale for the use of comics-based research for illness, death, and grief among practitioners, policy makers, and the bereaved.

**Keywords** Perinatal death · Grief · Fathers · Stillbirth · Sequential art · Comics-based research · Narrative research · Qualitative research · Research comics

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✉ Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower  
mwh@und.edu

<sup>1</sup> Educational Foundations and Research, University of North Dakota, 231 Centennial Drive, Stop 7189, Grand Forks, ND 58202, USA

# Losing Thomas & Ella

## A FATHER'S STORY

A RESEARCH COMIC BY  
MARCUS B. WEAVER-HIGHTOWER  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

WHERE IT STARTED FOR ME, I GOT A CALL AT WORK AROUND ONE IN THE AFTERNOON.



MY WIFE, JENNA\*, WHO WAS ABOUT 22 WEEKS PREGNANT WITH TWINS—A BOY AND A GIRL—HAD JUST SAID SHE WAS FEELING SOME PAIN AND SHE HAD CALLED THE HOSPITAL. THEY JUST TOLD HER TO LAY THERE. THEY ALSO TOLD HER TO TAKE A BATH.



SUBSEQUENTLY THOUGH SHE CALLED ME BACK. THEY TOLD HER TO COME TO THE HOSPITAL. THEY THOUGHT I SHOULD COME, TOO.



BUT SHE HAD THE CAR THAT DAY. AND OF COURSE I MISS THE BUS...



I'LL COME GET YOU.

WE DROVE RIGHT TO THE HOSPITAL AS QUICK AS WE COULD.

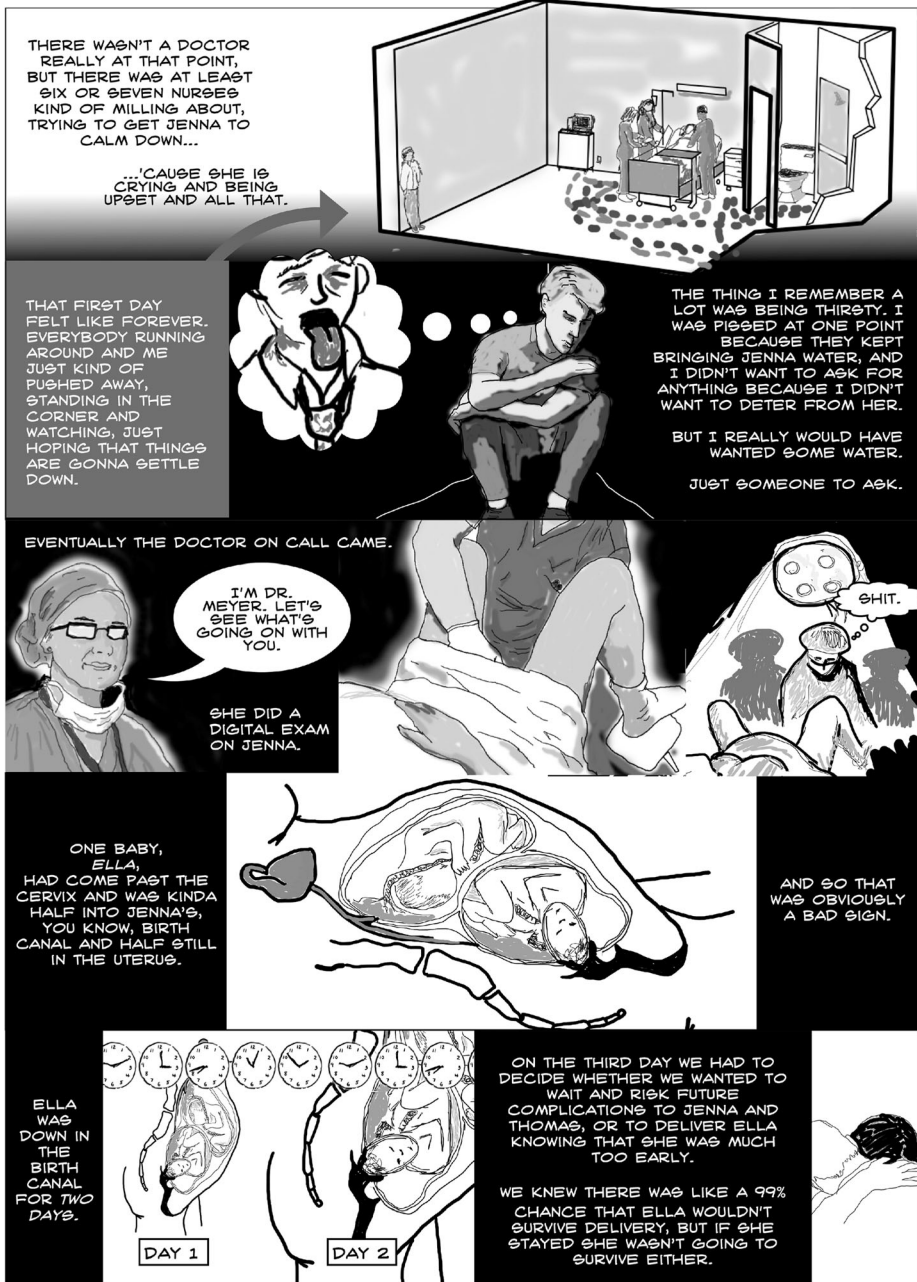


AS SOON AS THEY GOT HER INTO THE HOSPITAL ROOM, SHE NOTICED SHE HAD BLOOD.

SO SHE GOT REALLY UPSET.



\* PSEUDONYMS ARE USED THROUGHOUT.



SO WE ENDED UP  
DELIVERING HER ON THAT  
THIRD DAY.

SHE WAS WITH US FOR  
FORTY-FIVE MINUTES,  
ALIVE AND KIND OF  
FIGHTING.

BUT BECAUSE SHE  
WAS SO EARLY,  
HER LUNGS  
WEREN'T  
DEVELOPED.



SHE PASSED AWAY.

AFTER THAT THING~~S~~ REALLY STARTED CALMING DOWN, JENNA'S BODY WASN'T FREAKING OUT NEARLY AS MUCH. WE WERE IN THE HOSPITAL FOR FOURTEEN DAYS...



...AND FOR THE NEXT AT LEAST WEEK IT WAS LOOKING PRETTY HOPEFUL FOR THOMAS.

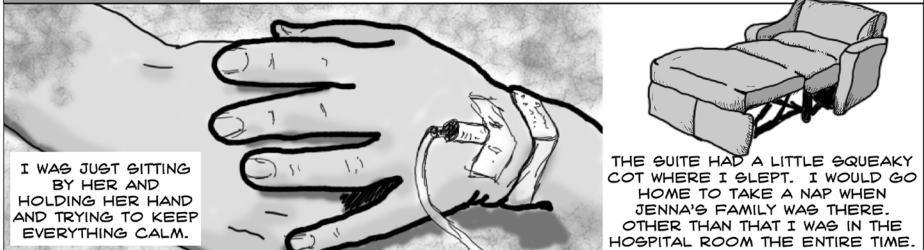


THOMAS ONLY HAD TO MAKE IT TO TWENTY-FOUR WEEKS BEFORE HE WOULD BE CONSIDERED "VIALE."



DURING ALL THIS, JENNA, BEING A NURSE, SHE DOESN'T WANT TO BE A BURDEN ON ANY OF THE OTHER NURSES. SO SHE HAD ME DOING A LOT OF STUFF. LIKE FOR EXAMPLE, SHE LIKED TO HAVE HER HAIR WASHED, SO I DID ALL OF THAT FOR HER.

AND I KNEW WHERE THE SECRET FRIDGE IS THAT THEY DON'T TELL THE VISITING FAMILIES ABOUT. SO I'D GO GET HER SPRITE.



I WAS JUST GETTING BY HER AND HOLDING HER HAND AND TRYING TO KEEP EVERYTHING CALM.

THE QUITE HAD A LITTLE SQUEAKY COT WHERE I SLEPT. I WOULD GO HOME TO TAKE A NAP WHEN JENNA'S FAMILY WAS THERE. OTHER THAN THAT I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM THE ENTIRE TIME.

AFTER ELLA WAS BORN, THE PLACENTA WAS STILL INSIDE JENNA. SO WHEN WE CUT THE CORD IT WAS STILL HANGING OUT. I MEAN IT WAS INSIDE HER HER, UH, VAGINA AND ALL THAT SORT OF STUFF.



SO JUST FROM JENNA HAVING TO USE THE BATHROOM, THINGS LIKE THAT, IT GOT E. COLI. AND SO THAT WENT UP AND STARTED TO INFECT THE PLACENTA AND THE UTERUS, TOO.





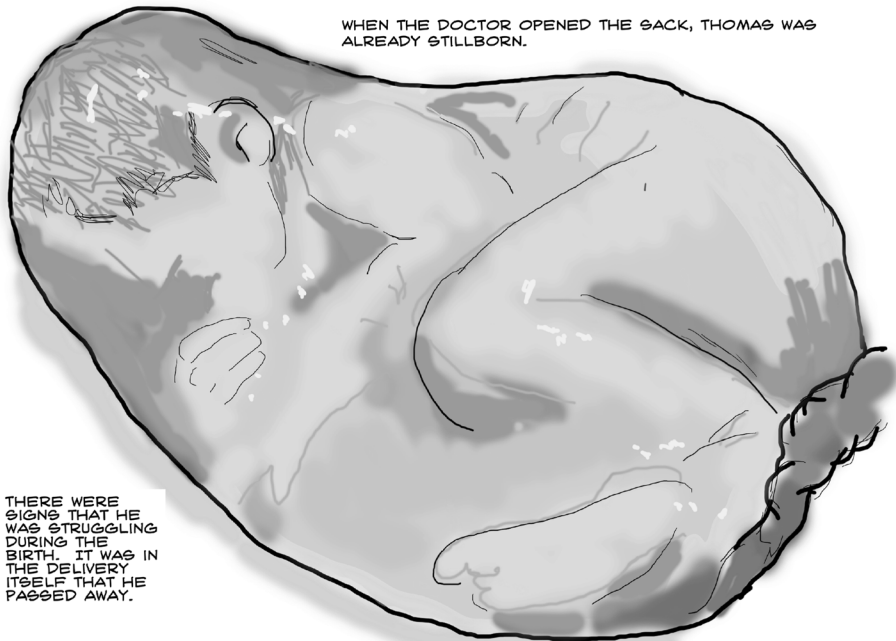
IT WAS A FRIDAY NIGHT, PROBABLY ABOUT SEVEN O'CLOCK, WHEN JENNA REALLY STARTED TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.

PROBABLY ABOUT TEN OR ELEVEN SHE REALLY WENT INTO HARD LABOR AGAIN.



THAT NEXT MORNING SHE FINALLY GAVE BIRTH TO THOMAS. HE CAME OUT INSIDE THE SACK.\*

WHEN THE DOCTOR OPENED THE SACK, THOMAS WAS ALREADY STILLBORN.



THERE WERE SIGNS THAT HE WAS STRUGGLING DURING THE BIRTH. IT WAS IN THE DELIVERY ITSELF THAT HE PASSED AWAY.

\*Also called a "veiled" or "en-caul" birth.



WE HELD BOTH BABIES AFTER THEY WERE DELIVERED, WHICH FOR ME WAS WEIRD. LIKE I—

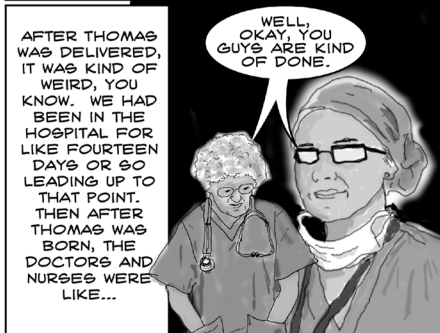
WITH ELLA IT WAS EASIER BECAUSE SHE WAS BORN ALIVE, YOU KNOW. SO IT WAS KINDA NO QUESTION.

BUT WHEN THOMAS WAS BORN, HE WAS STILLBORN. AND I THINK IF WE WOULD HAVE HAD ELLA STILLBORN FIRST, I WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE WEIRDED OUT BY HOLDING HER.



UP UNTIL THIS I REALLY HADN'T BEEN AROUND ANY BODIES AT ALL. OTHER THAN "OH THERE'S ONE UP AT THE FRONT OF THE CHURCH" OR WHATEVER, YOU KNOW. THAT SORT OF EXPERIENCE.

BUT NOTHING LIKE THIS.



AFTER THOMAS WAS DELIVERED, IT WAS KIND OF WEIRD, YOU KNOW. WE HAD BEEN IN THE HOSPITAL FOR LIKE FOURTEEN DAYS OR SO LEADING UP TO THAT POINT. THEN AFTER THOMAS WAS BORN, THE DOCTORS AND NURSES WERE LIKE...

WELL, OKAY, YOU GUYS ARE KIND OF DONE.



THEY GAVE JENNA AN EXTRA DAY OR TWO TO BE CHECKED OUT TO MAKE SURE THE INFECTION WAS GOING AWAY.

AND THEN WE JUST SORT OF...

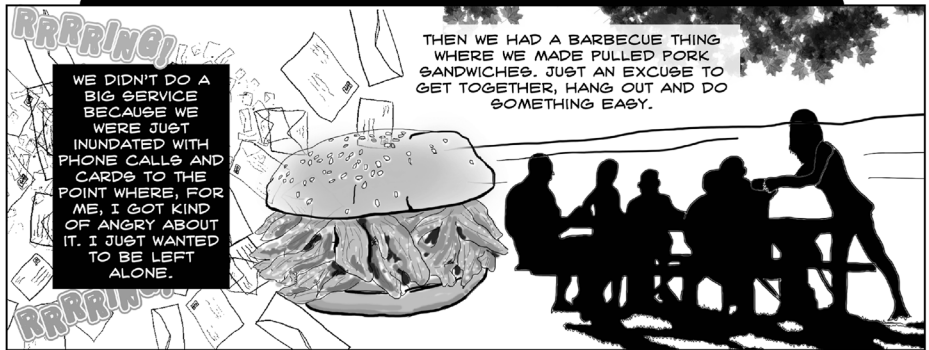
WENT HOME...

THE LONG 'AFTER'...



WE DIDN'T DO A BIG, FORMAL FUNERAL.

THERE'S AN ANGEL OF HOPE STATUE\* DOWNTOWN, SO WE JUST DID A LITTLE PRAYER SERVICE THERE.



WE DIDN'T DO A BIG SERVICE BECAUSE WE WERE JUST INUNDATED WITH PHONE CALLS AND CARDS TO THE POINT WHERE, FOR ME, I GOT KIND OF ANGRY ABOUT IT. I JUST WANTED TO BE LEFT ALONE.

THEN WE HAD A BARBECUE THING WHERE WE MADE PULLED PORK SANDWICHES. JUST AN EXCUSE TO GET TOGETHER, HANG OUT AND DO SOMETHING EASY.



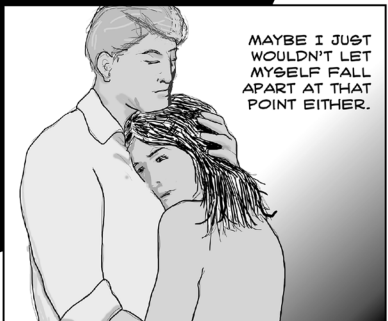
SO MANY PEOPLE TALK ABOUT PARENTS OR WHOEVER TELLING YOU AS THE HUSBAND, THE FATHER, TO BE STRONG. I DIDN'T REALLY GET THAT.

BE STRONG.



I TRIED TO BE STRONG. NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF MYSELF. AT THE SAME TIME I TRIED TO BE THERE FOR JENNA, JUST EMOTIONALLY. I WASN'T NECESSARILY BEING TOLD

BE THE MAN.



MAYBE I JUST WOULDN'T LET MYSELF FALL APART AT THAT POINT EITHER.

\* SO-CALLED "CHRISTMAS BOX ANGEL STATUES" HAVE BEEN ERECTED WORLDWIDE TO COMMEMORATE DEAD CHILDREN, BASED ON A NOVEL BY RICHARD PAUL EVANS (1993).

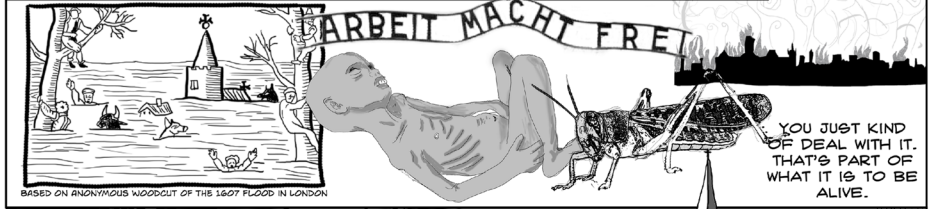




EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, WE STILL SAY A PRAYER.

JENNA HAS HAD AN ON-AGAIN OFF-AGAIN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AFTER THIS.

MY FAITH IS LESS SHAKEN, I GUESS. I'M CATHOLIC, AND CATHOLICS REALIZE THE WORLD SUCKS AND BAD THINGS HAPPEN. AND THERE'S NO REAL REASON FOR IT.



BASED ON ANONYMOUS WOODCUT OF THE 1607 FLOOD IN LONDON

YOU JUST KIND OF DEAL WITH IT. THAT'S PART OF WHAT IT IS TO BE ALIVE.



BUT THOMAS AND ELLA'S DEATHS HAVE SHAKEN ME IN THE SENSE THAT I'M LESS OF A GOOD CATHOLIC. NOW I'M LIKE...

THE HELL WITH IT!

BUT WE STILL GO TO CHURCH FROM TIME TO TIME, MOSTLY WHEN WE'RE STARTING TO FEEL GUILTY.



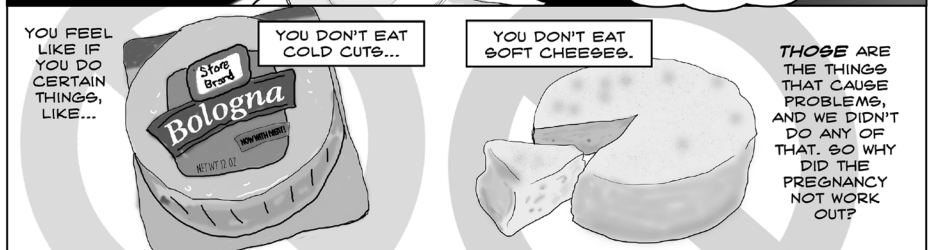
THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS, REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOU DO OR SAY OR HOW ANGRY YOU GET, IT DOESN'T CHANGE WHAT HAPPENED.

I FOCUSED ON THAT...

NO MATTER HOW MAD WE GET ABOUT IT, IT DOESN'T HELP.

THE HARDER THING FOR ME IS MORE SO WHEN YOU TRY TO FIGURE OUT

WHAT DID WE DO TO SCREW THIS UP?



YOU FEEL LIKE IF YOU DO CERTAIN THINGS, LIKE...

YOU DON'T EAT COLD CUTS...

YOU DON'T EAT SOFT CHEESES.

THOSE ARE THE THINGS THAT CAUSE PROBLEMS, AND WE DIDN'T DO ANY OF THAT. SO WHY DID THE PREGNANCY NOT WORK OUT?

I THINK TO SOME EXTENT LOSING THOMAS AND ELLA HAS BEEN A STRAIN ON JENNA'S AND MY RELATIONSHIP. BUT PEOPLE KEEP SAYING THINGS LIKE...

WELL, YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT AS HARD ON MARRIAGES AS YOU'VE BEEN TOLD. THE DIVORCE RATE IS ONLY 76%.

76%!!

AND I'M LIKE...

\* Relationship breakdown rates are higher for those with perinatal losses, but 76% far overestimates the occurrence (e.g., Gold et al. 2010)

IF WE'RE NOT AT THE SAME PLACE IN OUR GRIEF OR GRIEVING IN DIFFERENT WAYS, THAT PUTS A STRAIN. I THINK JENNA IS JUST SOMEBODY WHO KEEPS IT TO HERSELF.

I KNOW SHE GETS MAD THOUGH.

I THINK SHE THINKS

HE'S OVER IT ALREADY.

OR THE ANGER THING, YOU KNOW, WHERE IF SHE'S ANGRY AT SOME PEOPLE AND I'M NOT ANGRY AT THEM, SHE GETS FRUSTRATED WITH ME FOR NOT FEELING THE SAME WAY SHE IS.

WHY ARE YOU TAKING THEIR SIDE?

ONE THING THAT UPSET ME IS WHEN YOU SEE BABIES THE AGE THOMAS AND ELLA WOULD HAVE BEEN.

OR WHEN YOU START THINKING ABOUT HAVING TWINS, BECAUSE THE LIKELIHOOD IS THAT WE'LL NEVER HAVE TWINS AGAIN.

IT'S THAT WHOLE IDEA OF WHAT *WOULD* HAVE BEEN THAT YOU'RE MISSING.

IT'S NOT NECESSARILY JUST SADNESS; PARTIALLY IT'S ANGER, TOO. LIKE WHEN PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT BEING EXCITED ABOUT A PREGNANCY.

WE'VE GOT SOME GREAT NEWS...!

IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T WANT THEM TO BE EXCITED ABOUT THEIR PREGNANCY. I JUST DON'T WANT TO NECESSARILY BE EXCITED WITH THEM.

NOW, WITH OUR SECOND PREGNANCY, THERE ARE PEOPLE SAYING

WELL, WHY ARE YOU SO WORRIED? WHAT'S THE BIG CONCERN?

AND SOMETIMES IT'S PEOPLE THAT YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT TO SAY THAT. LIKE JENNA'S MOM WAS SAYING

WHEN YOU HAVE THIS BABY--

IF WE HAVE THIS BABY. IF!

WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT? WHY WOULD YOU EVEN THINK THAT?

WELL, IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS WHY. YOU HAVE FEAR FOREVER.

YOU'RE SO WORRIED ABOUT ALL THE POSSIBLE THINGS THAT COULD BE GOING WRONG...\*

\*©CRN, 2011

Placenta Previa

Cord Accident

Trisomy 13 or 18

Infection

...THAT IT MAKES YOU UNWILLING TO GET EXCITED ABOUT BUYING A STROLLER OR ALL THE DUMB STUFF THAT YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED ABOUT DOING OR THAT SHOULD SEEM SO IMPORTANT.

WE HAD THIS IDEA ABOUT WHAT PREGNANCY WAS SUPPOSED TO BE...

AND SUDDENLY IT'S NOT.

SUDDENLY THERE'S THIS CHANCE OF LOSS, OF THE BABY NOT MAKING IT.

IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT, JUST NOT WHAT YOU WANTED IT TO BE.

AND I THINK THAT'S A BIG PART OF WHAT MAKES IT SO HARD...

THE REALIZATION THAT THINGS AREN'T IN YOUR CONTROL.

I'D LIKE TO SAY TO OTHER BEREAVED FATHERS THAT IT'S GOING TO GET BETTER.

BUT I'M NOT SURE THAT IT WILL.

YOU LIKE TO THINK THAT THERE'S SOME GUARANTEES THAT ARE GOING TO COME OUT OF IT OR SOME SORT OF LESSON. I DON'T THINK THERE IS THAT EITHER.

IT'S JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS WHERE YOU JUST HAVE THE SHIT LUCK, AND WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THAT?

WELL, YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING REALLY. YOU CAN JUST KIND OF HOPE THAT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET THE BAD CALL NEXT TIME.

## Methodological appendix

A comic purporting to be “research,” or research-based, resides in a sort of limbo; what we might call a “research comic” is not exactly like a typical commercial comic or graphic novel.<sup>1</sup> Comics can do almost anything, tell nearly any story in any way, but in practice most comics follow particular conventions and reader expectations. The same is true for scholarly research in nearly all disciplines: conventions exist to which most adhere. Thus, to be a scholar-artist producing research comics is to inhabit two roles, sometimes overlapping and sometimes warring. Can a comic be rigorous, informative research and be aesthetically pleasing or entertaining *simultaneously*? How might one best navigate tensions between producing comics and producing academic research? Perhaps some tensions are irreconcilable, and compromises must be reached. Nevertheless, the comics form affords scholars modes of representation completely congruent with—perhaps even superior to—traditional, largely linguistic reporting in academia. (Not that a comic has to be seen by others to be useful to a researcher.)

“Losing Thomas & Ella: A Father’s Story” began as a traditional qualitative study and became a comic when it grew clear that standard qualitative writing could not adequately convey everything in Paul’s story. The concepts needed explications that in many cases could not be crafted using words, no matter how articulate. Paul’s story *could* be told in just text, but much would be missing. Pardon the trite expression, but a picture often is “worth” many, many words. Paul referenced things I felt needed to be seen or imagined, but which no qualitative researcher could “collect” from the lifeworld—views inside the womb, the inexpressible boredom of weeks spent in a hospital, statues prayed in front of, a feeling of being without control. Comics can explore these sometimes inaccessible places and capture emotions and experiences, and they can do so in ways that logocentric research methods often cannot (see Sousanis 2015).

Both of my roles in constructing “Losing Thomas & Ella”—comic creator and researcher—involved responsibilities of form. The tension between forms originates within the different social languages, indeed different literacy practices (Gee 1996), of people who produce comics and who produce research, usually quite apart from one another. To do both, then, is to attempt a different kind of literacy, but one that still requires things of its creators. A research comic has obligations to be helpful *as scholarship*. For instance, research must signal the source for its information. In “Losing Thomas & Ella,” I used an interview, so some panels include Paul talking. From the comic creator role, though, showing someone talking is often not particularly dynamic. Indeed, artist Wally Wood famously developed his “22 Panels That Always Work” for occasions “where some dumb writer has a bunch of lame characters sitting around and talking for page after page.”<sup>2</sup> In “Losing Thomas & Ella,” I have limited and varied the “talking head” panels while still showing that the information comes from an interview. Joe Sacco, a founder of comics journalism (2012), demonstrates other ways to handle this inherent difficulty, including captured speech, detail in drawings, but also sometimes just showing the talking heads (see Sacco 2005, 2007). Relatedly, to truly be scholarship, the research must refer to knowledge outside the stories of participants—secondary sources. Comics can do this, too, and in varying ways. In “Losing Thomas & Ella,” I use citations, footnotes, editor notes, and even purely visual references to signal the world outside and what the academic community already knows.

I am not only importing research into a comic, though; I’m also importing the conventions of comics into research. The comics form has capacities well suited to meeting research and other scholarly expectations, for it allows description, exposition, and speech just as traditional texts in journal articles. Comics accommodate the trappings of academic prose, like editorial comment and citations. Beyond this, though, comics afford their creators sights, motion, sound

effects, the elapsing of time, and even glimpses into places where normal, unaided human vision cannot go, like inside the body. The comics form more faithfully transforms the three-dimensional world of qualitative research into the two-dimensional format of academic publishing. It may not suit every research project (no one research practice could), but for some projects comics provide powerful cognitive and representational resources that can bring the subject alive. As graphic novelist Chris Ware said,

I believe that the expressive potentials of comics as a compositional art—with its combination of drawing, poetry, color, writing, pattern, rhythm, typography, and ‘music’—allow for the greatest possible recreation of the complexity of experience that a printed page can offer. (quoted in Rhoades 2008, 36)

For most qualitative researchers, recreating “the complexity of experience” is precisely their goal, and comics provide more resources for that than text alone.

To meet researchers’ expectations for process and information quality, in the comic-making process I borrowed qualitative research tools to help me make decisions. Qualitative research’s preference for multiple forms of data encouraged a mixing and assemblage of data and representations. Maps, photos, references, interviews, checks for dissenting opinions, and documents are more traditionally part of the qualitative writer’s toolkit, whereas comic artists (with many important exceptions) typically stick to a singular narrative line. To collect and analyze data for “Losing Thomas & Ella,” I used tools familiar to narrative inquiry, a major approach to qualitative research (see Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Saamivaara and Bochner 2003). The story grew from long-term personal contact and semiformal and informal interviews with Paul, a father I recruited from an infant bereavement group. The majority of text originates from verbatim quotations from one specific semiformal interview around one year after Paul’s loss.

A major step in narrative inquiry is “restorying,” or rearranging the narrated events into a chronological or other logical order (see Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002). Comics creators do the same task in scripting and page layouts. To restory Paul’s narrative to fit the format of a comic script, one which could be translated into panels and pages, I split events into two major time frames: first, the highly chronological events of the loss and hospital experience and, second, the abstract and much less time-bound experience of grieving afterward. Within this basic division, I made combinations and selections—what qualitative researchers typically refer to as “data reduction”; comics creators usually refer to this as “editing.” Most basically my selections were forced by page limits; academic journals usually stipulate word counts, whereas comics use page restrictions. Moreover, comics can fit far fewer words on a page given the visuals.

Comic-making decisions were *analytical* decisions, much like decisions made in qualitative analysis. My main criterion for including interview parts in the comic was, first, passages consistent with themes from the literature on fathers and perinatal bereavement (see Aho et al. 2006, 2009; Badenhorst et al. 2006; Cacciatore et al. 2008; Cook 1988; Dilts 2001; Flenady and Wilson 2008; McGreal et al. 1997; O’Neill 1998; Stinson et al. 1992; Vance et al. 1995, 2002; Weaver-Hightower 2012; Zeanah et al. 1995). For example, many studies report parents being anxious about the outcome in subsequent pregnancies, so I included Paul’s worries about Jenna’s and his impending first post-loss birth. In addition, Paul talked about listening to talk radio for “perspective.” That experience is not generally reported in the literature, so even though it was important for Paul, and I very well could have reported it, in the interest of space I left it out for more prevalent experiences. Like any research report, outlier experiences had to be weighed for possible importance to readers, and some experiences struck me—in my role as informed scholar—as less critical than others. In general, then, inclusion was a way of thematizing the narrative, connecting Paul’s

experiences to others', but hopefully without erasing Paul's important individualities. A second criterion, responsive to the obligation for aesthetic experience privileged by the comics form, was that I wanted to keep particularly well-said or potent passages, quotations with rhetorical and emotional power that would resonate with readers.

Through my iterative selection process, the 13,000-word interview transcript was condensed into a roughly 2,000-word comics script suited to ten comics pages. In places where they added little, I cleaned up pauses, hesitations, false starts and other non-content speech artifacts. Where these served meaning or verisimilitude, I retained them.

Once the script was complete, I made thumbnail sketches of panel and page layouts, constantly adjusting these to enhance story, interest, impact, and clarity. These decisions were guided by McCloud's (2006) five "choices" for comics artists—choices of moment, of frame, of image, of word, and of flow—considerations similar to the rhetorical choices all researchers make in reporting research. Other design decisions were guided by conventional comics creation practices (see Abel and M. Madden 2008, 2012). Decisions about what parts of the script were on a particular page, for example, were highly purposeful, making page turns and image groupings a meaningful, designed part of the reading experience.

Image creation highlighted another tension in doing research comics. Research—whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods—privileges life experiences *both* phenomenological and narrative (separable only theoretically, I concede). Comics, though, largely privilege narratives. Or, at least, phenomenological content proves harder to portray visually, and sometimes words better represent experience. While many comics readers favor more showing than telling, sometimes telling more than showing becomes necessary. McCloud's (1993) explication of how comics work, for one, shows that creators accomplish word-picture balance in many ways; comics can be wordless, can have pages of text only, or in places can contain neither (i.e., "blank" pages that forward a narrative). Further, whether and to what extent words and pictures correspond can vary wildly. The pictures can represent the same thing as the words or be completely disconnected, or the correspondence can sit on a continuum between these. "Losing Thomas & Ella" contains much text because I wanted to "ground" the comic in the participant's words—a hallmark of qualitative research. The relative correspondence between text and images varies across the comic, largely dependent on the relative abstraction of Paul's concepts. The text-image correspondence becomes looser in the second half as the story becomes less narrative and more phenomenological. It *may* be that comics seeking to also be qualitative research must include more text and more correspondence as a compromise between the two forms. Future creators, though, may find more elegant solutions to such tensions.

To assess quality and validity for the research comic, I borrowed a number of standard qualitative "trustworthiness" practices (Lincoln and Guba 1985) to apply to the comics creation process. Most helpfully, I did what qualitative researchers might call "member checking" with Paul; he read and commented on the comic, helping me confront issues of representational accuracy, ethics, and even transcription. I also conducted numerous critique sessions—what a qualitative researcher might call "peer debriefings"—sharing the comic with interested and knowledgeable colleagues, both artists and researchers, who commented on both research content and comic design. The feedback received helped me clarify and adjust aspects of the comic that were unclear, potentially misrepresentative, or just not aesthetically good. To that latter point, I constantly had in mind ethnodramatist Johnny Saldaña's (2005, 31) reminder that no one wants to see a bad play, even if it is based on research. No one wants to read a bad comic, either, so research obligations sometimes ceded to aesthetic obligations. Finally, in my role as researcher, I kept a reflexive journal to interrogate my own processes and

hopefully limit preconceptions. This was particularly germane given my own experiences as a bereaved parent (Weaver-Hightower 2012).

Many other comics and graphic novels have explored medical and psychological conditions (what might be called “graphic medicine”; see Czerwiec et al. 2015), as well as death and grief. Works like *Stiches* (Small 2009), *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo and Me* (Forney 2012), and *Billy, Me & You* (Streeten 2011), among many others, demonstrate the form’s power for conveying emotional and embodied experiences. Reporting “research” with comics and graphic novels, however, has a shorter history. Recently, comics-based research has found its way into medical journals like *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Green 2013) and *Journal of Medical Humanities* (Al-Jawad 2013; Williams 2011) and education journals like *Harvard Education Review* (Jones and Woglom 2013).

As these many examples (and hopefully “Losing Thomas & Ella”) attest, comics-based research can be more than a novelty. With the comic form researchers can expand their resources for analysis and representation. Bruner (1991, 4) argues that “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative,” and thus narrative, perhaps especially including comics, gives access to empathy and insight into experience that resides centrally in the aims of qualitative research, not to mention in medicine itself (Charon 2001). For authors who desire to spread awareness of an important issue, improve the training of practitioners, impact policymakers, or illustrate difficult or taboo concepts, the comics form offers powerful tools for emotional connection, personalization, and the often unseen sides of illness, death, and grief—what Williams (2011) refers to as an “empathic bond” between creator and reader. I hope that “Losing Thomas & Ella,” when viewed by practitioners, policymakers, and the bereaved, might provide insights into perinatal death and its wide-reaching effects on parents.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> What one should call the form has proved contentious. McCloud (1993) and Eisner (1990) use “sequential art,” while others suggest terms like “graphic novels,” “graphic narratives,” or even “graphica” (Jones and Woglom 2013; Thompson 2008). I have used “comics” because it is more recognizable than many of these terms. To connect a word synonymous with humor to one synonymous with seriousness—research comics—also creates a productive friction that challenges one to reimagine both; this highlights my argument about the inherent tensions between the two practices.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://momentofcerebus.blogspot.ca/2012/07/wally-woods-22-panels-that-always-work.html>

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