

Loretta Notareschi - TRANSCRIPT

One afternoon, in January 2013, I gave birth to my beautiful daughter, Ruby. I fell in love with her instantly; and my husband, Kevin, and I sang to her within minutes of her birth. (Singing) Oh, how lovely is the evening, is the evening.

It was her first lullaby. Over the next couple of days, my great love for Ruby began to mix with a great fear, and I began having scary thoughts about her and about myself. What if I threw Ruby down the spiral staircase in our home? What if I stabbed her with a knife? What if I drowned her in the bathtub? What if I took a bottle full of pills? What if I jumped off this railing? How do you stop a 'what-if' thought? I began trying to control my thoughts by repeating certain phrases and images to myself over and over again: ducky, hairbrush, baby face; ducky, hairbrush, baby face. I also repeated musical patterns in my mind, I rearranged knives, and I avoided the spiral staircase in our home, and I even checked and checked and checked and rechecked constantly the temperature of my daughter's room.

Before long, I was diagnosed with Postpartum Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Never heard of Postpartum OCD? Neither had I, until I got the disease, and that's why I want to talk about it tonight because Postpartum OCD is real, it's devastating, and it affects up to nine percent of postpartum mothers and some fathers, too.

In pop culture, OCD is often depicted as an obsession with being tidy or organized, but in reality, OCD is a serious disease in which the person who's suffering has such terrible intrusive thoughts that they try to control them with compulsions. For postpartum mothers with OCD, they're often afraid to even speak about their thoughts, because they think that if they do, someone will take their child away from them. Kevin and I can tell you

as first time parents how scary that thought was for us.

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Like many mothers with OCD, I wondered am I going crazy? Am I psychotic? Am I a danger to my child? But what I learned is that there's a big difference between postpartum OCD and postpartum psychosis, which is a serious emergency. In psychosis, the mother experiences the twisted thoughts as her new reality. But with OCD, she instead feels fear and shame, and she tries to control or banish the thoughts. The good news is that treatment works. After a year of intense therapy and medication, and a support group at Children's Hospital Colorado, I recovered from my illness.

As part of my recovery, I decided to write a string quartet for Denver's Playground Ensemble. I was following in the autobiographical tradition of great composers, like Beethoven, who wrote his own string quartet about a recovery from illness. And even Berg and Janáček, both of whom wrote autobiographical string quartets; in their case, about their extramarital affairs. My piece, "String quartet OCD," has four movements. Tonight, we're going to hear the third and the fourth movement.

In the third movement, called "Shame," you're going to hear the despair that I felt as I suffered from OCD, and in the fourth movement, called "A second delivery," you're going to hear the ups and downs of my recovery, and in that movement, I reclaim that lullaby we sang to Ruby at her birth. (Singing) Oh, how lovely is the evening, is the evening.

After I had recovered from postpartum OCD, I realized something: I had received a kind of gift. It was the gift of compassion; compassion to forgive myself and others who suffer from fear, because OCD is a disease about fear. What I learned is that fear needs compassion not control.



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I'd like to dedicate tonight's performance to my loving husband, Kevin, and our precious daughter, Ruby. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Sarah Whitnah, Leslie Sawyer, Donald Schumacher, and Richard vonFoerster of The Playground Ensemble String Quartet.

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