

Mothers Who Make the Ultimate Sacrifice

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(May 7, 2008) Although we don't often hear about it, women are still willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to save the life of their unborn children. In the past year, two such cases have made headlines.

The first occurred in Australia where a 37 year old doctor, Ellice Hammond, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, refused chemotherapy because it would endanger the life of her unborn daughter. Dr. Hammond was able to receive reduced-strength chemotherapy during the pregnancy, but each time the cancer returned worse than before. Full-strength chemotherapy was needed, but because it would endanger the life of her first-born child, she opted to wait until after the child was born.

On August 20, Dr. Hammond gave birth to baby girl, Mia Ellice, who was nine weeks premature. She immediately began chemotherapy but it was too late. She died in mid- September.

Dr. Hammond's husband, Peter Wojcik told Melbourne's *Herald Sun* that he was proud of his wife's devotion to their child. "It feels like I got robbed of a wife and a mother. I guess she didn't expect it to go this way, and if she did she wasn't telling us. But she would just want what is best for Mia and for everyone to love her and carry on with life. Her whole life was looking forward to being a mom."

Thankfully, his wife was able to experience precious moments with her newborn child, he said. "They have a kangaroo chair here, where they can put the baby down inside your shirt and you can lie back. And the first time Ellice tried that, she had tears coming down. She was just so happy."

The second case occurred in Pieve di Soligo, Italy, where a 38 year old woman died on April 9 after having declined potentially life-saving cancer treatment that might have harmed her child.

Paola Breda was diagnosed with breast cancer six months into her second pregnancy but chose to postpone treatment until after the baby's birth. By the time she was able to begin treatment, it was too late.

During her funeral, Vittorio Veneto Bishop Corrado Pizziolo called Breda an exemplification of Jesus Christ's Gospel call "to lay down one's life for one's friends."

"What Jesus did - the Gospel which He lived for us - this is what we see carried out in the life of our sister," said the Bishop according to the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*.

A friend of the family, Father Giuseppe Nadal, told *Radio Vaticana* about how disappointed Breda was when she and her husband Loris Amodei seemed unable to have a child for the first few years of their marriage. When their first child, Illaria, was born, she brought great joy to her

mother, the priest said.

However, when she became pregnant a second time, the priest remembered how the teary-eyed Breda came to him one day and announced, “I’ve been diagnosed with cancer, and they are suggesting chemotherapy, but that would hurt the baby. I absolutely don’t want that, because I always asked for the gift of motherhood, the gift of having children.”

Her second child, Nicola, was 17 months old when Paola died.

Both of these cases are very similar to that of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, who died in 1961 soon after giving birth to her fourth child. St. Gianna was pregnant when she was diagnosed with a fibroma in her uterus. She declined to have either the abortion or complete hysterectomy that would have saved her life.

Before surgery to rescue her unborn child, St. Gianna told doctors, “If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it. Save him.”

St. Gianna was canonized four years ago by Pope John Paul II.

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Pundits might argue about when life begins, but mothers know the truth. Explore the mystery of life with Dr. Kathlene Reviele in “A Life Growing Within” available in our store at www.womenofgrace.com/catalog