**Dedication**

To Leah, who taught me that you were listening.

**Introduction**

Having a baby is an experience like no other. I had nine births and each was a unique event. Nevertheless, it was my first baby that made an indelible impression upon my soul. Leah was my firstborn. Early in my pregnancy, I decided to name her Leah Nicole. I thought it was a beautiful name; solid, gentle, and kind. I referred to her as Leah, from the very beginning. I would talk to her and just tell her things; the mundane, the secrets, the sacred We shared many one-sided conversations. I never knew how much she paid attention or if she heard me at all.

On the day of her delivery, she made it known very early that she wanted a change of scenery, and the time was now. The drive to the hospital was quiet at 3:00AM in the morning. The Houston traffic was nonexistent, so the uneven roads and potholes were the only agitation to the ever-increasing labor pains. The hospital staff were ready and waiting when I arrived, and I were taken in almost immediately. The bright lights of the delivery room were sterile and unfriendly, yet Leah paid no attention. She was focused on the business at hand and rapidly she came. There was no time for epidurals or other assistants; only time for pushing and work.

Leah’s entrance to this world was noisy, angry and unhappy. She cried the moment she entered the room. Even before we could meet, she was whisk away to be cleaned, examined and bathed. Even in my discomfort I heard her angry cry; her plea for something she knew. I had no shame in calling out to her— “Leah, I am over here honey. Mommy is over here.” And somehow, she heard me amidst all the drama and trauma she faced alone. To this day I will never get over my amazement that she hushed her crying immediately. It was as if she heard me and knew I was coming for her. And she would wait for me. It was a profound moment for me as a young woman and a newly christened mother. She heard me; she knew my voice. And even in our separation, my voice was a source of comfort and calming.

Fast forward thirty-seven years. I was listening to an educational podcast discussing how to improve language comprehension in young children. The guest lecturer mentioned that new technology was enabling scientist to document that a baby could hear from inside the womb. Science had estimated that babies could sufficiently hear around the age of seven months. I immediately remembered my own experience many years ago with Leah. Science was finally able to prove something I had known for many years; babies can hear and learn to recognize their mother’s voice while still in the womb.

The work below is both a celebration and a reminder that our new creations are more aware of us than we believe or pay attention to. Babies are listening and beginning to make a connection to your world. And for those mothers that are connecting, they can hear their baby’s voice.

**Message to moms.**

Babies come into the world ready to learn. Their brains are wired to make connections. These connections facilitate learning. Parents can support their new child’s development and learning by being verbal in the presence of their baby. All types of verbal communication—talking, singing, humming, or speaking directly to the infant will help develop the baby’s brain. Nonverbal communication also sends strong messages to the developing brain. Smiling, gentle touch, holding your baby, all communicate love and security. These interactions help a child to learn safety and form an attachment to you. These strong emotional bonds will help your child grow into a socially and emotionally mature adult.

So, what do you say to an infant? Anything and everything. Pretend your baby understands your talking. Share what you are doing. Talk about what you are doing. Give your infant eye-to eye contact. Smile; laugh and just talk. Your child is learning the sounds of your language and beginning to isolate the difference in our language. When your baby tries to move its mouth, to smile or “coo”; respond. Your baby will learn to communicate with you.

Continue to share language with your baby. They will learn that you are listening to them.

So, in essence talk to your baby and your baby will talk to you.

Congratulations,

Dr. Tanya A. Jones