

# OPINION

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## Baby Noor a lesson for all

Out of war-torn Iraq and into the disrupted South of the United States was brought a gem of hope.

"Baby Noor," as she is called by the media, captured the hearts of soldiers with the Georgia National Guard 48th Brigade when they raided her family's Baghdad home, and the thoughts, prayers and support of hundreds of U.S. citizens.

A happy, smiling baby with chubby cheeks, Noor is certainly a charmer. I can tell from her picture on the Internet she is the kind of child who lights up a room with her smile. But, something about Noor is different from most children.

Noor was born with spina bifida.

At 3 months old, Noor had already exceeded by more than double Iraqi doctors' expectations for her length of life without treatment.

While the birth of a child, especially a first child like Noor, is met with anticipation and excitement, having a child born with serious medical conditions is heart-wrenching.

Imagine the desperation of a mother, living in the middle of a nightmare called war, having her home raided by foreign soldiers with guns and reaching for the last possible aid for her daughter whose life is in danger — handing her over to the men with guns, pleading for help with a look that transcends language boundaries.

And help her, they did. The soldiers went back at night to visit the family. They got people in the United States to help with providing the needed surgery. The chief of neurosurgery at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Dr. Roger Hudgins, agreed



**Joy Stodghill**

Monday, Noor's surgery went smoothly; and Friday, she was able to leave the hospital. The surgeon closed her spinal column and realigned it. She will need at least one more medical procedure to help her with controlling her bladder and bowel functions and could need another surgery if the fluid on her brain gets worse.

For now, however, Baby Noor is better and out of immediate danger.

Noor will live a life of challenges; but, thanks to the soldiers' compassion, it looks like she will live. Hudgins said Noor will probably be a paraplegic. I think she will be fine, regardless of her condition. Even at her young age, she seems like a happy child from all the reports in the news.

I am reminded of Joni Eareckson Tada, a woman who became a quadriplegic in 1967 after a diving accident. Tada did not let her condition keep her in bed, angry at the world for her condition. She determined to make the best of her life and help others in the process.

Tada, who has no use of her arms or legs, paints beautiful pictures with her teeth. She is also the founder of Joni and Friends, an organization which has many roles, but particularly focuses on ministering to people with disabilities and their families. One part of the ministry gathers thousands of wheelchairs and sends them to needy individuals around the world.

I had the honor of meeting Mrs. Tada four and a half years ago. She spoke at a convention and sang hymns. As she told her story, her eyes shone and a smile remained on her face. When I met her, she took time to speak to me and take a picture with me as well.

I can see the potential of little Baby Noor to be a "Joni" to Iraq. The country is in shambles, but it is beginning to improve. She will grow up with the "new" Iraq and take part in the healing processes, her own and her country's.

Along the Coast where loss, devastation, depression, crime and sadness are now the norm for conversations and life in general, a story with a positive ending can give us hope — hope that even in our shattered world some little glimmer of hope can still come shining through.

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