

Induced Labor Lets Dying Man See His Daughter

Jamie Stengle, AP

Diane Aulger was about two weeks from her delivery date when she and her husband decided there was no time to wait. Mark Aulger had only days to live and he wanted to see his child. Diane Aulger had her labor induced and gave birth to their daughter. When tiny Savannah was placed in his arms, Mark Aulger "cried, and he just looked very sad," his wife said. He died five days later from complications related to his cancer treatment.

The 52-year-old Texas man was diagnosed with colon cancer in April. He had surgery and, as a precaution, six months of chemotherapy, Diane Aulger said. With no signs of cancer showing up in follow up tests, the treatment seemed successful. Then in November, Mark Aulger began having trouble breathing. By January 3, he was sick enough to go to the emergency room. His wife said he was told the chemotherapy had caused him to develop pulmonary fibrosis, which causes scarring and thickening in the lungs. Initially, the Aulgers were hopeful.

"He thought he'd be coming home in a few days with an oxygen tank," said Diane Aulger, who lives in The Colony, about 25 miles north of Dallas. But then doctors delivered more bad news: Mark Aulger's condition was fatal. When Diane Aulger asked how long her husband had, the response was a sobering five or six days. "Mark said, 'I'd like to see the baby,'" the 31-year-old mother told The Associated Press.

Their baby was due January 29, and Diane Aulger had planned a natural childbirth, but when the doctor suggested an induced labor, she immediately agreed. She was already experiencing pre-labor symptoms, and they scheduled the birth for January 18. Hospital staff arranged for the Aulgers to share a large labor and delivery room. "Our beds were side by side," Diane Aulger said.

Mark Aulger held his daughter for about 45 minutes after she was born. For the next couple of days, though, he was so tired he was only able to hold her a couple of times for a minute or so. She said he slipped into a coma on January 21 and died two days later. "I brought her home the night before he fell into the coma. It was just me and Savannah when he passed away," Diane Aulger said. Along with Savannah, the Aulgers have two other children, ages 10 and 7. Diane Aulger also has a 15-year-old and a 13-year-old.

With her family's story getting much media attention in recent days, Diane Aulger said she's been heartened by the nice comments she's received from people. She plans to blanket her home with pictures of her husband and said her children are already doing a good job of keeping his memory alive by talking about him. "We're living day-to-day as if dad's still here," she said. "We know dad is here with us. They talk to dad. Mark was a very funny, funny dad."

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