

Balloons. Streamers. Singing. It's Charlotte's first birthday party! As her frosting-covered fingers shoveled cake onto her smiling face, a sigh of relief, a tear of triumph, and overwhelming sense of pride warmed our hearts. Everyone told us that if we could survive the first year, we'd look back and smile. Today was that day of celebration.

Two months earlier, doctors repaired Charlotte's cleft palate. Entering into the hospital for the follow up to the lip repair, we knew the routine. Hold and hug the baby in pre-op as she wonders why you are crying, hand the baby off to the surgical team, cry, anxiously wait, cry, hold and hug the baby in post-op as she wonders why you are crying. Living in the moment of recovery is exhausting; pain medicine, arm restraints, fussing feedings and sleepless nights. Eventually ten days passed, a milestone accomplished and another one on the horizon, the first birthday!

Friends and family showed up to the party without a single wrapped gift to present to the birthday girl.

Instead, small blue envelopes that were included in the party invitation were placed on the entry table. The following poem was printed on the envelope...

Look at me: I'm turning one.
Come celebrate and have some fun.
But please don't bring a book, gift, or toy.
Instead donate money to another girl or boy.
Bring your donation gift in this envelope.
I'll make sure it gives a baby with a cleft hope.

Charlotte won't remember the taste of the cake, the bright-colored balloons, or the bravery her young heart showed during her first year, but we will tell her. We will tell her that she has 'Daddy's eyes,

Mommy's spunk, the NAM doctor's nose and the surgeon's smile'. We will tell her that so many people and organizations gave us the support we needed. We will tell her, as we show her the famous 'cake all over the face' birthday picture, that she was born beautiful, charismatic, and with a cleft lip and palate. And most of all, we will tell her never to forget to help others the way we were helped.



Charlotte Gould turns one!



Charlotte's birthday gift: helping others with cleft lip and palate!