



Hunter, five weeks after surgery

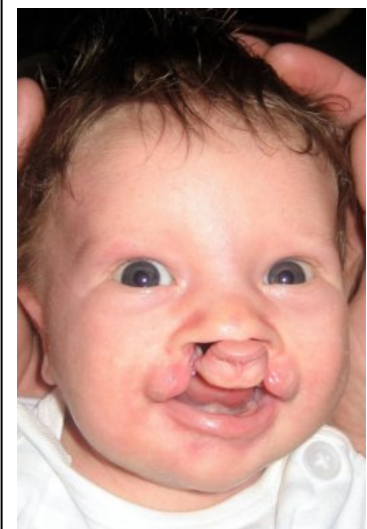
My story begins with a newly married couple who were having a baby. My name is Lacey and this is a story of faith and love. I was 16 weeks pregnant and my husband Rick and I went to get a sonogram to find out the gender of our baby and to make sure the baby was developing correctly. The nurses told us that we were expecting a boy, but they also expressed concern over what they were seeing. They couldn't give us any detail until we saw a doctor so we headed to a fetal medicine specialist to talk about our options. The specialist said the baby had a bilateral cleft lip and a possible cleft palate and that he might also have Down syndrome. Although his activeness was perfect, the sonogram had shown 2 calcium deposits in his heart, a thickening of his neck, a small chin and stomach, and the bilateral cleft lip. Rick and I looked up to the highest of highs and asked the Lord for a miracle. A week later we went

to see another specialist for a 3-D ultrasound and a second opinion. After many, many prayers, the Lord gave us our first miracle – all the signs of Down syndrome were no longer there. His chin, heart, and neck were perfect, but the ultrasound still showed the cleft lip. Just to be sure the baby didn't have Down syndrome, the doctor sent me to have an Amnio. The good Lord answered! Our son was perfect and healthy. I knew there was a greater reason why we were going through this experience. Only God knows the plans He has for our lives. I had to trust His will.

On May 23, 2008, my life changed for the better. I gave birth to

my beautiful baby boy, Hunter Joseph Stitely. He has brought my husband and me so much joy – we now have a new little

family. My delivery went perfectly. Hunter weighed 6 lbs. 15 oz. and was 19 inches long. He was born with a full head of hair. Hunter also was born with a bilateral cleft lip and cleft palate. He is the most loving, sweet, handsome little man and an all around great baby! We discovered that a cleft is not anything to be sad about, it only gives character to his



Hunter's first smile – 1.5 months



Hunter, just before surgery, with his cleft doll

The Stitely Family

Cleft Palate Foundation's Story of the Month

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<http://www.cleftline.org/features/som>

adorable personality. We went and saw his craniofacial team and planned Hunter's surgery date for when he was 3 months old. Rick and I did not want to hide our son, and we wanted to share this incredible little boy with the world. We took Hunter everywhere, and if people asked about his lip, we would share our story with them.

In August 2008 Hunter had his first surgery to correct his lip. As a mother, handing my baby over to the surgical team was probably the hardest thing I will ever have to do. My tears soaked my blouse as they rolled Hunter out of the room and into surgery. I prayed for the doctor and his team as they worked on my baby. A few hours later the doctor came to get us. I was scared to see Hunter – I was scared of seeing his “new” face. I knew I was going to miss the face I first fell in love with, and I felt like we were going to have to start over with getting to know one other.

But, boy was I wrong!

When I walked into his recovery room, Hunter looked at me with groggy eyes and wanted me. I picked him up and just held him...he looked wonderful! Nothing could EVER change my love for my son.

Now it is almost 2 months after the first of many surgeries. It was an uncomfortable few weeks after the repair. Hunter was a real trooper and looks amazing. We are planning his next surgery to repair his palate around April 2009.

God blessed us with a healthy and happy child.

We couldn't love the Lord more for this incredible gift that He has given us in Hunter.

- By Lacey Stitely



Six days after surgery



Four weeks after surgery