



This is a true love story. Like all classic love stories it begins something like, "Boy meets Girl. Boy marries Girl. Girl finds out Baby is on the way. Boy and Girl are ecstatic." The due date was determined to be March 27, 2008 and a baby girl was suspected at an early 12 week ultrasound. My husband, Graham, and I joked about having to chase the boys away from our gorgeous little girl. Pink baby delicacies and adorable pink outfits were quickly filling up a perfectly decorated nursery even before a baby girl was confirmed. Charlotte, meaning "small and strong" was on her way.

Sitting in the ultrasound chair, thoughts of my beautiful little girl spinning in a pink tutu, wearing bows in her curly, blonde hair were envisioned with

hearing the happy words, "It's a girl!" Graham and I kissed quickly then asked to see a 3D image of our beauty queen's face. The moment that I saw the black and white screen displaying my baby's face, I instantly knew something wasn't right. My heart sank, the room grew quiet, my dreams seemed to crumble, the ultrasound technician tried to get a better image, the room grew colder, and I looked into the teary eyes of my husband, as my sister asked, "What's on the baby's lip?" I didn't need to hear the answer. I already knew; a cleft lip. As the ultrasound technician began to explain, the information entered my head, but didn't settle upon my heart. I didn't cry. Graham on the other hand shattered. He went into the attached bathroom and I could hear him sobbing. My mother and sister cried silent, helpless tears. Steadily, I listened to the diagnosis with such bravery that I even surprised myself; a unilateral cleft lip with suspected cleft palate. We left in shock with the printed images of our daughter.

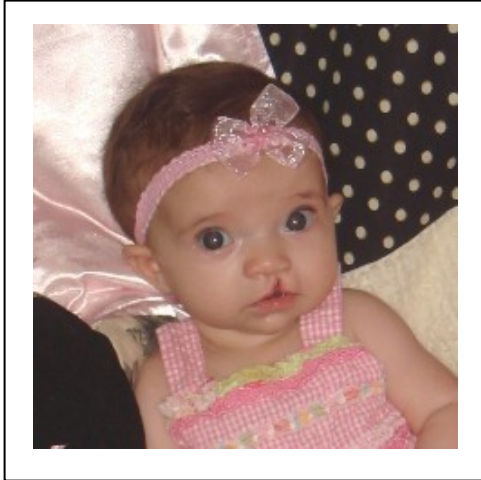
Graham and I crawled into bed, cried together, and spent the day mourning the loss of our "perfect" baby girl.

"I thought she'd be beautiful?" my husband would cry.

"She'll be beautiful to us." I'd reply.

I dragged myself out of bed and onto the World Wide Web. BIG mistake. I had yet to discover the helpful "cleft" websites and instead found myself viewing scary images and terrifying information. Then I found [cleftline.org](http://www.cleftline.org). I stayed up all night long, watching the clock, waiting for morning to call the Cleft Palate Foundation's *Cleftline*. I was the first call of the day and received the comfort and





information that my hurting heart needed so badly. After two more ultrasounds, a neonatologist visit, two meetings with surgeons, and an amniocentesis later, Graham and I were ready to meet Charlotte.

The delivery on March 24, 2008 was picture perfect. She was placed on my chest not facing me so I asked her to be turned around that I could see her face. What I saw made me cry harder than ever before, "She's beautiful!" Graham and I put our heads together, took turns kissing each other and our new baby, releasing "happy" tears along with five months of tense thoughts and unknown fears. Our daughter was here, just as gorgeous as we had ever imagined, and we were instantly in love.

Charlotte lived up to her name. She was strong, enduring a NAM device, daily taping, and her lip revision at three months and three days. Along the way, she won the love of all those she met; our little Miss Congeniality. Looking back, I am saddened that we expected more than a healthy baby. We craved "The World's Most Beautiful Baby," and I thank God that Charlotte was born with a cleft to teach me a little something about true beauty. Today, three months since the lip repair and three months until the palate repair, there is no doubt in my mind that my little girl will grow more beautiful, inside and out, with each passing day. She will tie her hair in fancy bows, spin circles while dancing, and definitely need Dad's help chasing the boys away. I'm happy to say that this love story is heading towards its "Happily Ever After."

