

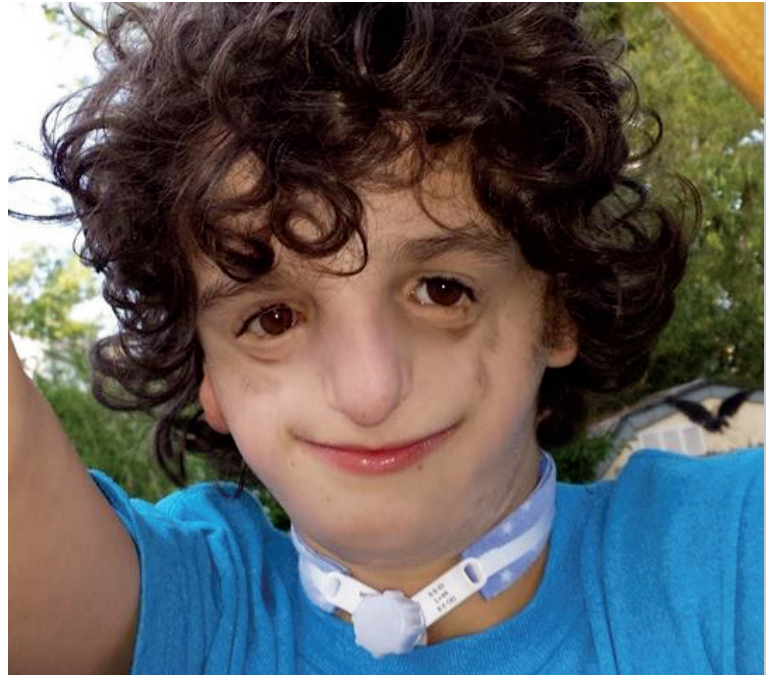


Some of the hardest times were kissing our daughter goodbye before surgery. We always felt helpless as we waited, hoping that all was going well. I will never forget how my heart would pound when someone would approach or call with an update. Or when the surgeon would talk with us after the surgery.

It was always a big relief to be back at her bedside, holding her hand. Even though I was able to be with her, I felt worried about whether the surgery had been successful or if she would need another.

MARLENA

MOM OF A BABY WHO HAD SURGERY



Nathaniel was born with Treacher-Collins syndrome. This birth defect caused him to be born with missing or deformed bones throughout his face. He was born at a hospital that couldn't care for the many needs he had, so he had to be transferred to another hospital that could better care for him. We ended up spending the first 30 days of Nathaniel's life in the NICU.

In the NICU, Nathaniel received wonderful care, and it seemed as if he was loved from the minute we stepped into the NICU. Because of his birth defect, he struggled to breathe and eat. He required multiple surgeries in just the first days of his life. Because of all of the issues Nathaniel was born with, we were two panic-stricken parents who didn't know what to do. It was an emotional experience.

The doctors and nurses in the NICU made sure that Nathaniel got everything he needed. But most importantly, they created a feeling of love and warmth. I am convinced that this helped launch Nathaniel on a life of happiness.

RUSSELL

DAD OF A BABY BORN WITH TREACHER-COLLINS SYNDROME



I knew nothing about premies when Charlie was born at 26 weeks, weighing 1 pound 11 ounces. Having a baby was supposed to be a happy event, but I was scared, heartbroken and full of grief. I was overwhelmed by the strange new world that now surrounded me.

The NICU nurses taught me how to care for my daughter and explained what to expect. The NICU staff supported me on the tough days. After 3 months in the NICU, my baby was well enough to go home. Her discharge day is a day I will remember for the rest of my life.

REBECCA

MOM OF A PREMATURE BABY



After my daughter was born, I felt so guilty knowing her early arrival was due to my preeclampsia. I felt like I missed so many moments; holding and comforting her, putting on her first outfit, and taking her home with me when I was discharged.

The NICU made me feel defeated and not quite like a parent. These were feelings and experiences that I didn't prepare for while happily expecting. I'm thankful that, with time and reflection, I've grown to know that my early experiences didn't define our family. We're not what happened to us; we are what we've become.

LAUREN

MOM OF A PREMATURE BABY



During a prenatal visit many weeks before my due date, the doctor told me that my blood pressure was high and protein was found in my urine screen. She diagnosed me with preeclampsia and told me to go on bed rest. About a week later, I woke up not feeling well, so my husband took me to the hospital. The doctors told me that I needed to deliver right away. My husband and I were so scared!

Harper was born 4 weeks early and weighed 5 pounds. She stayed in the NICU for 15 days. During her NICU stay, Harper stopped breathing because her brain hadn't finished developing. We were very worried, but felt so supported and loved by the NICU staff. Today she is a healthy, happy child who enjoys singing, dancing and playing with her big sister.

JANOCQUA

MOM OF A BABY BORN PREMATURELY