

# Amazing Addie

**Jessica Quarello, 36, always dreamed of having two inseparable daughters. But she thought her family dream was shattered forever when her newborn baby received a shock diagnosis...**

**H**olding out the baby doll, I couldn't wait to break the news. My daughter Charlee, then two, grinned, reaching out for it. Placing it in her arms, she instantly cradled its head.

I was so surprised – she took to it so naturally! 'Mummy's having a baby,' I told her. 'You're going to be a big sister soon.'

With my tummy just starting to round, my husband Matthew, now 43, and I had waited until a safe 16 weeks before telling Charlee.

But now she knew, Charlee started looking around our New Jersey home desperately. Searching for her sister. 'No, she's in here!' I laughed, pointing at my tummy.

Frowning, Charlee looked at

me in confusion – she was too young to understand.

But her little baby doll helped her immensely.

Taking the dolly everywhere, Charlee hugged it tight to her chest and dressed it in pink.

It filled my heart with joy to see her be so caring.

After all, I had grown up with my little sister Britta, 32, always by my side. And so seeing the love behind Charlee's eyes as she cradled her doll,

pretending it was her little sister, I knew my dream of having two inseparable daughters was within reach.

Throughout my pregnancy, Charlee was desperate to meet her baby sister, too.

'Where's sissy?' she asked. 'I can't wait to meet baby sissy!'

The pregnancy went smoothly – although I always craved Taco Bell!

But, we didn't realise our baby girl would arrive three

weeks early.

Having suffered an unrelated spinal injury, the doctors considered it safer for me to have a planned C-section.

And so at 1.30pm on 21 July 2020, our little Adeline was born, weighing 7lb 14oz.

Smiling through my exhaustion, I couldn't wait to hold my baby.

'I'm so proud of you,' Matthew smiled.

But our sweet moment quickly turned sour.

'She has Down's syndrome,' the paediatrician said.

He pointed out the sandal gap of her toes and her neck folds – both physical markers.

But she looked perfect to me. I was in complete disbelief.

Beside me, Matthew started shaking, as he started to faint.

I looked on at the horror as if from someone else's body.

How had the dreamy arrival of our bouncing baby girl turned into a living nightmare for us?

Without ever holding her, Addie was whisked away to the neo-natal unit at Mount Sinai Hospital for further genetic testing.

For four days, I stayed in the hospital under strict supervision due to my injury, but all I could think about was Addie's disability.

Staying on a different floor, I focused on being well enough to see her.

My mind was spiralling just thinking



Our gorgeous family



PERFECT TO ME

about her diagnosis.

I just needed to know if it was true or not.

And with Matthew and I like passing ships in the night, with him looking after Charlee back home, I was left to spiral alone.

*She doesn't have Down's syndrome,* I convinced myself.

But once I saw her, I knew that the doctors were right.

I was horrified, looking down at my baby's features.

No one in my family had a disability, so I struggled to understand why Addie did.

And how had none of my pregnancy scans revealed her Down's syndrome?

Without realising, I was looking at Addie's disability first before her as a person.

While waiting for the genetic test results, Matthew spent the days with me at the hospital while Charlee was at nursery.

I knew the diagnosis was taking a toll on him, too.

Walking into the hospital, I noticed that Matthew's eyes were red and watery.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'I just put on a big smile for Charlee,' he admitted. 'But when I'm not with her, I just can't stop crying.'

A lump formed in my throat – seeing Matthew break down



My girls

it's something she slowly came to realise.

As soon as Addie turned two months old, we enrolled her into physical therapy classes to improve her mobility.

With the doctors warning us that her mobility would be delayed by a few years, including her ability to walk, we wanted to give her the best chance.

Sitting on the floor in the living room during the pandemic, I logged onto our online class.

Helping Addie to gently stretch out her legs and arms, Charlee came bounding into the room.

'Let me help!' she exclaimed, sitting down beside us.

Charlee always wanted to be by Addie's side.

Asking if she could bottle feed her when she was a baby, Charlee loved looking after her.

Even today, they love singing together in Charlee's girly pink bedroom or snuggling up on the bean bag to watch *Encanto*.

Popping my head around the living room door, my heart skipped a beat seeing Addie sleeping on Charlee.

In awe, Charlee carefully tried not to wake her up.

'Look Mum!' she whispered. 'She loves me!'

But my favourite memory of the girls was Addie's first

steps at two years old.

Whipping out my phone, I started recording the girls as they toddled along the

corridor, Addie's hands in mine to steady her.

When all of a sudden, I let go of her to see what she did.

Charlee let out a shriek as she saw her little sister standing there all by herself.

'Oh my god Mum!' she screamed, staring at Addie.

I was frozen in shock.

Then, Addie took a little step forward.

Charlee shrieked, bouncing up and down with joy.

We both crouched down, beckoning Addie towards us.

'Come on!' I called, amazed as Addie wobbled forwards.

Right into Charlee's arms. And so my lifelong dream of having two inseparable little girls had come true.

Since then, Charlee has been with Addie for every step.

To think we were told she would have difficulty walking... now she's unstoppable, running around!

While at first, I was scared to become Addie's carer and feared what her Down's syndrome might mean for us, now I couldn't be prouder about being her Mum.

Now a full-time content creator, I get to spend every day with my little girl and each one is a blessing.

Addie has taught me so much and busted so many stereotypes about being a disability parent, too.

Sharing my hope and advice with other disability parents, I founded the platform Extra Lucky Moms with my friend Taryn whose daughter also has Down's syndrome.

We've even written a book together, *Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life*, sharing our heartfelt stories of accepting our children.

I want other mums out there facing a shock diagnosis to know that Down's syndrome doesn't mean it's the end.

In fact, it's just the beginning of something wonderful.

Now, seeing Charlee play with her original baby doll with her beloved sissy, I know their special bond is forever.

● For more, follow @extraluckyjess on TikTok and visit: extraluckymoms.com

● Buy *Dear Mama: Stories of an Extra Lucky Life* on Amazon

Charlee just wants to look after her

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I was scared at first



Soul sisters