

THIS (TINY) LIFE

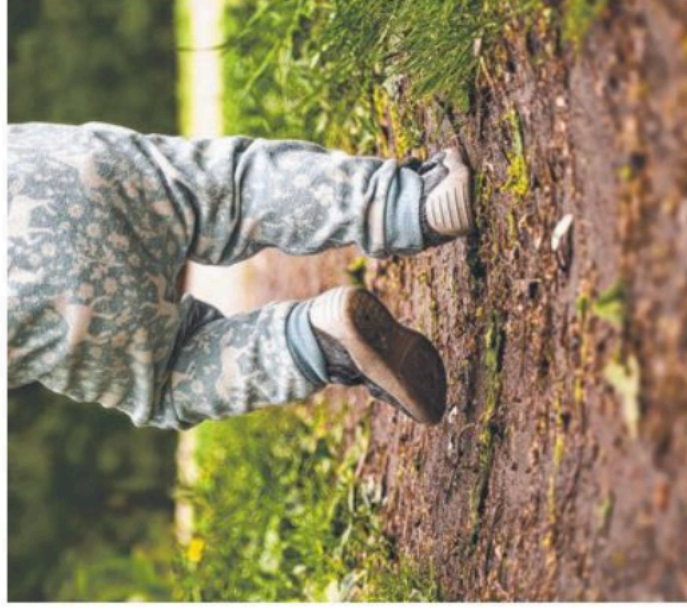
CHERIE GILMOUR

The birth isn't great, but you weren't expecting it to be. They use "BBQ tongs", as your husband calls it, to pull **the** tiny mewling creature out of your body and on to your chest. You lose a litre and a half of blood – if it weren't for modern medical intervention, you'd be dead – but here you are, barely conscious, wondering when doctors became **the** same age as you and if they also watch Farmer Wants a Wife.

You will yourself to capture **the** memory, grasping at smoke with your bare hands. A baby girl lies on your chest, weighing 3.78kg, and you wonder how **the** weight of such enormous responsibility could be so small.

You spend long nights cradling her in your arms while **the** world sleeps, feeling like you're in some post-apocalyptic world where you're **the** only two people alive.

She grows into a toddler, bumbling around **the** house with possum-round, inquisitive eyes. Her first word is "book", which you, like most parents, assume is an early indication of unusual intelligence. Her hair grows in long golden-brown ringlets, which you'd always wanted as a child. She becomes chatty with an infectious giggle. Her weight doubles, triples



and quadruples, and you notice a new definition in your arms from picking her up.

You become pregnant with her brother, but one day, while frying an egg, a flash of hot, sharp pain rips through your back. You're told

it's probably a herniated disc, but all you know is pain.

One day, she falls over and scrapes her knees and rather than scooping her up into your arms, you watch helplessly as she cries on **the** ground, your back stiff and unyielding.

And suddenly, you're clutching your daughter's hand in front of her new primary school. She is now 20kg, and picking her up requires **the** kind of OHS instruction you get in social work job training: bend **the** knees.

She doesn't want to be picked up as much anymore; she's a big girl now, but on **the** rare occasions you do, you're in awe of how this tiny baby has grown long, unwieldy limbs.

An older female teacher with kind eyes walks over and calls my daughter by name. She holds out her hand. My daughter looks up at me, and I give her a little nod. She takes **the** teacher's hand and disappears into **the** crowd. I blink back tears. She'll be fine.

I'll be fine, I think.

Review considers original submissions for This Life of 450-500 words. Work may be edited for clarity. Email: thislife@theaustralian.com.au