

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...

Holding out the baby doll, I couldn't wait to hook the news. My daughter, Charlee, then two, grinned, reaching out to it. Placing it in her arms, she instantly cradled it to her.

I was so surprised—she took 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 five 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 doll every where, Charlee hugged it tight to her chest and dressed it in pink.

She held the doll like it was her sister

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

about her diagnosis.

I just needed to know if it was true or not. 'I'm so proud of you,' Matthew smiled. But our sweet moment quickly turned sour.

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For four days, I stayed in 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



PERFECT TO ME

only sharpened our harsh reality into focus.

And seeing Addie's Down's syndrome confirmed a few days later, I was torn between two emotions—love for our gorgeous girl and grief over having our perfect family vision shattered, too.

'Are we going to be old, haggard special needs parents now?' I asked Matthew.

We never imagined this would even happen to us—it just wasn't our life plan. 'Will we be able to go on holiday?' Or will we be full-time carers now?' I thought.

But all I knew is that I loved Addie regardless of her diagnosis—we would just have to learn to accept it.

Driving to New Jersey, my mum Lauric, 60, my step-dad Chris, 63, and Britta were there to welcome us home.

Walking through the front door with Addie, you'd never suspect anything was wrong. It was a celebration of the latest member of our family.

Lifting her out of her carrier,



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 on to 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 Addie's side.

Asking if she could bottle feed her when she was a baby, Charlee loved looking after her. Even then, they love singing together in Charlee's girly pink bedroom or snuggling up on the bean bag to watch *Zorro*.

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.

'I look Mum!' she whispered. 'She loves me!' But my favourite memory of the girls was when she's first

steps at two years old. Whipping out my phone, I started recording the girls as they toddled along in

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 crumpled 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 disabled 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 heart-felt experiences of accepting our children.

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

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

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

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

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I was scared at first



Soul sisters