



### Three Pounds, Five Ounces

by Debbie McNaughton

Thirty years ago, as a pregnant woman with a baby in fetal distress, I found myself on board a "Flight for Life" plane as it rose into the evening sky.

In a Denver hospital, 500 miles from home, my daughter was delivered by C-section. The doctor cradled her in the palms of his two hands and brought her into my view. I looked at the tiny new soul, covered with silken body hair, still in the fetal position; her fingers and toes were the size of a doll. I cried with relief that she was alive.

"Hello little one," I said, "I'm your mother. Your name is Meghann."

Two months premature, in critical condition, Meg was transferred to Children's Hospital Neonatal ICU. My blood pressure was out of control and though it was imperative during delivery that I stay awake, sedation was now necessary to save my life. I said a silent prayer, "Please let me live, to hold Meg in my arms."

As the medication took effect and the noises of the operating room began to fade, the last thing I heard was the nurse telling the doctor, "Weight: 3 lbs, 5 oz."

Five days later I visited Meg. She laid in an open incubator, naked, her body swollen and discolored. I thought of my high school science class; she looked like a frog ready for dissection. A respirator had been taped to her face, forcing oxygen into her immature lungs. The smallest of needles were inserted into her transparent skin, on her head, arms and feet.

I gasped for breath and said, "Oh, my God." Then fainted.

The next day, I held Meg's hand, the size of a thumb nail. I couldn't hold her close to my heart so she'd remember the sound of a familiar beat. Instead, I kissed her and spoke her name, "Meg. Mama loves you." Meg opened her eyes at the sound of my voice.

Uncertain if Meg would survive, she was baptized on the eighth day of her life. While in NICU, Meg had a brain hemorrhage and corrective surgery to close a heart valve.

Against the odds, she came home after three months, weighing 5 pounds. Meghann lived up to the meaning of her name: Great Mighty One.

In her baby book, I faithfully wrote down her first milestones with anticipation of the next. Then I grew fearful when they were not on schedule.

As Meg turned five months old, I enrolled her in a preemie program to observe her development. After several months I became concerned when she couldn't sit up or hold a rattle. I was advised her progress more than likely was due to being premature.

One day after a physical therapy session Meg's therapist gave me a book to read, she told me I should talk to the pediatrician. My heart was racing as I finished the first chapter.

A week later, meeting with the doctor, I handed him the book, "Why didn't you tell me something was seriously wrong with

Meg?"

He looked at me and said, "You've been through so much already, I wanted you to bond with her."

I stared back at him in disbelief. "My God, did you think I would have loved her less?"

He touched my hand and said, "Not at all. I'll make the necessary assessments." After the evaluations at Denver Children's Hospital, Meg was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, at eighteen months. I was the mother of a child with a disability.



I felt alone and angry. What had I done wrong, why did this happen? I mourned the loss of my dream child and then I faced the reality of my life ahead.

I sought out other parents with children who had special needs. Together we forged friendships, and became advocates to improve the quality of life for our children.

In Meg's baby book I continued to record her milestones each year. Along with her first smile and laugh, I kept a record of her first leg braces, wheelchair and communication device. Next to her list of baby shots, I wrote down her double hip surgery and spinal fusion.

Since Meg's wheelchair had its limitations, creative alternatives were made to do fun things at home and in school. A car seat was made into a backpack for hiking. A little red wagon was built with railings to race down the street in the summer.



In the winter, our dog, Lilly, pulled her in a sled. Meg rode horses with a harness and roller-skated on her belly in the school gym. She painted with an adaptive easel and played the tambourine in the school band. At both her junior and senior proms, Meg danced in her power wheelchair with her classmates.

I not only became Meg's voice for inclusion and independence, but also her advocate.

Soon to be thirty, Meg makes her home with me. She's an incredible young lady; her smile is constant, her laughter contagious. She is patient, forgiving, and loves unconditionally. I shine in her shadow.





Debbie McNaughton is a writer of short stories drawn from everyday life.

Raised in Framingham, MA, she moved on a whim to Dubois, Wyoming, population 900 souls and stayed for 25 years. Living close to Yellowstone National Park, she enjoyed hiking and photography.

In 2002, she moved to Cape Cod with her daughter. Both love loud rock music and Cape sunsets.

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