**Marissa**

After having my 4 sons I longed for a daughter. When I was pregnant with no.5 I hoped that I would be giving my sons the sister they had wished for and the daughter my partner and I had longed for.

At 16 weeks we went for a private gender scan and were over the moon to be told that I was indeed carrying a little girl.. a dream come true. If only I knew what was to follow.....

At 22 weeks pregnant, I'd noticed that the baby wasn't moving around as well as she should be. I'd also been feeling very tired and sluggish myself. I went to my doctors who checked me over and said that all was well.

By 23-weeks I'd felt very ill with a cold, again VERY concerned that baby had not moved ALL day, nothing, not even when poked and prodded my bump.

I went to bed as normal but slept badly and woke at 4.30am to go to the bathroom as I had a bit of pain. I noticed that I had been bleeding. I phoned my hospital. I told them about baby's lack of movements and the bleed and they told me to pack an overnight bag and come up straight away.

I got to the hospital and they checked baby's heartbeat, it was fine, checked me over but things were going badly. The bleeding was coming out in gushes, they checked my cervix and noticed it was slightly open and that I was getting constant tightenings. The doctor came to see me and said the outcome look good, they thought that baby would be born early or that baby would miscarry and that as my hospital didn't take babies at 23 weeks she wasn't even classed as viable. My hospital only took babies at 26 weeks. I started to cry and said to them that i couldn't lose my baby, told them how much I'd longed for her, my long awaited daughter and I wanted all in their power to be done for my baby.

All the doctors disappeared from the room to speak and agreed that they would help me as best they could and transfer me to a unit that could deal with 24 week premature babies. They gave me a shot of steroids for her lungs and rushed me up for a scan to check her size.

I went for my scan , as soon as the lady put the probe on my tummy you could see straight away something was VERY very wrong with my baby. The lady did her measurements but her face dropped, baby had fluid pockets on her tummy, around her heart, and in the space between her skin and skull on her forehead. This was not right at all.

She was also appearing too small in size - not having grown much at all since 20 weeks. Just in that 3 weeks something had gone terribly wrong and my baby was very sick. She needed help now!

They managed to transfer me up to a hospital in London, a place that specialises in early fetal care and medicines.. I was in the very BEST place.They blue lighted me up in an ambulance, once there they again scanned me over and discovered that baby had fetal anaemia and fetal hydrops (the fluid pockets). They said that if my baby didn't get an In-utero blood transfusion then she would surely die.

They asked me whether I'd been in contact with anyone with "Slapcheek" as a blood test they had run on me showed that I'd contracted Parvo virus, or "slapcheek", and it had passed to the baby. The diagnosis was severe fetal Anaemia secondary to parvo-virus infection.

Everything had suddenly become clear as a few weeks before my son had beetroot red cheeks and his school alerted me that it could be have been slap cheek and could I take him to the doctors. I did that very afternoon and the doctor briefly checked him over and basically said no it wasnt slap cheek and that if anything my son was a little hot that was all, no need to worry. I had come home thinking nothing of it, telling the school he didn't have it and all was safe (as they had been concerned of the risks to myself and there staff if it was). Clearly the doctor had been wrong.

So we went ahead with everything that needed to be done to save my baby's life. That very night I was prepped, given anti-biotics to prevent infections and taken to have the blood transfusion, by this time hubby had left the children with his mother and was by my side.

The doctors and us watched it all via scan, they cover you over with tissues just exposing your bump, pop a local in and then this huge needle gets used (like the needle you have with amnios) the risk factor was at its highest because I was already bleeding, the risks were she could die during the transfusion or I'd miscarry after..But she would surely die without it so we had to try.

The Pre-transfusion fetal haemoglobin was 2.6g% with a haematocrit of 6.9%. 70mls of O negative blood was transfused raising the haemoglobin to 16.6g% and the haematocrit to 46.6%

Thankfully the blood transfusion was a success, and she tolerated the procedure very well. It had to be the most scariest time in my life though.

After that they put me up in a private room on the ward to rest, they gave me some more steroids and some tablets to stop any contractions. Then it was sit and wait and hope that she pulled through the night and days to follow.

She did, and repeat scans demonstrated resolving hydrops and normal Dopplers, normal liquor volume and satisfactory interval growth too.

It was like she had a new lease of life, she was so active in there in the days that followed, kicking me hard, just like my boys did, I could tell that my lil girl was improving with each day, each day getting stronger.

We had constant monitoring, regular heartbeat checks, checks done on me. Then care was handed back to my local hospital once I'd hit 26 weeks.

The following scan at my local hospital showed that my sweet baby girl had made a complete turnaround!

But when I hit 27 wks and 1 day I went into labour.

As soon as she arrived she was popped into a plastic bag to keep her warm and given the tiniest knitted hat on her head and rushed her to the resuss cot and whisked her out the room. She weighed 1lbs 14oz.

Coming home was horrible. Yes the house was busy, filled with the children running about and laughing but I felt empty, lost, I missed my baby and I had empty arms.

I visited every day without fail. I wasn't able to come during the day even though I yearned to. I had to spit my time between the 4 children at home that needed me and the school runs/housework and of course making time for expressing my milk.

On weekends I could go to be with her ALL day, Saturday and Sunday.

It was very hard in the early weeks, I cried often, had nightmares and would wake in cold sweats, I was tired, stressed, worried and I missed her so much. Her brothers would ask every day when their sister was coming home. My newborn was in hospital being cared for by strangers and fighting each minute of her life.

It was a real rollercoaster ride of emotions. While in NICU she had a PDA operation (Patent ductus arteriosus) at Great Ormond Street Hospital, she was ventilated, had blood transfusions, light treatments, antibiotics for infections and I'm sure many more things I can't remember.

It was 4 weeks before we had got our very first cuddle. But we did settle into the NICU and the nurses became like extended family. Life got easier, and eventually, after 14 weeks, Marissa was able to come home.

She has done fantastically. She has caught up developmentally with her actual age peers, though she is still on the little side, but I'm so proud of her and all she's come through .

She truly is a miracle! And I'm pleased to inform you that Marissa became a "big" sister in March of 2011! Her sister Alexia also needed the care of Lister NICU too (though thankfully not for nearly so long).... but that is another story!