

Amazing Grace (Story 3)

Grace was born without eyes.

With an affliction like that, there is really no other way of putting it. You can't just say she has an eye problem or trouble with her eyes. It's a brutal fact and nothing is going to change it.

It is incomprehensible to imagine what this means. It is not like losing your sight in old age or even when fairly young. Losing your sight, by definition, means that at one time you could have enjoyed the beauty of the world. At the very least a person who has once seen will have some understanding of the amazing sense of sight.

But Grace's world had no such sense; she lives in perpetual darkness.

When she was born, the shock was palpable. Her father was simply unable to cope. He couldn't even hold his lovely, but severely disabled baby. Please don't judge him. I hope to God that you have never been dealt such a terrible hand in life. If you had the sadness of losing a child, then at least you could recall the good times. A newborn has no past, only a future.

Grace's future was unknown, uncertain and potentially hazardous from the moment of her birth. In all other respects, Grace was a model baby. She was charming, as all babies are. She gurgled happily when being fed and in time learned to smile to her mother's voice. Unusually placid, but hardly surprising as she could never distinguish between night and day.

We met our delightful new niece when she stayed with us at just five days old. She was being taken to the world famous Moorfields Eye Hospital in London for her initial assessment. We all knew there was no real hope. All Moorfields could offer was to fit tiny glass eyes. Little more than cosmetic.

No chance ever for Grace to enjoy the things we all take for granted. No sunrise. No sunset. No wildflower meadow. No mountain. No lake. No film. No television. No shared glances with a lover. Never seeing her own wedding dress or a handsome husband.

We went to her christening when she was about six months old. It was understandably a subdued affair. Her family had asked that people gave something she could touch and feel. Perhaps a button or some small object that could be sewn into a blanket. A sort of sensory keepsake. I gave her my medal from the recent London Marathon. Her family appreciated the thought, but I doubt if it will ever mean anything to Grace.

But then it might. You see the one thing that Grace, now aged twelve, can do with confidence and joy is to swim. With family support and a patient coach she has become a little champion. She's swims with gusto and skill. Very soon, as her technique improves, she will win medals of her own. She will have her own sensory keepsakes to add to her christening blanket. She will be amazing.