

From Wynand, on Day 730

A couple of days ago I went to the second birthday party of the triplets who were in neonatal ICU with me. They were running about exuberantly, taking part in pony rides and bouncing around on the jumping castle. Me, I crawled up and down the stairs, checked out every corner of the house, ate ice-cream until it ran down my chin and onto my T-shirt, and generally scattered happiness around.

My mom and her friends marvelled at all of us, that we have come this far - from the little pink crumpled prawns who lay there in incubators protruding with lines and tubes, to these lively and cheerful toddlers who seem to get such a kick out of life.

Today is Day 730, my second birthday. My body may still be delicate and small, but I am already becoming lithe and sinewy like my big cousins. My lashes are still as long and alluring as they were two years ago when my mom saw me for the first time. Then my eyes were tightly closed, now they shine mischievously behind my sexy Harry Potter spectacles. Then my dad's wedding ring fitted loosely around my arm, today I swing that same arm about in order to pull the tails of my cats, draw pictures in my mom's story books and grab washing powder out of the cupboard and scatter it all over the kitchen floor. My little ears were as thin as paper two years ago and would crumple just from lying - now they stand out strongly and stubbornly on both sides of my head and I am able to use them only when I find it appropriate.

I practise every day to stand and walk with my splints, because I can't wait to play outside with the neighbouring boys. I say "hallo", "ba-baai", "daath'y" and a few other words my folks can't understand properly. I click away in Zulu and know how to work the TV and switch the lights on and off. My favourite food is lasagne and ice-cream, and my favourite TV programme "Takalani Sesame".

If it weren't for you, I would never have succeeded in picking up the cat food in a perfect pincer grasp and putting it into my mouth; I would never have been able to pull up against cupboards and take down expensive but fragile glass artwork; I would never have discovered how to slap the CD player as fiercely as possible to get it going and play my favourite music.

My mom would never have had the opportunity to see me throw myself on the floor like a Cape cobra and kick holes in the air during a temper tantrum, and she would never have been able to hear how I laugh deeply and happily from my tummy whenever she waves a warning finger under my nose.

If it weren't for you, I would never have had the chance to become a typical toddler. You devoted hours, days, weeks and months to my welfare, walked down the road with my parents and got to love me just as much as they do.

My mom, my dad and I wish to thank you on this day. Thank you to

- Oom Dokter Dave, who got out of bed at midnight to be present at my birth, who in those first few weeks fought relentlessly to keep me alive, and who through the years rejoiced with my parents about every step ahead, and supported them with every small setback.
- The sisters at neonates, particularly Marina, Michelle, André and Denise, who watched over me every minute of my first months – without your empathy and support everything would have been so much more difficult for my parents.
- Mary Anne, who patiently brought me from a helpless little body constantly pulling back to the little boy who this week boldly trudged behind the push-cart in his splints; who was always ready not only with advice about my physical development, but about everything my dumb mom still had to learn about child-rearing.
- Wilma, who in her soft and sympathetic way always challenges me a bit more, who is sometimes so overwhelmed that she grabs me tightly in the middle of a session and gives me a huge kiss, who becomes excited with us every time I master something new.
- Sylinde, who with thorough programs and exercises taught my mom so much about my development and under whose skilled direction my communication skills improved from month to month, until now when I have started to say my first words and understand a lot of what my parents tell me, with the possible exception of “no!” and “leave that alone!”

Thank you for helping to make me a dignified two. I pay tribute to you all.

Love

Wynand