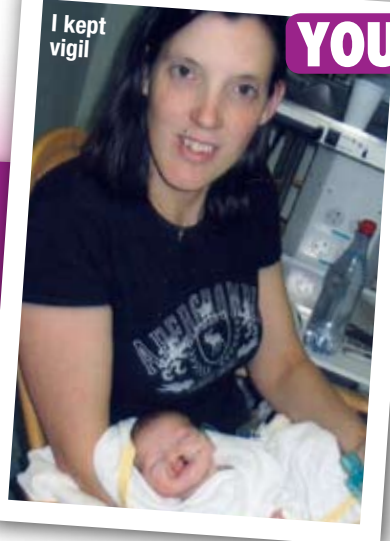


It happened to me...

I gave birth to his biggest FEAR



I kept vigil

Lying on the bed, I knew the procedure. 'After two babies, I'm a pro,' I smiled at the sonographer.

My husband James, 37, stared at the grainy image of our third child — another boy.

I was 34, mum to Sebastian, four, and one-year-old Henry. And I was 20 weeks gone.

But suddenly I was worried — the sonographer was frowning. 'He has a cleft lip and palate,' she said.

Her words stabbed me. And James's face seemed to implode with pain. He understood exactly what this would mean — because he'd been born with a cleft lip and palate too.

There had been a large hole between his upper lip and where the roof of his mouth should have been. Despite 12 operations to repair the defect, his confidence had been destroyed by bullies and the cruel stares of strangers. And when we'd met, he'd still been very conscious of how he looked. 'I don't mind,' I'd assured him.

But James's biggest fear was he'd pass the condition on to his kids. He'd been so happy when our first two arrived with perfect faces.

But now, we fell silent, imagining all that lay ahead for this little one. *Merciless taunts and poor self-confidence,*

endless gruelling operations? 'We'll be strong for him,' I comforted James.

He smiled but felt so guilty. After that, I focused on my pregnancy — and Rupert arrived weighing 7lb.

Gazing at him I saw a cleft on the right of his top lip. Then I found the big gap under his left nostril which revealed his gums.

We wept. It was heartbreaking, but this was our son and we loved him unconditionally. I showed him off to family and friends.

At 10 days old, Rupert developed a

life-threatening respiratory infection. And for three weeks I kept constant vigil by his hospital incubator until he was free from danger.

After that, I barely noticed his lip. To us, Rupert was gorgeous.

But if strangers peered into the pram, their cooing soon turned to looks of horror. And that crucified me.

When one boy saw my five-month-old lad he even shrieked: 'Your baby looks like a monster!'

A month on, Rupert had an op to stretch the skin and close the hole on the left side of his upper lip. A second op at eight months fixed the other side.

'He looks perfect,' I beamed. There was just the faintest of scars.

Now, four months later, Rupert's about to have one last op — to repair his palate — and then he'll be just like any other little boy... Happy, loved and adored.

And he'll grow up with confidence. We'll see to that.

SARAH GAY, 35, ROMSEY, HAMPSHIRE



James with our gorgeous Rupert

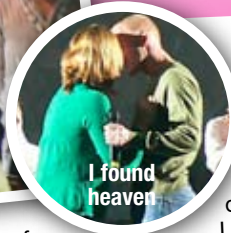
'Suddenly I saw the sonographer frown'

It happened to me...

Will you TAKE THAT man?



Could it be magic?



I found heaven

The lyrics came back after all the years. 'Relight my fire, your love is my only desire,' I screeched, driving home from my job as a dental nurse.

Take That's Mark, Gary, Jason and Howard had broken a million hearts when they'd split. And it felt like yesterday...when I was 10, listening to *Pray* and daydreaming Mark and I were marrying in a star-studded bash.

Now I was 22 — and the lads had reformed. I knew I'd never be Mrs Owen and I

didn't mind. I had Craig Hammond, my boyfriend of four years. He was 27 and worked as a safety manager for an energy efficiency company. He was so romantic, always surprising me with holidays and flowers.

Later, at our flat, he sat at the computer. 'Mum gave me some Take That tickets,' he shrugged. 'I'm putting them on eBay.'

'What?' I shrieked. 'I love them! But I never saw them play live.'

'I can't believe I didn't know that,' Craig laughed. 'OK, we'll go.'

I was delirious with excitement when the concert arrived three months on. My mum Jane, 47, and best friend Rachel, 21, came too.

But on the way to the Birmingham NEC venue, Craig barely spoke. 'Maybe he's jealous of the competition,'

Rachel joked. But I was far too thrilled to worry.

Finding our seats, I saw a walkway leading to a mini stage next to us. *I'd be within touching distance of my idols...*

The concert began. 'I love you, Mark!' I screamed. Rachel and I sang our hearts out, especially when the boys came to the stage beside us.

'You're a brilliant audience,' Mark yelled.

Then he looked right at us. 'Especially you, Craig Hammond,' he grinned. 'Want to bring someone on stage?'

My heart flipped, stalled. *Had...I...just...heard...?*

Craig grabbed my trembling hand, and dragged me up towards the boys. The crowd was roaring but all I could hear was my pounding heart. 'Craig's

'Craig dragged me on stage towards the boys'

got something to ask you,' Mark said, and Craig fell on one knee.

'Will you marry me Holly?' he asked, holding a platinum diamond ring.

I threw myself into his arms. 'Yes!' I yelled and the arena erupted. Then the band was hugging me, but I couldn't take my eyes off my fiancé.

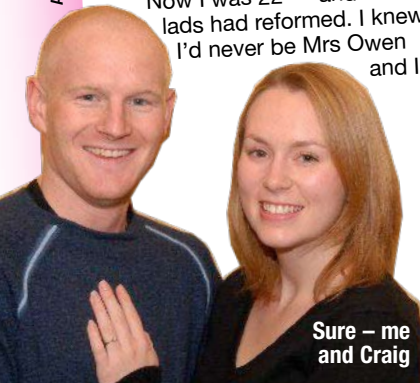
As Gary started singing *A Million Love Songs*, we were led off stage. The rest of the concert was a blur — but I didn't mind.

Two months on, meeting my childhood heart-throb didn't come close to Craig's amazing proposal. He's definitely my *Babe*.

HOLLY DAVIES, 22, HERFORD

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Sure — me and Craig

As told to Dominique Searle and Aoife Stuart