

## **Melissa Crawford**

IN 2004, Melissa Crawford was twenty years old. She was living in Smiths Falls, a town in Ontario, in central Canada. She had been severely handicapped from the time she was born. She couldn't speak or walk—or do anything else for herself. She had had to be looked after since her birth. Apart from her handicap she was healthy and was expected to live for a long time

Before she was born, inside her mother's uterus, Melissa was a healthy baby. However, she was deprived of oxygen for fifteen minutes at the time of her birth, and, as a result, her brain was damaged. That was the cause of her handicap.

Melissa was deprived of oxygen because the doctors who were delivering her could not extricate her from her mother's birth canal. They were unable to extricate her because she was much larger than a normal baby. Average birth weight is just over three kilograms, but Melissa weighed approximately five kilograms. Melissa's shoulders were too big to pass naturally through her mother's birth canal. She got stuck there and couldn't breathe. The doctors had to use forceps to pull her through. But even with the help of this tool, they had a very difficult job.

When the doctors finally succeeded in removing Melissa from the birth canal, she had become blue and seemed to be dead. They were able to hear a faint heartbeat however, and they managed to keep Melissa alive.

Melissa was an abnormally large baby because her mother was diabetic. Diabetes is a chronic disease, caused by the body's inability to remove sugar from the blood. It is very common. About one person in twenty is a diabetic. Diabetics have abnormally high amounts of sugar in their blood, and, as a result, they often become blind or suffer from kidney failure.

Melissa's mother, Jeanette Crawford, had a special kind of diabetes called gestational diabetes. Women who suffer from gestational diabetes become diabetic while they are pregnant. They often have no diabetic symptoms and, as a result, their disease may not be detected. Their diabetes almost always disappears as soon as they have their baby. But even if a mother is not seriously affected, her baby often is.

The baby may be affected because the mother shares her blood with her baby. The baby gets more sugar than it needs, and this causes it to grow too quickly. When the time comes for it to be born, it may be too big to get through its mother's birth canal.

When Melissa's parents found out what had happened to Melissa, and found out that this had happened because her mother had diabetes, they felt that the doctors were responsible for the catastrophe. The doctors who delivered Melissa had been looking after her mother while she was pregnant. Jeanette Crawford and her husband felt that if the doctors had done their job properly, they would have had a normal, healthy daughter.