

MY FIRST DAYS



Hello,

My name is Coco Elysa Lennox. I came out of my Mummy's tummy and emerged into the world on Friday, 7 April 2006 at 8.24 in the evening (Daddy took a photo of the clock on the wall at the precise moment that I drew my first breath so we'll always know the exact time). Mummy says I took my time to make an appearance and that it was a long labour. In my defence, I say I was ready and, in fact had been ready for weeks, although I thought the polite thing would be to wait until DD (due date) so that Mummy could get all her shopping done, fit in that last hair appointment, facial, manicure and pedicure. That way she could look all pretty when I met her.

Even Dr Keith told Mummy and Daddy that 'the baby has read the textbook and is doing all the right moves' and now it was up to her to read her version of the textbook so everyone could be on the same page. Unfortunately, she never got her hands on this supposed textbook for Mummies-about-to-give-birth, and so set out to experience the longest 26 hours of her life. She went through four midwives in that time - with labour being more than a day long, Mummy even got the first midwife back when she came in for her shift the next day!

After knock-knock-knocking on the door, they eventually let me out. My head got squashed for what seemed to be an eternity and I almost ran the risk of being a bit of a cone head for a few days - much to Daddy's horror. Luckily though, that didn't happen and as Dr Keith pulled me out he laid me in my Mummy's arms and smeared the grey goo I was covered in on all who touched me. After the first couple of breaths I tried out my lungs with some vocals. My intention was to let everyone know I had arrived with a great bellowing cry but all that came out was a modest squeal.

Mummy says my eyes were really small, like kitten slits before they open, but apparently I had this perfectly contoured mouth, just like Daddy's (Mummy's going to be biased here, isn't she?). My nose was flat, button-like and insignificant, same as all babies' noses, since we need to make sure our nose doesn't get in the way of feeding on the boob. I bet you didn't know that, but it's true, it's in the baby textbook - a flat nose ensures that we can still breathe whilst suckling away (makes you wonder if baby Barbra Streisand refused her mother's boob and insisted on a bottle for fear she might asphyxiate!).

I also came out with lots of hair - like why wouldn't I since I had been painstakingly growing it since Week 28?! I'm a girl, so naturally I'm going to want long hair. But while we're on the subject of hair, what is people's fascination with baby hair, anyway? I cannot count the number of comments I still get about it. And it's been ongoing since the day I was born. 'Wow, look at all that hair!'... 'My, doesn't she have a good crop of hair!'... 'Was she born with all that hair?' Durhh... what do you think? I'm far too young to have a hair transplant and wigs just don't stay on at this age.

Whilst I was cuddling with Mummy, me gazing at her mostly with my left eye and she

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blinking through tears, Dr Keith asked Daddy to cut my cord. This was not something I was too thrilled about as it represented the point of no return. From this moment on, I was committing to feeding on my own, weeing on my own and pooing on my own – this is a huge deal for a baby and not something we babies take lightly. Just think about it – for nine months, your Mum does it all for you and you form this great team where you can tell her what to eat, when to eat it, how much to eat and she just does it. Then, all of a sudden, you are thrust into the world, out of your comfort zone and suddenly everyone expects you to do EVERYTHING! You have to get the food into you, which by the way, at the beginning takes hours, and then get it out of you. What's with that? Inside Mummy, I just ordered in and then it was taken out – Mummy cleaned up the mess whilst I sucked my hand and thought up the order for next time. Now it's just milk every day, and whilst it's nice and nutritious, it can get a bit boring knowing what you are having morning, noon and night.

The cuddle was over in no time and to make things worse I was now cordless. Next thing I knew I was whisked away and dumped on a cold metal surface – all for the purpose of being weighed. What is the obsession with a baby's weight that you people have? Why the all burning question: 'How much does she weigh?' Is that really all that relevant? The point is if a baby is healthy and happy, who cares if it's a light midget at just around 2kg or a small elephant over the 10 pound mark? We're going to put on weight and grow if you feed us properly and love us, and eventually all babies turn into little elephants so no need to stress out about it. I decided to be kind to my Mummy who had to do the carrying and pushing and weighed in at 3.3kg, measured 50cm in length and came out with a relatively small head circumference (33.5cm). Again, no point in growing a big head inside since we can easily get one on the outside from all the well-wishers' compliments!

After the weighing and measuring debacle was completed, they put me in these scratchy fabric things for the first time. It was a strange sensation against my still gooey skin and I didn't like it much. The biggest problem I had was with the miniature hospital gown which they make all newborn babies wear. Firstly, there is no telling apart the girls from the boys as all the gowns are blue. Secondly, it makes us look like little doctors-in-waiting and isn't it just a little presumptuous to assume we'll all become doctors when we grow up..? The hospital staff tell all mummies and daddies not to bring any clothes for their babies as everything is provided while in hospital. But how depressing to have to wear bland Bonds singlets, blue hospital gowns and be wrapped in blue (yet again) woollen blankets for five days! It's not a good introduction to gender differentiation or any fashion sense.

Once wrapped and swaddled I was given to Daddy to hold me for the first time. It was nice to see his face at last and hear the familiar voice. His eyes seemed slanty and wet as he talked to me and held me in his big strong arms. He then played some music that he said was his and Mummy's wedding songs and I had my first dance with him to the tune of Van Morrison's *Someone like You* less than 40 minutes after I was born. The hospital staff had left us alone by now and this was our special private family moment. Mummy watched from the bed with not a lot of feeling in her legs but a lot of feeling in her eyes. The next song came on and it was *La Vie en Rose*, in French. Daddy and I continued dancing and Mummy accompanied us by singing the words (she can't carry a tune but she can say the French nicely – and I know because my middle name is French).



On the subject of names, a lot of people have asked Mummy and Daddy how they came up with my name. The simple answer is – they didn't, I did! It's only befitting that you are given the right name and for a while I was a little worried they wouldn't be able to hear it from me before I was born. But Mummy is quite receptive and has been known to be a little left of field at times, so thank goodness she got it when I beamed it through. She wasn't too sure about Coco initially and Maia (Mummy's Mum) even tried to put them off by saying it sounds like the name of a cabaret dancer from the Moulin Rouge (along with Lulu, and Froufrou and Juju), but after calling me Coco for four months, they realised it was my name and there was no disputing it. So one less thing for me to worry about, and the good thing about my name is that people can't shorten it – but I'm sure they'll try.

As it happens, Mummy only calls me Coco when she's being serious and wants me to stop crying or go to sleep. Every other time, I get Popette (from Pop, as in Coco Pops), and Rosebud (because I sometimes make this rosebud like, small mouth) or Puppette (French version of puppet and a different permutation of Popette) and Puppy (short for the French version of puppet), and Bunny (when I'm cute and cuddly), and Fox (cause apparently I'm a cunning feeder), and Squirrel (don't ask!). Suffice to say, I'm acquainted with pretty much most animals already!

Once Daddy and I finished dancing, it was time to get acquainted with The Boob. That's the order of importance for introductions for a baby – Mum, Dad, Boob. Sometimes if Dad isn't fast enough, Boob can even precede the meeting with him. We have to get our priorities straight here – food supply or warm embraces with Daddy. It's about survival and you would do the same if you were a baby and your life depended on it. It took a little while to become familiar with Boob and to know what to do with it – for both Mummy and I. Eventually I got the hang of it and pretended to suck to make everyone happy, but it wasn't until the next day that I had a good chew and got some colostrum – that stuff that babies need to make us healthy and immune to the new big bad world. I also managed to mangle the Boob good and proper to show it who was boss.

That strategy backfired on me the following day as the mean midwives advised Mummy to take Boob away for the next few days. I still got all the colostrum and pre-milk, but it was given to me out of these funny looking tubes and later bottles. It was still yummy and I didn't care too much, but I guess I learnt quickly enough that I had to show Boob some respect if we were going to be friends.

That first night, wrapped tightly in about four layers of sheets and blankets, they put me in this hard, elevated bed on wheels. I later realised it was the plastic bassinet that the hospital provides for all babies. The funny thing was that everyone expected me to actually go to sleep. Since I was pretty exhausted because of all the knock-knock-knocking on Mummy's door I had been doing, I decided to give in to their expectations and sleep... at least for a few hours at a time. I think Mummy was relieved as she could get some well needed rest herself, but it also gave her the idea that she had a great baby and this is how it was going to be every night. I set the record straight the next night, the night after that, and pretty much every night after that.

Thus started the Coco signature catnapping, a few minutes at a time or 20 minutes at a long stretch. I call it power napping, and it's something I used to do in the womb all the time. You sleep for a bit, wake up for a bit, get some eggs Benedict and ham sent through



the cord, chew on your hand for a bit, then have another little nap. It all makes perfect sense, so why is it that I can't do the same here? Have a little sleep, wake up and have a little nibble on the Boob, wet the nappy, get the nappy changed, have another little snooze, and so on. Why do people expect babies to sleep all the time? This sleep business is boring and totally overrated; it's much more interesting being awake.

The mean midwives kept trying to convince Mummy that 20-30 minutes of sleep at a time was not acceptable and the 'baby had to learn to sleep and needed to be settled'. They proceeded to teach her several settling routines. One of the routines was to let the baby cry herself to sleep once she established the baby was fed, changed and dry - that was the first time I saw Mummy angry, when she told the mean midwives that was unacceptable and not something she was about to try on her baby. Needless to say, I was rather happy about that. Another routine involved putting the baby in the horrible plastic bed and violently rocking the thing back and forth to simulate a four wheel drive experience - the jerky movement is supposed to soothe babies to sleep. Huh..??

The next few days in hospital passed quickly and were fairly uneventful - if you don't count that water dunking experience called a first bath, a couple of immunisation needles in my tiny thighs, being hooked up to this ridiculous machine and looking like an extraterrestrial so they could perform a hearing test, and going a lovely shade of daffodil yellow on my face (which luckily wasn't jaundiced enough to require being put under ultraviolet lights sporting trendy sunglasses at the tender age of four days!). Mummy had her own trials and tribulations - something about controlling midwives, tears, burning boobs and ice packs.

Daddy's life seemed the easiest during this time, although we did lose him every night and didn't get him back until the following day. He came in bearing soy lattes and fresh clothes for Mummy, and hugs and kisses for both. I was lucky to have such a good Daddy already, and Mummy let out a sigh of relief every time he walked through the door. Although he appeared relaxed, I did notice by the time we got home, Daddy seemed to have less hair (if that's possible... makes me wonder how I came out with so much hair myself).

Whilst in hospital, we had lots of visitors. I met Granddad Nev and Gran Fran on my first day, before I was even 24 hours old. Apparently Gran Fran had phoned on Friday night at around 7pm, beside herself with excitement and asking if they can come see the baby that night. The only trouble was the baby hadn't come out yet, and although I think I'll be quite the social butterfly, that first visit might have been a little early, even for me. The revolving door of visitors also included Auntie Mary-Ellen, Uncle Den and Gabe, Terasita, Jason and Grandma Cecilia (although she isn't technically my Grandma everyone calls her that), all bearing gifts.

Over the next few days there were more faces peering over my bassinet and expectant arms reaching out for the first cuddle with the baby. Everyone came loaded with goodies for the new bub and good wishes for the proud parents - Uncle Stan, Sally, Gwen, Bina, Bekky, Joy and Grandma Mari (Daddy's Mum). If I've left anyone out, please forgive me, I am only little and my short-term memory isn't up to scratch yet. Maia and Taia (my grandparents on Mummy's side were unfortunately not able to come to Sydney because

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Taia is not well, but they rang every day and spoke to Mummy.

Soon enough, armed with settling routines, breastfeeding techniques and lots of well-meaning advice from the mean midwives that I secretly hoped Mummy and Daddy wouldn't follow, it was time to go home. For me this meant ditching the unattractive blue hospital nighties and wraps for real clothes - it was time for the unveiling of the pink wardrobe. For my going away outfit Mummy and Daddy picked a cute little jumpsuit to dress me in (pink, of course). It was 0000 in size but it was still loose and very roomy - I figured I had some fast growing to do to fit into my new clothes. Mummy and Daddy said their goodbyes and thank you's, loaded the car with all the flowers, gifts and baby paraphernalia, and finally loaded the baby into the car. This is the part I wish I had been warned about - they bolstered me into this funny looking contraption with lots of belts and harnesses that I was somehow supposed to sit in without sliding around in, and do so with a smile on my face. I let them know what I thought of their car seat all the way home, but struggled a little to stay awake. The purr of the engine and bumpy ride almost put me to sleep.

Once home Daddy rescued me out of the contraption and carried me over the threshold. It was my first time inside our home and his first time as a Daddy carrying his little girl. He too wore a pink shirt that day, in celebration of our hospital release. Nouchie, my feline sister, who had previously been warned of my impending arrival, wasn't waiting for me. She appeared later to greet Mum, proceeded to sniff me out and walked off unimpressed. Mummy and Daddy had a rocker waiting for me and I took proud place in it. It was decked out with a pink bunny rug. My days of hospital blue and acquiescing to the mean midwives were over. A whole new era of days at home with Mum and Dad, sleepless nights, boob fighting and milk guzzling was just starting...

