When you're expecting a child, you secretly pray for certain things. In the case of my first pregnancy, it was a little girl with big brown eyes. The moment I slapped eyes on my daughter, she of the big blue eyes, I immediately forgot I wanted anything else. She was perfect.

But what happens when, after a little while, you realize your perfect child really isn't so perfect after all? What happens when your gorgeous bundle of girl doesn't develop the way she's supposed to? When she doesn't hold her head up? When her eyes don't track moving objects—like your smiling face? And when her little body is constantly besieged by tremors?

That's what Rick and Kristine Larson of Missoula wondered after their blue-eyed, blonde-haired bundle of perfection was born in February of 2002. The Larsons chose an old family name for their daughter and adjusted the spelling from McCasslyn to Mikaslyn, to make it appear less like a surname and more like a first name. Not long after Mikaslyn's birth, they noticed she experienced a constant stream of tremors, which were attributed to "Baby Shakes." In addition, when she didn't respond to loud noises and still wasn't tracking visually, they knew something wasn't right.

After numerous visits to several doctors and neurologists, and after exhaustive personal research, the Larsons learned their daughter was having seizures. Hundreds and hundreds of tiny little seizures each and every day. Seizures 24/7. Seizures that interfered with normal functions--like hearing and seeing well enough to track moving objects and sitting up on her own. After being emergency life-flighted to Seattle at age eighteen months, Mikaslyn was diagnosed with *hypsarrhythmia.*

Hypsarrhythmia is a neurological condition of unidentified origin that manifests itself in infants. It is characterized by seizures that vary from mild to severe and most often result in brain damage. The seizures generally do not continue beyond age 24 months.

Right now, three methods exist for reducing or eliminating the seizures—all with their own lists of side effects. After opting to allow Mikaslyn to undergo daily injections, her EEG showed no sign of seizures after two weeks of treatment. Ditto for the EEG review at four weeks. She has been seizure-free since July of 2004.

Mikaslyn’s doctors identified brain damage when she was fifteen months old. They indicated that they didn’t expect her to develop “normally.” Whatever that means. The most difficult thing to accept is that no one can determine precisely how severe Mikaslyn’s brain damage is or what the long-term prognosis is.

The Larsons find it impossible to accept. If there’s a way for their daughter to “catch up,” if there’s a way they can help her develop “normally,” they’re going to find it. Mikaslyn has been receiving physical, occupational, and speech therapy every week since the diagnosis was made. The Larsons have transformed their single-family ranch into an environment that is conducive to Mikaslyn’s growth and development.

They’ve torn up all the carpeting and installed hardwood and laminate flooring so that her walker can tool around unimpaired. The collection of brightly colored toys and equipment is mind-boggling. At least to me. For Mikaslyn, it’s perfect. They’re planning to remodel their finished basement so that it includes mats and equipment which will make her therapy sessions more beneficial and comfortable, for both Mikaslyn and her therapists. They’d also like to landscape the yard with paved walkways so that she can scoot around outside in her walker instead of just sitting in a seat when she collects her daily doses of Vitamin D.

Problem is: you guessed it—money. At $150 per session, the price tag for three weekly therapy sessions is steep.

Especially since the Larson's have already maxed out the limit on their health insurance. Having a special-needs child involves a lot of other expenses, including uninsured medical costs, necessary modifications to their home and yard, developmental tools and equipment that will help accelerate her progress, etc.

What are the Larsons doing to come up with all that money? One thing they're not doing is asking for a handout. Instead, Rick and Kristine developed www.TheGrubClub.com in 2005. It's a web site that Rick created so restaurants can post their menus online—at no cost. Not just Missoula restaurants, either.

If you check out the web site, you'll find that restaurants all over the US and in other countries have done so. Restaurant owners upload their menus and location information and/or submit menus for printing in a .PDF file.

Going on vacation? TheGrubClumb.com not only offers access to information about local restaurants, it also provides a map so you don't get lost on your way! How about Chez Donald's in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada? Or The Classic Café in downtown Providence, Rhode Island--just 20 minutes from where I used to live in Massachusetts?

Rick is in the process of expanding the services TheGrubClub.com makes available to restaurants and will soon be able to post photos and reviews.

Back to the money, you're thinking. If this web site provides services at no charge, how are the Larsons making money? Well, right now they're not.

Although the web site's traffic increases every day, Rick is planning to sell advertising space on the site when traffic reaches a certain level. He's been working on and improving the site for the past 2 years, waiting for it to reach the point where it's worthy of paid advertising. When that happens, Rick, Kristine, and Mikaslyn will have the financial assistance they so desperately need.

What can you do to help? Increase the traffic to the web site by visiting it yourself. Contact restaurants you know and encourage them to register (free) on the web site and upload their menus. Share this story with friends and relatives, locally and out of state, asking them to do the same. The web site details Mikaslyn's story and shows photos of the blue-eyed, blonde-haired little girl, so if you want to know more about the web site's background, be sure to visit www.TheGrubClub.com.

Mikaslyn’s progress since the seizures ended has been phenomenal. She attends pre-school at Co-Teach here in Missoula and she’s advancing every day. She’s sitting up on her own now. She doesn’t talk, but she hums and sings and chats in her own special way--quite nicely, I might add.

As I was preparing to leave the Larsons’ home, Rick carried Mikaslyn in his arms and they all walked me to the door. She’s tall for her age, a bit on the thin side, and cute as a button, blonde hair and big glue eyes behind her eyeglasses. She was doing her humming/chatting thing and playing with her fingers. I said, “Bye bye, Mikaslyn.”

She looked up at me, made eye-contact, and began chatting a bit louder, all with sounds beginning with “B.” This from a child who didn’t make a sound for the longest time, from a child who—it was believed—wouldn’t be able to talk.

I guess perfect is in the eye of the beholder.