

# Cleft

Category: Poems

written by Jon Neher | November 27, 2009

As Caroline was born

the doctor saw  
the split  
from lip to nose—  
purple rimmed,  
going down deep—  
Deep enough  
to hurt  
generations.

And the imperfect doctor,  
tired of wounds  
tired of divisions,  
saw the small  
wholeness  
Chose that moment  
Chose tenderness  
saying simply,  
*She is beautiful.*

And the imperfect mother,  
tired of pain,  
held her child,  
touched the tiny,  
ragged face  
Chose that moment  
Chose acceptance  
crying softly,  
*She is beautiful.*

## **About the poet:**

Jon Neher is clinical professor of family medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle and associate director of the Valley Medical Center Family Medicine Residency Program. He is editor-in-chief of the newsletter [Evidence-Based Practice](#) and a frequent contributor of essays on medical education to [Family Medicine](#).

## **About the poem:**

This poem was written to capture the layering of emotions that occurred the day I unexpectedly delivered an infant with a cleft palate. I was new to my career, and this was a novel challenge for me. Since I had no professional scripting to fall back on and because I wanted to encourage bonding, I found myself repeatedly saying how beautiful the baby was, even as I discussed the

cleft with the parents. The effect on the family was precisely what I was hoping for.

**Poetry editors:**

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro