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## Proud parents don't notice lizard phase

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### Up Front/Commentary

In a mother's eyes, every newborn is the most beautiful child ever born.

But from the viewpoint of one generation removed, you might see some things you would rather not see.

Such as: Yes, this new granddaughter is beautiful just because she's a brand new human being, she's healthy, she's ours and we are so happy about it.

But when I looked at Miss Erin Kathryn Oberholtzer at 2 days old, I saw through the lens of a woman who has seen plenty of newborns. And my honest reaction was, "Good God, she looks like a lizard."

Not that I voiced this concern to my daughter. It seemed obvious - those puffy eyes, that red, splotchy skin, even that little pink tongue that darted between her lips seeking either her mother's milk, or perhaps bugs, gave Miss Erin an unmistakable resemblance to the scaly little beasts I've seen sunning themselves on rocks in the desert.

This is a concern to a loving grandmother. How will she get through life, I asked myself, looking like a creature that advertises Geico insurance? Kids at school are bound to tease. What happens when she tries out for the school play, will she always get the part of the animals? Who will recognize her brilliant mind or her laser-sharp wit if they are watching to see if she's flicking out her tongue to catch flies?

Lizard tendencies are not a plus when you're a young woman growing up in this image-conscious society.

Fortunately, this lizard phase of a child's life usually lasts only a day or two. As the little being starts filling out and getting accustomed to the outside world she begins to look less like a lizard and more like something else - like a space alien.

The shriveled little face becomes heart-shaped with outsized-eyes and a tiny, ribbon-like mouth. If little Erin's skin was green she would have been the spitting image of an old movie character. When I rocked her I'd whisper in her ear: "E.T. phone home" just to see if there was any reaction.

The parents of a newborn child rarely see these quirky characteristics, but other people often do. People have standard phrases when they meet a newborn, such as: "Oh, isn't she darling. Isn't she a doll." What they really mean is: "I hope I'm not going to laugh," or, "This kid's face could set off a fire alarm."

These judgments are always too hasty. It sometimes takes a while for babies' inner beauty to become apparent, but it's always there. By the time we went for our first family portraits with two-week-old Erin and 2-year-old Miss Julia May, Erin was looking more like a real person and not a zoo animal. In fact, when I look at those pictures from a few weeks ago I can hardly see the lizard or the alien traits. Erin is well on her way to becoming one of the most beautiful children I have ever seen in my life. And this opinion comes from an unbiased observer.

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