

caring matters

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report on giving

The Willson Triplets Three Tiny Miracles in One

The birth of a baby is a miraculous event for any parent. But Thea and Phil Willson received three miracles in one. Their premature triplets, Daniella, Alexis and Gemma, were delivered at Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH) by caesarean section on Leap Year Day. The fact that the naturally conceived sisters are identical is even more remarkable. The odds are one in 200 million!

Thea was shocked the day she learned she was carrying triplets. At five months pregnant, she went for a routine ultrasound. With no history of multiples on her side of the family, Thea wasn't even thinking about the possibility when the technician discovered three tiny hearts beating in her womb.

"Before that moment, we had no idea that Royal Columbian even had a special neonatal unit," says Thea. RCH is a level three hospital for sick babies and one of only three hospitals in the province with a specialized neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) to treat premature babies, multiple birth babies and those with serious health problems.

Each year, the NICU at RCH treats 1,300 babies and provides emotional support to their families. Thea and Phil were given a tour of the nursery to see where their babies would spend their first days and weeks. This tour is standard for parents and lets them



Daniella, Gemma and Alexis Willson, identical triplets born at RCH on Leap Year Day.

prepare to see their babies attached to IVs and breathing tubes, and learn about the special care equipment.

RCH is also the only high-risk maternity centre in the Fraser Health region for pregnant women who need renal, cardiac, or intensive care. Thea was put under the care of Dr. Ubhi, an Obstetrician/Gynecologist at RCH. Babies grow in their own amniotic sac in the womb. When Dr. Ubhi discovered that two of the babies were sharing the same amniotic sac, he put Thea on immediate bed rest. The rare condition is very dangerous because it means the two babies' umbilical cords can become tangled together. One of the cords could have compressed the other, and one of the babies could have died.

Dr. Ubhi closely monitored the babies. Each week in the womb was another milestone as they reached a new stage of development. "It was a scary time," admits Thea, who worried for the triplets' safety every day while staying in an unfamiliar environment. "I had never

been in a hospital before and didn't know what to expect. But the nurses were awesome and became like a second family to us." After Thea spent five weeks in hospital, the babies were ready to be delivered. They were 10 weeks premature.

On February 29, the operating room was full with three sets of paediatric teams: one assigned for each baby. Phil watched his tiny babies being delivered and took pictures for Thea. "I wasn't able to see them," she says. "But I heard them cry when they came out. They sounded just like little kittens."

Gemma was the smallest and weighed 2 lbs. 5 oz., Daniella and Alexis, who shared the same amniotic sac, weighed 2 lbs. 11 oz. and 3 lbs. 5 oz., respectively. The doctors were astounded. The two babies' umbilical cords were so entwined they looked like they had been braided together. Miraculously, neither cord had compressed the other. *(cont'd on back)*

(cont'd from front)

Thea could not see her babies right away as they needed to be rushed to the NICU for oxygen and IV treatment. "I knew they were born but it wasn't until I saw them that it finally became real." In the NICU, the infants were prepped and had tubes put in their nose and throat for oxygen. Five days later, Thea held her babies for the first time. "They were so small, they could fit into one hand," she recalls.

Since the triplets' birth, the Willsons have developed a new routine as parents of three premature baby girls. Phil balances working full time with visiting the babies in the hospital, while Thea is with them every day. Still, life is an emotional rollercoaster for the Willsons. "It's two steps forward and

one step back," Thea says. "Every time the babies reach a new milestone, we get really excited. But the next day, it can all change." As the triplets grow, Thea and Phil try to make the small moments count, like when the babies hold their fingers and smile.

The Willsons have a lot of support from their family and friends, and even their new "family" at RCH. "The nurses are all very good and compassionate," says Thea. "I can't emphasize enough how great they've been. We appreciate their care and are so thankful to Dr. Ubhi; he has been so personable and sincere."

As much as the Willsons have made RCH their second home, they look forward to

the day they can take their three miracle babies home to sleep in their own cribs for the very first time.



Phil and Thea Willson hold their three little miracles at RCH: Gemma, Daniella and Alexis.

Donor-funded equipment provides better baby comfort and care

This year, the annual Urgent Needs equipment list at Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH) is as long as ever. Hospital administration has placed requests into the RCH Foundation asking for help from donors to purchase better equipment, more equipment or replace aging equipment throughout the hospital.

The team at RCH is dedicated to providing the best care possible for every patient, from premature babies to loving grandparents. That is why it is so important that the equipment they use is as efficient and effective as possible. One such piece of specialized equipment is the state-of-the-art Giraffe OmniBed, which is used in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

This piece of equipment is so special because it provides the NICU care team with greater access to their infant patients; more room to provide treatment; and easy-to-use features. "We are so grateful for donor support to fund this new equipment, as it really does make a difference in the lives of our tiny patients," says Coreen Claggett, Clinical Nurse Educator for NICU and Paediatrics at RCH.

Giraffe OmniBed

Clear, large hood design

Provides unobstructed visibility to baby from three sides.

Whisper Quiet Mode

Creates soothing environment for babies and promotes better health.

Servo oxygen control system

Maintains a precise oxygen-rich environment.

Easy access control panel

Convenient access so caregivers can perform duties without disrupting family members.

Radiant warming system

Heats entire mattress evenly so baby always receives uniform heat.

Double active wall design

Provides bi-directional airflow to keep temperature even and protect baby from heat loss when either door is open.

Baby Susan rotating mattress

Unique design allows caregivers to rotate the mattress 360 degrees for complete access during procedures without disturbing the baby.

Elevating base

Can be raised to a comfortable height for procedures or lowered for seated care and family visits.

