

2023 SIGNATURE CHEFS GALA AMBASSADOR FAMILY



In May of 2022, we found out we were pregnant for the ninth time. A few weeks later, when we found out we were pregnant with twins, we were overwhelmed with excitement, joy, gratitude, and a healthy dose of fear. Our perinatologist discovered during the first ultrasound that our twins were monochorionic diamniotic, or mono-di. This meant that our girls shared one placenta, but each had their own amniotic sac inside of that placenta. This type of twin pregnancy poses a higher risk for complications than twins who each have their own placenta but are not as high risk as twins who share a placenta and an amniotic sac. Chris and I immediately started researching mono-di twins to prepare ourselves for the pregnancy and to arm ourselves with questions for our care team. Unlike our previous pregnancies, I had ultrasound appointments and met with doctors every 1-2 weeks. Our girls were truly miracle twins in the womb, having none of the complications that typically arise with twins, let alone mono-di twins. They were growing at the same rate, there was no evidence of twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, my body was growing and accommodating their every need, and all three of us were healthy on all measures.

The morning of November 8th, 2022 was just like any other, I was gearing up for another appointment with my OB and yet another ultrasound to check on the girls—a routine 29-week check-up. During that appointment, the doctor found that twin B, our sweet Lyla, had passed away. In an extraordinarily rare series of events, Lyla passed as a result of a cord accident that occurred when our girls became mono-mono twins, sharing both the placenta and amniotic sac. The next few days were a blur as a plan was established to deliver twin A, Anna, with the best opportunity for success. On November 11th, at 29 weeks and 3 days gestation, doctors delivered both of our girls, Anna and Lyla.

Our sweet Anna would spend the next 62 days at Sharp Mary Birch NICU, surrounded by doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. The early days in the NICU were the most difficult. Watching our 2lb 13oz daughter desat multiple times a day, listening to the alarms and machines beeping, and learning how to care for her were our main challenges in those first few weeks. Her diapers fit in the palm of our hands, and when doing skin-to-skin she could fit comfortably inside of our shirts. She didn't take up very much space physically, but she quickly filled the hearts of everyone who cared for her. The nurses would lovingly call her "feisty" and tell us how much they love the feisty babies. Anna hated having her temperature taken and hated the CPAP machine even more. Boy, did she let everyone know her dissatisfaction.

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As her parents, we often felt helpless in those early days. We weren't neonatologists or nurses; we couldn't care for her like we had our boys in those first few weeks. But we quickly got to know our daughter despite the non-traditional bonding experience. We came to understand her and, even in an incubator, we were able to comfort our daughter as she learned to navigate life outside of the womb. The final few weeks of her NICU stay were busy, to say the least. While we would miss the daily kindness of her respiratory therapists, we were so happy to see her breathing without any oxygen. Once the oxygen was removed, she was able to go to the final pod where we would focus on bottle feeding. During this time, we spent the majority of the day with Anna, changing diapers and feeding her every three hours. Anyone who has sat in a hospital all day knows how grueling this can be. Her primary nurses were heaven-sent and guided us every step of the way. They'd offer a hug and words of encouragement if a feeding didn't go as well as we had hoped, which happened more often than not at first. I remember one feeding in particular when Anna stopped breathing and began turning purple. One of her primary nurses was standing right there with me and calmly sprang into action.

Once Anna was stable, her nurse went from caring for her to caring for me, as I was visibly distraught from watching my daughter turn purple in my arms. When the day came that the feeding tube could be removed, they celebrated right alongside us. Only a few days after the feeding tube was removed, Anna's neonatologist signed off on her discharge. On January 11, 2023, at exactly two months old, there was a literal parade of nurses who cheered on our girl as she graduated from the NICU.

The NICU doesn't just care for the tiniest of babies; they care for the parents. Our social worker and all of Anna's nurses doubled as family. We would not have survived this experience if it weren't for the compassion and love all of us were shown in those 62 days. We owe everything to those angels in scrubs. They gave us a healthy, 6lb 13oz baby girl to bring home to her big brothers.

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