

# One miracle baby delivers another

by Allison Lindgren

"Miracles are interesting. God answers prayer always. Whether it doesn't turn out the way we hoped or it does turn out the way we hoped, I believe he answers our prayer."

Paula Loewen quietly speaks those words, sitting in her living room today, as she talks about miracles with alternating tears and laughter. She and her husband Rick lost a baby many years ago. It seemed that she had just found out she was pregnant and then just as quickly, the baby was gone. Paula was devastated and depressed and she remembers a follow-up visit to the doctor following the miscarriage. On the way to the doctor's office, she told her husband, "I am so depressed, I think I am making myself feel pregnant."

When she got to the doctor's office, they asked her to take a blood test because there had been a mistake made on a previous blood test, so they needed to repeat it. She remembers the doctor asking her how she was doing and she told him that she was doing okay. She said he looked at her and asked how she was REALLY doing. "I started crying," Paula said. She told him, "I feel awful. None of what you said was going to happen has happened, and I think I am so depressed that I am making myself sick."

Before they left his office that day, Paula and Rick learned that Paula had indeed lost a baby but there had been twins. Six weeks after losing one baby, they found out she was still pregnant. "That was my Elizabeth," she said softly. "She was our first miracle."

That miracle baby, Elizabeth Loewen, became Betsy Richardson and she delivered her own miracle baby at home on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2014. Betsy recalls the events that led up to that day. She had worked the day before at the Lutheran Home of the Good Shepherd and had not been feeling well. Her back hurt but she knew "there was something going around," and she assumed that she was coming down with it too. She was sick—she tested positive for a virus that caused stomach flu symptoms, so she didn't recognize



*Above: Betsy Richardson holds her son Isaiah, who was born on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2014. Isaiah was born at his family's home 12 weeks premature and spent two months in the hospital. Isaiah is now a healthy one-year old.*

signs that may have been indicators that she was in labor.

It was not a normal labor or delivery in any way. Betsy went in to take a shower; she thought her water broke and immediately felt that the baby was coming. Her husband Jeremy had been sleeping and woke to hear her saying, "Go get my mom, the baby is coming." Normally a very sound sleeper, it was a blessing that he woke. He told her to get on the floor. Jeremy went upstairs to get Paula and by the time Paula got there, Isaiah was well on his way. Weighing only 2 pounds, 14 ounces, Isaiah Richardson was born twelve weeks premature, at home.

Paula had helped her mother, a nurse who coordinated an EMT course in Washington, and she had gotten to sit in on the classes that included childbirth courses and absorb some of the information. Those courses, and the CRP certification that she received at the Lutheran Home of the Good Shepherd daycare where she worked, were some of the "God things," or blessings that led to the miracle of Isaiah's birth. "I just knew that Betsy was delivering so early and this was not a nor-

mal delivery so I just shouted a prayer—Help me Lord. I don't know what to do."

When she got to Betsy, she literally dropped to her knees, grabbed a clean towel and caught the baby, still in the amniotic sac. She said that she yelled to Jeremy to call 911.

Paula checked the baby and was stunned at how big he was; saying that she thought he be smaller but he was 15 inches long and very skinny. He was also kind of grey. She checked for a pulse and there was none, but he was warm. Paula said to Betsy, "If it's okay with you, I think I am going to try." And she told me to go for it.

Paula continued with the story, "His face was so tiny, his entire face fit in my mouth and I gave him the tiniest of a breath and started compressions. I didn't even count and before we knew it, he let out a cry. His big, big dark eyes opened and I didn't even know they could. 'His eyes are open,' I screamed. I was stunned." She said that she may not have been screaming but in her mind, it seemed like she was. His eyes were open, he let out this precious little cry and he started to wake up. "He's alive, he's alive,"

she exclaimed. She said she didn't cut the cord, she just wrapped him in a towel and then realized that she needed to give him to his mom to let him bond."

Betsy, however, was a little afraid to hold him and told her mom she was doing just fine. Paula said that she told Betsy, "Take your baby. Shake him, keep jostling him." She didn't know if he would keep breathing but she didn't know what else to do. It turned out that it was the right thing to do, the doctors told them later, because he did have a serious problem with apnea. His brain was not telling him to breathe. Both Betsy and Paula agree that they didn't wait long for the ambulance to arrive, thinking that it was literally just minutes from the call to their arrival. Their arrival was almost right after the baby was born.

Nathan Presnell, from the New Rockford Ambulance service was the first one down the stairs. He came in and Paula said, "There's the baby." Presnell took Isaiah; we told him the baby was 12 weeks early and that he was born still in his amniotic sac. When Nathan realized what had happened, he called Kathy Jenrich, an RN, and she arrived shortly afterward. They wrapped Isaiah in a special blanket, put clips on the umbilical cord and then they let Grandma cut the cord.

According to a Time magazine article, while this type of birth is "seemingly unusual, births in which the infant remains entirely inside the sac during the journey through the birth canal, can be intentional, particularly when the baby is premature. Dr. Amos Grunebaum, director of obstetrics at NewYork-Presbyterian Weill Cornell Medical Center, purposefully delivers some of his babies in the sac, as a way to protect them during the delivery process. "It protects the baby from being injured; it serves as a cushion around the baby."

After Isaiah was born, medical staff told them that it was actually fortunate that he had been born in the sac because it protected him from catching Betsy's virus, which could have been deadly for him. Also, as the Time article suggests, the bag protected him

from any head trauma that could have resulted in a stroke in a baby in that stage of development.

Isaiah was taken in one ambulance to CHI Carrington Health. Betsy followed in a second ambulance shortly afterward. Paula said, "When we got to the hospital in Carrington, the staff members were literally running. They had called Sanford in Sioux Falls, which is renowned for their children's care. There was Skype-like communication system already set up to communicate with Sioux Falls. The ambulance had communicated with the hospital en route and by the time that Betsy and Isaiah got there, the staff in Carrington and in Sioux Falls were already communicating. Sioux Falls immediately dispatched a flight with medical staff on board to bring Isaiah to Sanford in Bismarck.

With the screen set up, the team in Sioux Falls was able to see the baby and coach them, even right down to the right blanket to use for Isaiah because a premature baby's skin is so fragile. The hospital staff were asking about every detail. Paula remembers that when she arrived at the hospital, Isaiah was holding on to Betsy's finger. She says, "It was the sweetest thing, and Betsy was so calm throughout the entire experience."

It was Thanksgiving Day, but it seemed like everyone who could be at the hospital was there. Both Betsy and Paula are thankful to Dr. Page. They remember that the staff handled the situation so well, especially for a hospital that hasn't delivered babies in years and isn't equipped for pediatric intensive care. "We were so impressed with them," Paula said. They ended up air-fighting Isaiah to Bismarck with the flight team from Sanford.

Betsy stayed in the hospital in Carrington for the night to make certain that she was all right. "I cried all night. All I could think of was that the last time that I held him, really could be the last time that I held him," Betsy recalled. Her dad, Rick, stayed with her in the hospital while Paula and Jeremy went on to Bismarck to be with Isaiah.

Isaiah was in the hospital in Bismarck for over two

months, which was difficult for the young family. Betsy's sister and her husband live in Bismarck and were able to provide a place to stay when they came to be with Isaiah. Betsy talked about the milestones that took place during the time that he was in the hospital and how such little things for full-term babies became milestones for a premature baby like Isaiah.

The doctors are still treating Isaiah with kid gloves because of his immune system. For a while they thought that he might be blind. It was obvious that he couldn't hear and they were very concerned that he was going to be deaf especially because it was unknown how long he was without oxygen. However, it is very clear that he can hear now. His cries have changed because he can now hear himself, he responds to sounds around him and he is trying to talk. He had three holes in his heart that were supposed to take two to six years to close and they've already closed. There have already been so many miracles with him.

Isaiah is a year old now, and is walking along furniture, laughing at the dog and scooting around after his brother, J.D. His adjusted age would be that of a nine month old; he is the size of a nine month old but is behaviorally doing things that a twelve month old would do.

"It's such a wonderful thing to have watched happen. I am anxious to see what Isaiah's story will be and what God will do through this little miracle's life," Paula says. "This is a story that we have wanted to tell for a long time, but the last year has had so much going on in our lives that we haven't been able to do it."

"Every time someone hears about a miracle, I know that there is someone whose heart is broken and says, 'what about mine—why didn't mine make it?' And I understand that feeling totally. I still miss the three children that I lost," Paula continues. "I remember thinking the same thing, why not mine? I prayed just as hard for them but I also remember saying, 'I trust you, I know you know what's best. I don't know why He chose us for the miracle but I am so grateful.'"