



Thanksgiving was supposed to be Sherri Goggin's last hurrah before going on bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. She was expecting twins—a boy and a girl. After receiving fertility treatments in Atlanta, this pregnancy was the start to having the family that Sherri and husband Tom, had always hoped for. "It was perfect— boy, girl," said Sherri. "Who hasn't secretly wanted twins?" In the rush of preparing to take dinner to a friend's house, Sherri ran to the restroom while Tom, who has been an obstetrician gynecologist for 17 years, busily loaded their white sports utility vehicle. Even though this was her first pregnancy, she knew that the bleeding she noticed was nothing to ignore. The look on her husband's face confirmed Sherri's fears.

"I thought, I know he looks worried, but things will work out," said Sherri. She and Tom made their way to St. Mary's Hospital only to find out that it was too late to stop her labor. Her pregnancy lasted 24 weeks to the day— a typical pregnancy lasts anywhere from 38 to 40 weeks.

According to the March of Dimes, every year nearly 500,000 infants are born prematurely. This organization, whose mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality, compares this number roughly to the population of Cleveland. By raising awareness of this complicated issue and supporting research to better understand why premature births happen, the March of Dimes says they hope that someday doctors will be able to effectively prevent pre-term deliveries.

On November 28, 1998, Sherri delivered twins, Kate and Jack. Both infants struggled after birth and Jack lived for only nine hours. Weighing only 1 pound 7 ounces at birth, Kate spent nine days in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at St. Mary's before an intestinal perforation sent her to the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta for emergency surgery.

Sherri rushed to be with her daughter immediately. "I don't even remember what I packed—I just went," she said. The medical team at MCG was waiting on Sherri to arrive before starting Kate's surgery. "The doctors were clear that even Kate's survival may bring future challenges," said Sherri. "While each day was a blessing, we never knew what the next day would bring."

What did happen next for Kate Goggin was a series of challenging events during her four month stay in the NICU, including a grade three brain hemorrhage, corrective eye surgery and complications involving feeding intolerance. With each of these setbacks, Sherri tried harder to become pro-active in her daughter's care. "By becoming more involved in Kate's care, we were able to make more informed decisions based on the most current medical information available," said Sherri. "The doctors and nurses welcomed our participation."

One example of something more that could be done is how a local plastic surgeon donated a breast implant for Kate to use as a pillow, to help support her tiny head. "I think that being pro-active is the main thing that I

My 5 Miracles

Sherri Goggin shares the obstacles, fears and joys of entering motherhood

BY STEPHANIE MARKHAM
PHOTOS BY RL HODNETT

did, that parents can do," said Sherri, remembering ways that she tried to do something, anything to participate in Kate's care. "I would tape my voice in the car driving to and from Augusta, reading *Little Women*, or singing Christmas carols to play for her while I was gone...anything that I thought might help, I would just try."

Everyone wanted to see her thrive, and thrive she did. Kate is now as active and healthy as any 7-year-old little girl. She loves to play the piano, swim and spend time outside with her three younger brothers and one sister. Yes— that makes five of them in all. After Kate, Sherri and Tom Goggin welcomed son Tom into the family and then triplets Will, Sam and Mary. All together that makes 100 fingers and toes. This growing bunch goes through four gallons of milk every two days and a weekly trip to the grocery store can easily add up to \$300.

"I always wanted a Kool-Aid house," said Sherri. "Like the old commercial; kids everywhere having fun, mom smiling, serving a healthy lunch for the entire neighborhood...Tom and I are so thankful for these five wonderful blessings. There's no man to man coverage in our home—we are strictly zone defense."

When I first met Sherri Goggin she warmly welcomed me into her home. We sat comfortably on the floor of her living room sipping ice water from cobalt blue glasses and snacking on delicious southern style pound cake. Will, Sam and Mary later joined us and Sherri let their sweet little hands sneak a bite of her cake. I watched as mother and children smiled at each other through crumbs and gleeful laughs.

After hearing Kate's story, I realized that she and I had more in common than I had first thought. I was born at 26 weeks gestation at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta and faced many of the same surgeries and challenges that Kate did as an infant in the NICU. I weighed just 2 pounds at birth and my hand was small enough to fit inside my mother's thumbnail. I endured four intestinal surgeries,

each of which were fairly new procedures at the time for such a tiny infant to undergo. I also suffered many breathing difficulties and a massive brain hemorrhage. As with Kate as well, people referred to IF I lived and the doctors even told my mother that at best, I would probably be "trainable."

Kate and I, and the Goggin's triplets who were born at 30 weeks, are all living proof of the importance of funding for organizations, like the March of Dimes, that are committed to funding research that gives premature infants a better chance at survival. For



ABOVE: Sherri & Kate BELOW RIGHT: Kate 3 lb. 5 oz.
BELOW LEFT: Will 3 lbs. 2 oz., Sam 2 lbs. 10 oz., & Mary 2 lbs. 5 oz.



example, doctors can now administer a drug called surfactant to premature babies early on as a way to combat Respiratory Distress Syndrome. This often fatal disease is a common challenge that many premature babies face. Surfactant, and the \$12.5 million that the March of Dimes has contributed to studying newborn lung development, is one example of how these infants now have a better chance of surviving.

"What if surfactant didn't exist?" asked Sherri. "Because I had four preemies, my kids might not be here today. The impact of this drug is nothing short of amazing."

Today, Sherri volunteers with the March of Dimes by sharing her story and helping to raise money in their annual walk that takes place every spring. With a group of friends, Sherri and her "preemie teamie" raised over \$5,000 for research. Raising money and bringing attention to this important issue is something that Sherri says she is passionate about.

Her optimistic attitude and contagious spirit helps her pass on this passion to the community around her.

For each of her children's futures, Sherri says that what she hopes for them the most, aside from happiness, is for all five of them to have a strong faith, a positive attitude and to be surrounded by positive-energy people. "Tom and I feel that leading by example is the best way to achieve these goals," said Sherri.

Sherri's positive attitude certainly is an example for her children to follow. Even when discussing all of her family's challenges, she manages to find the positive in what Kate went through to survive. "It's one of those life experiences you never dream possible nor would you ever want another person to experience—yet it strengthened my faith in God's miracles," said Sherri. "I am so blessed to have witnessed one of God's miracles before my very eyes; now I look around and there are five of them!"

In the 16 years between my birth and Kate's, research organizations have made a number of accomplishments in this field of study. However, even though babies born prematurely now have a better chance of survival, the rate of premature births has risen by 21 percent since 1981. This trend makes raising awareness of this issue all the more important. Even still, in the face of such challenges there is hope; hope and endless possibilities to what the human body and spirit are capable of overcoming.

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