

Simply Miraculous

Quietly sleeping, 12-month old Jamiey Zeigler looks like any other one-year-old baby. Her long eyelashes rest on chubby cheeks, her lips are open in a relaxed bow, and wisps of feathery-soft hair fall across her head. If it were not for the tube leading to a tracheostomy, and the oxygen tank sitting nearby, there would be little evidence of her daunting first year of life to the casual observer.

by Reanna Stoinoff



Jamiey Zeigler's determination to survive inspires all who meet her.

When she is awake, Jamiey's challenges are more apparent. Born 14 weeks early, her first year has been a continually intertwined exercise in pain and progress, joy and struggle. The right side of her face is paralyzed, and her vision has been slow to develop, so her eyes tend to cross. Seasonal allergies that would give other babies runny noses cause Jamiey's respiratory system the same distress, but the wheezing and coughing are amplified by her tracheostomy and respirator.

Despite these challenges, Jamiey is

a calm, content baby. She radiates with the resilience and determination that have kept her alive and continuing to improve regardless of her difficult birth.

"Even though she can't fully smile, I can tell when she's happy. Her eyes light up and she focuses on you. She is always trying to express herself," said Charles "Steve" Zeigler, Jamiey's grandfather.

Born at 26 weeks, Jamiey has faced a number of struggles. Her family recognizes the battles still ahead, but do so with gratitude that she has come so far already.

Kristie Zeigler, Jamiey's mother, discovered she was pregnant at four and a half months gestation. She had experienced high blood pressure during her first two pregnancies, but was not prepared for the severity of her situation with the third. "I went into the doctor's office on a Monday for my blood sugar test. It was 50 points above normal." More urgently, however, was her blood pressure which had skyrocketed to an extremely dangerous level. This resulted in Kristie being admitted to the hospital.

"My feet didn't touch the floor for seven days after that," Kristie said.

She was kept under sedation to prevent seizures or strokes from her preeclampsia (a pregnancy complication of high blood pressure and protein in the urine). The second day of her hospital stay, staff from the McLeod Neonatal Intensive Care Unit visited Kristie to discuss the very real possibility her baby would be arriving later in the week.

Born by Cesarean section that Thursday, April 3, 2008, Jamiey Dandleallen Zeigler weighed 1 pound, 15 ounces and was quickly whisked to the NICU, but not before Kristie heard her cry. "I made the nurses open the incubator door so I could hear her cry before I let her go. I didn't know if it would be the first and last time I would hear it," she said quietly.

Jamiey was admitted to the NICU with a long list of complications: she had a heart murmur; her blood pressure was low; her thyroid gland was functioning too low; her right lung had collapsed and her left lung showed symptoms of PIE, or pulmonary interstitial emphysema, a complication of premature lung disease. She also could not breathe or eat without the assistance of tubes.

Dr. J. Thomas Cox, the physician who admitted Jamiey to the NICU, said, "These complications are not uncommon for premature babies of Jamiey's gestational age. Twenty years ago,



50 percent of babies that premature would die. Now, 90 percent of babies born at 26 or 27 weeks survive, but they

often have a lot of health issues."

With her mother recovering from her own complications and Jamiey in the NICU, their extended family waited vigilantly at McLeod, praying for the health and safety of both Kristie and Jamiey.

"Pawpaw," as Steve is called by his grandchildren, has a loud, animated voice that holds Jamiey's attention as he speaks. Though he was at many times in her early life afraid to handle the fragile baby, he now is at ease with Jamiey in his lap and her two siblings, eight-year-old Jordan and six-year-old Haylie,

cooing and holding their sister's hands.

Though Kristie recovered from her preeclampsia and stayed at Jamiey's bedside, she herself was not able to hold Jamiey until she was about one and a half months old. "I could fit her head in one hand and the rest of her body in the other," Kristie recalled.

Many weeks after Jamiey was admitted, caregivers moved her respirator tube and noticed that the right side of her face seemed slack. An MRI conducted in June confirmed there was atrophy of the right cerebellum.

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Baby Jamiey is constantly surrounded and cared for by her attentive, loving family: grandparents Carolyn and Steve Zeigler, mother Kristie, brother Jordan (8) and sister Haylie (6).

VALUE OF CARING

Dr. Cox, along with Jamiey's neurologist, inferred that an inutero stroke had likely caused the atrophy and the facial paralysis. He said that unlike her other complications, Jamiey's stroke and damage to her brain were not likely to have been cause by her extreme prematurity. "It was probably just an unfortunate coincidence. It is a rare occurrence for something like that to happen without an obvious cause," he said.

Though Jamiey's health problems were stacked against her, she did have the benefit of an extremely attentive family. "Her mom was here all the time," Dr. Cox remembered. Kristie's presence in the NICU was almost constant, despite her hour-long drive from Cheraw.

"Until the last month before she was discharged, there were more bad days that stood out than good days," Kristie admitted. She also dreaded calls from the nurses to tell her that Jamiey had to be put back on a ventilator, or had otherwise experienced a setback. Jamiey's progress was slow, but nevertheless miraculous. She continued to grow stronger and get better.

On August 26, 2008, Kristie and her family prepared to bring five and a half month old baby Jamiey home for the first time.

The NICU nurses who still call to check in on her have passed their wisdom and encouragement onto Kristie, who spends her days with Jamiey and receives a great deal of help from her family. Even with their constant support, Kristie admits that her days are full with the work involved to care for Jamiey.

On top of the care other babies would need – baths, feedings, exercise and attention, Jamiey has at least six doctor's appointments each month. She is visited weekly by a physical therapist and will soon begin seeing a speech therapist. Jamiey's caregivers are working to wean her off the ventilator; six months after that is successfully accomplished, they may begin the process of weaning her off her feeding tube. Jamiey's family admits that there is still so much progress to be made.

Though Kristie and her family sometimes feel overwhelmed by Jamiey's situation, they see Jamiey's determination and good nature as inspiration. They are amazed at how intently she focuses, how calm she is, and how rarely they see the silent tears that indicate Jamiey is crying.

"If Jamiey can do what she does every day, despite what she's been through, I can do it too," Kristie said.



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**Charles "Steve" Zeigler,
Jamiey's grandfather**