



Kate Shirilla - Delivered by Providence

Katie Shirilla has always known her birth story.

The earliest photos of the 23-year-old elementary school teacher were all taken in MetroHealth’s old Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). The tight-knit Shirilla family still make jokes about the way Katie’s hair came in – young Katie rocked a “mohawk” for a really long time. Her mom, Sue, and her father, Rich, had planned to welcome their first-born into the world at MetroHealth. They just didn’t anticipate how quickly she would arrive.

Sue, then 32, had a very normal pregnancy with no signs of distress, save the day near the end of her second trimester when she noticed bleeding. Katie’s birth was imminent. The attending OB/GYN at

MetroHealth didn’t sugarcoat the situation. He let the Shirillas know that while there had been some success with babies born this early, they might want to consider having a priest come to the hospital. Father Art was in the delivery room when Katie was born at just 26 weeks gestation, weighing only 1 pound, 11 ounces on August 2, 1993.

Katie was immediately taken to the NICU. Her underdeveloped lungs simply weren’t ready to function on their own. She had a breathing tube inserted and was placed on an oxygen monitor.

Already at risk for her low birth weight, baby Katie’s inability to adapt to the breathing tube caused her to drop to 1 pound, 8 ounces. Doctors put her on a steroid to try to clear her lungs. It worked. After 30 days in the NICU, the breathing tube was successfully removed and the Shirillas saw their little girl’s face for the first time without tubing and tape.

Sue couldn’t stand feeling helpless just sitting in the NICU. She returned to work, taking long lunches each day to spend with Katie. Now able to breathe on her own, Katie was gaining weight and keeping it on. After 93 days in the NICU, Katie was healthy enough to go home. Follow-up appointments at the preemie clinic tracked her progress through her early development stages. She was doing great, with no eyesight, hearing or feeding issues.

The family didn’t know anyone whose baby had been born as early as Katie. “Our ignorance was bliss,” said Sue, adding that they now know how fortunate they were that Katie had no other complications. There were too many coincidences for them not to feel as though there were larger forces at work.

When Rich first wheeled Sue to visit Katie in the NICU, he recognized one of the nurses as a friend from high school and introduced his wife and new daughter. Judy worked the night shift in the NICU. She requested to continue to care for Katie

The nurse working the NICU day shift turned out to be Sue's second cousin, Stephanie. She also requested to provide Katie's care. Stephanie became Katie's godmother. Once Katie finally came home, she was baptized during a ceremony at the family's church. Stephanie was there, as was Judy. For the Shirillas, each of these moments is an essential part of their family story. With each telling, they recall a new favorite memory and yet another way they were blessed by their little angel.

In 1998, Father Art baptized Amy Shirilla at MetroHealth, where he had been hired as a chaplain. Unlike her older sister, Amy was not considered a pediatric emergency when she was born six weeks before her due date. Father Art has since retired, but still connects with Katie through social media.

