



The Balog Twins

Six weeks into her pregnancy, Jen Balog noticed she was bleeding. Afraid of a miscarriage, she and her husband, Steve, immediately went to the emergency room. Jen emerged from the exam room, both crying and laughing. Steve didn't know what to think. Jen finally clued him in: they were still pregnant...with twins.

Jen decided to change her delivery plan and her obstetrician referred her to a high-risk OB at MetroHealth. It was a decision that saved the lives of her children.

Just 14 weeks later during a routine exam, Jen mentioned to her doctor that she had noticed some discharge. Otherwise, things seemed fine. But they weren't. At just 20 weeks into her pregnancy, she was dilated. Doctors immediately admitted her to the hospital and worked to prevent her from going into labor. They were able to hold it off until she was at 23 weeks and two days.

Any birth before 37 weeks gestation is considered preterm. The earlier that babies are born, the less viable they are outside of the womb. Had Jen been in a different hospital, or in a state with a different definition of preterm viability, efforts to save the lives of her twins may not have been successful.

Isaac and Katelyn Balog entered the world on August 17, 2009, 15 weeks early. They had a 1 percent chance of survival. Their heads were smaller than the size of an adult's fist and their bodies about as big as soda cans. Isaac weighed 1 pound, 3 ounces. Katelyn was 1 pound, 6 ounces – which, for that point in a pregnancy, was actually considered “big” for twins.

Both babies were placed in incubators in MetroHealth's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). There, Jen and Steve remained focused on getting the twins over one hurdle at a time. Isaac and Katelyn both had heart surgery when they were just two weeks old. Isaac needed an additional procedure to correct nerve damage in his eyes. Katelyn had laparoscopic surgery to address issues in her digestive tract. Their parents worried about brain bleeds and the constant risks of infection. But they celebrated milestones, too: The twins transitioned to formula, eating just 2 ounces at first, then four, then six.

The twins were a month old before Jen and Steve were able to hold their children for the first time. For Isaac and Katelyn's first Halloween, their “costumes” were outfits from a Build-A-Bear™ toy store, which sells clothes for stuffed animals.

After five months in the NICU, the Balog twins headed home, oxygen in tow. For the next three months, the basement of the family's home served as base camp: two bassinets surrounded by TV trays holding assorted monitors and various pieces of equipment, a snarl of leads and wires running among them. Jen slept on the couch. Steve took an air mattress on the floor. It took every bit of an hour to prepare everything they needed in order to attend a follow-up doctor's appointment. Jen keeps the tiny Halloween costumes along with other memorabilia of the twins' first year in a box. She

doesn't get it out too often because she and Steve are focused on their children's futures.

One day, Isaac and Katelyn will learn about their first year of life and about how they beat incredible odds. But, for now, they're just going to enjoy being a couple of kids.

And that is a beautiful thing to witness.

