

The Neuners: Celebrating a Happy Ending

Sharon Neuner faced a challenge: How in the world to thank the quick-thinking doctor who saved her life and minutes later delivered her son through an emergency c-section.

“I almost died and my baby almost died,” says Mrs. Neuner. “Dr. Iammatteo single-handedly gave us our lives back. My husband and I didn’t know what to do when someone saves your life.”

They considered a trip to Hawaii. Instead, Mrs. Neuner and her husband, Chris, presented a gift to Labor and Delivery and the Maternity Center in honor of Matthew Iammatteo, MD, and the nurses that helped Mrs. Neuner through this crisis as well as an earlier heart-breaking loss.

The Neuners’ story began when they moved to Chatham with their 8-month-old daughter, Annabel. At 40-weeks pregnant, Mrs. Neuner started bleeding. Not especially worried because she felt her baby kicking, she proceeded to Morristown Memorial. Later that day, daughter Sereana Catherine was delivered stillborn. Mrs. Neuner credits the compassion of two nurses, Kelly Trotter and Elizabeth Dennis, for helping her through the tragedy.

Two years later, both nurses helped Dr. Iammatteo deliver Gabrielle Hope. Then, a year later, Nurse Trotter was once again with the Neuners for what seemed like a normal birth until Mrs. Neuner sat up for an epidural. Before the anesthesiologist was able to proceed, Mrs. Neuner experienced anxiety and elevated heart rate, which then abruptly dropped to below 10 beats per minute — the equivalent of a flat line.

When Mr. Neuner asked about the baby’s heartbeat, Nurse Trotter responded through tears that the baby’s heart rate was fine. “I never imagined potentially losing my wife,” he says.

Dr. Iammatteo assessed his patient and immediately ordered blood, platelets, and other essential blood products.

“He was like a quarterback; with no hesitation on his part, he started to bark out orders,” says Mr. Neuner. “I watched in horror from the back of the room.” Although losing the baby was a threat, the doctors first had to stabilize Mrs. Neuner.



Christopher and Sharon Neuner

After three shots of epinephrine, her heart rate rose. Then Christopher Thomas was delivered by Caesarian section. While he recovered in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Mrs. Neuner received blood transfusions and was taken for her own intensive care.

She had experienced an amniotic fluid embolism, a rare occurrence that caused placenta abruption, meaning the placenta prematurely separated from the uterus. She then suffered disseminated intravascular coagulation, where a lethal blood-thinning agent was released into her bloodstream. The transfusions were critical to Mrs. Neuner's survival.

Miraculously, both mother and son went home within seven days.

When Mrs. Neuner thanked Dr. Iammatteo, he responded: "It's not a job to me; it's my life." She wonders what would have happened if he had picked pro football over medical school, as he almost did. "We're so glad he put that football down 30 years ago," she quips.

As Mrs. Neuner talks, Annabel creeps downstairs from her nap dressed in a pink tutu. Her blond curls resemble her mother's. Nearby, Christopher naps in a bouncy seat. His big sister, Gabrielle, sleeps upstairs. They are the reason she can put her near-death experience behind her.

"For me, birthing a stillborn was much harder," she says. "My whole life was planned out with that perfect little girl. It's an open wound. With this, I passed out and when I woke up, we were all here; we were all alive. It's a happy ending."
-Alice Roche Cody