

# THE PEE WEE POST

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## Eloise's Story

By Eloise's mom, Dana Shelton



My pregnancy started out fantastic- no morning sickness, no swelling, no problems whatsoever, and at every appointment my doctor would tell me I was perfect, the baby was perfect, everything looked perfect!

On a Friday morning I went for my 28 week check-up. Long story short, I ended up being admitted to De Paul, and was then transferred to Sentara Norfolk General with concerns of possible preeclampsia. All weekend two main things happened. One, my blood pressure would continuously rise and then stabilize, leading to several "We're going to send you home on bed rest! Wait, just kidding!" conversations. Two, the baby seemed to be wiggling away from the fetal monitor. Every few hours the nurse would have to come in and find her again. (Meanwhile, my husband had been in Australia for work for the past two weeks, but managed to make it home late Saturday night!)

On Monday they did an ultrasound and realized that it wasn't that she was wiggling around, but that her heart was stopping. Cue emergency c-section. Our daughter Eloise was born at 29 weeks, 1 day gestation with IUGR (intrauterine growth restriction) and weighed only 1lb 15oz.

The first few weeks were dicey, but every single nurse would tell us "she's feisty!!" which we all know is a good thing in the NICU. When she was about five weeks old she got sick and ended up on NEC watch for 10 days, but thankfully never actually developed NEC. Once she recovered, we mostly spent the rest of our stay dealing with reflux and just waiting for her to get big enough to come home! After 75 days we were finally able to bring her home, the day before her original due date.



Now Eloise is four years old and still feisty! She has the biggest heart and loves going to Busch Gardens and the Virginia Aquarium. She has no fear of roller coasters and loves to hug reptiles! My advice to current NICU parents - get to know the other parents in the NICU! Parenting a NICU baby is different than parenting a "regular" baby, and you will be glad to have that support, especially after you take your baby home! And once you do get home, don't forget to join the CHKD post-NICU group on Facebook!



# Who's Who in the NICU?

## Meet Nurse Yvonne Swisher

### How long have you been working in the NICU?

I have worked in the NICU a total of 20.5 years (19 at CHKD and 1.5 in Michigan).

### What made you decide to go into neonatal nursing?

I became a neonatal nurse to care for the smallest of patients and see miracles happen.

### What do you find most rewarding about your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is to see the smallest of babies overcome the many obstacles and finally be able to go home to the families that have longed for that day to come.

### What advice do you have for the family members of NICU babies?

My advice to families in the NICU is to pray for your baby daily. There will be good days and bad days. Be present for your baby. He/She knows your voice and reacts to your touch. Don't be afraid to ask to hold your baby. They may be tiny but they are mighty. Holding is beneficial to both you and your baby.

### What do you like to do when you are not at work?

When I am not at work I love spending time with my husband, son, 2 daughters and 2 dogs. Crafting and exploring the great outdoors is a passion.

### What is an interesting fact that most NICU parents don't know about you?

Interesting fact that many do not know is that I was born in Athens, Greece while my Air Force Dad was stationed there. I attended preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade in Italy. I spoke Italian fluently when I lived there but don't remember any now.



## What You Can Do TODAY To Help Your NICU Baby

### ATTEND ROUNDS

You are a vital part of your baby's team! Attend rounds to stay informed and help make decisions about your baby's care.

### GET INVOLVED

Ask your baby's nurse what you can do to care for your baby. Nurses may suggest changing diapers, giving baths, doing oral care, or doing kangaroo care.

### SPEND TIME WITH YOUR BABY

Even if you aren't able to hold your baby, he still wants to spend time with you! Read stories, sing lullabies, or spend quiet time together.

### TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Get some sleep, take a shower, attend support groups and classes, and don't feel bad about taking some time for yourself. NICU life is stressful and tiring. Be sure to take care of yourself, too!

## Documenting Your Child's NICU Journey

Need some quick, easy ideas for documenting your baby's NICU journey? Look no further!

### Write it Out

Many parents find writing to be very therapeutic. Whether writing updates for friends or family or jotting down personal thoughts, these ideas can end up becoming a written legacy of your child's story. Some ideas for writing and/or journaling are:

- A public or private Facebook page
- CaringBridge site/blog
- Personal journal
- Letters to your baby
- Prayer journal



### Say Cheese!

- Take pictures of important firsts, milestones, and special moments. Make sure to document the date of important occasions. No milestone is too small to celebrate!
- Document your child's growth through monthly or weekly pictures of your baby with a specific item, like a wipeable toy
- Don't forget mom and dad! Have a family member take pictures of you with your baby or ask your nurse to snap a picture of you as a family.



### Take Notes

Keeping notes can come in handy. Some parents find it helpful to keep an informal record of medications, medical procedures, or other day-to-day details.

### Treasured Keepsakes

- Keep treasured keepsakes such as first hat and first footprints. Ask your nurse for the first pulse-ox, first blood pressure cuff, and a diaper.
- Compile your photos into a scrapbook or have a photo book made online.



## Is Your Baby Eligible for Social Security or Medicaid?

All babies who have a low birth weight (1199 grams or less) are eligible for Social Security (SSI) and Medicaid benefits through the Low Birth Weight Program. While your low birth weight baby is in the hospital, SSI eligibility is NOT based on family income or resources (only birth weight). Once your low birth weight baby is discharged, family income will be considered to determine if the baby is still eligible for this first-year-of-life program. If your baby meets the low birth weight criteria and you would like to file for SSI benefits on your child's behalf, please speak with your Social Worker for an application.

A Social Security representative is available in the NICU Family Waiting Room two days/month at 1:00 p.m. to accept applications for the program. The signup sheet is available at the reception desk between 12:30 and 1 on the designated days. Please contact your NICU Social Worker or call Social Security at 800-772-1213 if you have additional questions. Please note: Application for Medicaid is a separate process; please see your Social Worker for further instructions.

In addition, if your baby has been in the hospital longer than 30 days, he/she becomes eligible for Medicaid for long term hospitalization. Please see your Social Worker or Case Manager in the Fishbowl for details.

## Meet some NICU Graduates!!



Top row from left: Dawson and DJ, 29 weekers now 2 ; Korryn, 25 weeker now 2; Eloise, 29 weeker now 4

Second row: Thomas, 25 weeker now 4, Scarlett and Hayden, 27 weekers now 2.5 ; Aubrey Jade, 36 weeker now 3

Third row: Nathaniel, 26 weeker now 17 months, Bennett, 36 weeker now 3.5, Hudson, 28 weeker now 2