

Danielle and I were excited to learn, in June 2020, that we were expecting our first child. Those first weeks were blissfully typical: we shared our news with friends and family, began renovating our home, shopped for baby essentials and debated over potential names.

Then, everything changed.

“Our baby is very sick. The doctor says he may not survive,” Danielle said. Our detailed anatomy scan, which she attended alone due to pandemic rules, revealed that our baby had critical *Congenital Heart Defects* (CHD). He would require life-saving surgery, as a newborn, and need a lifetime of medical support.

We were referred to the high-risk pregnancy program at Mount Sinai Hospital, and neonatal cardiology at Sick Kids Hospital, in Toronto. Danielle and I petitioned our political leaders for the right to face those out-of-town prenatal visits together and, thankfully, were approved.

Then, with a week to go until his planned birthday, our “heart warrior” decided to make a surprise entrance! We welcomed baby Jericho on February 1st.

Jericho was whisked away, almost immediately, to begin medications and assessments. At two days old, he underwent a four-hour heart surgery, to repair his aorta. When we saw him again, he was covered in tubes, breathing on a ventilator, sedated and fighting to heal. We took turns sitting by his bed, in a sea of specialized equipment, as he battled a fast-moving wound infection, vocal cord damage and feeding challenges.

The scenes we witnessed over those two weeks were unforgettable. We were, as it turned out, among the lucky few to transition to home care quickly; many other babies lived in ICU for months.

CHD occurs in 1 of every 100 babies born in Canada. It is the most common birth defect, and a leading cause of infant death. Of those born with critical CHD, like Jericho, 25% do not survive to celebrate their first birthday.

So, a heartiversary – the anniversary of a child’s first heart surgery – is a momentous milestone! It’s a special recognition of the struggles, the victories, a nod to the miracles of modern medicine and to the power of prayer.

We’re celebrating Jericho’s first heartiversary by giving back; our goal is to raise \$2500.00 for SickKids Foundation, to help families like ours.

If you would like to participate, by donating, please visit our fundraising website: <http://gofundraise.sickkidsfoundation.com/goto/Jericho>

Happy Heart Month!

Jake M.

Cheshire London PSW