



Jennifer and Noah Byrd.

Guardian
Angel

Going Home

Since 1998, Mercy Medical's pediatric home care has served more than 850 families. It was the first and is one of the only programs in the area that solely focuses on delivering home healthcare, palliative care and hospice care to children, any child in need, no matter of their family's ability to pay. Because Medicaid or private insurance doesn't cover many pediatric home care services, sometimes more than 70 percent of these costs are funded through Guardian Angel, a Mercy fundraising program.

The Byrd family knows the enormity of this community benefit. Although the Byrd family had the financial resources to cover their healthcare costs, they became advocates for Guardian Angel by allowing Mercy to share their story.

Jennifer Byrd was expecting. At a routine 20-week ultrasound, Jennifer was told her unborn son was missing part of his heart.

"I knew something was terribly wrong. They could only see the right side of my baby's heart. A high risk pediatric cardiologist diagnosed our baby with hypoplastic left heart syndrome," explained Jennifer.

In hypoplastic left heart syndrome, the left side of the heart is underdeveloped. This heart defect is usually fatal within the first hours or days of life as the ductus closes, unless otherwise treated.

"We couldn't put our son through multiple surgeries, trauma and incredible pain with such a slim outcome. And the other option to terminate my pregnancy was not an option. We decided to let nature take its course, which was one the hardest

decisions we have ever made. Noah was born on August 6. Knowing he would die was so painful, I can't imagine how we would have gotten through this without Mercy's pediatric program," stated Jennifer.

Upon Noah's birth at USA Children's and Women's hospital in Mobile, Noah was admitted into Mercy's pediatric hospice care. After a two week hospital stay, the Byrd family courageously brought Noah home. Amanda Manning, Mercy's pediatric nurse visited daily to assess baby Noah and help Jennifer, Brad her husband, and Conner, their 6-year old son cope with medical and emotional issues.

"We had no intentions of bringing Noah home because we thought he would pass away within hours of birth. Honestly, if not for Amanda, I don't think I could have brought Noah home and I would have regretted that. We didn't know what to expect or what would happen from day to day. Having Amanda was a reassurance. Everyday she assessed Noah, and shared any changes. There would be days Noah was more cyanotic. He would have blue hands, blue nail beds, and blue around his mouth. Being at home, allowed us to be a family. It allowed us to know Noah. I feel he wanted to see his home. It allowed us to bond with him. I would have regretted not having Noah here in our home, in his home, even if only for a short while," explained Jennifer.

Noah lived for three weeks at home and passed away early one Monday morning, about 3 am. "When Noah died, all I could do was pick up the phone and call Amanda. She came over in 5 minutes," Jennifer said.