Our story

Abby’s Gift

Written by Melinda Gordon

After losing their newborn daughter Abby to a genetic disease, the Gordons give back to other families in need.

Big sister Ashlin gives baby Abby a kiss. Abby was diagnosed with Edwards Syndrome, a rare genetic disease, and only lived 12 days.
It seems like yesterday that I was making a rare and unusual trip alone to Fire Station #67 in Acres Homes to see my husband Clyde at work. He was surprised to see me, and even more so when I silently handed him the pregnancy test. We joked about being way too old for a newborn, but through the conversation Clyde never waivered from his initial reaction of, “It will be okay.” We are one of those couples that spent years hoping and praying for a child, with countless doctors and infertility specialists telling us how small our chances were. It took seven years to have our first daughter, Ashlin, 9. Little did we think that exactly seven years and five days later, our second child would be born.

**Excited for the New Addition**
We went as a family to the first doctor’s appointment. Ashlin was ecstatic to finally be having a brother or sister. The standard blood screenings were performed. Three days later, our doctor called. The instant I heard his voice, I knew something was wrong.

Nurses call. Front office people call. Billing people call. But the actual doctor never calls, unless there is bad news. He was kind and explained that the triple screen came back with a one-in-seven chance of the baby having Trisomy 13 (T13) or Trisomy 18 (T18), which is also known as Edwards Syndrome. What in the world is T13 and T18? Research began.

**It’s a Girl!**
We returned as a family to the 20-week ultrasound, and two things were certain: It was a girl, and there were reasons for concern. We were referred to a perinatal specialist, who confirmed some abnormalities, but could not say with 100% accuracy if it was truly a chromosomal defect. If it wasn’t, this meant that the problems could be repaired in-utero.

Scared to death that either of these outcomes could be our baby’s reality, we agreed on an amniocentesis. We felt helpless and clung to the only thing we knew for sure at this point: God had blessed us with another pregnancy and this little girl was alive, kicking, growing, and cute as a button on the big screen ultrasound.

**Tragic Diagnosis**
The result of the amnio was unmistakable, which gave our baby girl an official diagnosis of Edwards Syndrome. Our minds raced. Tears fell as our hearts broke and questions filled our minds. What does this mean? What do we do now? How can we help our baby girl? Is there anything we can do? What do we tell Ashlin? How do we tell Ashlin? How much should we tell her? How little should we tell her? How much is an 8-year-old really able to comprehend about this? How much are we really able to comprehend about this?

**Moving Forward**
Together, we went through countless appointments, pre-term contractions, nine weeks of bed rest, and hours of researching everything from “how to live with T18” to “how to tell your child that their sibling might die.” Prayer consumed the next few months, but within that time we also agreed on her beautiful name. Ashlin walked in one day and said, “Her name will be Hope Abigail, and we’ll call her Abby - Baby Abby.”

Baby Abby was born Sept. 23, 2010, weighing 3 pounds 5 ounces. Only expected to live minutes, Abby had other plans. We had no plans except to love her. We chose not to put her little body through all the medical strategies to force her life. We wanted her life to be lived for as many days as God intended, naturally. Loving on her was literally our only plan.

**Dealing with the Loss**
There was no way to prepare for the loss of Abby. Disbelief,
sadness, paralyzing grief, and unexplainable heartbreak only touch the surface of the emotions we felt and continue to struggle with. Abby was a gift to so many, and she offered more to this world in 12 days than most of us do in a lifetime.

Because of our experience and the obstacles we faced, we started Abby’s Gift, a nonprofit dedicated to providing support and resources to families with a child in hospice care. We can’t imagine other families facing obstacles like inadequate equipment or the unfortunate reality of having to set up a payment plan with the funeral home.

**Blankets for Babies**

A second avenue of the foundation is Abby’s Blanket Ministry, which began at Methodist Willowbrook Hospital’s neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). When Abby was in the NICU, the nurses placed a quilted blanket on her bed, not for warmth but as a simple, yet powerful gesture of love. We can’t imagine other families with sweet, sick little babies not receiving a blanket, whether it be the symbol of a time when they overcame all odds or as a cherished keepsake for the family after the death of their child. Since October 2010, 658 blankets have passed through the NICU. We continue to find healing in giving back. We open our life, our journey, and our hearts to share the gift of hope, with all the love a heart can hold. CFM

EDITOR’S NOTE: Cy-Fair Magazine would like to thank Melinda Gordon for sharing her family’s inspirational story of courage and coping with the tragic loss of their daughter Abby. If you have an inspirational story you’d like to share, please email us at editor@cyfairmagazine.com.

To learn more about Abby’s Gift or to donate to families in need, visit [abbyssgift.com](http://abbyssgift.com)