Baby defies offs and celebrates first birthday

Thursday 1 March, 2018

A little girl who was given just a 50% chance of survival has defied the odds and is celebrating her first birthday.

Before little Mabel Bush was born, she was diagnosed with a congenital diaphragmatic hernia which meant that some of her organs had moved up into her chest cavity through a hole in her diaphragm, which was restricting the growth of her left lung.

Her parents, Marlo Rankin, 40, and Jeff Bush, 42, from Upminster, were referred to The Royal London Children's Hospital as Mabel would need lifesaving treatment as soon as she was born. As soon as she arrived, she was intubated and rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at the specialist hospital. With Mabel struggling for survival, at just 15 hours old her parents were told to prepare for the worst. **Mum Marlo, who works as an Agricultural Economist for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, says:**

“The weeks leading up to Mabel’s birth were the most terrifying of our lives. There were no guarantees that she’d survive.

“When Mabel entered the world, we were filled with pride and joy. We knew she was a fighter from the beginning. Despite being told she may not cry, she did. And we took this as a sign that she was willing to fight for her life. Mabel was placed on my chest momentarily before being taken away, intubated and transferred to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The hours that followed passed in a blur of exhaustion and worry, but I will never forget the kindness and care shown by the registrar and the rest of the delivery team. It was extremely comforting.

“At just 15 hours old, we had a conversation about Mabel’s condition with the consultants that we will never forget. And which we hope no parent will ever have to go through. We needed to prepare for the worst. That evening felt endless, but thankfully the amazing team managed to stabilise our daughter. The next morning Mabel was still with us.”

In the weeks that followed, Mabel’s battle for survival continued. At ten days old, Mabel underwent major surgery to move the organs from her chest cavity back into her abdomen, close the hernia and repair her diaphragm. For 44 days Mabel was ventilated and it was discovered she had a rare condition known as chylothorax, which meant that she could not tolerate any milk feeds and would need to be fed a special medical formula for which she would need another operation.

Throughout Mabel’s recovery, The Sick Children’s Trust supported her family with free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation at the charity’s Stevenson House, located just minutes from Mabel’s hospital bedside. **Marlo adds:**

“We hadn’t thought about where we would stay in London. Thankfully, on NICU we were told about free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation run by The Sick Children’s Trust. Simply put, Stevenson House was our lifeline. It meant that we could see Mabel every day and spend as much time with her as possible.

“Despite nearly losing our daughter in her first 24 hours of life, Mabel began to gradually improve and build up her strength.

“But it wasn’t until Mabel was three weeks old that I was able to hold her properly – something many mothers take for granted. It was one of the most joyful days of my life, especially as Mabel’s recovery was so slow and she suffered a number of rare complications, which took time to diagnose.

“She required another small procedure where 135ml of fluid was drained off her chest. This enabled her to move and in the days that followed Mabel woke up and became very active. Finally, they were able to take her off the ventilator and incredibly just over a week later she was breathing entirely on her own without any oxygen support. It was a miraculous recovery.”

The Sick Children’s Trust runs ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Although the accommodation is free for families, it costs the charity £30 to support a family for one night. **Marlo continues:**

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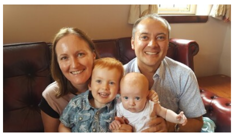

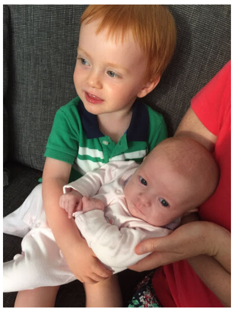

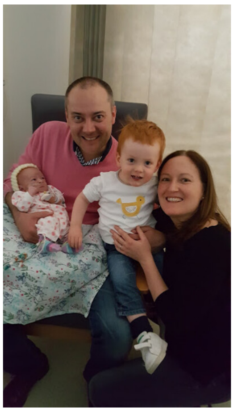

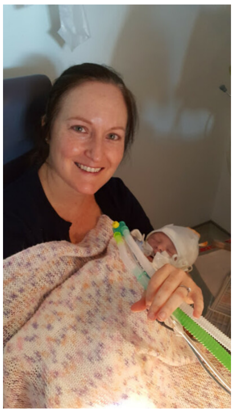

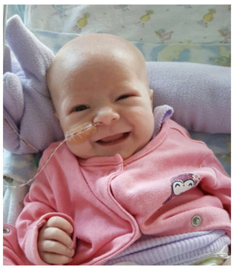

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“What makes Stevenson House so special is the combination of benefits staying there brings. It’s not just the fact that you’re minutes from your child’s bedside, or the amazing team on hand, it’s being surrounded by other families who have children in hospital too. The sense of solidarity at Stevenson House is what helps you get through the tough days.

“By being at Stevenson House, we could also be involved in Mabel’s care. We saw the staff every day for nine weeks and were so comforted by their level of professionalism and commitment. We want to express our lifelong gratitude to all the staff on NICU for what they did for us. We still regularly talk about how they went above and beyond, not just for Mabel, but for all the sick babies on NICU.

“A year on, we’re
delighted to say that Mabel is incredible. She’s doing so well and is celebrating her first birthday. Mabel is a very happy and curious baby, who is adored by her parents and big brother, Joey. We will make her birthday a very joyous and monumental occasion, celebrating our little fighter.”

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/

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