

Prayers for Niki

Written February 2010



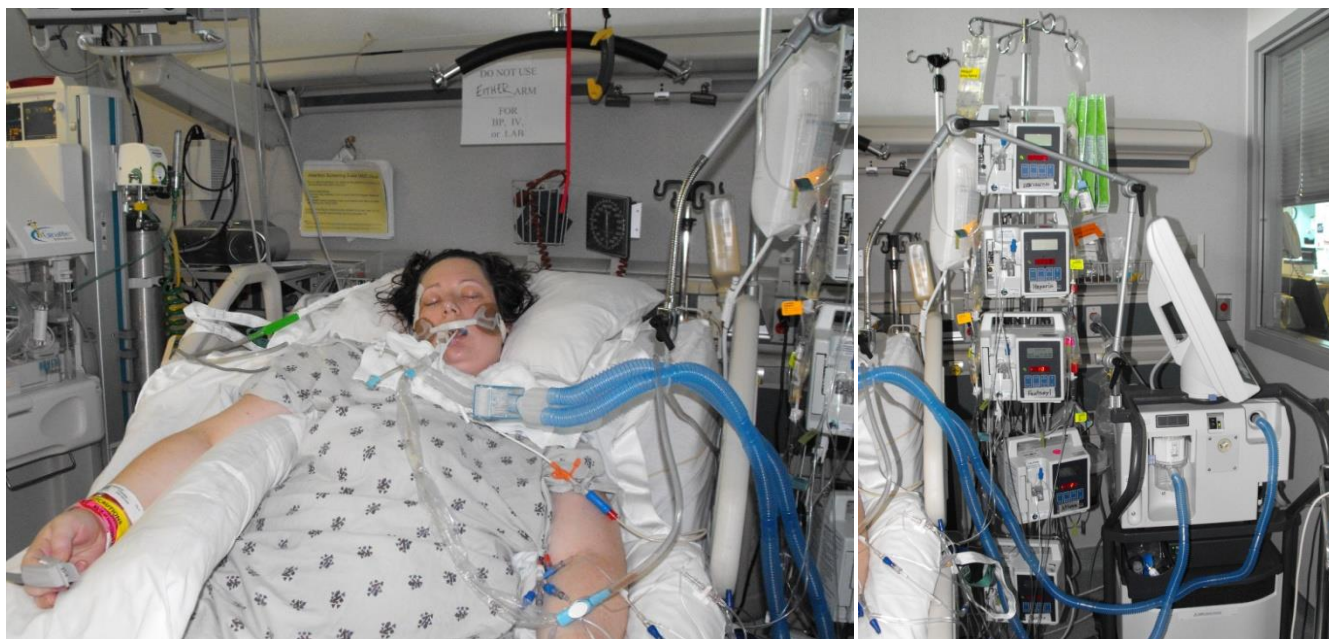
A few pictures of me from 2008-2009 while living in Calhoun, GA. I ran the music program at Coble Elementary, taught 5th-8th grade homerooms, multiple music lessons & the touring choir Bel Canto. In May, we found out we were going to have a baby and my husband received a call from AAA to teach Math. So in July of 2009, we moved to Duluth. I began to teach AAA's choir Adoramus, my husband began his job, and then our world collapsed...

I've been here for five weeks?! It was like waking up in the middle of a nightmare and finding out it was real! Last I remembered, it was Labor Day and my husband Tim had taken me to the E.R. for the second time in a week. I was 25 ½ weeks pregnant with our first child and had been sick for more than a week. Now the chest pain and my cough were worse and my fever was 102. The X-ray showed Pneumonia in both lungs now, so they decided to admit me. They ambulated me from the Duluth site to Gwinnett Hospital of Lawrenceville where they had Labor & Delivery services. I remember feeling like the oxygen mask was smothering me, sitting upright on the gurney, crying and begging them to take it off my face as they wheeled me into the ICU room my family would become much too familiar with. I vaguely remember the nurses hooking me up, my husband coming in and then...nothing.



My Baby Brother, Travis, Holding my hand on his Birthday, September 27, 2009

I don't recall my first three days in the ICU, although awake. I was intubated on September 10, my 28th birthday, three days after being admitted. I've always been stubborn and was not surprised to hear that I adamantly refused the endotracheal tube and made them call my family first. They tried to keep me sedated, but it was hard to get the "cocktail" of drugs just right and I unconsciously fought the ventilator and the nurses constantly, making it necessary to restrain me.



In ICU 9-22-2009, Intubated on Vent

'Drug Tree' with MANY MEDS!

Though the tests came back negative, it is still believed that my Pneumonia was caused by the H1N1 virus (swine flu). I was subsequently diagnosed with ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome) and it soon became clear that my illness was not going away any time soon. My family began a journal to write down their feelings and thoughts so I could read them later and asked my countless visitors to write in it as well. My aunt, Melodie Reid, started a Facebook group called *Prayers for Niki* that grew to more than three and a half *thousand* members representing every continent in the world!

I'm told there were many "boring" days; my family preferred them. Exciting days were usually synonymous with scary days, like when they switched me from the ventilator to the oscillator, a machine that sounded like a jack-hammer and made my lungs expand three to six hundred of times a minute. One day, I had a fever of 104 and they had to "put me on ice" (a cooling mattress). Once, I developed a blood clot from the IV site in my arm and had to receive blood thinners. Soon after, I had a pneumothorax (a collapsed lung) which would normally necessitate putting in a chest tube. However, with the blood thinners I was receiving, the risks of a chest tube were too high. Praise God, within the next two days, it healed itself! At one point, after being administered so much fluid and being malnourished from weeks of being unable to eat, my body retained enough water that it actually began to seep through my skin! I became so swollen, that my Aunt Melodie lovingly called me the Michelin Man! I was anointed three times during my ICU stay and there were many times urgent requests were made for prayers on my behalf. There were discussions of "priorities" if the time came to choose between my life and my son's. One of the worst days was when they moved me back from the oscillator, the best ventilator, to the regular ventilator (which I had previously failed on) because my lungs were failing again. The doctors did not hold out much hope and my siblings were called to come down and be by my side. NICU equipment was brought down to the ICU in preparation for the possibility of an emergency delivery and the room was filled with medical personnel when the switch was made. My mom sent out a massive text message that simply said – "Pray now... pray hard". Several schools stopped everything, gathered students together and prayed. I switched over to the other machine and God performed another miracle. I exceeded all of the doctor's expectations.

There was however, a good, exciting day. On September 30th, I had been visibly agitated all evening. My mother noticed my discomfort came in cycles and felt my abdomen suspecting contractions. It felt soft, so she disregarded it. My Aunt Melodie Reid, my mother's sister, had flown in from Canada to be with me and the family, but when I was not improving she decided to extend her stay. The family members had each been taking personal time to "unwind" and Aunt Melodie had gone out to eat and was going to go shopping afterwards, but got an extremely strong feeling that she should come back to the hospital. When she arrived, the



nurses were still trying to get me comfortable. They finally turned me and found my hospital gown wet. At first, they thought my skin was leaking fluids again. Upon further inspection, they found not only had I been in labor, but my son was already making his appearance! As wonderful as the ICU nurses are, they were stunned and unprepared. "We've never had a baby in the ICU!" My aunt, having had Labor & Delivery experience, took a good look around, grabbed some gloves and proceeded to go to work. At first, my baby was limp and blue and my aunt said she was sure she had delivered her "niece's dead baby." But his little chest moved and she excitedly began rubbing and suctioning him and he began to pink up. Labor and Delivery was in another building and it took them nearly ten minutes to get there. My Aunt "Dee Dee" saved my baby's life and unfortunately she had to return to Canada before I was even conscious she was there.

Reid Alexander Knowlton, born at 10:20 PM on September 30th, 2009 at 28 weeks gestation, was 2 lbs. 8 oz., 14 inches long. Although, his lungs were still underdeveloped and he needed to be put on a ventilator,

overall, he was healthy and perfect.

Because I had signs of Eclampsia or Toxemia of Pregnancy, the doctors had been contemplating doing a perilous emergency C-section on me. They thought delivering him would help me get better, but God made that decision unnecessary as he gave me a spontaneous delivery which was much less risky to me than a C-section. Everything needed for the delivery was there: the right equipment, the right woman and God's power! God had performed a miracle.

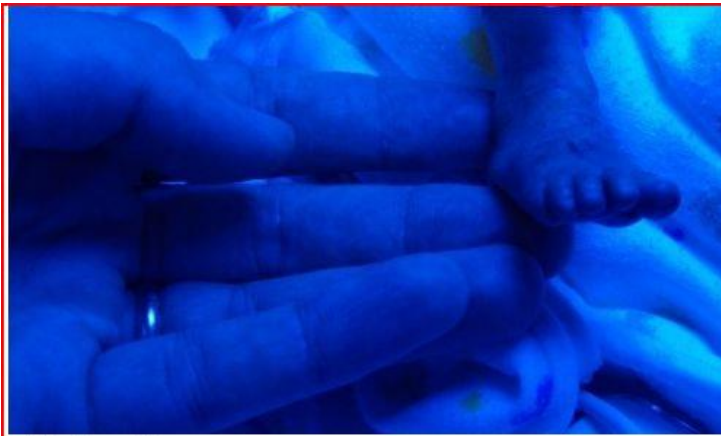




This was Reid's Diaper - it was TOO BIG!



Daddy's wedding ring on Reid's hand



Daddy holding Reid's foot



Reid's footprint next to a Canadian Quarter (same size as a US Quarter)

Now that Reid was born, the doctors could treat my sickness more aggressively and I quickly began to improve. On October 6, they performed a tracheotomy (a hole made in the neck), because I had outlived the healthy time limit for the endotracheal tube. It was then that I began to regain consciousness as they weaned me off sedatives.



It wasn't like they show in the movies, slowly blinking things into focus while loved ones peer over you wide-eyed and ecstatic that you have come back to them. Reality came together slowly as the numerous medications wore off and I became more aware of my surroundings. I cried a lot, was very disoriented and I had to be told things several times as the medication made it hard for me to remember. I had ICU Psychosis and experienced a lot of hallucinations both while in a coma and after I awakened; some were downright horrific, while others were outright hilarious! I began Physical and



Mom & Son Meet October 12, 2009

Reid was doing well, despite an initial cerebral bleed and underdeveloped lungs. Both conditions improved in time with no needed surgery. He had also gotten a pneumothorax and had a chest tube put in. I hadn't seen him yet and was aching to do so. On Monday, October 12, Canadian Thanksgiving, via wheelchair and escorted by a nurse, a respiratory therapist, an oxygen tank, my IV pole, my parents and my husband, I was *finally* able to see my beautiful baby boy! It was very hard to conceptualize he was mine since I had no recollection of his birth, but I was in so much awe at what God had created through me. He was so tiny and perfect. For the first time, I had a small inkling of the love God has for us.

The next day, I was moved from the ICU to a beautiful, brand new room and I got a real *shower*! Hallelujah! I had my own bathroom and a *huge* window through which I watched the sunrise the next morning while drowning in tears. I had certainly learned to appreciate the little things, including my son, whom I was absolutely elated to finally hold on October 14th. Finally, after more than 7 weeks in the hospital, on the evening of Friday, October 23rd, I slept in my own bed.



Occupational Therapy and was very surprised at how hard everything had become! Writing, texting, swallowing, holding utensils, brushing my hair, and just putting on socks had become *very* difficult! I had to learn to deal with my trach site until they were able to take it out and let it heal, learning to speak despite it and clean it. There is nothing more disgusting than sneezing from your neck! The hardest thing was relearning how to walk. Most people learn to walk once; God never meant for us to have to learn twice!



Holding Reid for the 1st Time October 14, 2009

At home, I spent many weeks doing physical therapy, visiting Reid in the NICU every chance I got and experienced the humility and frustration of relying on others for most everything I needed. I can never thank my family and my husband enough for their patience with me over the last few months. Reid finally came home on December 8th at 5 lb. 5 oz. He will forever be my best Christmas present ever!

I cannot begin to convey how much I've learned from this experience. Reading through the many cards, journal entries and Facebook posts was one of the most amazing and humbling experiences of my life. I've heard so many testimonies of how my experience has changed others, rekindled their faith and given them hope. I've learned that when you are at your weakest point, God becomes your strength. I've had so many obstacles the last few months and I know it is God that has given me the strength to recuperate as fast as I have, both emotionally and physically. I've also realized how much I love my family and "chosen" family as we like to call it. Words cannot describe how much their support has meant to me. God extends His love through those around us and I used to take that for granted.

I still have some pain in my feet and ankles, I still can't sing like I want to, I still get tired too fast and lose patience with myself, but I know God is with me. He has taken me this far and I trust Him to carry me through whatever else the world throws my way.



Visiting Family in Canada
Summer 2010



Reid's 1st Birthday
September 30, 2010

Family Portrait November 2011



Baby Shower for Twin girls due May 2013



"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord; plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you a hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

