

Boy Reunites with Medical Staff Seven Years after Premature Birth

By Michelle Brubaker | August 12, 2013

When you look at seven-year-old Tanner Gresbrink, you see an animated boy who likes to wrestle, laugh and has a deep passion for theater, but this energetic second grader is considered a miracle baby by his family after being born weighing a little more than a pound and spending the first several months of his life fighting to stay alive.

Tanner and his twin brother, Caden, were born at 25 weeks gestation via emergency Cesarean section after his mother, Keri, went into early labor for unknown reasons.



“I was devastated. In my opinion, I did everything correct. I ate well, took care of myself, went to regular doctor appointments, but for some reason my body decided to go into labor early, and from that moment, we knew our babies were in for the fight of their lives,” said Gresbrink.

The twins were born at UC San Diego Health and arrived in the [neonatal intensive care unit \(NICU\)](#) shortly after birth.

“When I first saw them, they were so tiny and fragile with tubes coming out of everywhere,” said Gresbrink. “It was so difficult because we couldn’t hold and comfort them, and we felt so helpless.”

Sadly, three days after his birth, Caden passed away from complications.

“I held my baby as he passed away surrounded by family and close friends. It was the most heartbreaking event in my life. I remember walking back to my room feeling numb, but I knew I had another baby down the hall who was still fighting for all of us,” said Gresbrink.

Tanner was intubated in the NICU and his lungs were extremely underdeveloped. He was also diagnosed with jaundice and chronic lung disease. He fought off infections and underwent several procedures, including a heart surgery.

“I sat by my baby’s incubator every day watching his oxygen levels on the monitor. It did not make for a relaxing experience, but I felt I



was the only voice Tanner had at the time,” said Gresbrink. “It wasn’t until a month into our stay, that I was finally able to hold my son. It was amazing to finally feel him close to me.”

After four and a half months of critical care and a roller coaster of emotions, Tanner was finally healthy enough to go home.

“The nurses were incredible to our family. We had full support from the UC San Diego Health medical team, and although nervous, we were so grateful when we could take Tanner home,” said Gresbrink.

After discharge, Tanner began out-patient treatment with an optometrist, pulmonologist, urologist, ear/nose/throat specialist and received occupational and physical therapy.

“It’s been a long, bumpy road, but I’m happy to report that today Tanner is healthy and bright. He may have physical battle scars but he is a walking miracle,” said Gresbrink.

Recently, Gresbrink also realized her son was curious about where his journey began.



“He started asking questions about where he was born, who took care of him and what the machines look like,” said Gresbrink. “It was important for our family to schedule a tour of the UC San Diego Health NICU so Tanner could get his questions answered.”

Nurse manger Jan Hebert escorted the family to the entrance of the NICU where Tanner could see the 49-bed, highly specialized area for premature and sick babies.

“This is where you stayed several months after you were born,” said Gresbrink to her wide-eyed son.

As Tanner scanned the room he was greeted with hugs by the nursing staff and respiratory therapist who cared for him seven years ago.

“It’s an honor to have a patient come back to visit us. To see a child who was once severely premature now so happy and healthy is what truly makes our career so rewarding,” said Hebert.

After all of her son’s questions were answered, Gresbrink stepped further inside the NICU and was overcome with emotion.

“I vividly remember being here all day and night. It became my second home and the nurses and doctors became my family,” said Gresbrink. “I faced my life’s greatest challenges and blessings here.”

After the tour, mom and son walked down the hall hand-in-hand before stopping to look at a handmade scrapbook Gresbrink put together of Tanner and Caden.

“I made the scrapbook as a reminder of how far we’ve come. Tanner is my miracle baby and little fighter, and Caden will always be my angel,” said Gresbrink. “The UC San Diego Health NICU will always hold a special place in our hearts.”

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