

Aria's Story | CEHS

JoLynne Lyon

03/06/2015



Michael and Natasha Rutkowski's time with their daughter, Aria, was too short.

But the circle of lives Aria touched extends far beyond them, to the family and friends who supported them during a difficult time, to the more than 100 donors who contributed to a Utah State University scholarship in her name, to the nurses who helped take care of her.

"I don't know if she was meant to be in my life or if I was meant to be in hers," said Jamie Nordberg, a registered nurse at Primary Children's Hospital.

Nordberg felt an instant bond with Aria and asked if she could be the baby's primary nurse. At the time she knew the little girl's outcomes didn't look good, but she wanted to remain close to the baby and her family. Nordberg wanted to hold Aria, too—but she knew she couldn't, because Aria was on a ventilator. Instead Nordberg bathed Aria, put a bow in her hair and made sure she was ready for quality time with her parents.

"We went from thinking we were both going to go back to work that afternoon to hearing we might have the baby that day," Michael said. Aria was born by emergency C-section and immediately flown to Primary Children's Hospital, while Natasha remained in Orem Community Hospital. Natasha spent her time between her young son in Lehi and Primary Children's Hospital. "That was tricky," she said. "We live an hour away and obviously we couldn't take our son with us every day. He's three." The hospital didn't have much to occupy a three-year old. But family flew in to be with him, and neighborhood volunteers helped, too, allowing Natasha to spend time with her baby and Michael to return to his job.

When Natasha came to the hospital to visit Aria, she often noticed her girl was bathed and ready with a bow in her hair. She read notes the nurses left about things Aria had done. Those nurses helped her build memories, even when she wasn't there. And when she was, Nordberg took the care necessary to make it possible for Natasha to hold her baby. "It's a little harder when they're on a ventilator to move them in and out of bed, but I did feel it was important that Natasha hold her," she said.



Still, Nordberg didn't hold the baby herself. Since those moments-in-arms happened sparingly, she made sure they all went to Natasha.

Being a nurse Primary Children's meant she saw some hard things. "We get the babies that nobody else can care for," she said. It had its rewards, though. "If I can just give them the best care possible while their mommies can't be there, that gives me a lot of joy," she said.

Nordberg was one of many nurses who made an impression on the Rutkowskis. There were others—like those who took care of Natasha at the end of a wrenching day.

That day began when she and Michael had gone into the doctor's for a routine checkup and learned that the medical professionals were concerned about some of the things they'd seen in an ultrasound image of their daughter.

There, Natasha felt the support of nurses, who helped the family along the seven-week journey that was Aria's life. "The nurses were always amazing. They didn't mind us calling at any hour of the day or night," Natasha said. "They did so much to make us feel like when we were away from her, she wasn't just left by herself."

Michael said medical tests revealed that their daughter would probably not live long, and that she would have serious challenges while she was alive.

On the day Aria passed away, Nordberg and another nurse who had grown close to the family were both there. They stayed long past the ending of their shifts. "We were lucky," Michael said. "We all got to be together."



After Aria passed, Nordberg could finally give in to her desire to hold her.

By then, the nurses felt like family. The Rutkowskis decided to honor both Aria and the nurses who had helped them, through a scholarship they set up at Utah State University. They set up an online donation page. They told their story on KSL News. And together with more than 100 friends, family members and total strangers, they met their goal to endow a scholarship in Aria's name for nurses at USU. The Nursing and Health Professions department recently became part of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

"This gave us something positive to do," Michael said. "The hard thing about these situations is you can be there, but you're not the medical professionals. We couldn't comfort Aria other than just be with her. ... The scholarship preparation gave us a way to do something positive and impact more than just us."

One of the scholarship's criteria is that it goes to a compassionate person. "Our hope is that this would be a very suitable memorial for Aria, but what excited us about this idea is that if we're contributing to help people, then Aria's live influences unnumbered lives for the better," Michael said. "People rallied around her. We thought it would be unfortunate if it ended when she passed."

The Aria Rutkowski Scholarship Fund is still accepting donations. To learn more, contact [Lance Beckert](#) at 435-797-1611.

Writer: [JoLynne Lyon](#), 435-797-1463