



Lori Farr-Strong Memorial Hospital
Shown shortly after his birth, Anthony Allen, one of the quintuplets, is now off the ventilator.

Tired couple says faith helped deal with risks

Waterloo parish rallies to assist family with quints

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Sandy Saxton had always hoped to have five or six children one day.

But not all at once.

The Waterloo resident gave birth to quintuplets — three boys and two girls — at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester Feb. 13. The Caesarean section delivery involved 35 medical personnel at Strong working under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Sanko.

Philip William, Anthony Allen, Zachary James, Maria Elizabeth and Bianca Diana were born nearly two months premature.

The five babies are currently receiving care in the neonatal unit at Strong Hospital, where they will probably remain until mid-April. According to Robert Loeb, hospital spokesman, the babies are all doing well.

Saxton and her husband, Scott, already have a 2-year-old daughter, Kyla. The parishioners of St. Mary Parish, 25 Center St., Waterloo, now face the prospect of their eight-person family living in the three-bedroom house they had only recently purchased.

The quintuplets' birth followed months in which Sandy was confined to bed much of the time to prevent delivery before the babies had a realistic chance of survival.

"Through the whole thing we have just been praying to the Lord that Sandy could make it," Scott said. "We were concerned with Sandy and the health of the unborn children."

Sandy noted that one of her relatives had given birth to twins, and Scott's family also boasted twins — and even a set of triplets. But nothing had prepared them for quintuplets.

The couple — both converts to Catholicism — were married Sept. 2, 1989, at St. Mary's in Waterloo. Kyla was born Aug. 24, 1990.

The Saxtons had planned to have more children, but Sandy experienced irregularity in her menstrual cycle following Kyla's birth. After taking progesterone to help regulate her cycles, she took one dose of the fertility



Lori Farr-Strong Memorial Hospital
Neonatologist Dr. Rita Ryan, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics and attending physician for the quintuplets, checks on Philip William. Although some of the quintuplets are still receiving help with their breathing, all are now off ventilators.

drug Clomid.

"It worked," Scott quipped.

When Sandy had an exam early in the pregnancy, an ultrasound scan revealed that she was carrying five babies. She immediately went to Scott's workplace in Geneva, Zotos International, where the couple first met.

"She came in crying," Scott recalled. "I thought something was wrong with the pregnancy. Then she asked how I felt about more than one baby. I said twins are nice. She said, 'five.'"

"I wouldn't have believed it if she hadn't been crying," Scott added.

The Saxtons received an even bigger surprise when they went back to the physician who had given them the fertility drug.

The doctor — who is not associated with Strong Memorial Hospital — recommended that the couple consider "selective reduction," Scott said. His rationale was that the couple should consider aborting two of the fetuses to give the other three a better chance for survival.

"I explained to him that we didn't believe in abortion, and that it was against our religion," Scott recalled. "He said, 'Maybe you should talk to your local priest because the church is getting more liberal.'"

The couple had already decided that they would not consider abortion under any circumstances. But the couple did report their doctor's recommendation to their pastor, Father James Cosgrove, who had helped lead them to the church and after whom Zachary James was named.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Scott and Sandy Saxton relax with their 2-year-old daughter Kyla at the Ronald McDonald House in Rochester Feb. 19 after the Feb. 13 birth of the Saxton quintuplets at Strong Memorial Hospital.

The Waterloo priest was blunt in his reaction to the physician's suggestion, Scott reported. "Father Cosgrove just looked at me and said, 'What a jerk.'"

In talking to other parents of quintuplets, Scott reported that other doctors had likewise suggested abortions, but none of the families had chosen to do so.

Their faith helped the Saxtons deal with the risks involved in Sandy carrying all the babies to term, Scott observed.

"We put everything in the hands of the Lord," Scott said. "And he gave us five babies."

Indeed, the Saxtons were constantly in their parish community's prayers as the pregnancy progressed, Scott said. Sandy also received a childbirth prayer from Sister Agnes Paula Shambo, SSJ, of Rochester.

"Sandy said (the prayer) all through the pregnancy," Scott said. "She said it all the way to the operating room."

They also knew that Sister Shambo and several other Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester were praying the entire time the Caesarean section was being performed.

The couple will continue to need prayers — and assistance.

The task of caring for five infants and a small child could be overwhelming, they acknowledged. But they have already received offers of clothing, free diaper service for one year, high chairs and car seats. Several area nurses have already offered to visit the house several times a week for free, and other people have volunteered to come over to help out.

In addition, while visiting their new family members, the Saxtons have

been staying at the Ronald McDonald House, 333 Westmoreland Drive. The house provides support and low-cost accommodations for up to 20 families with children undergoing medical treatment at Rochester-area hospitals.

Meanwhile, the Sisters of St. Joseph serving St. Mary's in Waterloo are planning a baby shower for the family, Father Cosgrove reported. The pastor has also sent out word that anyone wishing to donate items for the Saxtons may do so through the parish.

One kind of donation will be especially appreciated, Father Cosgrove added.

"Cash," he laughed. "Gift certificates. There's going to be a lot of things they will need."

Scott said he has already been advised to contact an attorney to help fend off people trying to exploit the family. He noted that several talk shows had already contacted the family. He also plans to set up trust funds for the children's education.

Right now, their main concern is with the quintuplets' health, the couple said. The babies initially needed the help of ventilators to breathe. Although some of the quintuplets are still receiving help with their breathing, all the babies are now off the ventilators, Loeb reported. Philip became the first of the quints to breathe entirely on his own.

In fact, Sandy was able to hold Philip on Feb. 18 — the first time she was able to do more than just touch them.

"God willing," Scott said, "they will continue to progress."

EDITORS' NOTE: Donations for the Saxton family may be sent c/o St. Mary Church, 25 Center St., Waterloo 13165.