

How do you summarize 9 months with such a beautiful and precious little girl in only a few minutes? Well, you can't. We hope that the DVD you've just seen acts as a visual substitute.

We will miss Elysha's full face smiles, bright blue dancing eyes, and her sock removing running feet. Grandma Smith finally had found a pair of knee high socks that would stay on for more than five minutes. We'll miss the furrowed brow looks she gave Grandpa even though he tried so hard to make her smile. I think Richard and I were more entertained by his playful antics than Elysha was. Those of you privileged to see Elysha's "worried" look - the one that she even demonstrated in her prenatal ultrasounds, will know the look I'm talking about. We will miss the deep giggles that she freely gave to Grandma. Grandma's knitting kept Elysha clothes in everything pink - and that colour suited her so well. She even provided Elysha special hats to wear that had holes for any iv lines that needed to be placed in her head - these special hats will be donated to Sick Kids so that other children may benefit from Grandma's special talents. The blanket that Elysha had been wrapped in the last few days was from Grandma too and the very first one she ever received.

Grandma and Grandpa Brooks could not be as big of a part of her life as they would have liked to be, but Elysha was very special to them as well and we know that Elysha loved meeting them too. Grandma Brooks would sing "I am Jesus' Little Lamb" to her over and over and took the picture of Elysha that appears on the bookmark you have all been given.

For all that Elysha went through as her Bravery Beads demonstrated; she was such a happy baby and rarely fussed. Each of these beads you see represents an event, procedure, or test that she had done. The bravery beads program is just one reason that the hospital for sick children is so special but more on that shortly.

Elysha taught us a lot of being content with the situation the Lord allows us to be in. Our time with her was not ideal in human thinking - the world around us called it a tragedy but we learned to see it for more than the here and now.

We would like to thank our dear friends at Hopedale Bible Chapel who helped us over the past few weeks - providing us with meals, gardening, running errands, all so that we could spend as much time as we could with Elysha in her final days. Your prayers strengthened our spirits and your phone calls, cards, and practical help strengthened us physically.

Richard's place of employment, Hatch, has gone far beyond what most employers would do in support of us during this time. What a blessing you have been. Thank you to all his coworkers for your visits and phone calls, even if some of them just happened to come at a time when Richard's help was needed at work...seriously though we are happy he could be kept in the loop as returning to work after so long away would be difficult not knowing what he is coming back to.

I wanted to take a few minutes to publically thank all the people involved in Elysha's medical journey.

Months before she was born, Elysha already had an expert team of doctors and nurses like Dr. Ryan and one of our nurses, Kathy, looking after her in the Special Pregnancy Clinic at

Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. We got to know our little girl very well through ultrasound and treasure all the photos that were slipped into our binder on our way out

At Sick Kids we had the privilege of having Dr. Bradley as our prenatal cardiologist. After one rushed appointment for which he was very apologetic, he called us after hours at home to ensure we had understood what we had been told that day and to answer any further questions. We were given his personal pager number to call if we needed anything. Going the extra mile is standard at Sick Kids. Thank you Dr. Bradley, Dr. Ryan, Kathy and others for seeing us through to Elysha's birth.

Your care and compassion allowed us to enjoy Elysha's development as much as possible as we did not know if we would even get to meet our daughter in person.

We knew ultimately that the Lord was in control and He had numbered her days. We would enjoy the time we had with her, however long or short that time was. The plan was that Elysha would be immediately taken to a resuscitation room following her birth at Mount Sinai then transported to Sick Kids so it did not look like we were going to get to see her. We prayed that even if it was for just a moment we could get a glimpse of our little girl. The Lord answered our prayer with our labour and delivery nurse, Karen. Not only did she take pictures for us but she also she ensured we were taken into the room where Elysha was and we got to hold our little girl. We never dreamed we would be able to do that so soon, or at all. The Lord answered our prayers more abundantly than we ever thought. Thank you Karen for giving us those special first memories with Elysha.

One of my fears as a mother was that with Elysha being taken away so soon without a chance to bond with us, it would be difficult for her to bond later on. I worried that Elysha would be lonely once she was taken away from us. Perhaps she would wonder where her mommy and daddy were. Again, the Lord answered my prayer through Elysha's very first nurses in the cardiac critical care unit at Sick Kids. Miraculously, Elysha was stable enough to be taken off her monitors very early on so these two amazing women spent much of their time carrying Elysha around. When I was finally able to get over to Sick Kids to see her, Elysha was already a very cuddly baby. Because of their care, Elysha's nickname became "Cuddles" and she did love to cuddle with anyone who held her.

Susan and Lynn you will always hold a special place in our hearts as the first ones at Sick Kids to love Elysha and who cared for her when we could not. I will always remember with laughter this story about Elysha from Susan that showed how tenacious and strong Elysha was from the beginning. Elysha's hand that had the i.v. in was clenched very tightly and Susan was concerned about skin breakdown and that the iv would come out. She tried to get Elysha's hand open to put a foam wedge inside her palm to relax the hand. Elysha would not budge. Calling two other nurses over, they tried to lift her fingers up but to no avail. Not wanting to hurt Elysha, they gave up Susan later told us that in all her years of nursing, she had never lost to a baby before...until Elysha came along.

Thank you Susan for teaching us how to bundle Elysha so she could feel secure despite being so tiny and fragile. She loved to be wrapped up at night and we continued to do so even as she grew. It was the last thing we did for her the day that she died.

Liz, Aaron, Habiba, Sue, Lisa, Rebecca, Nyssa, Nancy - we will not forget the tender care you showed Elysha and the care for us as well during very difficult and dark times. The Lord used you to brighten our days especially at the end..

Those of you who have been following our story from the beginning will know that we miraculously brought Elysha home four days after she was born. We were transferred to the outpatient cardiac clinic. To Dr. Jaeggi and our wonderful cardiac nurse Nicole – thank you for caring for Elysha during our time at home both pre and post surgeries and being available to us day and night. We were able to confidently care for her knowing that we had you to turn to if we needed help.

To Elysha's nurses on 4D – the cardiac ward - you became Elysha's other family and made her second home so welcoming, especially during our final visit. Amanda, Paula Melanie, Kim, Caralee, Stacey, Suzie, Lauren, Jessica, Jackie, Torrie, Natalie, Jolanta so many of you we cannot imagine better people suited for this place. We always felt at home with you around and knew that Elysha was getting the best care possible.

We were privileged to have the two best surgeons for Elysha – Dr. Van Arsdell for cardiology and Dr. Wales for her intestinal surgeries. You both have been given such skill not only in surgery but also in working with families. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us when we needed you. We know that had Elysha been able to have her next heart surgery, she would have been in excellent hands. Dr. Wales – Elysha is healed completely now; thank you for being there for her when she needed you and giving us these last few weeks with her.

Dr. MacGregor in neurology who had the very difficult task of letting us know about Elysha's brain damage and who did it with such care and compassion. Hearing you say "Sorry" to Elysha for what she went through was so touching and just shows the depths of the care that people at Sick Kids have for their patients. Thank you for allaying our fears about what Elysha was actually hearing and seeing- or not as the case was-and going out of your way to help us.

To our team at CCAC and St. Elizabeth nursing: Anticipating the needs of your clients is a gift you all share. Thank you for knowing what we needed and making sure we had it. Our time at home was made easier with your help. We could not have kept Elysha home for her remaining days without you.

Brianna - our Occupational Therapist. Thank you for your using your skills with Elysha in such a caring and passion-filled manner. Anything we needed you were so quick to respond knowing that time was precious. Your phone calls and visits were always a bright spot in the day and I could see that Elysha enjoyed her play time with you. I am sorry Elysha did not have the chance to work more with you but knowing that she is now doing things in Heaven far greater than anything we who are left behind could do is a comfort.

While we were at home our amazing pediatrician Dr. Fox saw us through to the end. We are so thankful you were able to take Elysha on with all her complexities. How many doctors make house calls these days? Being not just *new* parents, but new parents of a fragile baby put us in some interesting situations but you so easily saw us through them. Thank you for

being such a big part of lives, especially at the end of Elysha's life. We are so glad to have you continue on with in the coming months with Elysha's little brother or sister.

Maria and Chris – our palliative care team. It takes very special people to do this job and we thank the Lord for you both. You must see such pain and suffering and death and yet you keep your hearts soft and your sense of humour too. We were glad to be able to relax at home in your company without having a “clinical” sense with your visits. Thank you for being a comfort to us in Elysha's last days. She lived longer than anyone thought...the Lord had plans for her that no one else knows about or even understands. But we take comfort in the fact we will know one day. Dr. Newman, Chris, was away on vacation the last two weeks before Elysha died. She did not expect Elysha to still be with us when she returned, but of course, Elysha was still here being the strong little girl that she was. Dr. Newman returned to work on Tuesday and came to visit us that evening – we are so thankful the Lord sustained Elysha so she could visit one last time. It was almost as if Elysha was waiting for her to come back. Twenty minutes after Dr. Newman left our home, Elysha went to be Jesus, free from her broken body. Fifty four days after her initial cardiac arrest and 47 days after extubation. Amazing days that taught us so much about faith, brokenness and making each day count for the Lord.

I am Jesus' little lamb  
Happy all day long I am  
He will keep me safe from harm  
For I'm His lamb

Our little lamb Elysha is now with the Good Shepherd.