

STORIES of HOPE

Donor Heart Valve Provides Hope for Newborn

Bringing a new child into the world can be exciting, with lots of fun experiences leading up to the birth. But this isn't the case for everyone.

Michelle Anderson of Roanoke, Virginia, realized something was off during an 18-week ultrasound of her unborn daughter, Jayla. “The whole day is burned into my mind,” she recalled. “Being in the medical field I noticed that they were concentrating on her heart a little too long. I knew something was wrong. They put me in a room to meet with the doctor, which seemed like an eternity.”



Jayla was diagnosed with truncus arteriosus, a potentially fatal birth defect of the heart. The doctor went over the options while a crying Michelle hugged Jayla's father, Matt. It was news no expectant parents would ever want to hear, but there was hope.

The doctor explained that an aortic valve from a tissue donor could give their baby a chance.

Jayla was born at UVA. In her mom's eyes, she was perfect, but Michelle knew there were more challenges ahead and worried about her baby's upcoming surgery.

The surgery was successful. While there were setbacks in her recovery, Jayla was strong – fighting to breathe on her own – and alert.

Before Jayla's birth, Michelle was already familiar with tissue donation from her time working in healthcare. She knows how families make decisions, at the most difficult of times, that help a lot of people. Michelle has written to Jayla's donor family to express her gratitude for their selfless decisions. She is humbled to realize that without their gift, her daughter would not have a chance at life.

“There is no way to really thank them,” Michelle said. “There are not enough words. For something like that, ‘thank you’ is not enough.”