

A flower that never bloomed

Local family hosts annual benefit for baby Abbey Rose

By JAIME ANTON
The Post staff writer

It has been said that when children die, their tiny feet go before us to teach us the way home. This is a hope Sam and Suzi Kudrin, both 25, cling to each day.

For on April 7, they lived the nightmare every new parent fears. Their four-month-old daughter Abbey Rose was found not breathing during a nap at her babysitter's home.

She was transported to Southwest General Health Center and eventually downtown to Rainbow Babies and Children's at University Hospitals. Doctors were able to get a pulse after extensive CPR. But it was too late. Abbey's brain had been deprived of oxygen for at least 90 minutes.

She experienced congestive heart failure twice and organs began failing. After a CT scan revealed no brain function, the couple made the difficult decision not to resuscitate her if her heart failed again, which it did within moments of the decision. They picked up their baby for the last time and cradled her as she died.

"We told her about heaven, prayed with her, sang 'You are my Sunshine' one of her favorite songs, and she died in our arms in the blanket she came home from the hospital in," Suzi said. "The blanket I still sleep with every night."

The parents don't know exactly what happened, but they have been told that Abbey was found on her stomach in the crib.

It is strongly recommended that caregivers lay newborns and young infants on their backs to sleep to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which was the likely cause of Abbey's death. Blankets, pillows, stuffed animals and crib bumper pads should also be avoided in the bassinet or crib for the first year of life.

Such a situation could devastate a family and open the door to bitterness and resentment but that's not the case with Sam and Suzi.

"I think we said in the car ride home that we need to forgive (the babysitter)," Suzi recalls. "She has enough to think about, and we don't want her to suffer.



Photo by JAIME ANTON

Sam and Suzi Kudrin hope to keep their daughter's memory alive by helping others through an annual benefit in her name each year.

Like my dad says, 'accidents happen - little ones and big ones,'" Sam added.

Nearly 3,000 people attended Abbey's viewing.

"There were teachers there from when I was in school," Sam said.

"Six continents, we had heard, had been praying and 15 states were represented at her funeral. It was unbelievable," Suzi said.

The couple's faith, family and church have helped them cope immensely.

"I don't know if we could have done it if it wasn't without our faith, our church, our families," Suzi said.

A few weeks after Abbey's death the couple found out they are expecting another baby due Jan. 15, something that has also helped them through this difficult time.

"It wasn't, 'I'm cleaning out her room'. It was, 'I'm getting it ready for the next baby'," Suzi said.

She has since taken on a job that will enable her to be with this child during the day.

The family has set up an account in Abbey's honor, the Abbey Rose Fund, at Key Bank. The fund has been used to

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pay medical bills and to pay it forward to others. Anytime they have money left over from medical bills, they have given it to others such as the Ronald McDonald House, where they stayed when Abbey was in the hospital. They have also donated money so that others could be CPR certified.

In honor of Abbey's first birthday, the couple is hosting a benefit from 4-10 p.m. Nov. 12 at the Northeast Ohio College Preparatory Academy, located at 2280 Professor Ave. in Tremont, where Sam teaches.

There will be 50/50 raffles, a Chinese raffle and a silent auction. Some of the items available include a flat screen provided by the North Royalton Schools, an

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iPad 2, Lake Erie Crushers tickets, jewelry, a \$250 happy hour at a downtown establishment, a hot-air balloon ride, gift cards and much more.

Dinner will also be served. The menu includes pulled pork sandwiches, spaghetti, salad, pasta salad, chicken salad, egg salad and pop.

Entertainment will be provided by Liverpool Lads, a Beatles cover band, from 8-10 p.m.

"It's free to get in. The only thing you have to pay for is the raffle tickets and T-shirts," Sam said.

Proceeds will be used to pay Abbey's medical bills and to make donations where they can. The hope is to host a yearly event in Abbey's honor with 100 percent of the proceeds going toward other organizations like Rainbow Babies, Cornerstone of Hope grief counseling and to SIDS awareness in the future.

"We just want people to get together and remember Abbey and have a good time and think of her," Suzi said.

And not a day goes by that she is not remembered. Abbey was a calm, happy baby that loved Christmas lights, rarely ever cried, slept through the night at just two months old, and enjoyed falling to sleep every night listening to Beatles lullaby music. Sam is a huge fan of the band obviously with a name like Abbey Rose.

Abbey's tiny shoes sit empty on a table in the family's living room, but Mommy and Daddy's hearts overflow with her memories and love. They miss their little girl deeply. They talk about her often and share stories and smile at each other as they think of her.

"We know she is in a better place," Suzi said.

"And we will see her again," Sam said.

For more information about the benefit or the Abbey Rose Fund, visit abbey-rosekudrin.com.