

Big Surprises Come in Little Packages

For Dawn and Joe King, knowing that they were pregnant with twins was surprise enough. But when their twins were born premature, at almost 28 weeks, they were apprehensive about what changes this would bring to their life. What they didn't know was that it would change for the better.

"I was four months pregnant when I had to have my appendix removed," says King. "From that point forward, I was experiencing and monitoring contractions daily, and making trips to the emergency room. With the twins being my first children, I didn't know what to expect."

A little over six months pregnant, King's contractions were getting worse. After going to her Prince George's County hospital, she was flown by helicopter to Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. Son Dominic and daughter Kendall were delivered not long after her arrival and sent immediately to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Dominic weighed 2 lbs., 8 oz., and Kendall, 2 lbs., 7.5 oz.

Because of King's C-section, she was not able to visit her twins in the NICU for the first 24 hours. The nurses there photographed Dominic and Kendall every few hours so that mom could see them. "For that first day, the photographs were my only connection to them," she says. "As little as it was, I so appreciated it."

For the next three months, the new parents spent every day at the NICU, sometimes for eight or nine hours at a time. Dominic was sicker, so to

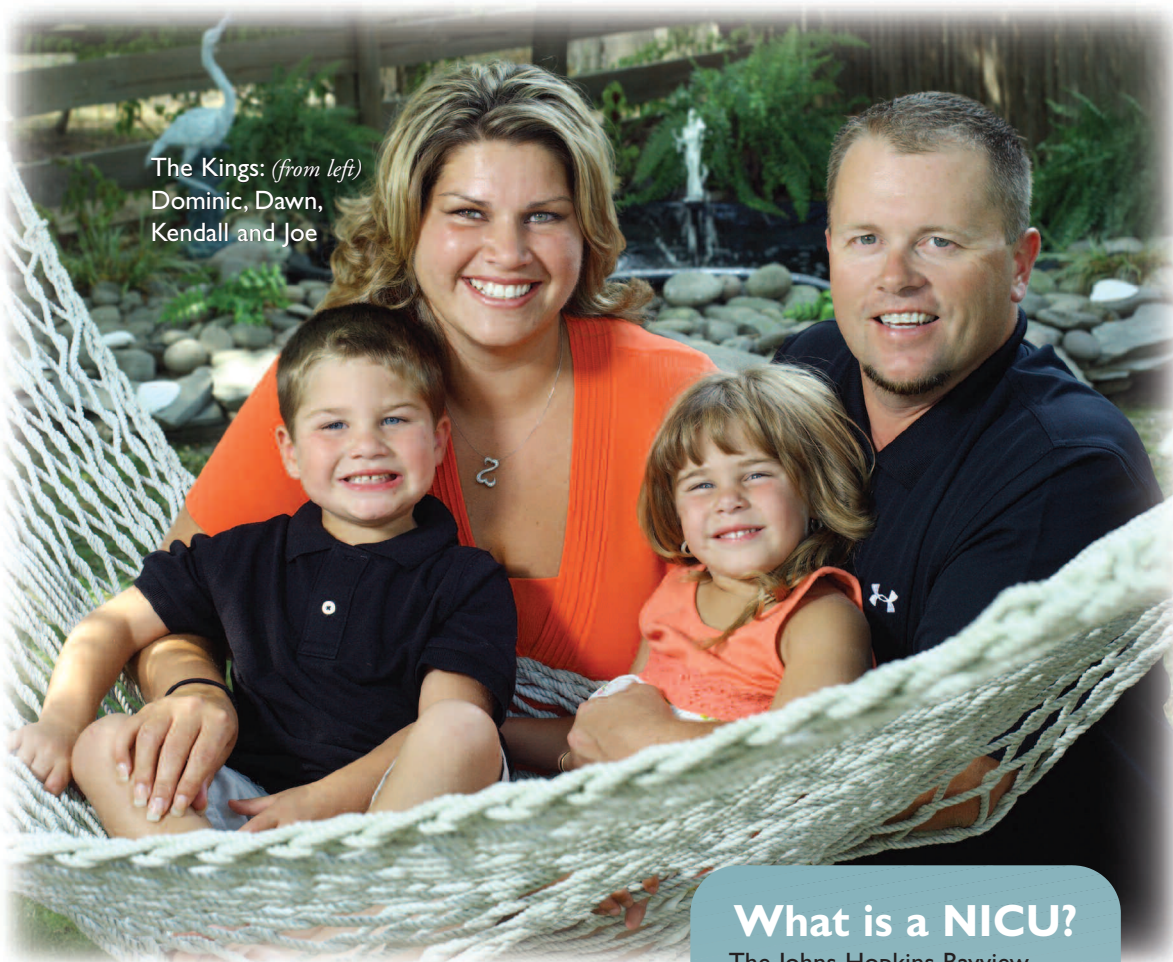
ensure his continuity of care, he always had the same nurse. "It was a relief knowing that he was with the same nurse every day," King says. "She always knew what was happening day-to-day. She wasn't reading a chart, trying to catch up."

So that Dawn and Joe would be prepared to care for the twins at home, they watched the nurses closely. King explains that her husband was a little scared, but one of the nurses took him by the hand and showed him how to feed and change the twins. The nurse didn't let him be afraid. By the time the twins were ready to leave the NICU, the Kings were ready for them to come home.

Four birthdays later, the Kings still visit the NICU and send birthday cakes to the staff on July 27, in honor of the day Dominic and Kendall were born. "We weren't just other patients in the NICU. They made us feel like family," says the Kings. "If we have another child, we want to deliver at Johns Hopkins Bayview because of the excellent care Dominic and Kendall received."

—Katie Kuehn

The Kings: (from left)
Dominic, Dawn,
Kendall and Joe



What is a NICU?

The Johns Hopkins Bayview Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), one of the first NICUs in Maryland, is a Level 3B, which means that staff can care for critically ill newborns from term to the extremely premature at 23 to 24 weeks old. Provided at the NICU are all levels of ventilator support and pediatric specialists in cardiology, ophthalmology, neurology, genetics, radiology and surgery.

The NICU is an integral part of Johns Hopkins Bayview's Perinatal Center designation by the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS).