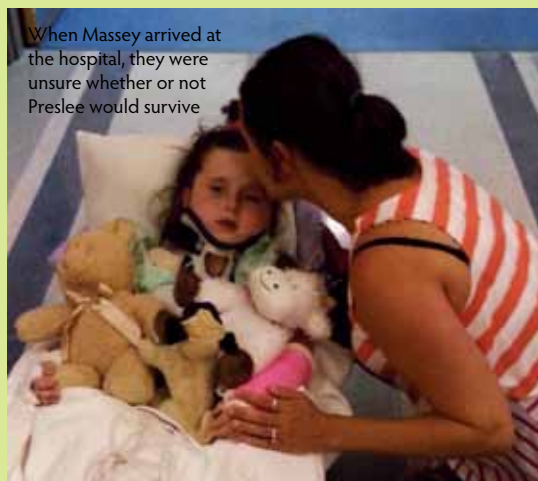


Praying for Preslee

Katy mom Lara Massey shares her story of living through her worst nightmare, the tragic accident involving her 6-year-old daughter, and how Preslee Nicholson's journey of recovery has brought hope to many



Preslee Nicholson was in a life-threatening car accident on July 5, 2013



When Massey arrived at the hospital, they were unsure whether or not Preslee would survive



Nicholson with one of her nurses at Spero Rehab in Katy

Written by Lara Massey | Select photography by Sassy Massey Photography

Arriving four weeks early, Preslee was born a fighter. After spending her first seven days in NICU, she came home weighing a little less than five pounds. The first few months of her life were just a glimpse of her strength and will to live. When Preslee was 2, her dad and I divorced. He was awarded visitation at various times, mostly during summer vacation for six weeks. In time, I remarried, and in a few short years our family welcomed Kaylee and Jax. Our lives were complete.

Lara Massey has been overwhelmed by the support she and her family have received from her hometown of Katy, and people around the country who have followed their journey

"I don't know what is in store for the rest of Preslee's life, or for mine, but I know I made it through my worst nightmare."

- Lara Massey

Photo by Melissa Brewer



Summer Days

Friday, July 5, 2013 was normal. Our family spent the day swimming at my parent's house counting the days until Preslee returned home in two weeks. I knew Preslee would be traveling that day, and I was nervous. She was making a cross-country journey from Texas to Virginia with her dad's girlfriend to visit family. I talked to her that night and told her I loved her, to be good, and that I would call her in the morning. By then, she would be in Virginia. I went to sleep that night uneasy, I always worry. I kept thinking that if I could just sleep, I'd wake up in the morning and Preslee would be off the road, safe and sound.

The Call

At 6 a.m. my cell phone rang. I heard a voice on the other end asking, "Are you the mother of Preslee Nicholson?" My heart stopped, and I said, "Yes." The doctor told me that my daughter had been in a terrible accident. The words, "her heart is still beating, but she is non-responsive. She is not breathing on her own and has critical injuries," kept repeating over and over.

Our lives changed in an instant. I woke up my husband Jarrod, and told him Preslee was hurt. I remember him flying out of bed and dropping to his knees, praying through his tears. I wasn't crying - I don't know why. We left the house with nothing except my purse and one phone charger. I threw up in the front yard, but I didn't cry.

Flying to Our Baby

After dropping off our two younger children with my parents, we got a flight and were in Winston-Salem, bedside by 2 p.m. To this day, I don't know how I emotionally survived two flights across the country not knowing if my baby would be alive when I got there.

As our plane landed, the hospital informed me they were going to have to open Preslee's abdomen to relieve pressure

and "to be aware." I wasn't even sure what that meant. I remember the drive to the hospital, I kept wondering with each curve of the road "Is this where it happened? Was my baby crying for me?"

Arriving at the hospital, I made my way to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). Before I saw Preslee, her doctor informed me that it had been a single car accident. My daughter was found on the floorboard in the back seat, pinned down by one of the doors that had been inverted from the impact of the crash. Numb with fear, her doctor led me down a hallway to the last room. The room was large and filled with machines, a big bed, and my little girl. She was asleep, hurt, and swollen with a sheet covering her abdomen that now contained a wound vac with suction pulling blood and fluid out of her little body. She was on an oscillator to breathe.

Her skull was fractured, her femur was split in two, and her arm and wrist were broken. Her lungs were collapsed. Her liver and arms had deep lacerations. Her ligaments in her neck were torn, and her thoracic vertebra had compression fractures. She couldn't breathe on her own, sit up, or walk. She was heavily sedated due to pain. She's my gymnast, my partner in crime, and she's only 6.

Devastating Injuries

I asked over and over if my daughter would be okay. The only response was that they were going to try their hardest to save my little girl's life. For now, we had to look at time in one-hour increments. If we get through this hour, we will look to the next. The doctors didn't know if she would have brain damage, be paralyzed, wake up, or if she would even survive. I prayed harder than I've ever prayed in my entire life. I reached out to my family and friends back home in Katy. I told them to pray. I told them to tell their friends to pray. Please God, save her. Please do not make me go home without my daughter.

Nicholson has received many messages and tokens from people who have prayed for her recovery



Massey with her children, Jax, Kaylee, and Preslee



Praying for Preslee

From then on, the clock was ticking. In the coming days, we would see small improvements only to have a set back. Meanwhile, my friends set up a website, "Pray for Preslee Lynn." It soon became "P4P." Before I knew it, packages were being sent to the hospital, 20 to 30 letters a day, P4P car decals were made, and people started sending us clothes and personal items since we left home without anything. Ministers from all over North Carolina were stopping by to pray with us - it was amazing.

We spent the month of July in the hospital. Slowly, we moved her from the PICU, to intermediate care, and then to the general care floor. Preslee was weaned off of her medications. She started to show her doctors she knew exactly what they were saying and that she was determined to get out of there.

I sang to her in the hospital, painted her nails, put her hair in pigtail braids, and gave her feet spa treatments while she slept. I left music on 24/7, read books to her, and told her I loved her constantly. After 22 days, we were ready to go home. I was so happy, but knew we had a long road ahead of us. Preslee was in a turtle shell, a neck brace, arm cast, and couldn't do anything on her own. She was miserable, but she was alive. We couldn't fly, so God sent to us the amazing crew of Life Star Emergency Services. We made it home in approximately 21 hours via ambulance.

Coming Home to Katy

Arriving home, there were balloons, gifts, meals, and packages from wonderful people who were following our journey. My small town of Katy amazed us with support.

Doctor's appointments started the next day. Within one week of being home, her neck brace came off. Within two weeks, her cast was gone. She started first grade in a wheelchair and turtle shell. By mid-September her turtle shell came off, and she was able to start putting pressure on her leg; and by the end of the month, the wheelchair was gone. Within three days of being out of her wheelchair, she was walking. Within two days of being out of her turtle shell she climbed the rock wall at the mall.

She started gymnastics again, loves swimming and diving, playing with her siblings, and touching lives. I don't know what is in store for the rest of Preslee's life, or for mine, but I know I made it through my worst nightmare. I still question why. But something amazing and beautiful came from this tragedy. A little girl changed the hearts of so many, and let God shine through her. **KM**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Lara Massey for sharing her story of faith and strength. If you have an inspirational story you would like to share, email editor@katymagazine.com. As one of our former Katy Magazine cover girls, we will always be cheering for Preslee!

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