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FEATURED

Tennessee couple has first baby in Gillette during Camporee

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Aug 17, 2024

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Tennessee couple Emory and Sarah Kelley hold their firstborn son, Nathaniel, who was born last Saturday on the final day of Camporee in Gillette.

Courtesy Photo

He was just slightly premature at 35 weeks, but by all accounts, Nathaniel Wilde Kelley was exceptionally healthy when he was born in Gillette last Saturday.

The baby's parents — Sarah and Emory Kelley, both 22 — said that the birth, which lasted about 12 hours at Campbell County Memorial Hospital, went well.

When it was all over, it hardly mattered that the two of them were a long, long way from home.

Ron Whitehead, International Pathfinder Camporee director, said that Nathaniel is, to his knowledge, the first baby born at a Camporee in its 39-year history.

“The Gillette baby, we like to call it,” Whitehead said. “You'd expect a lot more issues that early out ... He wanted to be a part of Camporee weekend, I suppose.”

The Kelleys, who live in Bristol, Tennessee, are members of the Winston-Salem Messengers Pathfinder club, out of the Seventh-day Adventist's Carolina Conference. Emory is a paramedic for Carter and Sullivan County in North Carolina, and Sarah is an EMT.

So it's possibly a little less surprising that two 22-year-olds were able to handle the birth of their first child, hundreds of miles away from home, with a kind of cool composure Whitehead said was “very impressive.”

Sarah said she and Emory knew giving birth at Camporee was a possibility. In the run up to Camporee week, Sarah's pregnancy doctor gave her the final OK to travel, equipping her with her prenatal records.

“By the time we knew I was pregnant, it was a little too early to back out,” Sarah said. “I had some really good friends in the area, and my mom’s in the area, so it wasn’t too challenging.”



Sarah Kelley holds her firstborn son, Nathaniel, beside husband Emory after giving birth at Campbell County Memorial Hospital last Saturday. The Tennesseans were in Gillette for the International Pathfinder Camporee.

Courtesy Photo

With Gillette in the rear-view mirror, Sarah and Emory don’t regret having their baby under singular circumstances. In fact, to hear it from hospital staff, the delivery itself went as smoothly as anyone could’ve hoped.

Camporee delivery

It started on Friday night of Camporee: Sarah felt her water break while she and Emory were making their way back to base camp.

Sarah said that her contractions didn’t regulate that night, and that the two of them were able to sleep the night in their tent

before going to the hospital. In the morning, Emory called their pregnancy doctor, who advised them that it was time to get going.

Emory said that Sarah’s childhood friends, based out of Hohenwald, Tennessee — Amelia and Max Myers, and their mother Dusty — were the ones to hustle the two of them to the hospital that morning.

By 8 a.m. Saturday, Sarah had been checked in. Dani Harmeyer, the 41-year-old Campbell County Health nurse who delivered Sarah's baby, said that because Sarah's treatment history documents had been prepared in advance, much of the guesswork of treating an out-of-towner was taken out of the equation.

"They don't have labs, you don't now how many times they've been seen," Harmeyer said. "We had all the information we needed, because he sent all her information along with her."

A slight miscommunication between Harmeyer and the delivery doctor meant that the doctor wouldn't make it to the delivery room that night. About 12 hours after checking in, Harmeyer called the doctor, letting her know they were going to do some "practice pushes."

Harmeyer explained that after the call, the doctor was under the impression Harmeyer would let her know when Sarah was ready, while Harmeyer thought the doctor would be showing up any minute. At crunch time, it became increasingly clear Harmeyer would have to deliver the baby herself.

Harmeyer has been a delivery and labor nurse for 14 years, but she'd only recently moved to Gillette in February this year. Sarah's child was the first baby Harmeyer delivered since working for Campbell County Health.

"Honestly, I was a little nervous, because I don't know the doctors here as well," Harmeyer said. "But delivery is my passion, that's why I've been doing it for 14 years."

Harmeyer said the delivery could hardly have gone better. Even though Nathaniel was born pre-term, he was healthy enough that he didn't need an incubator. As a precaution, he was held at the hospital for an extra four days.

Whitehead said families staying in Gillette for Camporee, along with local churches, donated items that were brought directly to the hospital: The two of them were given clothes, diapers, a car seat and flowers.

“When you have 60,000 people, there's births, there's marriages, life continues,” Whitehead said. “That doesn't stop for Camporee.”

A long way from home

On Tuesday, the day the baby was discharged, Sarah, Emory, Nathaniel and the Myers trio piled into a modified 15-person Ford van. They expected to land in Hohenwald, Tennessee, within a few days.

It's easy to drive through the night with enough passengers. On Wednesday, Emory said they'd been taking turns at the wheel, and attending to Nathaniel, as they made their way across state lines.



Sarah Kelley holds her newborn son Nathaniel beside husband Emory at Campbell County Memorial Hospital as International Pathfinder Camporee director Ron Whitehead poses approvingly in the background.

Courtesy Photo

After reaching Hohenwald, Sarah and Emory said they planned to stay with the Myers for at least a night before reaching their home in Bristol, Tennessee. After that, besides getting some hiking in, their future is pretty Nathaniel-oriented.

Nathaniel, for his part, has been a very agreeable infant throughout all this.

“He sleeps a lot, he eats a lot. He’s pretty calm,” Sarah said.

If they’re lucky, he’ll take after his parents.

Susan Monaghan