

MONUMENTAL

THE CALLER ID SIMPLY READ 202. Pacing in the waiting room of Children's National Medical Center, Bret Baier thought nothing of it—White House calls are de rigueur for the Fox News chief White House correspondent—and at that moment, work was not a priority. The missed call was from President Bush, leaving his thoughts and prayers for Baier's newborn son, Paul, as he underwent open-heart surgery.

With the euphoria that new life brings, Bret and Amy Baier had prepared to take their son home from Sibley Memorial Hospital, the newborn having been issued a clean bill of health. Then a nurse noticed that the baby looked wan and decided to run further tests. An echocardiogram revealed that Paul's heart was

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pumping blood the wrong way. Their baby was suffering from a combination of five life-threatening heart defects, a condition so rare it occurs in only one in 10,000 newborns. Paul was transferred to Children's National Medical Center on Michigan Avenue, where the Baiers would wait 12 days for Dr. Richard Jonas, one of the country's eminent pediatric surgeons, to return from overseas and perform open-heart surgery on their son. "Never in a million years did I think this would be our lives," Amy reflects. "Waiting really tested us. As a mother I didn't know if I could still dream for my child."

After the eight-hour operation, the Baiers were able to see their son, with his chest still open and his beating heart visible. "The aorta of another child who died was keeping my son alive," says Bret. "It was a piece that didn't grow with Paul. He underwent a second surgery in April to replace the connector with a toddler's aorta. Two different families

have suffered through loss so our son could live." The Baiers wrote anonymous letters of gratitude to the families that provided the organs.

Bret and Amy describe the waiting room of Children's as the trenches—a place where families face similar trials together. "There was one family—

their nine-month-old daughter, Maggie, had been through nine surgeries," Bret says. "The day before Paul's surgery, Maggie died. It was devastating." Yet Maggie's mother called the day after her child passed away to check on the success of Paul's surgery. "I get teary-eyed about it even now. You think about the power of a person who is going through that and still picks up the phone to call. She was their only child."

Paul underwent two angioplasties, two open-heart operations, and stomach surgery before his first birthday. "Everyone handles things like this differently," says Bret. "Amy did an amazing job of expressing her love to Paul."

"Paul was hooked up to 10 cords and IVs, and we were still able to hold him. He was never without someone at his side," Amy recalls. Bret sought solace through documenting their experiences, keeping concerned friends and family updated. "As a mother it makes me really nervous about having more children," says Amy. "But we're going to do it," adds Bret. "We don't know why this happened—you realize nature is not perfect," Amy remarks.

Since Paul's successful treatments, Amy and Bret have joined the foundation board of Children's National Medical Center. "Paul had five major heart defects that should have been diagnosed at my 20-week sonogram," says Amy. "If we had brought him home, he would not have made it. We want to bring attention to the cause, and do something to better other people's lives."

Grateful for their son's survival, the Baiers have been true to their word. They spoke in front of 1,000 people at the spring gala, and also gave a family donation to underwrite Dr. Jonas' studies and to create a room in their son's name: the Paul Francis Baier Comprehensive Media Room.—K.T.

Keeping the Faith

A newborn's battle with multiple heart defects inspires his parents to help others.



Amy and Bret Baier with son Paul.

photograph by Kevin Allen