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Christmas miracle for girl in coma

By KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
 Staff Reporter

They are calling it a miracle. But Stouffville's Riitta Donahue doesn't care whether it was divine intervention or not. All she knows is her daughter Katriina, 17, came back to her two days before Christmas. Katriina suffered severe

brain injuries in a September car crash at Hwys 7 and 48. Her injuries left her in a deep coma for three days, then in a lighter, but still a comatose state, since then.

The Grade 11 student at Markham District High School spent more than six weeks at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre before being trans-

ferred to Markham Stouffville Hospital to be closer to her Stouffville family.

"Hi"

And on Dec. 23, Katriina opened her eyes and said, "Hi," to her sister Melissa Bell.

"I was at the chiropractor's at the time. Melissa came running in saying Katriina was awake," said mom Riitta.

"I ran to the hospital and she was awake and alert. I said, 'Can you say mom?' and she did. I couldn't believe it."

On Sept. 21, Katriina was a passenger in her friend Tracy Rickard's car.

Rickard was forced to pull over about 11:15 p.m. after noticing smoke coming from a flat tire. After pulling over, two Good Samaritans - Emmett Dillon, 46, and Jeremy Powers, 19, - stopped to help her change the flat.

As the four walked behind Rickard's car to put the tire in the trunk, they were slammed by a westbound vehicle which hit three of the four, critically injuring Katriina and Dillon.

Powers, who escaped serious injury, had the presence of mind to call 911 on his cellular phone and wave off cars from the two injured lying in the road.

The driver of the westbound car, Monica Alexander, 28, of Scarborough, was charged with careless driving. Her trial is slated for Feb. 3.

Dillon was released from Sunnybrook, after being airlifted there the night of the accident, about two weeks later.

Wheelchair

He was still in a wheelchair but is expected to make a full recovery.

But Katriina remained unconscious. In an interview with mom Riitta, a few weeks after the accident, she said it could be two years before they know the full extent of her injuries.

"She's always been a tough cookie and it's going to be a long road but I'm not giving up hope," she said then.

"I never gave up hope," she said Monday.

"Katriina has a lot of work ahead of her, there's no doubt about that, but everyone at

the hospital is calling her a Christmas miracle, their Christmas angel."

Katriina has months of rehabilitation ahead of her.

Her speech is impaired so she'll have to learn to talk all over again.

She has to learn to walk too. And run. And work on her coordination and balance.

"It's not going to be easy, but I see improvement every day. Every time she does something, we're all just ecstatic," Riitta said.

"She wants to come home, but the doctors and nurses tell her she must be the best she can be before she can go home. So that's what she's working on."

Riitta said doctors don't know if Katriina will make a full recovery or not. But she has faith. "I told her she'll be walking by spring," she said.

"With a severe brain injury like Katriina's almost everything is up in the air. But I promised her she would be walking by spring, that's the goal."

The joy and hope in her voice is unmistakable.

Thrilled

Her two other daughters, Jasmine, 19 and Melissa, 14, are thrilled as well, she said.

"It really was (almost) four months of hell for all of us. But every day that goes by she's a little better. She'll keep working and her sisters will do the same." Riitta excused herself then - she was sneaking Katriina a soft bagel and cream cheese for lunch.



DONAHUE



New for '97

Nina Grace DeLapa was the first baby born to a Stouffville couple in 1997. The first baby came into the world at Markham Stouffville Hospital at 8:50 a.m. New Year's Day. Proud parents are Tony and Esther DeLapa.

Photo/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Nina is Stouffville's first baby

Nina Grace DeLapa made her debut as Whitchurch-Stouffville's first baby of the year at 8:50 a.m. on New Year's Day.

The first child for proud parents Esther and Tony DeLapa, Nina Grace, who was born at Markham Stouffville Hospital, weighed in at a healthy 8 pounds 13 ounces.

"My wife went into labor at midnight and the baby was due on Dec. 31, so it was perfect timing," said Tony.

"Everything went really well and she is doing fine."

She's a beautiful baby with an fine head of hair, "more than her dad," added Tony with a chuckle. Esther is also doing well and mother and baby came home from the hospital Thursday.

- Kate Gilderdale

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