

## Sofia's Story: A Victory for Life

BY Liz Townsend

As pro-lifers mourned the babies lost to abortion on the 33rd anniversary of Roe v. Wade January 22, a little miracle was born in El Paso, Texas. Yvonne and Santiago Alomía refused to abort their baby despite the diagnosis of a severe heart defect. Although more challenges lie ahead, their baby Sofia is now happily growing and bringing joy to their lives.

"No matter what, our children are gifts from God," Yvonne Alomía told NRL News, as Sofia cheerfully gurgled in the background. "We're only babysitting them. Only God can give and take away life."

The Alomías discovered their baby's heart problem at the end of the third month of pregnancy. Ultrasounds showed evidence of an enlarged heart, and an amniocentesis led to a diagnosis of 22q11.2 deletion syndrome.

The syndrome occurs when a small piece of chromosome 22 is missing, leading to various conditions, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine. Some of the common effects are heart defects, cleft palate, immune system disorders, and kidney problems.

The months between the diagnosis and Sofia's birth were extremely difficult for her parents, who were urged repeatedly to abort the baby. After a fetal heart echocardiogram, the cardiologist told Yvonne Alomía, "You're running out of time if you are going to terminate your pregnancy." While she responded that as a Catholic, she believed abortion violates one of the Ten Commandments, others continued to urge her toward abortion.

"They said the quality of life would not be good, the baby would not survive, we would suffer throughout the whole pregnancy, it would be too hard to care for a disabled baby," Alomía said. Despite such advice, they stood firm in their belief that their baby should be given a chance to live.

Even with their firm decision not to have an abortion, the Alomías still faced the wrenching decision about how to care for Sofia after birth. They spent much time praying about whether immediate surgery after birth might only cause Sofia pain without helping her survive. "In those last ultrasounds that we saw of Sofia's heart it appeared as if it occupied her entire chest cavity," Yvonne Alomía said, "so we concluded she would probably only live a few hours."

They scheduled a Caesarean section for January 24, and were planning to make Sofia comfortable and let her pass away peacefully. However, their plans changed on the morning of January 22 during morning Mass, when Alomía felt a strong contraction. Arriving at the hospital, the doctors decided to deliver the baby at 3 p.m. "Christians know the significance of that hour, when Jesus died on the cross for our sins," Alomía said.

"After Sofia was born they let my husband and mother-in-law hold her and we were scared and sad thinking she would die," Alomía recalled. "We immediately had her baptized."

But a Catholic neonatologist and a pro-life cardiologist spoke to the Alomías and urged them to agree to the surgery. The cardiologist told them, "I honestly can't find anything wrong with your baby besides her heart defect," Yvonne Alomía said. For the first time, they were able to hope that the treatment would be successful.

Sofia was flown to Children's Medical Center in Dallas and had surgery when she was three days old. Her heart was 30% enlarged, Alomía said, and she needed to have the valves replaced to help the blood flow normally.

After the operation, Sofia's oxygen levels decreased to dangerously low levels, and doctors began to lose hope that she would survive. The Alomías consulted with their bishop, who told them "make sure nothing else can be done," Yvonne Alomía recalled. "He offered Mass for us, and when we returned to the hospital we were told she was finally responding to the antibiotics." Sofia was on the path to recovery.

She remained in the hospital for two months, but was eventually able to return home to El Paso after her parents were taught how to insert her feeding tube and administer her medication.

Sofia faces several more operations, as her heart valves need to be replaced as she grows. But her family has a new appreciation of God's goodness and His will. "I do not think God has plans for her to die any time soon," Alomía said. "She almost died a few times but it is God's will that she lives, as she has a special purpose to fulfill."

Yvonne Alomía is determined to tell Sofia's story and spread the word that all life is precious and needs to be held sacred, no matter what the person's condition or challenges.

"Don't think that if a baby's not perfect you have the right to take away life," she said. "It may not always be easy to care for Sofia, but with God's grace we will make it. Every time we see her smile it gives us so much joy."