

PREEMIES TODAY

Families Helping Families

PREEMIE OF THE MONTH:

This month's preemie is Abigail Marie Sanderson, who proves that she is nobody's "fool." Here is her story as told by mom, Sarah.

Whenever I told anyone that my due date was April 1, they laughed and said, "Oh, April Fool's Day!" We had no idea what a joke that due date would turn out to be.

In late January, I began to feel what I thought were Braxton-Hicks contractions. I remember being surprised that something so intense was going to go on for the next two months, but it never occurred to me that they could be the real thing.

It wasn't until February 6, when I lost my mucous plug, that I finally called the doctor, who told me to get checked out at the hospital. I thought it was just a checkup, so we left lights on, didn't bring anything with us, and parked in a metered spot outside the hospital. I even apologized to the nurses for wasting their time as they gave me my hospital gown.

When I was finally hooked up to a contraction monitor, the nurse looked at me with concern. "Are you feeling anything?" she asked me. Unbeknownst to me, I was experiencing contractions about four minutes apart.

Next the midwife came in to do an internal examination. As she did the exam, tears came to her eyes. That was when I knew for the first time that something was wrong. "You're three centimeters dilated," she informed me.

The next two days passed in a blur. I was whisked to a room of my own, started on an IV of magnesium sulfate, injected with steroids for the baby's lungs, and introduced to the neonatologist. Contractions intensified, slackened, and then intensified again. Finally, on February 8, I was fully dilated. The magnesium sulfate line came out, the doctor broke my waters, and after 19 minutes of pushing, Abigail Marie entered the world. She was eight weeks early and weighed four pounds,

seven ounces.

I wish I could say that I instantly bonded with my new baby daughter or that I was immediately impressed by her fighting spirit, but in reality I was just overwhelmed and tired. The doctor put my baby in my arms for a few seconds, but she was already all bundled up and my only impression was of how small she seemed. The next time I saw her, she was



four hours old, lying naked under a heating lamp with monitor wires, IV, blood pressure cuff, oxygen meter, nasal prongs – all this paraphernalia that seemed to get in the way of me being with my child. I was allowed to stroke her toes for a few minutes before the nurses encouraged me to go back to my room and rest.

Gradually we learned the rhythms of the NICU and began to feel more at home there. Abigail developed and grew with no major setbacks. Along the way, we learned about CPAP, IV feeding, naso-gastric tube feeding, Grade I brain bleeds, apnea, jaundice, and other common preemie issues! Finally Abigail came home, on an apnea monitor and a few different medications, after three weeks

in the hospital.

Our first weeks at home were difficult as I struggled to transition Abigail from pumped breast milk to breast feeding "au naturale." Waking up every three hours to try breast feeding, then feed Abigail with a bottle, then put her back to bed, then pump, was even more exhausting than visiting her in the hospital had been. Complicating our problems was an undiagnosed case of reflux, which caused Abigail to wake up screaming whenever she was placed in a horizontal position. My husband and I tried switching off holding her upright on our chests throughout the night. It was a sleepless time for all of us.

People with older babies were always telling me, "It goes by so fast!" and I felt like telling them they were crazy. But as a matter of fact, it did go by fast- after we got through the first five months, that is! Those initial months of apnea monitor false alarms, breast feeding issues, constant reflux, colic, sleepless nights, and medications seemed like they would go on forever. But after the five month mark, we suddenly felt like we had a different baby on our hands.

The latter half of Abigail's first year, I feel like I was finally able to begin to enjoy having a baby. It has been a delight to watch her grow and develop. She is on track for all the developmental milestones according to her adjusted age, and she is at the 75th percentile for weight according to her actual age. More importantly, she is a happier baby. My mom says that she has "worked through" the trauma of her early beginning and put it behind her. I don't know about baby psychology, but I do know that we are starting to get in sync with one another! It is amazing to be so attuned to another human being that I know exactly what she wants and needs without her even using words. We are still breast feeding, and that is another daily joy. We are fortunate that those early preemie days can be just a dim memory.

Spring is in the air and that can only mean one thing. It is time for the March of Dimes Walk America!

Many of us at Premies Today remember Walk America vaguely from our elementary school days. Going door to door to get our neighbors to sponsor us and earning a t-shirt or poncho if we raised enough money. We felt good about helping, but it was more about hanging out with our friends for an afternoon than raising money. We quickly forgot the reason for the walk and the importance of the March of Dimes. It wasn't until years later when faced with the birth of a premature baby that we fully appreciated what the March of Dimes has done and does for millions of babies for over a half century.

The March of Dimes was established in 1938 to battle polio and in 1952 that battle was won with the development of the polio vaccine by Jonas Salk. This was just the beginning of the March of Dimes fight to save babies through research and education. The March of Dimes has now turned its efforts toward preventing premature birth as well as other causes of

infant mortality and birth defects. Since 1984, the March of Dimes has funded at least 200 grants related to low birthweight and prematurity totaling more than thirteen million dollars.

In addition to funding medical research, the March of Dimes also is committed to funding projects in the community. The March of Dimes, National Capital Chapter, has generously funded the Premies Today Newsletter since soon after its inception in 2003.

Walk America is the March of Dimes largest fundraising effort and support from all of us is critical to its success. Now is the time that we can help the March of Dimes in their mission to save babies by walking or sponsoring a Walk America walker.



Premies Today Walk America Team

For more information about Walk America, or to join the Premies Today family team please go to www.WalkAmerica.org.

All statical information and the full history of the March of Dimes can be found at their website, www.marchofdimes.com.

Book Review : Baby Steps: Exercises for Baby's First Year

Susan Fox, a pediatric neurodevelopmental therapist, has written a book with simple but fun exercises that help your baby from birth until they are walking. Although, I think the book is inappropriately titled since many of us know that few babies actually walk by 12 months. She does emphasize that all babies develop at their own rate, and many preemies and other special needs children may even take a little while longer to accomplish developmental milestones.

Each chapter starts by identifying the skills your baby needs to be able to accomplish the desired objective. She also includes lists of books, as well as toys and equipment that are geared towards that particular stage of development. Each chapter then ends with some frequently asked questions and parent stories (Several stories are experiences shared by preemie parents!) The chapter titles include: Calm and Comfort; I Can Hold My Head Up; I Can Roll Over; I Can Crawl; I Can Stand Up; I Can Walk; Feet, Feet, Feet; and Special Babies, Special Parents (This includes a section on preemies).

I applaud Susan Fox for writing such an easy to read book. I think any parent of a preemie developmentally delayed child, or a parent just wanting to enhance their child's development should read this book. I enjoyed doing these exercises with my daughter who was born at 26 weeks gestation, and I continue to use the same types of exercises with my youngest daughter who was born at term. All the activities are fun and my babies all have enjoyed playing with me!

Mary Beth Hazelgrove

Local News:

Announcements:

Preemies Today Annual Celebration and Silent Auction

This year's celebration will take place on May 21, 2006* at the Sully Government Center in Chantilly, VA. Come and enjoy our VIP area (for the Very Important Preemies), great food, and make your bid on some exciting auction items. We will be honoring our Health Professionals of the Year, Lynn Kuba and Donna Reed for all they do for families and premature infants. Proceeds from the Silent auction will help support our programs such as our NICU Welcome Home bags. We will also be donating 20% of the proceeds to a NICU in New Orleans affected by Hurricane Katrina. If you would like to help volunteer at the event or if you have an auction item you would like to donate please contact Deborah Leaf at deborah_leaf@yahoo.com.

*Please note that we have moved our Annual Celebration from March to May due to RSV season.

March of Dimes, Walk America

Please help the March of Dimes continue to save the lives of babies born prematurely by participating in WalkAmerica 2006. You can join the Preemies Today team by searching for Preemies Today under family teams when registering to walk at www.walkamerica.org. For more information on joining the Preemies Today team or to order a Preemies Today Walk America t-shirt contact Kathy at preemiestoday@yahoo.com.

Times and Places of this Year's Walk:

Leesburg, VA, <i>Ida Lee Park</i>	4/30/06
Manassas, VA, <i>Loy Harris Pavilion</i>	4/23/06
Reston, VA, <i>Lake Fairfax Park</i>	4/23/06
Springfield, VA, <i>Lake Anccotink Park</i>	4/23/06
Warrenton, VA, <i>Airlie Center</i>	4/30/06
Washington, DC, <i>Sylvan Theatre</i>	5/01/06

(Washington Monument grounds)

Support Groups:

Take a Break

Preemies Today offers meal preparation assistance, babysitting, and other additional support options for preemie families in crisis. If you are in need of assistance or would like to volunteer to help others, please contact Sara at sara@teamchae.com.

"A Friend to Talk to"

Our "Friend to Talk to" support line is up and running. Please feel free to give us a call and one of our preemie parent volunteers can offer you some much needed support. The support line telephone number is 703-552-0163, or toll free number at 1-888-712-3208.

NICU Support Group

INOVA Healthsource is continuing to offer a NICU Support group for NICU families at INOVA Fairfax. The meetings are held on the unit and vary month to month. The group is led by Lynn Kuba, RN and is a great opportunity to talk about your experience in the NICU. For more information contact INOVA Healthsource at 703-204-3366.

Preemies Today Online Chat

Join us every 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at 8:30 pm for an online chat. For more information contact Julie at jkipers@lmi.org

Local Support Groups

Local support groups are going strong! On the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 7:30 pm we hold our local support group meetings. For more information email preemiestoday@yahoo.com.

Yahoogroup!

Come and join our yahoogroup and meet some of our wonderful parents where you can exchange information on preemie parenting. You can subscribe at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PreemiesToday/>

Helpful Resources:

The following are some helpful resources available by phone and online:

Prince William County Social Services:
www.co.prince-william.va.us/csb/programsandservices/

Fairfax County Department of Family Services:
(703) 324-7500

www.co.fairfax.va.us/services/dfs/

Social Security Administration:
1-800-772-1213
www.ssa.org

SIDS Mid-Atlantic
(703) 933-9100
www.sidsma.org

March of Dimes
1-800-326-BABY
(703) 425-BABY (Metro DC)
www.marchofdimes.com

Sidelines National Support
1-888-447-4754
www.sidelines.org

Early Intervention/ Infant Toddler Connection

Fairfax County- (703) 246-7121
Alexandria- (703) 838-5060
Prince William- (703) 792-7879
Calvert County- (410) 535-1955
Arlington County- (703) 228-1630

WIC

Manassas- (703) 792-4703
Woodbridge- (703) 792-7319
Springfield (703) 569-1031
Mount Vernon (703) 660-7100
Fairfax- (703) 246-7100

For a list of online resources please go to:

www.PreemiesToday.com

Mission of Preemies Today:

Preemies Today is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to reach out and provide support to families of infants born prematurely beginning at birth and throughout childhood.

Vision: We will reduce the stress of caring for a child born prematurely by creating a network of families who offer help, comfort, and understanding to one another.

Values: We strive to promote compassion, inclusiveness, understanding and patience.

Membership/Subscription Information:

We offer the Premies Today newsletter, family outings, parent support groups, preemie playgroups, and “A Friend to Talk To,” our call-in line for parents and families of preemies. Membership in our organization is free.

For a free subscription to the newsletter please email us at premienewsletter@yahoo.com. If you would like to become a member of Premies Today please email us at premiemembership@yahoo.com. Our website is **www.PremiesToday.com**

In this Issue:

Preemie of the Month:
Abigail Marie Sanderson

Focus on:
March of Dimes Walk America

Local News:
Annual Celebration
and Silent Auction

This newsletter was funded by a Community Grant from the March of Dimes. This material is for information purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. The opinions expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the March of Dimes.

Premies Today
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Do you need to talk to someone
who understands the preemie
experience? If so, call the
“Friend to Talk to” line at
1-888-712-3208