



Marching Mommy: Big Battles, Bigger Miracles

Why FOX 35's Heidi Hatch walks for her son in the March of Dimes

It's time for the March of Dimes' "March for Babies." For me, it's not just another walk in the park; it's personal. I hope that my story will make you take it personally, too.

"Are you my cute mommy?" asks my inquisitive 3-year-old.
"Yup," I answer emphatically. "Are you my cute buddy?"
Before he can answer me, it's on to daddy.
"Are you my cute daddy?"

I can't help but smile at this conversation, no matter how many times he asks me and my husband this same question. I smile because I know it won't be long before he starts asking for my car keys.

His mess of blond hair and pale skin make him look like me. His smile and big blue eyes are a reflection of his daddy. If you look closely though, you'll notice a spider web of blue veins close to the surface of his porcelain skin. These are the same veins doctors and nurses used to feed and medicate him during his first few weeks of life.

My now gregarious three-year-old was born 10 weeks early. His nervous system was not fully developed. He suffered from what doctors

call "apnea bradycardia." For me and my husband it was a nightmare. Our baby boy was born so early his body didn't always remember to breathe on its own; his tiny little heart would sometimes forget to beat. Thanks to modern technology, a lot of love and prayers, he's with us today tormenting his big sister and quizzing his parents.

The weeks leading up to my son's birth were traumatic. I had preeclampsia, the leading cause of maternal and infant illness and death. No one knows what causes preeclampsia or how it can be cured. The only option to save the life of mom and baby is to deliver. I delivered at 30 weeks, and while I knew long before then that I was sick, my doctors almost didn't catch my preeclampsia. However, I'd been pregnant before and I knew this time was different. Not just because I was having a boy instead of a girl, but because I knew I didn't feel right.

My ankles were huge. Some women joke about



By Heidi Hatch

She can be seen weekday mornings on FOX 35 News from 7:00-9:00 a.m.

getting "cankles," but my ankles were the size of my thighs. If I pushed my finger into my leg, the indentation would stay. I didn't know it at the time, but my kidneys were shutting down and my body was swelling with the fluid my body could no longer process. My endless calls of concern to my OB-GYN were answered with: "don't stress out, pregnancy can do strange things to your body." The usual battery of tests that would pick up on preeclampsia came back negative. Science could not tell my doctors what I instinctively knew – I was not well and needed help.

It wasn't until after a small seizure at work and a trip to the grocery store blood pressure monitor, which confirmed that my blood pressure was off the charts, that I had something tangible to prove something was wrong. That day, my husband drove me to the doctor's office without an appointment. Apparently by then I didn't need one. I was rushed by ambulance to a hospital with a high-risk pregnancy unit. My doctors tried their best to delay delivery, but when my liver began to shut down, the only option was to induce.

In my baby's first few days and weeks of life, I cried for him and I cried for me. I cried when I had to leave my tiny little newborn in the care of strangers in the sterile environment of the NICU. In turn, I'd cry each time

I left the house. It broke my heart to leave behind my kindergartener who didn't understand why Mommy couldn't stay at home with her and why this new brother she'd waited so long for could not come home.

More than half a million babies are born preterm in the United States each year, and sadly the numbers are rising, not falling. In Florida 14 percent of all babies are born early. From 1996-2005 the numbers increased by 17 percent.

The effects of preterm birth can last a lifetime. As a mother of a preemie, I'm here to tell you that we should all care about this alarming epidemic. We owe it to our children to ensure that cerebral palsy, mental impairment, lung disease, hearing loss and blindness are not battles they'll have to face.

This will be my third year acting as honorary chair for the Central Florida March of Dimes' "March for Babies." The March of Dimes funds research to find a cure not just for preeclampsia, but the many causes of preterm birth. In the last year, The March of Dimes has led the way with new research on what causes preeclampsia. My hope is that if we all work together, someday all babies will have a fighting chance.

march of dimes

I hope you will join me and the FOX 35 team as we walk towards a cure. It's six miles of exercise, sunshine and good company. This year's walk is at Lake Lily Park in Maitland, April 25th at 8:00 a.m. Sign up at myfoxorlando.com

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