



“On Giving Back”

by
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On June 26, 2000, my husband and I said goodbye to our 4-day old daughter, Olivia Ascot Erlanger, born at 25-weeks gestation, and disconnected her from her oxygen machine. Holding her as she died was the most excruciating experience of our lives and, understandably, changed us forever. How could it not?

Four months after that tragic event, we were blessed to conceive, and in August 2001 gave birth to Julia, our beautiful baby girl. Our experience is not unique. Although the NICU death rate is very low, many families have lost babies in the unit. However, it seems a large percentage of those families-through faith, determination and the sheer desire to be parents-kept trying to become pregnant again. And, like us, were blessed with a child or many children.

Our sanity was preserved because we decided to channel our grief by giving back-and what better place to do that than at the NICU. Being part of the NICU family is certainly not something that any of us would have chosen. But I will say that in all my years in the entertainment business and beyond as a writer, I have never met a more soulful, loving and truly inspiring collection of human beings.

Last year, I joined Good Beginnings as its president-elect, which means I operate as the vice president and when Scott Choate completes his term in 2005, I can be elected to replace him. I had grave reservations about coming on board. My husband and I were already active in other areas, including supporting the NICU through other projects we had undertaken, but I saw such a need in the organization that I stepped forward to volunteer my time.

Being involved so closely with the NICU has been an incredibly satisfying experience. I feel that if I were to die tomorrow, I have, in a very small way, given back to the world and somehow made a positive difference.

When I came on board, it was shocking to see how little money this worthy organization had and how thin the volunteer base was. The organization has been operating in the red for many years, and it is usually the same group of people that co-chairs events and volunteers time and time again. So much so, that the organization suffers from a high rate of burnout. There are too few people doing too many things. Scott and I both started to feel the effects of that within months of being involved.

For this reason, we have revamped the by-laws of the organization to create a true high-level board of directors, separate from the executive committee, to oversee and chart the big-picture course of the organization. The officers of the organization, like myself, now will be part of the executive committee, which essentially runs the day-to-day operations of the support group. We will report to the board. We have also brought back a very important group, the advisory board. The advisory board will report to the board and will be comprised of people like you, people who may not have a lot of free time but have an expertise

that they can offer to the group on an as-needed basis to support our many programs, services and critical new fund-raising activities. Our objective in doing this was to broaden our base so that Good Beginnings has 30 or 40 people as a core team to help guide, support and direct this incredible and amazing organization. These people will ensure that Good Beginnings will be here in years to come to help other families through a difficult and emotional time.

If you have a skill, an expertise, a talent or a passion that you would like to donate to the organization, we really would like to hear from you. We have parents, for example, in the graphic design trade, who this year helped us design and print Good Beginnings brochures. We might only need help two or three times a year, but your volunteer efforts are an enormous help to the organization. Currently, we are in dire need of an accountant to join our executive committee. Skye Howzdy, who had been our wonderful treasurer for several years, sadly passed away this fall. We also need to get our Website up and running and very much need people to help two wonderful parents who are currently working on this. We are seeking people who have expertise and experience in grant-writing, to help us identify and apply for grants that could help us achieve our many goals. Lastly, we are in need of volunteers to help plan this year's Forever in our Hearts memorial event, which Heidi Swan and I will be co-chairing. The advisory board will have general meetings three times a year, and then it will be a matter of lending your services for a particular initiative or event as you choose. Whether you would like to volunteer for a committee or join the advisory board, you can be of service. You can donate as little as two hours a year and still be of incredible service to the group. To find out more, contact Dorothy Williams.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the executive committee to thank the small, dedicated group of volunteers who have worked tirelessly to keep this organization alive -- who have done so with little glamour or broad recognition for their efforts. They have done so because they wanted to contribute to an organization that had helped them in their time of need.

We have many exciting programs that we are developing to expand and improve current Good Beginnings services, as well as add critical new ones. Please join us in our effort so that every NICU family gets the best beginning Good Beginnings can offer. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Fernanda Erlanger
Vice President
Good Beginnings