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'The Tiniest Warrior of All': A Fairytale story For Parents and Siblings of a 'Baby Born Too Soon'

TORONTO, ONTARIO--(CCNMatthews - June 3, 2005) -

The Tiniest Warrior of All
By Nicola JD Maher
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According to recent statistics, 1 in every 8 babies in the developed world is born prematurely - that's one every 11 minutes. The cost to the health care system is immense. Most experts agree that premature and low birth weight births are the 3rd most expensive condition treated in hospitals for people of any age.

Yet it is not just the financial cost that is staggering - it's the emotional trauma that is faced by an ever-increasing number of North American families, who find that their joy and anticipation of a new child is suddenly shattered with the arrival of a baby born too soon.

"You find yourself permanently living on the cutting edge of terror," notes Mississauga, Ontario resident and mother, Nicola JD Maher. Her daughter, Imogen Rose Day Maher was born on 11 February 2003 at Women's College Hospital in Toronto. She weighed only 685g, or 1 lb 8 ozs - and was so tiny she could fit in her father John's hand.

Her chances for survival were bleak, but she was alive -- and therein began her four-month struggle in the hospital's NICU. Nicola and her husband John were constantly by her side, but because she arrived in the midst of the global SARS crisis with Toronto as its centre, her two young children were not allowed to visit.

"While my husband and I were struggling with our own emotions, we also had to try to explain things to Henry and Lydia," then aged 8. The fairytale story she invented for them was of a tiny "Warrior Princess" literally fighting the battle of her life.

The story ended up providing the entire family a framework of hope and understanding that would carry them through the next four months. "I'd take daily events in the hospital, such as a new medical procedure, and put it in the context of this fairytale story. I couldn't find anything else that helped to explain, in an emotional or spiritual way, the battle my tiny child was involved in," she notes of her own journey.

That's why Nicola has now released the story in her new book, *The Tiniest Warrior of All*, a fairytale for kids and grownups alike that explores the twilight world of a baby born too soon. "My hope is that it can help the parents to open a discussion with their children on the battle that their newest sibling is immersed in. Any parent is emotionally overwhelmed at this time, and it can be tremendously difficult to try to explain to a young child both

the good things and the bad things that might happen."

"The nurses at the hospital told me that many parents talk about writing a book about their experience with a premature child. I decided to do it."

The Tiniest Warrior of All is being launched at Lifebeat, a one-of-a-kind variety show by healthcare professionals, which takes place nightly on June 8th through 11th at the Premier Dance Theatre in Toronto. Performances will feature doctors, occupational and physical therapists, nurses, and administrators from Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre, Toronto's teaching and community hospitals as well as the University of Toronto. Audiences will be treated to dynamic instrumental and vocal performances in classical music, jazz, rock and roll, blues, pop and folk music.

All proceeds from the event will support the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Sunnybrook & Women's.

For information and regular and gala tickets, please contact the Premier Dance Theatre Box Office at (416) 973-4000.

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