

media watch

by Patricia Nicholson

Preemie's tale a resource for families

Canadian children's book aids discussion of difficult topic

THE STORY OF A BABY called Imogen, born at Women's College Hospital in Toronto in 2003 weighing just 685 grams, has become a fairy tale for both children and adults in a book called *The Tiniest Warrior of All*.

During Imogen's four-month stay in a neonatal intensive care unit, her mother, Nicola Maher, invented a fairy tale framework to help explain the baby's struggle for life to the other children in the family. Maher decided to share that story—which chronicles a tiny warrior princess's battle for life—in order to help families of premature babies discuss an emotionally difficult situation.

The book, published by Oblio Press, is available online at www.tiniestwarrior.com.

A beautiful mind

A *Maclean's* cover story titled "Are you ready for your mental makeover?" (June 20) heralds the age of cosmetic neurology—an era in which problems ranging from shyness to forgetfulness are solved with pharmaceuticals. The article looks at the escalating use of psychotropic drugs, and what the trend implies about our values, our ethics, and what does and doesn't fall under the banner of health care.

Ritalin (methylphenidate) isn't just kid stuff anymore—it's all grown up, and in demand by college students needing a boost to get them through all-nighters at exam time. SSRIs still treat major depression, but can also help people cope with social anxiety. New research indicates that amphetamines may have the potential to enhance motor skills. So why be forgetful, shy or clumsy when you can take a pill?

One source estimates that one-fifth to one-quarter of Canadians are taking a psychotropic drug. In addition to seeking treatment for medical conditions, more and more patients may be seeking treatment for the human condition. The trend—which generated 45 million prescriptions last year—is fuelled by patients' willingness to view unpleasant feelings and states of mind as treatable conditions, an expanding view of health care that includes improving quality of life as well as treating illness, and consumer-targeted marketing campaigns that spill over the U.S. border into Canada.

This type of mental and emotional enhancement is compared to the esthetic improvement now available through cosmetic surgery. But another comparison might be to the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sports: Some of these drugs are quite effective, but their use influences not only the individual but also the sport, and potentially culture and how it values athletic accomplishment.

Fries with that?

In the film *Supersize Me*, Morgan Spurlock documented the sharp decline in his health after eating nothing but fast food for one month. Spurlock's campaign against overeating and poor nutrition has been expanded into print with *Don't Eat This Book: Fast food and the supersizing of America*, in which the author explores the continued popularity of drive-thru dining, as well as the growing

girth and plummeting health of Americans. Rather than just ambling up to the counter and asking for fries with that, Spurlock approaches the topic from several perspectives, including marketing and medicine.

Incredible shrinking governor Spurlock isn't alone in drawing attention to the health risks of obesity, poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle. Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee was once part of the problem, but is now part of the solution.

In 2002, Huckabee was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. He weighed 280 pounds, viewed the deep fryer as haute cuisine, and might have got winded by jogging his memory. In 2003, he had a heart disease scare.

Since then, Huckabee has embraced a healthy diet, lost 110 pounds, recently ran his first marathon and published a book called *Quit Digging Your Grave With a Knife and Fork*.

In an interview with *Salon*, Huckabee discussed the program he is launching with former U.S. president Bill Clinton

to halt the rise of childhood obesity by 2010. Some of the changes he's making in Arkansas include measuring kids' body mass index at school, a ban on junk food in elementary schools and offering a discount on health insurance to state employees who have their health risks assessed. The governor also talked about the stigma of being overweight, and how blame and guilt won't solve the problem.

