

BY LOUISE COBB
PHOTO BY ERIC MYER

How twin boys' difficult beginnings brought a family together to champion continuing education in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Two Miracles and a Bundle

For many new parents, pregnancy and the birth of their first child are among the happiest and most memorable experiences of their lives. For Jill and Andrew Rosenfeld, this was a time filled with fear and uncertainty. Their journey started in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, as they desperately hoped their twin boys would survive. The inspiring efforts of the medical staff who painstakingly fought to save their lives led the family's grandparents to embark on a journey of their own.

Jill, a woman with a warm smile in her early 30s, was in the sixth month of her high-risk pregnancy with twins when she was ordered on bed rest due to a pre-existing clotting disorder. Soon after, her condition worsened, and she was hospitalized.

Her twin boys, Jack and Sam, were delivered on August 28, 2006, via cesarean section at only 27 weeks; each weighed less than two pounds.

Lori Rousso, the twins' grandmother, remembers the trying times Jack and Sam spent in the NICU all too well. "The boys were literally transparent and we couldn't really touch them or hold them. They were just so fragile. It was not a pretty time."

The boys battled unthinkable circumstances, especially Jack, who, at 3 days old, endured surgery for intestinal perforations and later double hernias; he also fought a life-threatening bacterial infection.

"Preemies are so small, it's unbelievable what the doctors in the NICU are able to do to save their lives," Jill says.

After 84 grueling days in the hospital, Jill and Andrew were able to bring their sons home just before Thanksgiving. They and the boys' grandparents, Lori and David Rousso and Brenda and David Rosenfeld, couldn't have been happier. Lori and David immediately laid the groundwork to establish an education fund to foster continuing education for

physicians, nurses, and all medical staff working in the NICU. The endowment fund, which they hope will grow with the support of other families and supporters, was named after their grandchildren: The Learning Tree Endowment of Cedars-Sinai—to support the academic enrichment of the NICU staff, established by Lori and David Rousso, loving grandparents of Jack and Sam Rosenfeld.

"Without the talent and dedication of the doctors and nurses in the NICU, our grandchildren would not be alive," says David. "The care they received was superb and we knew we had to find a meaningful way to show our support of Cedars-Sinai and the NICU."

According to Charles F. Simmons, Jr., MD, who heads the Division of Neonatology, Cedars-Sinai is "an incubator for new ideas in neonatal care." Cedars-Sinai's focus on education and training, paired with the large number of patients with diverse medical needs, allows for excellent learning and research opportunities in the NICU. The neonatology division conducts weekly clinical conferences and educational activities for its staff. Additionally, neonatal-perinatal medicine fellows have the opportunity to train in a combination of clinical areas including clinical perinatal, fetal, and neonatal medicine, as well as various areas of perinatal research.

While continuing education and the academic enrichment of the entire staff is a keystone of the Medical Center's mission, the convergence of established programs and private support can have a significant impact.

"The more education the NICU staff receives, the better care they will be able to provide to patients and their families," says David. "There can be a lot of heartbreak in the NICU. Parents need good medical information and strong emotional support from the staff because the

of Joy

stress is so intense.”

The fund established by the Roussos will facilitate further communication about emerging technologies, care, and preventive mechanisms for improving newborn healthcare in the future.

Dr. Simmons was delighted to see this type of fund established.

“This will allow us to bring thought leaders from around the world to Cedars-Sinai,” he explains.

In addition to his role as director of the Division of Neonatology, Dr. Simmons serves as chairman of the Department of Pediatrics. His expertise as an educator is widely recognized. He has trained hundreds of leaders in perinatal medicine worldwide over the past 20 years. Gaining expertise as an educator at Harvard-affiliated medical centers in Boston, he served as the director of Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine at Children’s Hospital Boston.

“Certain special people like the Roussos have the right idea about how they can help healthcare beyond just how their own family has been impacted,” says Dr. Simmons. “We are very grateful for that.”

Today, Jack and Sam are happy, healthy two-and-a-half-year-old boys, who take care of each other, laugh and play, and whose cheerful nature is downright infectious. “They have the most incredible personalities, they are constantly laughing and having fun,” says their dad, Andrew. “They persevered through so much, I think, and



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—DAVID ROUSSO (TOP RIGHT) AND FAMILY

it’s made them capable of doing whatever they want.”

As with most toddlers, every day is met with wide-eyed curiosity and brings new experiences. For Lori and David Rouso, every minute they spend with their grandsons is something precious. They hope many other families from the NICU will get the opportunity to experience similar joy. ■

For more information on supporting the fund, please contact Ellen Cheney at (323) 866-6890.