



The Parent Paper

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*"When your perfect pregnancy results in a premature baby, it's totally unexpected and we are completely unprepared for any of it. It's a physical, emotional and spiritual roller coaster. The new normal for parents includes ringing bells and alarms, life-saving equipment, difficult conversations with numerous healthcare providers and a tremendous amount of unknowns. This new normal is largely what I address in **Preemie Parents** – giving ideas to grow through the experience."*

- Tami C. Gaines, author of *Preemie Parents*

Q&A

preemie babies

How parents can grow with them

BY MARY VALLO

*Pregnate women don't expect to give birth prematurely, but it happens. I suggested to Tami C. Gaines, the mother of four children (including premature twins born at just 25 weeks). With an M.S.W. from Columbia University and 25 years as an entrepreneur and executive, Tami did not foresee the events that would take her from the board room to the hospital room. But the birth of her premature twin was a journey that brought forth her new book, *Preemie Parents: 26 Ways to Grow With Your Premature Baby* (www.PreemieParents.com). In it, she helps other parents of premature babies learn to cope – in the NICU – by opening their hearts to learning life's lessons. The Parent Paper spoke to Tami in a recent e-mail conversation.*

Why did you write the book?

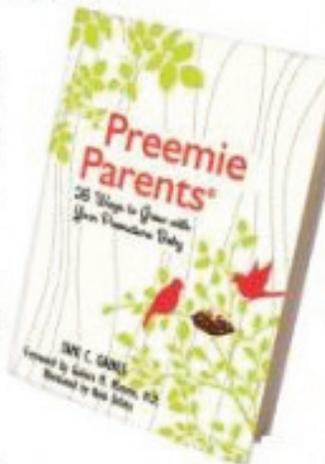
I had such a long journey in the NICU with my twins – 18 months in the hospital with my son before he came home. It was an emotional roller coaster that I learned how to deal with very quickly. The doctors, nurses and even other parents encouraged me to write the book to help other parents and caregivers cope with this unexpected experience. The idea of helping other parents of premature babies inspired me to write the book.

What is the hardest part of the preemie parent's journey?

Embracing the new "normal." When your perfect pregnancy results in a premature baby, it's totally unexpected and we are completely unprepared for any of it. It's a physical, emotional and spiritual roller coaster. The new normal for parents includes ringing bells and alarms, life-saving equipment, difficult conversations with numerous healthcare providers and a tremendous amount of unknowns. This new normal is largely what I address in *Preemie Parents* – giving ideas to grow through the experience.

What is the best thing you can do for your tiny baby?

Be an unwavering, committed and empowered advocate for him. Advocating under these circumstances is extremely dif-



Author: Tami C. Gaines

cult. It requires a level of emotional detachment so that you can effectively gather information, ask the right questions and make the right decisions for your baby.

What is the best thing you can do for the rest of the family?

Every family is different, so I can only speak to what I did for my family ... in this case, I was going through a divorce and dealing with two babies in the NICU. My focus was my two kids at home. Remember also, that I was on bed rest in the hospital for five weeks before I had the twins. My two older kids were having a really difficult time – they were bombarded. I taught them both, through example and through words, the importance of living in the moment. We practiced not thinking about the past, not worrying about the future, just living in this moment, right now. By teaching them to be present, we all learned that the real power is in this very moment. We all became very grateful for every moment that the twins lived. Those moments became days and those days became weeks and here we are today. I love to hear my kids tell their friends, "Just be in this very moment!"

How can others help a preemie family?

Looking back on my journey, I can give you three big ways that would have helped me: (1) Sometimes it's best just to listen and not speak. Unless you've been through the experience of having a premature baby, there's not much you can say to help. (2) Do the stuff that we never had like doing under good circumstances – laundry, grocery shopping, cleaning, cooking. Just do it, don't ask. And, (3) Give them a copy of *Preemie Parents*. I know it would help anyone going through the NICU experience.

How are your children faring now?

I always say that all of my kids are always amazing ... simply because they're here! My two older kids are back in balance and thriving. They've learned things that I could have never taught them. We just celebrated the twins' 5th birthday. My daughter, the older twin who came home after four months in the NICU, is brilliant, funny, charming and loves and lives every moment of every day. Her twin brother is a warrior. He wasn't supposed to make it out of the hospital, but he's here. He still has a track, is on oxygen, primarily eats through a G-tube and has many developmental delays. For example, he doesn't speak. Despite all of that, he's wildly intelligent, is a happy kid, loves his family and loves a challenge. He always rises to them. In fact, he tends to surprise everyone, including himself! ☺

