



From the March of Dimes Cleveland County Ambassador Family ...

Spencer at 2-weeks old

Our first personal experience with the March of Dimes came at last spring's WalkAmerica in Norman, less than a year after our son Spencer was born. Today, we're writing to thank you and to encourage your continued support for this wonderful organization.

In August 2002, Spencer's due date was still three months away. We hadn't picked a crib, settled on a name, or even begun to prepare "the baby's room" when we found ourselves in the hospital with unexplained pre-term labor. Our scheduled classes on pre-natal care and childbirth became crash courses on neo-natal ICUs and survivability chances.

We were able to prolong labor for three precious weeks until the contractions became unstoppable and ***Spencer came into the world on August 19th – ten weeks early.*** He couldn't breathe on his own and relied on machines to get him through his first few days. After a month of care in the NICU, surfactant therapy to help develop his tiny lungs and a blood transfusion, Spencer made it to four pounds. He came home a few weeks later and spent the next six months confined to our home and away from otherwise-ordinary illnesses that can be devastating for premies. With care and support from many of Oklahoma's finest people, he's overcome any lasting effects of prematurity and is a healthy and vibrant one-year-old.

Spencer's story is not uncommon. Each year, nearly half a million babies are born prematurely in our country. ***Half a million.*** Transfusions, feeding tubes, ventilators and a wrenching nightly separation are a fact of life for many of them and their families. In Oklahoma, one out of eight babies are born too soon. Many aren't as fortunate as Spencer. Their first weeks in the world are nothing less than a fight for survival. Our tiniest babies often endure numerous surgeries and long-lasting complications. ***Some never make it home.***



Spencer today.

The rate of prematurity has skyrocketed in recent years, and the medical community is still searching for the causes. But tomorrow's babies have hope – and a champion – in the March of Dimes.

Thanks to the hard work and support of volunteers like you, we will overcome this explosion in pre-term labor and premature births. No organization has a proven track record like the March of Dimes. Polio and neural tube birth defects once seemed just as scary as today's prematurity epidemic, but these threats were met head-on by the March of Dimes and stopped in their tracks. We have every reason to believe that, through time and a tenacious effort from all of us, the prematurity epidemic will be defeated too.

Whether you're involved in WalkAmerica, or donating your time and resources to the March of Dimes, we can't thank you enough for fighting alongside our tiniest little fighters. For today's and tomorrow's babies, and their families, you are nothing less than a hero.

God Bless You,

***Derek, Jenifer & Spencer Arndt
Norman, Oklahoma***