

BABY MAGIC

Told by Allan Luks

Adapted from his book *The Healing Power of Doing Good*, written with
Peggy Payne

Twelve years ago, Lynn was suffering from chronic back pain. No matter what she did, the pain just wouldn't go away. One day she found herself lying in traction in a hospital bed, listening to her doctor recommend surgery. Lynn listened carefully and thought about her options. She'd heard about a program where people learned how to cope with stress and control most back problems. Lynn decided against the surgery, opting to join the program instead. She found that the relaxation techniques did help ease the pain, but the periodic flare-ups continued—until she began to help with the babies.

At first Lynn didn't think she would have the time. She lived a full and fast-paced life. In addition to being a wife and mother of two teenagers, she carried heavy professional responsibilities. As the director of a private preschool, she worried about competing for students, pleasing worried parents, and placating her school's supervisors. It seemed her schedule couldn't hold another thing, but it did.

Now, once a week after work, Lynn takes a fifteen-minute walk to the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine in a nearby urban medical center. There she puts on gloves and a bright yellow sterile gown, and for the next two hours she holds, feeds, and diapers new babies who have no one else to care for them. Most days, Lynn arrives to find ten

babies in the room, four being fed and the rest crying. They are so small that it sounds more like the meowing of kittens. Some of the babies, abandoned by drug-addicted mothers, are shaking with withdrawal symptoms. Many were born outside of a hospital, to mothers without medical care. Here they sleep in metal cribs, each tagged with a sticker displaying a name and a few statistics.

Even with all of their problems, these babies are uncommonly beautiful. Their huge eyes and little bodies remind Lynn how precious and fragile life really is. She leans over a waist-high crib and picks up a baby. Today it is Madison, a tiny, dark-skinned, seven-day-old baby boy. He is awaiting the results of a drug test, then placement in a foster home. She can feel his tiny bones in her hands. *It's so scary to hold some of them*, Lynn thinks as she cradles him. As they rock back and forth, Madison latches onto a bottle with surprising vigor. When he is finished, she gently pats him to sleep and puts him to bed. Someone brings in a new baby, half an hour old, big, pink, and howling. This little linebacker looks so unusually healthy, he makes the others seem even smaller. Next to him, Sanchez, born with heart and liver problems, lies helpless in an incubator. At birth, Sanchez weighed a little over two pounds.

Leaning over to pick up another, Lynn makes no effort to protect her back. Dupree has curly black hair and features that look almost grown-up. He is two weeks old and trembling, sometimes faintly, sometimes in shudders that move through his whole body. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Lynn whispers as she holds his little body.

Lynn spends her entire two hours in the nursery, lifting and lowering

babies, feeding and diapering. When she arrived, her back had been a little stiff, but the pain has vanished. As she gets her coat to leave the hospital, she notices her hands still smell of babies. “Baby magic,” she says, taking a sniff. “Baby magic has changed my life.”

A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on.

CARL SANDBURG

Discover the joy and experience the healing of holding babies. Call your local hospital volunteer program and ask how you can join their volunteer program, helping out in their nursery.