

Saving Grace

How “A Night of Hope” Became a Strategy for Progress

Motivation



Awards



Fun



When Jaime Nolan lost her daughter, Grace Ann, she was determined not to let the meaning of her life end there.

Born at 27 weeks after Jaime’s sudden onset of severe preeclampsia, Grace only survived eight days while her mother fought for her life in the intensive care unit. When Grace went into cardiac arrest, Joe Nolan watched the doctor standing over his daughter’s isolette, performing chest compressions with his thumb.

Jaime discovered the Preeclampsia Foundation online and found a network of support that helped her work through her grief. Determined to help prevent others from enduring such a painful loss, she reached out to the Foundation and found out they were in need of an annual fundraiser.

Jaime gathered a local group of volunteers and chaired what she thought would be a one-time gala in Minneapolis. At the same time she was helping with the first national walk-a-thon, which was expected to become the Foundation’s annual fundraiser.

The “Saving Grace” gala was held in November 2005 and the tremendously moving event raised more than \$57,000. The Nolans were asked if the Foundation could make the gala an annual event and they were honored that *Saving Grace – A Night of Hope* has become a signature event.



Joe and Jaime Nolan, gala founders



Saving Grace History

- 2005 Minneapolis, MN
- 2006 San Francisco, CA
Mark Hopkins Hotel
- 2007 Boston, MA
Omni Parker House
- 2008 Washington, DC
Omni Renaissance
- 2009 Chicago, IL
Renaissance Chicago
- 2010 Seattle, WA
Fairmont Hotel
- 2011 Manhattan, NY
Hilton New York

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The World Health Organization's "Art4Health" exhibit made a stop in Washington, DC, for the 2008 Saving Grace gala. Coordinated to coincide with the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy biennial World Congress, the gala attracted physician-scientists from around the world.

Each year the gala rotates among major cities, increasing national awareness of the disorder and taking advantage of the relationships and synergies present in the host city.

Eleni Tsigas, executive director of the Foundation and chair of the 2008 gala in Washington, D.C. said the D.C. site was selected to coincide with the annual meeting of the World Congress of the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy and to increase awareness among legislators.

"It connected us to an international agenda," she said. "And it gave us an opportunity to reach out to Capitol Hill and begin advocacy and public policy efforts."

Last year's Saving Grace, held in Seattle, honored the Foundation's 10-year anniversary, its historical roots in that city, and its newly broadened global health agenda. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was recognized, not just for its generous support of the Preeclampsia Foundation, but for its heightened attention to the profound global impact of preeclampsia. There, the Gates Foundation announced a \$7 million, five-year grant for preeclampsia. Attendees were given a just-released publication, *Preeclampsia: A Decade of Perspective / Building a Global Call to Action*, produced by the Preeclampsia Foundation.

With each gala, there is one constant: telling the powerful stories that put a face on preeclampsia, told through video, photos and accompanied by

renowned musicians playing "Amazing Grace." The stories connect the guests, whether they're survivors and their families, researchers, members of the medical community or someone with no previous experience with the pregnancy disorder.

"The combination of all these people who care or are being touched for the first time leads to a very inspiring evening," Eleni said.

When Jill Siegel coordinated the 2009 event in Chicago, she was worried about raising money in a shattered economy. There were gaps in sponsorships and donations. She asked survivors to write their stories and ask for donations of support so they could be included in a special commemorative program, an effort that netted nearly \$7,500.

One of the most touching moments of the evening was 13-year-old Christopher Lee's testimony. There was not a dry eye in the elegantly lit room as he portrayed the



Survivor Christine Meola supports her son

“Please say yes,” read the email’s subject line. J&J Chairman and CEO Bill Weldon replied.

unique perspective of a child born of a harrowing preeclamptic pregnancy who now lives as a “differently abled” survivor.

“It is so important we tell our stories,” said Jill, an active volunteer for the Foundation. “Statistics may be hard to remember, but you won’t forget the stories and if you remember them, you can share them with others and if you share them with others you can save lives. That’s one of the key roles *Saving Grace* plays.”

And sometimes those stories are caught in unforgettable moments. Lauren Larsen was attending the first gala in Minneapolis when her 5-year-old daughter, Clare, walked up to Eleni with a month’s worth of her “giving money,” pressing four \$1 bills into her hand.

“I thought I’d cry on the spot,” Lauren said.

When Lauren was asked to chair the 2006 gala in San Francisco, she didn’t feel prepared for the role but a bold move allowed her to double the previous year’s sponsorships. The motivational speaker gave talks for Johnson & Johnson and decided to e-mail the chairman and CEO, asking if he’d like to co-chair. The subject line read “Please say yes.” William Weldon agreed and his company became the lead sponsor, helping to bring in \$252,000 in gross revenue that year.



William Weldon, Chairman & CEO, Johnson & Johnson

“The night just came together and it was amazing, people laughing, people crying, people having their hearts touched,” she said.

Jaime Nolan coordinated the gala again in 2007 with co-chair Leslie Weeks. It was held in Boston, in a small room that forced an intimacy unusual among charity galas. Jill Siegel’s personal story of survival and the keynote address from luminary Dr. Benjamin Sachs weren’t delivered like rehearsed speeches but more like living room conversations.

“It felt as if they were personally

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Friends and Corporate Partners Have Played a Pivotal Role in Saving Grace Success

Corporate sponsors such as Beckman Coulter and Ortho Clinical Diagnostics have contributed not only financial support, but rallied their employees to participate in internal company fundraising events.

Other sponsors such as Glenveigh Medical, BAS Medical (now Novartis), Roche, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Fark, Pediatrix, Abbott, and, of course, our Life of Hope sponsor Johnson & Johnson, have been great supporters, along with many others.



Scott & Susan Garrett



Roy Davis

At each *Saving Grace*, a specific programmatic need is identified; enthusiastic and generous audience participation raises the necessary funds. This often follows a fun and “wildly” successful live auction, ably led by our longtime friends at Fladeboe Auctions. The crowd bids high for travel, artwork and a variety of “experiences.” Employer matching programs have also become a strong factor in the gala’s fundraising success. ❖

connected with each person there,” Leslie said.

Maybe that’s what led to a moment that still gives Eleni chills. During the auction there was a pledge drive and as it was nearing to a close, a man stood up and asked what the total was. It was quickly calculated at about \$20,000. He challenged the guests – if they could reach \$30,000, he would match it. Bid cards were flying and the goal was reached within minutes.

“I was flying around the room, with tears in my eyes, trying to get bid numbers,” Eleni recalled.



Patrick Jeffries challenges attendees to match his \$30,000

And Jaime remembers the tears too, while standing at the podium, thinking about her daughter’s legacy, one that has led to raising \$1,137,748 to support the Foundation’s mission.

“While I know that the event is not about Grace herself, it was through her that the event was created and has been able to touch so many,” she said. ❖

The Impact of Saving Grace Continues

After six years, Saving Grace has become the signature gala event for the Foundation, with the rare combination of inspiration, emotional “reality-check”, entertainment, and ability to bring together key stakeholders in the field, but also one of our primary sources of funding. Proceeds from Saving Grace support much of our basic research and education programs – critical strategies toward realizing our vision of eliminating preeclampsia as a life-threatening complication of pregnancy. This evening has become a critical strategy for the Foundation’s financial sustainability – and thus *our* “saving grace.” In addition, the name reflects how often the Foundation has been the “saving grace” for so many affected families.

Now, new programs on the horizon such as establishing a national preeclampsia registry, launching a “closed claims” analysis project and broadening our international agenda, will be dependent on our ability to grow Saving Grace into a larger, more prosperous fundraiser, while still maintaining its core value as an awareness-building and advocacy event. ❖



Julie Feller reacts to a compelling speaker

Two organizations fighting together for mothers and babies

This year, the Preeclampsia Foundation has invited another non-profit organization, the Foundation for America’s Blood Centers, to co-host *Saving Grace – A Night of Hope and Gratitude*, creating a powerful collaboration between two complementary and vital organizations delivering solutions for mothers and babies. Preeclampsia – one of the oldest known and still perplexing disorders of pregnancy – remains one of the leading causes of mothers and babies dying around the world. New moms and babies represent one of the major patient groups in need of life-saving blood transfusions. All monies raised will be shared equally between the two organizations. ❖

Saturday, November 12, 2011 | Hilton New York | www.preeclampsia.org

Together...



...we can save lives.