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R Baby's Life: How One Family's Loss Became A Foundation For Saving Newborns Everywhere



Founders Andrew and Phyllis Rabinowitz

On July 13, 2006, Phyllis and Andrew Rabinowitz gave birth to their second child—a daughter, Rebecca Ava. Born four weeks early, Rebecca spent the first five days of her life in the neonatal intensive care unit before being released as a healthy baby girl. The following day she developed an audible wheeze, was severely congested, and continued to feed slowly. Multiple times the Rabinowitzes rushed their daughter to the pediatrician's office and emergency room, where she was diagnosed as contracting a common cold. Rebecca died on July 21 from Coxsackie, an enteroviral infection of the stomach. She was nine days old.

Rebecca could be alive today had the virus been detected, but unfortunately the misdiagnosis instead left Phyllis and Andrew Rabinowitz, COO of Marathon Asset Management LLC, a \$9 billion multi-strategy hedge fund group, devastated, angry, and determined to make a difference. They created R Baby Foundation, a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to helping newborn babies with often-misunderstood viral infections receive the highest quality of medical care through education, research, treatment, training, and life-saving equipment.

“As I started to study what happened to Rebecca, I then started looking more generally at how many other families have experienced what we've experienced, and I was surprised by the statistics,” says Rabinowitz, 36, in an interview. According to WebMD, up to 30,000 families in the United States alone experience a death of a baby—20,000 of which are in the first 28 days of life. Furthermore, the United States ranks 36 out of 196 nations worldwide in infant mortality rates, with infants twice as likely to die than in many other developed countries, reports the World Health Organization.

Before creating R Baby Foundation, Rabinowitz considered seeking change by joining a pre-existing charity, but he says that none seemed to be “on-point” with the problem at hand. “I don't want to say I felt it was my obligation,” says Rabinowitz

about deciding to start his own non-profit organization, “but I felt it was the right thing to do to increase awareness for other expecting parents and to raise money to make this medical issue understood much better than it is and has been.”

R Baby Foundation quickly gained traction on Wall Street with the support of Rabinowitz's colleagues and friends. A community of powerful and passionate individuals, they identified with Rebecca's story, because they themselves were parents, grandparents, or had even experienced a similar scare. Rabinowitz's firm met early on with John Mack, CEO of Morgan Stanley, who was very supportive and introduced Rabinowitz to Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital of New York-Presbyterian. Commerce Bank, Lehman Brothers, and Goldman Sachs jumped on board, forming what Rabinowitz refers to as “the spearhead.” They allowed for the financial support, and then the Rabinowitzes formed an esteemed medical board that offered further guidance.

Since the first donation in December 2006, R Baby Foundation has already raised \$2.7 million thanks to generous backers, celebrity recognition, and a sold-out fundraising gala held in May at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York City.

“Charity is about passion—and Phyllis, the board, and I are all very passionate about R Baby. I spent every available moment when I was not at work or not with my son working on it. I guess personally it was trying to find enough time and hours in a day, because it was definitely a full-time job along with work and being a father,” explains Rabinowitz. “I think with most new start-ups, it's the financial resources that are the greatest challenge, and we were very lucky with our corporate sponsors to get R Baby underway.”

R Baby Foundation's multifaceted goals involve parents, doctors, hospitals, and politicians. “Parents need to be aware of the frailty of newborns and treat illnesses with a sense of urgency,” says



Andrew, Kelly Ripa, and Phyllis



Phyllis and Mr. G

Rabinowitz. “But we also need to send a message to the medical community saying sometimes parents do know best, and although we may not be doctors, some members of the medical community have to do a better job of listening to parents.”

In May, Senate President Richard J. Cody of New Jersey became the first senator to rally with R Baby Foundation. He introduced a bill legislating that all state children’s hospitals must have a pediatric emergency physician present during all shifts in the pediatric emergency room. Future legislative goals also include mandating that babies under six months being seen in emergency rooms receive a blood test—something the Rabinowitzes requested but were denied—and tort reform for insurance companies. Rabinowitz’s passion lies in the political arena, because “those changes are going to have the most meaningful impact.”

A baby’s life is capped at \$250,000 in New York, New Jersey, and many other states, yet hospitals have been known to pay millions in non-death-related lawsuits. “That’s not right,” says Rabinowitz, “because we’re sending the message that we don’t care about newborns by having that disparity.” He continues, “As a parent I can tell you that I would gladly give my right arm for my daughter. And I bet you if you ask most parents, they would do the same.”

The charity also plans to work with parents nationally to create chapters of the foundation—a program affectionately named “Adopt R Baby.” Many families throughout the United States have contacted R Baby to share their stories, and some have committed to starting local chapters. “There’s power in numbers,” says Rabinowitz, “and the more chapters there are, the more people who are focused on this cause, and the more likely someone who is in a similar situation will not have the same results, because R Baby would have saved a lot of babies’ lives.”

On August 24, R Baby Foundation teamed up with the Univer-

sity of Maryland Hospital for Children to open the Rebecca Ava Rabinowitz Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory. This research center for viral infections will serve as a hub across the Northeast for hospitals seeking diagnoses and treatments for newborns in need of emergency medical care. The lab is just the first in a series of programs funded by R Baby Foundation.

“My greatest wish is to have my daughter back,” says Rabinowitz. “But besides that, I wish to be able to one day talk to the president and, as a parent, map it out for him and say ‘Mr. President, here are some very simple solutions.’ This is just what I’ve thought about in my dining room when I’m by myself late at night and I can’t sleep.”

The son of two public school teachers, Andrew Rabinowitz grew up in Queens, N.Y., earning his undergraduate degree from Pace University and his law degree from Fordham Law School. Before joining Marathon in January 2002 as a chief financial officer—later being appointed chief operating officer—he worked at Ernst and Young as a CPA, and then briefly at Schulte, Roth and Zabel LLP. At Marathon, Rabinowitz oversees financial controls, legal compliance, investor relations, and technology operations.

If you are interested in making an online donation, looking to start a chapter, or want to learn more about R Baby Foundation, please contact:



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