

Chicken Soup for the Soul

A Nose for Food

It takes little talent to see what lies under one's nose.

~W. H. Auden

Of our twins, Derik has always been a more enthusiastic eater than Lars, something we noticed soon after they were born. The boys are four now, and to this day, Derik is our gourmet adventure boy, willing to try just about anything. Among his favorite foods are tacos, Indian biryani rice, and pesto on crackers. Lars, on the other hand, sticks pretty much to nuggets and apples, occasionally venturing as far afield as white bread toast or green beans.

Like many twins, the boys arrived prematurely (in our case, two months). We were blessed that, although small, they were both very healthy. Derik, the bruiser, was three pounds, six ounces, while Lars weighed in at a petite two pounds, fourteen ounces. In order to leave the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) of our hospital, they had to accomplish three things: maintain their body temperature, gain weight, and be able to take a bottle or breast for twenty-four hours. The last was the most challenging, since premies are weak initially and must be fed through a gavage tube (through the nose directly into the stomach) until they are strong enough to suck.

Lars was always more interested in his new environment than in eating. Once he was able to take a bottle, he would suck a few times, pull away and look around. Whoever was feeding him had to constantly refocus his attention. As one of his nurses told us, "For

someone who can't hardly see past the end of his nose, he sure likes looking around!" After eating, he would lie awake, totally fascinated by the lights and sounds of the NICU. This invariably tired him out so much that he didn't have the strength to take a bottle at the next feeding.

Derik, however, stepped up to the feeding challenge, and within a week or so, he was taking the bottle like a pro. At mealtimes, he would quickly drain the bottle dry, stay awake for a few minutes and then crash into a deep sleep, gently snoring beside his brother. When it was time for the next feeding, he was awake and raring to go.

One morning while bringing the twins their breakfast bottles, the nurse on duty heard a strange sound coming from their crib. She grabbed the Polaroid camera they keep in the NICU for those spontaneous moments only babies can provide. Later that day when my husband and I stopped by to see the boys, the nurse proudly handed us the photo, which adorns our refrigerator to this day.

In it, a sleepy Lars stares with cross-eyed confusion at his brother. Derik, apparently deciding to chow down early, has somehow wiggled his head close to Lars' face and is latched onto his nose, sucking and tugging, our own little four-and-a-half-pound milking machine. When people ask us in what ways the boys are different from one another, we point to the picture. The caption reads, "Are you my breakfast?"

~Chela Wallace

