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I am Julia Giesen, a speech-language pathologist with 17 years of clinical practice working with pediatric patients in their homes, community programs, rehabilitation, and acute care settings. I am an Adjunct Professor in the department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Alberta. My primary role is as a feeding and swallowing specialist in the Philip C. Etches Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Stollery Children's Hospital. I am certified as a NIDCAP Professional and as an instructor and mentor for Family and Infant Neurodevelopmental Education (FINE). I draw on this learning to coach families and NICU staff in providing developmentally supportive, responsive care for infants.

I wrote this poem as a reflection after my first APIB (Assessment of Preterm Infants' Behavior) training session with Dr. Juzer Tyebkhan and Dr. Deborah Buehler. Juzer conducted the APIB on a little one who had been in our NICU for three months. His parents were in the room during the APIB. At the end, Juzer called his father over and he spoke to his son in his first (emotional) language. That evening, I reflected on what an APIB shows us; this is the result.

Julia Giesen

"Can you tell us your story?"

Hello, nice to meet you
Can you tell us your story?
How long have you been here?
What's it been like for you?

It's been all my life.
Three months to the day.
My mom and my dad
Have never gone away.

I see that you're sleeping,
Hard to do that in here.
With all the bright lights
And the sounds in your ear.

It's hard to keep going
Here all on my own
I try to keep breathing
But can't keep my tone.

Now warm hands around me
As my heart starts to race
Wrapping me in a blanket
My hands close to my face.

Speaking softly, speaking gently
Hold me close as I wake
A new face as my eyes open
And a few breaths I take.

Well hello, now I see you
Can we try a few things?
Can you stay here with me
Even when the apple rings?

You said, "Yes, I can try
I'll try all on my own
I'll show how far I've come
How much I have grown."

In these 90 days
Since the day I was born
With all of the milestones
That my necklace adorn.

And when it's enough
When it all becomes the same,
I hear my father's voice;
He's calling my name.

That's me! That's my dad!
I turn to my right
I smile so broadly
Then with all of my might.

I call right out to him
As his tears trace a line.
I'm here Dad, I hear you
I'm yours and you're mine.

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