

COVER STORY

Expecting



miracles

A Lafayette doctor and his wife create the perfect gift for couples with infertility

By Chéré Dastugue Coen



On Saturday, April 14 at 6:46 p.m., weighing seven pounds two ounces, Hope Elizabeth Hughes was born at Women's and Children's Hospital in Lafayette. Hope's mother, Laura Hughes, chose natural childbirth and was in labor for 23 hours before she and her husband, Terry, finally held their daughter in their arms.

While the birth was fairly routine, the couple's journey to that moment was anything but ordinary.

After years of infertility, the Hughes had been selected to receive an all-expenses-paid cycle of in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments – the unique “Gift of Hope” to the south Louisiana community from a caring doctor and his wife, the hospital, and a medical staffing company.

A year from now, if all goes well, two more couples chosen in the 2007 Gift of Hope program will see their dreams fulfilled with the birth of a child. And like the Hughes, their happiness will seem sweeter for the heartache and frustration they have endured.

HOPE FULFILLED: After years of frustration and heartache trying to have a child, Laura and Terry Hughes marvel at their newborn daughter, Hope Elizabeth. The couple received free treatment for infertility in The Gift of Hope, a new charity created by John and Amelle Stormont, above.

THE GIFT OF HOPE II

Two south Louisiana couples were recently selected to receive the Gift of Hope in its second year and will soon begin IVF treatment. We thank them for sharing their letters of application and wish them all success!

BRIDGETTE AND BRYAN BAUDOIN

HOME: Breaux Bridge

OCCUPATIONS: Secretary, mechanic

MEDICAL: Bryan became sterile at age 15 after treatment for testicular cancer. Bridgette has been diagnosed polycystic ovarian syndrome, which inhibits ovulation. Her only pregnancy, through IVF, ended in a miscarriage at eight weeks.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"We never gave up hope! Every day we prayed for the miracle of just one more chance. It would be so wonderful to see that little face, little fingers, little toes, and those little eyes. We long to see that first smile, hear that first word, see that first step. We hope to have what so many have...a baby to call our own."



BETH AND ERIC MCCLEERY

HOME: Rayne

OCCUPATIONS: Schoolteacher
Software trainer

MEDICAL: After unsuccessful fertility treatments and a surgery to repair Beth's fallopian tubes, the McCleerys were advised that IVF offers their only chance of having a baby.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"Many times when I was waiting to have an ultrasound or receive test results, I would look at the couples around me. I would wonder if today

would be a good day for them or, if like us, they still had a long struggle before them."

From Beth's letter

"When we were dating, we would spend countless hours talking about how many children we would like to have. My vote was for three, while Beth would say: 'I want as many as you will let me have.' That always stuck with me, even to this day."

From Eric's letter

The Hughes are one of 2.1 million couples in the United States with infertility. Their condition dates to back-to-back ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages in 2001 which damaged Laura's fallopian tubes. Against the odds, the couple kept trying to conceive.

"It took us five years to say, 'We're done,'" said Laura, 32.

"We made peace with it," Terry, 39, added. "We felt that if it's not going to happen, it's not going to happen."

The couple considered two more options – infant adoption and in vitro fertilization – but both seemed out of reach financially on her income as a veterinary assistant and his income from

a vending machine route. IVF typically costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per attempt. "It's a big investment and what if it doesn't work?" Terry said. "I didn't want to put that burden on Laura. She's the one who has to deal with the emotional pain."

Almost miraculously, their situation changed thanks to another Lafayette couple, John and Amelie Storment. A reproductive endocrinologist with the Fertility & Women's Health Center of Louisiana, John has helped bring more than 90 babies into the world through IVF. Amelie directs marketing and publicity for the Center. One night over dinner, the Storments were discussing ways to call

attention to the plight of infertile couples, especially those with modest means.

"The Gift of Hope was Amelie's brainchild," John Storment said. "It was our way to give something back to the community and raise awareness about infertility."

The couple incorporated the idea as a nonprofit organization, partnering with Women's and Children's Hospital to provide the special IVF surgical facilities with tightly-controlled humidity, temperature, and light. Florida-based Sheridan Healthcare donated the required fertility drugs.

They also recruited a volunteer selection committee to review the lengthy and often heartrending applications from couples seeking treatment.

The Gift of Hope went public last April with a splash of coverage on local television news. The Hughes happened to be watching that night, but it didn't really matter. "All of a sudden, the phone started ringing," Laura said with a laugh. "Everyone we know was calling and telling us to apply."

Once again, the Hughes faced long odds. Sixty other South Louisiana couples had also submitted their financial information, physician referrals, and a personal accounts of their experiences with infertility. "We all read the letters," said selection committee member Karen Alleman, a nurse at Women's & Children's Hospital. "We also looked at their medical histories, if they had been pregnant, to choose the candidate who would have the best success."

Even so, chances are just 50/50 that the procedure will result in pregnancy. "Last year, we were 58 percent," Storment said. "I hesitate to tell you those numbers because that year was so good."

As it turns out, the human species is not particularly fertile, Storment added. "The best normal pregnancy rate is 20 percent. Seventy percent of all conceptions miscarry, because if there's something genetically wrong, the body will reject. We're fighting human biology and it's a bigger battle than we think."

On Mother's Day, the organization held a second media event to announce that Laura and Terry Hughes had been selected to receive Lafayette's first Gift of Hope. It was a joyous day that may

also have been the crest of a roller coaster ride of emotions.

Within a few weeks, Laura was receiving daily injections of fertility drugs to bring on "superovulation" in which the ovaries produce several mature eggs rather than a single egg that normally develops each month. Laura was able to inject some

medications herself like allergy shots and others requiring large needles which

Terry had to administer. The medications made her moody, she said, and put a strain on their relationship.

"You have to talk to each other," Laura said. "You have to because you lose control of yourself. Sometimes you cry for no reason."

Storment points to an ample supply of Kleenex tissues in his office as proof that the hormone shots create dramatic mood swings resulting from a huge increase in estrogen levels. "A normal ovulatory cycle, the estrogen is 200," he said. "With IVE, it's 1500 to 3000. That's because

there are multiple eggs being produced."

Terry helped relieve the pressure by doing all the housework and grocery shopping. He remodeled the house, decorating the baby's room all in pink – they knew it would be a girl from the ultrasounds – with butterflies scattered about. "If you don't like your husband

In vitro fertilization costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per attempt with a 50/50 chance of success at best

or wife, you shouldn't do in vitro," Laura said. "You can't do it by yourself. You have to have someone help you through it."

In August, the eggs were extracted and fertilized. Next, in a painless office procedure, a single embryo was implanted. "You lay for 30 minutes and then you go home," Laura said, adding that she "laid down for a week and didn't move."

At last, Laura became pregnant, although it took several months before she could breathe easy. "I think between three and five months was the hardest because the

baby was not big enough to feel," she said. "Once I felt her I was better."


Like proud parents everywhere, the Hughes have taken hundreds of photos of their firstborn Hope. They also have a picture that most parents never see – a photo of their baby in the first moments after conception taken through a microscope. Because of the iffy success rate among IVF patients, Storment presents the photos only at birth.

Will the Hughes do it again? Since the embryos have already

been created, the costs are somewhat less. Having one successful pregnancy also tips the odds in their favor.

"I think we will do it again," Terry said. "Although maybe not right away."

And how did they decide on the name Hope? Pure coincidence, Laura said. They liked names that start with "H" and other family members had already taken their favorite, Hannah.


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