

FACE

SPECIAL EDITION
THE **BABY** ISSUE

AUGUST 2009

OH BABY!

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PAIN NO MORE

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ROBIN RACCA

How relentless hope gave one woman the one thing she waited for all of her life

WHAT A TRIP

Local decorators headed to Romania



A woman in a white dress stands in a room with a large, dark, arched doorway. The wall behind her is a light, mottled blue. On the wall, the words "I love you to the" and "and back!" are written in a simple, dark font. The woman is positioned in the lower left, looking towards the camera. The lighting is soft, creating a calm atmosphere.

I love you to the
and back!

relentless

Robin Racca is a believer. She's one of those relentless women with a drive you can't learn – it's something she must have been born with – and you don't develop over time. It's a kind of determination that's brought her through the heartache only a woman who harbors great hope can feel.

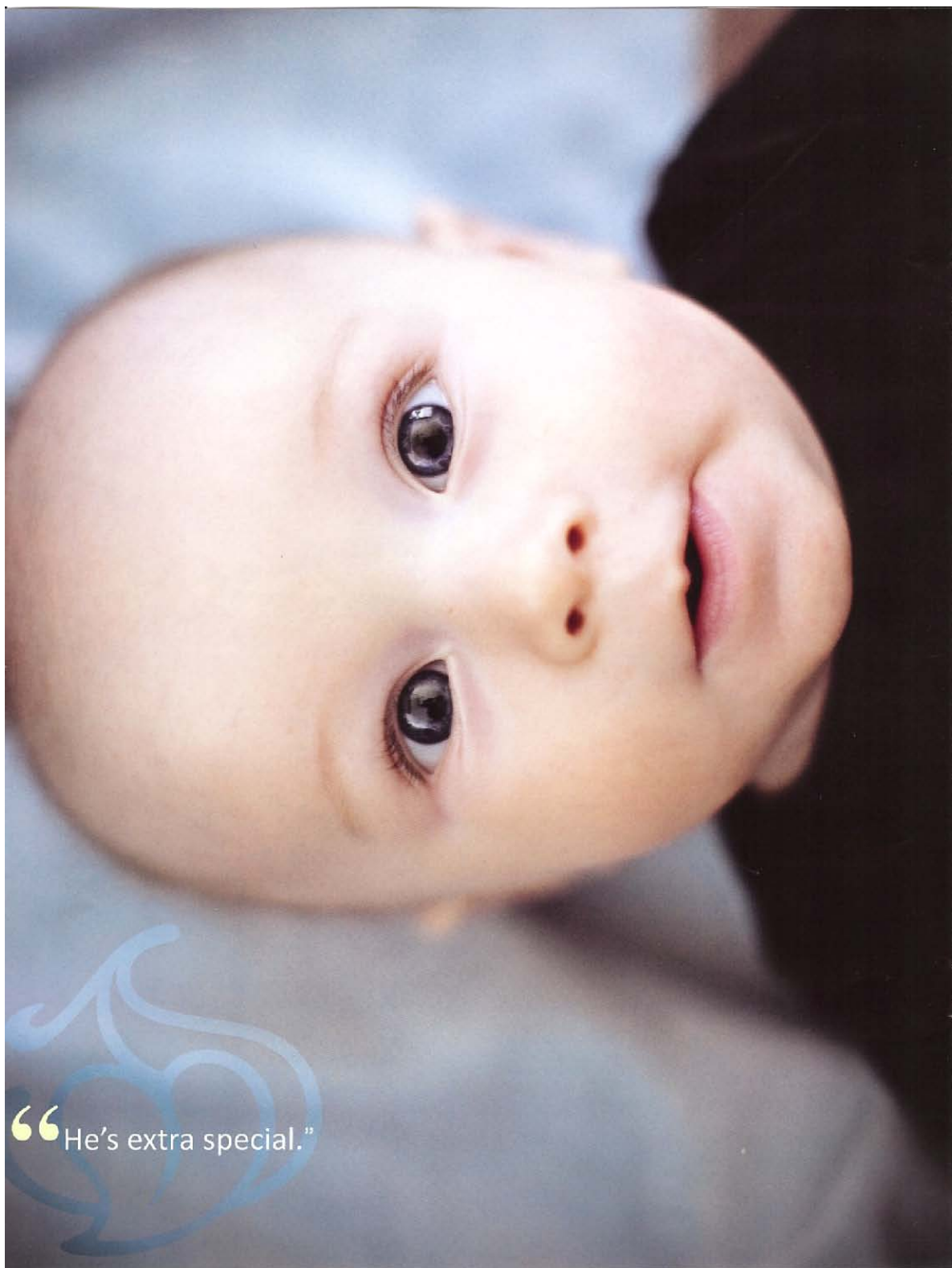
With great hope comes tremendous risk. The risk of disappointment and loss – Robin knows both too well.

But, the beauty of dangerous hope is that it seems for those who never lose it there is a great reward and Robin knows this. She holds evidence of that great reward in her arms each morning.

[photography by PENNY MOORE] [makeup by JENN RAUSCH]

moon





“He’s extra special.”

Robin, 36, always knew she wanted to be a mom. There were no doubts or questions in that one department.

And in 1996, to her surprise, she became pregnant with her boyfriend. In less than a week she would miscarry. And while the loss wasn't utterly heartbreaking, she was disappointed. At the time she had yet to marry, she was 6 weeks along and had only learned she was pregnant for a few days. By 1998, the two were married and pregnant again. Robin expected smooth sailing this time. She had morning sickness, she heard the heartbeat. But, at 12 weeks she lost the baby.

"I never thought it would happen again," she says.

Robin and her first husband later divorced and remain good friends and by 2004 she became pregnant for a third time. This time with her second husband — André.

"I was very fertile, I was pregnant again on accident," she says.

At 12 weeks Robin began bleeding and headed to the hospital where doctors heard a heartbeat and sent her home seeing nothing alarming with the baby. But, she soon miscarried sending her and André into a tailspin.

"I wanted a baby. Since I was a little girl I wanted to be a mom," Robin says. "I'm very nurturing, motherly and already mothering."

Robin says she didn't birth her 16-year-old stepdaughter, "but I claim her." (Although she is quick to say her stepdaughter's mother is very much there.) As for adoption, Robin says she knew in her heart she could carry and have a baby. She headed to a new doctor as she tried for pregnancy number four.

She ate right, took prenatal vitamins and progesterone.

"I thought this is it," she recalls.

At 13 weeks she started feeling cramps. Then she began to bleed. She headed to the ER and once again they saw a heartbeat and couldn't see where the blood was coming from. Robin's nurse this time told her about a disorder she recently discovered she had. It was the first Robin had heard of this disorder and she didn't think a lot about it. She hoped she would hold on to this baby. She and André had already given the baby a name — River.

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving Robin was in the ER again with bleeding and again was sent home. By Wednesday the bleeding was worse.



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"I was clinging to every ounce of hope I had because I wanted this baby so bad," she says.

She called her doctor again and again as her fears escalated. The doctor told her she would be fine and said after her vacation she would see Robin again.

"She said, 'I'm on vacation, I'll see you Monday.' And on Wednesday night all hell broke loose," Robin recalls with a shudder.

Robin's family was in town for the holiday, including her sister who happens to be a neonatal nurse. That evening she would lose another baby. After she lost the baby she remembers just sitting on the floor of the bathroom in shock. Even the support of family surrounding her couldn't dull the pain.

"We were so devastated and in a daze for three or four months," Robin says.

She went to her appointment Monday visibly shaken.

"How does this happen again?" she asked the doctor. "I didn't expect her to have the answer. But, expected a little compassion. She said, 'Some people just really can't have babies and I don't know why.' She gave me information on classes for grieving. I don't care if you've lost one baby or ten — you need support."

Robin was furious. At this point no one had done any sort of testing on her for what could be the cause of the miscarriages. When she asked about that next step she was told it was expensive and most of the disorders were rare. She didn't likely have any of them.

"I thought I'd have to drive to Houston and it would cost tens of thousands of dollars to find out what's going on," she says.

She left her doctor's office and never went back. In the car, she called a friend who had some troubles becoming pregnant and asked for her doctor's name.

"Dr. John Storment," she says with a smile. "He sat down with me, looked at me and said 'This is not your fault.' It was a rush of emotion. I didn't think it was my fault. But, I was angry with my body. I was angry I had to go through it."

Before Robin's appointment with Dr. Storment she became engrossed in finding out the cause of her miscarriages. She researched the disorder the nurse had mentioned to her — phospholipid disorder. She headed to the doctor armed with knowledge about potential disorders. But, found she need not argue her case.

Her new doctor was ready and willing to test her and told her he thought they would find something when they did testing.

"It was four thousand dollars in testing blood work and took six or seven weeks to come back. Every week I just had to know. I just had to have an answer," Robin says.

Dr. Storment called with the news. Robin had the disorder the nurse had mentioned to her that day in the hospital. The disorder, which is a mutation of a gene (called MTHFR), causes blood clots to form between the placenta and the uterus eventually causing the placenta to detach.

The treatment would be fairly simple (extra vitamins, baby aspirin, blood thinners and a daily shot throughout her pregnancy) and Robin was told 90 percent of women who are treated properly are able to have babies.

"That was huge," Robin says of the 90 percent figure. "Thirty percent would've been enough for me. I was relieved, scared, everything you could imagine all in one. Here's my answer. But, what if it doesn't work?"

Despite Robin's fear of disappointment she trudged ahead determined to become pregnant again. She started tracking her ovulation. She was relentless. And nothing happened.

"For someone so fertile, I wasn't getting pregnant? I was making myself nuts," Robin says.

After all Robin and André endured, a family friend offered her a getaway to Cabo for her birthday. She planned the vacation for the time she would be ovulating and decided in the mean time to chill out. She quit counting days and tracking her cycle.

But, two weeks before Cabo, she learned she was pregnant for the fifth time.

"The one time I forgot about it," she says and shakes her head.

When Robin took the test there was no great joy. No jumping up and down.



“You have to be proactive in your health.
You can't wait for it to come to you.”

"We just stared at each other," she says. "We had so much hope, so much belief. We had been so heartbroken."

André told her later he was terrified the entire pregnancy that Robin would lose another baby. Robin's doctor worked to put her mind at ease.

"He said, 'Relax, I got this. You eat right and rest and I will do everything in my power to help you have this baby. You don't worry about a thing.'"

Robin tried not to let the fears of miscarriage or the lingering questions as to 'why her?' surface.

"I had prayed and prayed and prayed so long for this. There are kids getting pregnant in the back seat of cars and women with crack babies and I'd be a great mom," she says with a laugh at the irony of wanting a baby so desperately and not being able to have one while other people who didn't want one could have one without complication.

"Please God, I can't lose another baby. I will lose my mind," she prayed.

During Robin's pregnancy friends and family surrounded her.

"They came together and made sure I was safe," she says.

Co-workers at Tsunami, where she is the manager, made sure she didn't overexert herself. Every day she gave herself a shot in the abdomen. She lifts her shirt a few inches to show me a smattering of deep purple bruises that remain more than 5 months after she quit the shots.

"People asked how I gave myself a shot every day. I would've cut off a toe to have a baby. A shot is nothing."

Week after week Robin watched her baby grow and hoped for the best. After her first trimester she was sent to a new doctor – Dr. Stephen Schorr – who she speaks of with great fondness.

"He is phenomenal," Robin says matter of factly.

She said Dr. Schorr didn't sugar coat anything. He made her no promises. But was very supportive.

"He said, 'we are going to make this happen. But, I can't promise you will have this baby.' He was realistic."

By 13 weeks Robin was moving full steam ahead as usual. The day Hurricane Gustav hit, however, Robin began bleeding.

She headed to the hospital where they found a blood clot, but also found a heartbeat and healthy baby.

They told Robin it was a strong, healthy boy.

"I said, 'Are you sure?' And they said, 'If not there is something wrong with this girl,'" Robin says with a laugh.

They told her it was a tiny clot and she would put her feet up. It would likely go away, but she had to spend two weeks on strict bed rest. Within a few days the bleeding stopped.

Robin's goal was to make it to 27 weeks.

"I know the chance of survival shoots up dramatically," Robin says.

Every week Robin went in for an ultrasound and every week she saw her son grow. The doctor told her because of her past miscarriages she was more likely to have a still birth, which is why she had the regular ultrasounds.

"He wanted to be on top of it," Robin says. "I can't say enough of the quality of care. I felt like their only patient."

They planned to induce her a week before her due date. And Robin prayed for a natural birth (plus an epidural).

Before her due date, Robin was induced between 10 and 11 p.m. on a Wednesday. She figured by Friday she would have the baby. But, by 3 a.m. complications started to surface. Whenever they upped pitocin to move her labor along, the baby's heart rate would drop. But, when they stopped the pitocin, her labor would stall. By 5 a.m. her water had broken and the baby's heart rate continued to fluctuate. They asked Robin to sign forms for a C-section if it became necessary.

"Can I just push a little longer," she asked the doctor.

But, for the health of Robin and her baby the doctor said a C-section would be the way to go. Within 5 minutes she was heading down the hall. She woke André who was sleeping in the room and sent word to her family to come quickly.

At 7:44 a.m. Zephyr Jude Racca was born.

"When we heard his cries we just started laughing," Robin says holding her 5-month-old boy on her lap. "It was the most precious, sweetest little sound I've ever heard."

"He's here. O my gosh! We worked so hard for this. Now he's here."

The doctor told André he could look over the sheet and see his son for the first time. He said he wanted to wait for his wife. He wanted them to see Zephyr's little face for the first time together.

"And then I cried," she says as tears well up in her eyes at the memory of seeing Zephyr that day.

"Every day, every single day I look at him and tear up. How easy it was – the answer. It was right there. I look at him every day and he's the most perfect thing. If he knew how much we wanted him – he's finally here. Even when he's fussing and crying – it's OK."

After all, Robin says, "He's extra special."

Robin herself is a special kind of person. She's the kind of person who after all she went through, never lost hope.

"I had so much determination," she says. "I wouldn't take no for an answer and I couldn't believe God didn't want me to have a baby."

Robin says the experience of miscarrying so many times was terrifying in a way she couldn't have imagined.

"Nothing prepares you for losing a baby," she says.

But, she is willing to tell her story, retell those painful moments in the hopes that even one woman reading her story will have hope. She says people like the doctors who helped her are there and can make a difference.

"They want you to have a baby and succeed," she says.

And while it isn't cheap, Robin says some places have payment plans and options. You just have to ask.

"You have to be proactive in your health. You can't wait for it to come to you," she says. I read everything I could and armed myself with knowledge."

Robin says just talking about these painful experiences has made her realize how many other women have endured something similar. She wonders today what if the nurse that day wouldn't have mentioned her painful experience and her disorder to Robin.

"You have to talk and ask question and dig. If you want something bad enough you do what it takes."

