

On being a mother

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of June 13-14, 2009.

By Martha McIver

WHITE OAK, Texas—I always wanted children. From the time I was a tiny little girl, I played with my dolls pretending I was their mommy—feeding them and rocking them and singing to them.

I grew up in a large, close-knit family. My mother is the oldest of 12 children. Although I have only one sister, I am the oldest of 29 grandchildren, so I always had at least one or two pregnant aunts, and there were always new babies being added to the family. All I ever wanted was to marry my prince charming, have babies and be a mommy.

Looking for answers

When I was 25 we moved to Galveston and I worked for the University of Texas Medical Branch at John Sealy Hospital. Since my efforts to have a baby had been without success thus far, I decided to take advantage of the access to the best medical care in the nation. My doctor was the head of ob-gyn, and my fertility specialist was world renown.

The doctors knew something was not working right, and they started trying treatments, beginning with the easy ones.

The first problem that became evident was a major hormone imbalance. It caused ovulation to be random and unpredictable. I was put on a fertility drug, and, to determine my "window of opportunity" to get pregnant, I took my temperature each morning with a special thermometer.

Immediately after the "window," the doctor examined me and did blood tests to determine the changes that meant I was pregnant.

Taking the fertility drug made me feel sluggish and achy all over, and each day that I took it increased the pain and exhaustion. But I was determined, and the doctor said that it could take a few months of taking the drug for it to work and result in pregnancy.

Around the third or fourth month the news was finally good. I was so overjoyed finally to be carrying a baby of my own. My fertility doctor gave me a carefully calculated dosage of hormones to help me carry the baby. I hate needles, but the painful injections were certainly worth the hoped-for outcome.

Hopes were dashed

Then, after about a week of flying high on joy, my hopes were dashed. We didn't give up. The dosages of hormonal shots each week were tweaked.

The next cycle I got pregnant again. I felt as though I held my breath for a week in anticipation.

Again I miscarried—and again, and again, and again, month after month. My doctor said I miscarried 10 times that year. I was so weak, and my body was so exhausted. A baby just did not seem to be God's will for me.

The next step was exploratory surgery. We moved from Galveston to East Texas, and I was referred to a wonderful doctor in Longview. He did the surgery. The findings were not good. I had polycystic ovarian disease and a severe case of endometriosis—two more road blocks to pregnancy.

I resisted the recommendation to have a hysterectomy right away. I wanted to keep on trying. I wanted to give God another chance to give me a miracle.

I tried another round of fertility drugs, this time with a new drug just out on the market. It was even more painful to my body, but it was supposed to have a much better success rate. With it came the weekly injections.

I stayed on the fertility treatments for about six months this time. That was all we could afford. The cost not covered by insurance was \$600 a month. And, in reality, that was all my poor body could take.

The polycystic ovarian disease caused cysts to form on my ovaries. The cysts would grow until they burst. When a cyst burst, the pain was so sudden and intense that it literally took my breath away and doubled me over.

Things happened in my life. I no longer had health insurance or the means to seek further treatments to get pregnant, even if it were a possibility. Each month brought greater pain from the cysts. In addition, the doctor found tumors growing. The endometriosis was spreading.

Mourning alone

I kept on praying for a miracle. Months turned into years. I mourned those babies I had never had.

I mourned alone. When a woman miscarries, people say, "Oh, there must've been something wrong," and "You can always try again."

When someone dies there is a funeral. Friends and loved ones gather round and grieve with you. When you miscarry no one sympathizes with you. They just carry on their lives as though nothing happened. It is a lonely mourning after a miscarriage.

Eventually the cysts were bursting at the rate of about two a week. The pain was severe and 24/7. There was no relief.

My marriage was deteriorating. At age 36 I got a miracle, but it wasn't a baby. My miracle was that my dear mother made it possible for me to have the much-needed hysterectomy. I knew the operation was mandatory by then, and I knew that at that stage in my life—at that age—a baby was definitely not even a good idea. But it was still so very hard to give up on the hope that I had so tightly grasped for so very long.

The surgery proved that my condition was even worse than the doctors had thought. My ovaries were 60 times thicker than they should have been because of the massive amount of scar tissue. There were several tumors. One of them was the size of a grapefruit.

Although the surgery took care of the constant physical pain, the emotional ache was still there. I could not even hold a baby for two years, the sorrow was just too unbearable.

Mothering and grandmothering

Now 18 years have passed since my dreams of having a baby were gone forever. As I reflect, I can see that God's reason for my not having a child might have had a lot to do with who the baby's father would have been.

God has so richly blessed me with so many other things. I have a wonderful husband now, and with him I have the two most fabulous stepchildren I could ever ask for. And, as for children, I have had the honor of mothering and grandmothering so many. So many, in fact, that to list them all would take pages.

Anyone who is young enough to be my child or grandchild is subject to my "mothering." I love them, shower them with gifts and dole out advice—sometimes solicited, sometimes not. I treat them as though they were my very own, and in my heart I think of them that way.

I have a special place in my heart for young women who have fertility issues. I mourn with those who have had a miscarriage. I do not want them to feel alone.

Being a stepmother is my greatest honor and one of the hardest jobs I have ever had to do too. The blessings I receive from mothering are rewards to me that I cannot even put into words.

Here on this earth, in this life, I have many children, and someday, in the eternal life to come, I will finally meet my babies.