

Specialists In Reproductive Medicine & Surgery, P.A.

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A Unique Modern Family Makes Reproductive History in a Very Unusual Way

Walk into the Green-Cavin household and you will notice a lot of baby equipment, all of which is replicated four times. Then you'll see four adorable babies, all bearing a striking resemblance to each other, laughing and playing with their two adoring parents. But these are not ordinary quadruplets. Using assisted reproductive technologies, these are quadruplets, who came from the same set of eggs and sperm, were delivered two weeks apart by both of their two mothers, Laura Cavin and Sheri Green, a same sex couple from south Florida, whose dream was to build a family together and finally did so in a big way.

The road to parenthood and these joyous occasions for these two "super moms" has been filled with both overwhelming joy and, unfortunately, indescribable sorrow. Both members of this loving couple, who met while they were studying to become physician assistants, always knew they wanted to become mothers. But like other lesbian couples, the native Floridians also understood they would need medical intervention to achieve this dream. Though they knew couples that had used the simpler method of intrauterine insemination to achieve a pregnancy, they wanted each other to be part of the baby making process and decided "reciprocal IVF" was their best option. Reciprocal IVF is where one partner uses her eggs/genetic material and the other carries the baby. Each undergoes one part of the in vitro fertilization process, either the egg retrieval or embryo transfer. This treatment was the closest that two women could come to making a baby together.

In 2008, they contacted Dr. Craig Sweet, a reproductive endocrinologist and medical director of Specialists in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery in Fort Myers, Florida. They decided Sheri, who wanted biological children, would provide her eggs and Laura, who wanted to experience pregnancy, would carry the child. At the time, they were 35 and 24 respectively. Even with her being older, Sheri produced numerous eggs via ovarian stimulation with fertility medications. Combined with anonymous donor sperm, many high quality embryos were produced, and Dr. Sweet transferred one embryo to Laura and the rest were frozen for future use.

Joy Turns to Tragedy

Amazingly, this one embryo split into two and Laura and Sheri discovered they were having identical twin boys as part of a monochorionic/diamniotic pregnancy where the fetuses developed in separate sacs but shared one placenta. The pregnancy looked like it would be the textbook twin pregnancy until tragedy occurred. At 24 weeks, Laura started having contractions and an ultrasound confirmed their worst fear. The twins were suffering from the very extremely rare condition of twin-to-twin transfusion where one twin was not getting enough blood while the other was getting too much. At best and if they survived, the twins would come away with some disabilities. Laura underwent emergency surgery at Miami Jackson University Hospital to correct the malady but started labor during the procedure. As this drama was unfolding, weeks earlier the women had learned Sheri's mother had been diagnosed with Stage IV metastatic breast cancer. What was to have been the happiest time in their lives turned out to be one filled with sadness and trauma.

During this time, the women were living at Sheri's grandmother's house in Fort Lauderdale to be close to the hospital for ultrasounds and to be near Sheri's mom while she was in cancer treatment. Initially it was thought one of the babies could survive, but the third ultrasound confirmed both angels had passed away.

Says Laura: "There really are no words to describe how we felt when we heard the news. I knew I could not deliver the twins – whom we named Aidan and Brendan – vaginally, so we traveled back to Fort Myers so I could deliver via Cesarean section at our local hospital with Dr. McLean, our OB/GYN, and where we knew so many of the labor and delivery nurses. I needed to be in familiar, more comforting surroundings."

"We treasure the few hours we had holding the twins and the photographs we have of them. We needed that closure and the support of The Share Group, the grief support group we joined that is specifically for parents who have lost a child. But without a doubt, enduring this was the hardest part of our relationship," explains Sheri.

Overcoming the Odds

Despite the pain of their tremendous loss, Laura and Sheri were determined not to give up. They went back to Dr. Sweet to try another time. Again, Sheri responded well to the fertility medications and produced an abundance of eggs and high quality embryos. Sweet suggested he transfer one or two embryos into Laura and one into Sheri to increase their odds they would have a successful outcome. On the day of the transfer and after much discussion, all were in agreement and two embryos were transferred into Laura's and another two into Sheri's uterus. Texting back and forth with each other, Dr. Sweet moved between the two transfer rooms. Little did they know they were making reproductive history in south Florida. The remaining embryos were cryopreserved for future use. Dr. Sweet commented, "The chance that all four transferred embryos would implant and grow was estimated less than 2%, so we were all amazed when the improbable occurred."

Fast forward five months after Sheri and Laura found out they were both pregnant. Both women were put on bed rest because of a variety of medical issues. Though they were cautiously optimistic, they still were very concerned after the tragedy they had experienced. Neither could work and turned to friends and family members for household help.

At 31 weeks, Laura went to the hospital with what she thought were flu-like symptoms. It turned out her placenta had ruptured. That day, May 9, 2011, she delivered Briana and Derek. Meanwhile, Sheri started going into labor, so she was admitted to the hospital. Anthony and Cason were born on May 23, 2011, essentially quadruplets born by two women two weeks apart.

"Though all four babies were in the NICU for a short period of time, we were so grateful that they were relatively healthy, strong and breathing when they were born. It has been total chaos at our home since they all left the hospital, but we would not have changed a moment of this," says Laura. "We are only grateful for the pandemonium that consumes our lives taking care of four children who were preemies. We also have gone back to work as physician assistants. I am working with our OB/GYN, Dr. McLean, and Sheri is working in cardiology. We are lucky to have wonderful relatives and friends to help us out."

As Mother's Day and the babies' birthdays approach, Laura and Sheri can look back at all they have endured and smile. Says Sheri: "We have become better mothers because we know what it is like to lose children. We would have given anything to hear Aidan and Brendan scream, so listening to four babies cry at once does not bother us. But our journey also took us to Anthony, Briana, Cason, and Derek, four beautiful babies who started their lives in the laboratory, but who were born out of the love we have for each other. Reproductive medicine made our dreams possible."

Sheri and Laura consider themselves mothers of four children, not of two each. From a gestational perspective, all four children were conceived on the same day. In Florida, however, they only are legally considered the mothers of the children they bore, so they are working with a family lawyer for each mother to adopt the other two. A family connected through genetics, reproductive medicine, and the love these two women share with each other. – an amazing modern family.