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A very special Father's Day

Medical advances, embryonic biopsies gave David and Darra Williams healthy twin boys

By LOIS EVEZICH ALISO VIEJO NEWS

David Williams never thought he'd have children. With a brother who died at 20 from cystic fibrosis, and an uncle with the disease, he didn't want to take the chance.

When he and Darra started dating, he didn't keep his concerns from her. They married, but were standoffish about babies, he said. Still, they didn't rule them out.



SMITH GARDNER/THE NEWS

"I'm a carrier," David said. "If both parents are carriers, the child has a bigger chance of inheriting the disease. I was the only carrier, though, but there was a slight chance the child would have cystic fibrosis."

They consulted Dr. Lawrence Werlin in Aliso Viejo, a specialist in fertilization for couples who want children. Werlin was interested in embryo biopsies. The process involves extracting eggs from a woman's ovaries and injecting them with sperm, and when embryos develop, cells are biopsied looking for abnormalities.

Since David had had a vasectomy, his sperm had to be aspirated too.

Without the embryo biopsies, the Williams might never have had babies.

"Darra's was a high-risk pregnancy," said Werlin. "She'd had two miscarriages and failed artificial inseminations." But genetic tests proved she wasn't a carrier. Darra gave up 11 eggs, and after fertilization, seven of them were biopsied. Werlin injected the best five embryos into her womb, and initially four took.

"Some had chromosome defects," David said. "But now we have 16-month-old twin boys." And they are perfect, he said.

"When we were finally pregnant, Darra had bi-weekly ultra sound. We fully expected to have one child. We celebrated with Dom Perignon. Darra didn't drink anything, but we were so relieved. Werlin then referred us to an obstetrician."

The babies were born at Saddleback Memorial Medical Center, and the Williams knew they were boys.

"Early on they told us the sex of all four implants," David said. Only two embryos fully attached. "I'm happy to have had two healthy boys."

The Williams story was so successful that Werlin refers them for interviews to other patients who are thinking about the same procedure.

"The Williams were involved in this study because of the pregnancy losses," he said. "It's the first randomized prospective study in the world, published in 2003. It looks at multiple cycles of pregnancies lost. Now we do this on a fairly routine basis, especially in high-risk pregnancies."

Werlin said he is gratified to see the procedure results.

"I've always been interested in hormones. When you think about medicine, it's an art. Not everybody fits into the same category. Hormones are one of the few things in medicine that make sense. They're predictable."

Werlin said the most important thing is that he works with wonderful people. They're basically young and healthy. "When you're successful it's the best thing in the world. When you're unsuccessful, it's devastating. "But ultimately it's not life-threatening," he said.

Most of Werlin's patients are incredibly motivated, he said.

"They read the same journals I read. They look online. David and Darra were never down. They were always optimistic, wanted to push ahead and meet the next challenge."