

Pierre de Villiers:



Imagine being newly wed at 23 and being told that if you want to have children, you'd better consider having them right away with the help of infertility treatment, because your female organs aren't formed correctly and your fertility will deteriorate with each passing year.



Imagine going through the emotional roller coaster of 12 unsuccessful infertility treatments over a 3-year period and completely snapping when all your frozen embryos burst during the last treatment.

Imagine the joy of holding your 5minute old adopted daughter in your arms three years later and thanking God for this miracle.

Imagine the frustration when the adoption agency tells you that there is no chance at all of adopting a second child, for there are simply too few babies to meet the demand.

Imagine the ecstatic feeling when the nurse comes to tell you that you are pregnant after your 13<sup>th</sup> fertility treatment.

Imagine the fear and then relief when you start to bleed at 6 weeks and the gynaecologist tells you that it's just the foetuses fastening to the uterus wall and that you are pregnant with quadruplets. However, he tells you that with all your problems you won't be able to carry them full term. Three doctors confirm this and tell you to abort at least 2 foetuses if you carry them to 12 weeks or you might lose them all.

Imagine your fear when you start bleeding at 8 weeks and the gynaecologist says that your body is aborting some of the foetuses. Survival of the fittest he calls it. He gets one strong heartbeat on the scan, and one very flimsy one and tells you not to count on staying pregnant with twins. You are so sad for the babies you lost, but also thankful to God for taking the decision of aborting them out of your hands.

Imagine the fear when you start to bleed again at 12 weeks and get admitted to hospital with a drip to try and keep the babies from aborting.

Imagine the pure joy of seeing two perfect foetuses with strong heartbeats and hearing it is just blood left from one of the babies you lost previously and you can go home.

Imagine having a perfect pregnancy thereafter with injections scheduled to help the babies' lungs develop from the 25th week onward.

Imagine waking up one night at 2am, only 24 and a half weeks pregnant, wanting to go to the toilet and realising that your babies are coming because you can feel one between your legs.

Imagine your husband rushing you to hospital and the nurse confirming that your baby is in the birth canal and is being born with her amniotic sac still intact.

Imagine your abdomen forming a Bundle's ring (muscles contract and the uterus closes up, trapping your baby in the birth canal) You start to swell so much that when the gynaecologist arrives 5 minutes later he cannot do an internal examination and tells you that your babies have to be delivered immediately. He tells you that they are not viable before 26 weeks and asks if they should try to save them?

Imagine being given a spinal block caesarean and your husband wanting to faint next to you but managing to keep sitting while the doctor's assistant faints and the nurses have to take over.

Imagine your blood pressure falling to 65/35, because you're bleeding too much and feeling so ill that you cannot focus on what is going on any more, but realising that you never saw your babies or heard them cry.

Imagine having to ask your husband what your babies look like and him being in so much shock that he can only tell you they have his big feet and cannot even remember the names you selected for them.

Imagine having to wait for the nurses to take you to NICU 16 hours later to see your babies for the first time and your first thought being that they are too small and fragile to survive.

Imagine walking to NICU the following morning holding on to the walls because you want to be with your babies and the personnel simply being too busy to take you there.

Imagine the fear when the paediatrician calls you to NICU and tells you that your baby girl is critical. She has 4th degree bleeding on the brain and cannot keep her blood pressure up even with medicine.

Imagine sitting on a bar stool for 3 hours praying and hoping with your hands next to her, for you are not allowed to touch her. Her skin is still too thin and tears with each touch.

Imagine being asked if they can turn the machines off because her lungs have started bleeding and she is drowning in her own blood. Your mind agrees, but your heart refuses to let her go.

Imagine the fear when your baby boy instinctively realises that his twin sister is dying and has a relapse himself.

Imagine being so tired that the nurses have to take you back to the ward immediately for you cannot stay on your feet any longer.

Imagine holding your angel for the first time and having to give her away to the people from the morgue.

Imagine the paediatricians telling you that your son's organs aren't developed yet and that the urea level in his body is toxic to his system and he swells up like a balloon.

Imagine the fear when his right lung, the only one functioning after 3 doses of Servanta, starts to burst at two weeks and you know that the machine keeping him alive is killing him.

Imagine the relief when his left lung miraculously starts functioning the following day and knowing it's a miracle brought about by prayer.

Imagine him opening his eyes for the first time.

Imagine the joy of holding your baby for the first time at 4 weeks and realising that you are holding more drips and tubes than baby, but that you are his mom and feeling like a mommy for the first time. However, picking him up makes the drips running through his navel cord come out and they have to start using veins all over his tiny body.



Imagine calling the hospital at 5am as you always do, just to hear that he is critical and that they haven't had time to call you, but that you'd better get there fast. He is a mere 5 weeks old, but his infection count goes up to 395 and he has a heart attack. Prem's can die if they have a count of 20, so they don't want to give you any hope. He stays in septic shock for 4 days with a blood pressure like that of an old man.

Imagine pulling through just to get a second infection two weeks later with an infection count of 315. A CVP line is put straight into his heart because there are no more veins to be found on any limb or in his head.

Imagine knowing that he cannot tolerate any food and the fear of his intestines rotting. Imagine the joy when he finally starts to tolerate 1ml of milk at 42 days of age.

Imagine the big milestone of reaching 1kg at 7weeks.

Imagine the big day when the ventilator is disconnected and he is placed on CPAP for the first time and later the week on nasal cannulas with 24% O<sub>2</sub>.

Imagine the cute little thing when he is bathed at 9 weeks for the first time in a 2litre ice cream bowl.



Imagine seeing that your child's ears are now formed and look normal at 10 weeks. He also gets transferred to an incubator and gets to wear clothes like a real baby.

Imagine one day walking into NICU and the staff telling you that your baby needs to be transferred to Pretoria for an emergency eye operation for ROP or face blindness.

Imagine a ride in an ambulance where they have a power failure and your baby's breathing stopping because of cold and you as parent having to give him CPR in the little space left in the ambulance next to the incubator, because the paramedic is sitting in the cab of the vehicle to show the driver the way.

Imagine an operation on a 1.3kg baby and having him on full ventilator again.

Imagine your baby crying till he develops a hernia because the doctor took away all pain killers after they made him stop breathing.

Imagine the staff wanting to keep him there and you knowing that their NICU is not up to standard. You insist on taking him 'home' in another nightmare ambulance ride where he stops breathing every 3 minutes. This time at least you have a real good paramedic after the fight you put up a week before. Your paediatrician waits for him in NICU and starts to give him antibiotics immediately and puts him back on CPAP as he has a very serious pneumonia.

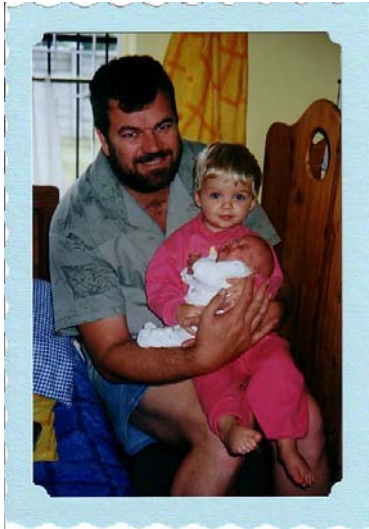
Imagine the ecstatic feeling when he, still on CPAP, starts to breastfeed at 12 weeks and 1.6kg.

Imagine the joy of seeing him go off oxygen at 14 weeks after the paediatrician predicted that he would go home with it.

Imagine having to go through a second operation to repair the hernia at 15 weeks and having to go back on a ventilator and oxygen. And as if that is not bad enough he has to get a second operation a week later for his eyes again.

Imagine the joy of going off oxygen a second time and being placed in a crib. He also starts to take all his own feeds.

Imagine the joy of taking him home after 121 days in NICU, on your husband's birthday and your 9<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.



Imagine going through another 6 operations, and the devastating news when your baby is diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and only 15% vision.

Imagine thanking God each day for your two miracle babies of which you are so privileged to be the mommy.

**Melanie proud mommy of:**

**Renata (38wk, 3.9kg, now 3years, 20kg)**

**Donita (24 wk, 660g and our little angel in heaven)**

**Pierre (24wk, 780g, now 2 years, 8.8kg)**

