

The joy and grief of expecting in the COVID-19 era

Finally pregnant, but now there’s a pandemic for M-F couple

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — In just over three weeks, Emily Martin will hold a dream more than a decade in the making. She and her husband, Bryan Martin, endured a long journey marked by grief and uncertainty to reach where they are now — about to become parents.

“Mini Mart,” as their baby is called at the moment, is scheduled to be born May 18 at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.

The Milton-Freewater couple travel there every four weeks because Emily has experienced placenta and cord abnormalities that put her and the baby at high risk during labor, she said.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the couple can only hope to be in the same room when Mini Mart is born. At a recent checkup at OHSU, Emily said her husband could not accompany her into the exam room.

“Supposedly, he will be allowed at the birth,” she said.

The Martins have much company in their concerns of having a pandemic pregnancy and birth. People around the globe are expressing fears about the coronavirus with so much yet unknown about COVID-19 and no vaccination or effective treatments.

According to obstetrical staff at the Mayo Clinic, there is not yet a definitive answer to whether infected mothers can pass the virus to their babies before birth, although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls the chances “unlikely.”

So far, the virus has not



Emily and Bryan Martin of Milton-Freewater are preparing for the birth of their baby. When their son greets his first visitors, however, it will be through their home’s windows.

been detected in amniotic fluid or breast milk, according to the CDC.

But newborns can become infected with the virus by exposure to sick caregivers after delivery, the Mayo Clinic said.

If there is any question if a mother has a suspected case of COVID-19, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends special precautions, including possibly separating mom and baby temporarily, monitoring the newborn for signs of infection and testing the newborn for COVID-19 — if tests are available.

The coronavirus is not the first hurdle in this pregnancy for the Martins.

Not only has Emily had serious medical emergencies, including a long battle with terrible infections, but she’s experienced three miscarriages in trying to begin a family.

“Getting pregnant has been extremely difficult and emotional,” she said. “And not very many people talk

about this.”

The Martins realized they would need to seek medical intervention to achieve pregnancy once again, but the associated costs put such help out of reach.

In Seattle and Spokane, Washington, people have to enter a fertility clinic with a “starter” fund of about \$18,000, Emily said, noting almost no health insurance plan covers any of the costs.

“You have to walk in with the money and put it down. A lot of my friends had to take out loans,” she said.

In researching solutions, however, she came across information about “CNY Fertility.”

Founded in 1997, Central New York fertility clinic is based on the philosophy that such care should be made as affordable as possible and that everyone who wants help should be able to get it.

The cost of fertility care there, even with round trip airfare, gave the couple wings.

After a six-month waiting

list evaporated with another patient’s cancellation, Emily flew to Albany, New York, multiple times.

Handling the logistics of travel, cycles, paperwork, medication and timing became a full-time job on top of her already full-time career as owner of Fringe hair salon on Milton-Freewater’s Main Street.

Victory came a year ago when the clinic team was able to retrieve the eggs Emily’s ovaries had produced through medicine.

After the best resulting embryo was transferred back to her in August, however, another loss was in store.

Despite being considered the “highest quality” embryo, the implantation didn’t take, Emily said.

“And it was a girl,” she said.

The small business owner has lived through plenty of hardship in her 34 years. Her shop has been robbed, flooded and driven into since it opened in 2015. But this was a new level of devasta-

tion, she said.

“That was like my body failed me ... just, as a woman,” she said.

Past trauma has taught her endurance, however, and Emily returned to New York on her next reproductive cycle.

That was September. Twelve weeks later the Martins could draw a breath and start letting people know a baby boy was on his way.

Their families were ecstatic. Celebrations were planned.

One baby shower was expected to be huge, slated to take place April 5 at Three Rivers Winery, where the couple were married.

A smaller family party was also in the works.

The threat of catching the coronavirus, of course, has wiped out all social engagements everywhere.

Emily said her sister-in-law, Kelsey Hendricks, created a virtual baby shower that was surprisingly perfect.

Guests sent gifts ahead of time, then everyone joined

online at the same time a weekend ago.

“We had 40 people on ‘live,’ and some were people who couldn’t have traveled here,” Emily said.

Other plans haven’t been similarly resolved. The birthing class they signed up for is a no-go.

“People say ‘Oh, those are stupid.’ But I’ve waited so long ... I’d love ‘stupid,’” she pointed out. “I read the book they sent, but I feel so unprepared.”

Creating a nursery for Mini Mart has been dispiriting, as well. With no specialty stores open to wander and collect ideas from, Emily said she’s lacked the drive to design her son’s room.

“I definitely feel depression, and that’s really not like me at all,” she said.

The pandemic world is going to shape her future, as well.

Her husband’s job is stable for now, but as a self-employed hair stylist, Emily has applied for every avenue of promised government financial help, without a positive result so far.

She tried to mitigate the state-ordered closure of non-essential Oregon businesses by serving as many clients as possible in the week before Gov. Kate Brown made the call.

Emily knew it was coming, and has a healthy fear of the consequences of violating that order, she said, citing long license suspensions.

Money made that frenetic week can’t outlast the pandemic, however.

“I feel like every day I’m home now is a day I won’t be able to stay home with the baby. Because I’ll have to go back to work,” she said.

There will be no pictures of smiling grandparents holding a tiny bundle in a hospital room. When Mini Mart gets home from OHSU, he will be available for window viewings only, Emily said.

AN AMAZING GIFT FOR AN AMAZING

MOM

MOTHER'S DAY IS MAY 10!

\$34.95 ~~\$44.95~~

plus shipping

offer expires May 10, 2020

Hardcover book • \$10 off • Limited supply

Order online today at

UMATILLA.PICTORIALBOOK.COM

Order by mail now (discount expires 5/10/20):

☐ **Ship my order to me:** \$34.95 plus \$6.95 shipping and handling per book. Order will be shipped to the address below. **Quantity:** **x \$41.90 = \$** **total**

Payment method: ☐ Check/Money Order **Credit card orders can be placed online:** Umatilla.PictorialBook.com

Name

Address

City **State** **Zip**

Phone **E-mail**

EAST OREGONIAN

Send form and payment to:

East Oregonian
211 SE Byers Ave.
Pendleton, OR 97801
or call 800-522-0255

From the archives of Athena Public Library, City of Echo, Milton-Freewater Area Historical Society, Pendleton Round-up, Tamástslikt Cultural Institute and Umatilla County Historical Society

EAST OREGONIAN

NEWSPAPERS HAVE YOUR BACK.

We are grateful for those who have our back in this important time. The list is long, but we want to thank our first responders and front-line workers.

Especially in critical times, newspapers have your back.

COVID-19 is a national story that is impacting you at home and at work. Your local newspaper is keeping you informed with current events in your neighborhood and is bringing communities together in these challenging times.

From the actions your local government is taking, to lists of local stores that are delivering and tips on what to do while you're at home, your local newspaper is committed to bringing you the news you need, when you need it.

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

Support your local newspaper.

Subscribe in print or online.

America's Newspapers

NEWSPAPERS.ORG

EAST OREGONIAN

Hermiston Herald

America's Newspapers is a national association supporting journalism and healthy newspapers in our local communities. Find out more at www.newspapers.org or follow us on Twitter @newspapersorg or on Facebook @americasnewspapers.