

# **My Hope for Having Children:**

## **A True Story of Love, Sacrifice, Faith, Courage and Hope**

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My essay is on hope with a focus on the most incredible, yet breath-taking part of my life story - "my hope for having children." What happened once my "hope" became a reality. Not only did I have one, two, but three babies at the same time! Yes, I am blessed to be alive and tell you that I am a proud mommy to "girl-boy-boy" beautiful triplets!

"For me, grace is having my miracle triplets. I chose not to give up and continue to fight for my life and my children's life in spite of my high-risk pregnancy."

Before sharing my story, I would like to define hope, in the psychological form. There are many definitions of hope that are used in a certain context. C. R. Snyder defines hope from a psychological viewpoint as: "the sum of mental willpower plus way power towards one's goals. The meaning of goals is very similar to that of hope in that goals are any objects, experiences, or outcomes that we imagine and desire in our minds." (The Psychology of Hope: You can get there from here, p. 10)

There are also many different definitions of hope; depending on which theorist we follow. But there are several common themes in all the definitions of hope. That is, hope usually involves some uncertainty of an outcome, typically concerns matters of importance, and usually reflects a person's moral values. Hope is frequently considered a temporary condition that is specific to a given situation and contingent upon one's skills or abilities.

For example, is there a biological component associated with hope? I could not find any theorists who study hope who supported a biological model of hope. In fact, James Averill states "hope is not associated with any specific physiological responses or reflex-like actions" (Averill et al, 1990).

How about hope being a learned component? Actually hope appears to be a primarily learned concept. In a series of studies done by Averill, et al (1990), Averill and his colleagues came to the conclusion that hope includes learned behaviors and thought processes that are acquired through the socialization process. This was demonstrated in a study of the implicit theories of hope as reflected in 108 metaphors, maxims, and proverbs related to hope that are common in many cultures. These findings support the theory that hope is a culturally determined concept and is implicitly acquired by children during the language acquisition process. Additionally there is a strong religious component to hope. Many Christian religions are built on hope and models of hope are implicitly taught in religious teachings.

Lastly, is there a cognitive component to hope? Yes, there is, but only in the restoration and maintenance of hope - not in the actual acquisition of hope. Many studies have shown that cognitive strategies such as positive self-talk, reading uplifting books, envisioning hopeful images, listening to uplifting music, and lightheartedness (humor and laughter) are used by hopeful persons when suffering some "crisis" or adverse life event (Farran, 1995).

But I could not find any evidence that people actively "think" about hope or about using any of these strategies. We do not seem to "think" about whether or not it would be helpful or wise to have "hope" in any given situation. We are either hopeful or we are not. And, if we are hopeful, it (the condition of hope) seems to "automatically kick in" based on a person's earlier learning.

Hope also seems to be a powerful motivator. C.R. Snyder, a University of Kansas psychologist, posed the following hypothetical situation to college students: "Although you set your goal of getting a B in a class, after your first exam, which accounts for 30% of your grade, you find you only scored a D. It is now one week later. What do you do?" Snyder found that hope made all the difference. Students with high levels of hope said they would work harder and thought of a wider range of things they could do to improve their final grade. Students with moderate levels of hope thought of several ways to improve their grade, but had far less determination to pursue them. Students with low levels of hope gave up attempting to improve their grade, completely demoralized (Goleman, 1995).

This study is not just a theoretical paradigm. When Snyder also compared the actual academic achievement of freshman students who scored high and low on hope, he found that hope was actually a better predictor of their first semester grades than were their SAT scores (which are highly correlated with IQ and therefore widely accepted as a predictor of how successful students will be in college) (Goleman, 1995).

I strongly agree with the researchers mentioned above that the definition of "hope" have learned, religious, and cognitive components because of my own life experiences ... when I had hope to have children, hope to keep my triplets growing inside me the longest time possible, and hope for my triplets to stay alive after they were born. For example, some of the cognitive strategies that I used were positive self-talk, healing thoughts, prayers, and reading uplifting books and envisioning hopeful images. These cognitive strategies helped me throughout my high-risk pregnancy and the months after my triplets were born.

Once "hope" became a reality for me, and I was told that I was pregnant with triplets, I was ecstatic and, at the same time, "welcomed" the trust and gift given to me to be a "mother" to three beautiful babies. I have felt immense inner strength to do my best to be their strongest advocate and protector. Yes, having "hope" was a very positive motivator.

Coming from a close-knit family of five - two parents and one sister and one brother, then my siblings getting married and having two children each, I realized the great joy, love, and happiness children brought to your heart.

But since I had "good" internal chains of not jumping into a serious relationship (as Fromm states we have even though we have freedom), I never really allowed myself to get serious with someone, get married and have a family of my own. Therefore, my hope to have children was only a "hope" until I met my dear husband Ruben of 19 years. From our dating conversations, we knew that we both wanted to have our own family someday. After getting married on October 14, 2001, we decided to wait 1 to 2 years to start a family to create memories together and "get to know each other on a more intimate level."

During December 2002, we decided it was time to start trying to have a family. Five months later, June 2003, I ended up in an emergency room in Turlock, California. This is when my hope to have children began to become a reality....

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Excerpt from María's Personal Journal (written to her children) June 21, 2003

Today your mommy had her last day of Research Data & Analysis III (PSY 786) class. (I am a doctorate student in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the Professional School of Psychology.) It was long intensive day at school so I was relieved to finally go home. Your sweet daddy had dinner waiting for me.

I had been feeling a little bloated with a mild pain in my stomach for about two weeks but I thought it was just stress due to working 9 hours per day, taking classes on weekends, etc.

June 22, 2003

Today your daddy invited me to eat breakfast at IHOP. We like to go there for breakfast. I love their corncakes! I have promised my former undergraduate professor and longtime friend, Dr. Julia Cruz, to take her to San Francisco for her eye specialist appointment. I am going to stay the night at her place tonight to leave from her place to San Francisco tomorrow. She lives in Turlock, CA, which is 1 1/2 hour away from Elk Grove. Your daddy and I had a nice breakfast. I left to Dr. Cruz' place at 2pm. I spend quality time with Dr. Cruz talking and enjoying a glass of Merlot with fruit, crackers, nuts, and cheese. At 7pm, we were having dinner at a nearby Italian restaurant close to the local university. I decided to order a Greek Feta Salad, soup and warm bread since I was not that hungry. After taking my second bite of my salad, I started feeling really awful.

Suddenly, I had to quickly excuse myself to go to the restroom. I knew I needed to leave as soon as possible because I did not understand my terrible symptoms. Why was I feeling so awful? I had never experience this appalling feeling of coldness, nauseous, weakness, etc. I remember getting up from my dinner chair, taking three steps forward, and thinking, as I saw the waiter and waitress talking to each other across the restaurant, I will need to say out loud "where is the restroom located?" because I am not going to make it....

Suddenly, my sight began to see darkness as if my body was shutting down. Sometime later, the paramedics told me that I had "blacked out." I was unconscious for a while because when I woke up, the paramedics, firefighters, chef, waiters and customers were around me! I had blacked out and was having trouble keeping my eyes open. It turned out that my blood pressure was dangerously low and when they attempted to get me up, I threw up everything I had drank and eaten that day. My blood pressure was getting lower than 80/40 so the paramedics ended up taking me to the emergency room at Emmanuel Hospital in Turlock, CA.

I was released 3-4 hours later because the hospital doctors could not identify what had gone wrong with me. I thought I would feel better soon but it was the start of a challenging ordeal. The following days to come were spent going back and forth to the emergency room at our nearby hospitals due to other unexplained "black-outs." Little did I know that was the beginning of a highly complex pregnancy that few people survive. It was during my pregnancy that my "hope" was challenged beyond anything I had experienced up to that point in my life.

[End of Excerpt from María's Personal Journal]

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My story is a miracle filled with hope, everlasting love, and most importantly blessings. My high-risk perinatologist told me after I gave birth to my beautiful triplets, "You have experienced more dramatic health problems than most mothers expecting multiples. You were meant to be here for your triplets. Your triplets are special and miracles of life." The reason he said this is because my triplets and I have experience syndromes and defects that are rare to say the least. I was diagnosed with Severe Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome (SOHS), which is when your ovaries overdevelop from a walnut size to a grapefruit size each, and your body starts to retain fluids. I gained 46 pounds of water in 10 days! I ended up in intensive care because I could not breathe. It was during my stay at the hospital that my husband and I were told that I was 3 ½ weeks pregnant! We were so happy. Then we were told that it seemed like they saw three sacs! Triplets!!! We could not be any happier.

My hope to have children had become a reality, but I had no idea that with this reality also came my biggest test of how much sacrifice, pain, and suffering my body could take. I remember asking my doctor, "Could I possibly die of pain?" In fact, even though I was not feeling well at all and could not move or breathe without having oxygen, I was ecstatic. How could I be blessed to be pregnant with triplets?! My husband was so happy too. However, he seemed very worried.

It was not until the SOHS went away (12 weeks later) that my husband confessed that I had almost passed away when we were first told that we were pregnant. We thought that maybe the worst had been over, however, it was only the beginning . . . .

At 20 weeks, I began to have pre-labor contractions, which never did stop. I had to take magnesium and other medicines to control the contractions to my threshold of 6-7 contractions per hour. At 33 weeks and two days, our sweet Elizabeth, Reuben and Michael were born. It was an emergency C-section because I was dying but I did not know it at the time. I was diagnosed with HELLP syndrome, and I had to receive two blood transfusions after the birth of my triplets. I thought the worst was over. No, it was not. It was only the beginning. Hours after the birth of our triplets, we found out that one of our sons, Reuben Luis would have to be air transferred to UCSF Children's Hospital.

Reuben was born with Transpose Pulmonary Veinary Reverse (TAPVR). A heart defect that is rare in preemie. Our son would require open-heart surgery in order to live. We were informed that our son had a very low chance of survival especially in the recovery stage after his open-heart surgery. Reuben was not home with his brother Michael, his sister Elizabeth, and his parents until after four months.

Our son Michael and daughter Elizabeth were born with some problems but they are not life threatening as was Reuben's health conditions. Elizabeth was diagnosed with hemifacial microsomia, a facial symmetry syndrome that is rare; 1 in 500,000 babies are born with this syndrome. However, it is not life threatening because it is corrected with surgeries.

Michael came home after 18 days in the NICU on February 2, 2004. Elizabeth came home 26 days later on February 10, 2004. Our little fighter Reuben finally came home one day before my first Mother's Day, on May 15, 2004. He was 4 months old.

Thanks to my hope, faith, courage, and all the love and support I received throughout this journey, I was able to come out of this emotional roller coaster with even more hope, strength, courage, and faith than I thought I could ever have.

Although, financially it has been very hard since it is triple the formula, triple the diapers, and triple of food, we are truly blessed to have TRIPLE the love, hugs and kisses!



Update as of January 15, 2021

Sixteen years have passed since I first wrote an essay on my true love story of sacrifice, faith, courage, and hope. My triplets and I are meant to be here to share our miracle lives' journey and how having hope, courage, and faith continues to positively play an important, instrumental role in our lives.

I intentionally live my life with hope, faith, courage, sacrifice, and love. Through the years, the triplets Elizabeth, Reuben, and Michael have had surgeries. For example, Reuben Luis had his first open heart surgery at 6 weeks old, then again at 14 years old on August 10, 2018. Elizabeth has had several surgeries related to being born with hemifacial microsomia, a facial symmetry syndrome that is rare; 1 in 500,000 babies are born with this syndrome. She will have another major surgery this summer. We are so excited for her! This surgery will be approximately eight hours long because they will need to implant a titanium prosthetic jaw joint to her left side and reset the jaw to make it symmetrical. As toddlers, both boys Michael and Reuben had ear tubes in their ears due to chronic ear infections.

Despite being preemies, the triplets have been blessed with being born with many gifts and are exceptionally great kids. All three were interested in learning piano at 6 years old and they actively played piano for 7 years. They learned to play golf at 4 years old and actively played golf until they were 14 years old. Reuben and Michael were in Boy Scouts and Elizabeth was in Girl Scouts. They are black belts in Taekwondo. Elizabeth has continued Taekwondo and is now a 3<sup>rd</sup> degree black belt in International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) style Taekwondo and a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt in Kukkiwon style Taekwondo. She has been a paid lead Taekwondo instructor since she was 15 years old. In addition, all three have been volunteering as altar servers for our parish since they were 11 years old.

Two of them were recognized as gifted when they were in elementary school. They challenge themselves academically by taking honors and AP courses. All three were selected to be part of the Innovative Design and Engineering Academy (IDEA) at their high school. They are now Juniors in high school and are in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in IDEA. Currently, Elizabeth is interested in aerospace engineering, Reuben is interested in mechanical or software engineering, and Michael is interested in biomedical engineering or something in the medical field.

I believe that challenges and experiences make us stronger because we always have hope and faith that it will work out. I am grateful and blessed to share that the triplets are now 17 years old! Their birthday was January 15<sup>th</sup>. I am so proud and honored to be their mom.

I would also like to share another personal story regarding my hope for hearing. I was born deaf on my right ear and only hear about 40% on my left ear. I am deaf on my right ear due to being born without an eardrum. I received the miracle of hearing for the first time on my right ear on January 30, 2015! I had surgery to have a bone-anchored hearing aid (BAHA) implant on the right side of my skull. Although I was told that there was a risk of nerve damage during surgery which could cause me to lose my smile on the right side, I still went forward with the surgery because my hope and faith was

stronger than my fear. My hope to hear on my right side became a reality and tears rolled down my face when I heard new sounds for the first time. I heard the sound of leaves wrestling on the tree, birds chirping, tires rolling on the blacktops, footsteps on the floor, water running from the shower in a different room, and being able to hear my kids from behind while I am driving, to name a few!

My daily rituals of gratitude and appreciation coupled with having hope continue to give me strength to be my family's anchor. I know without a doubt that we are meant to live our best life with intentional purpose to make a positive difference in our personal lives and in the lives of the people in our world.

I learned that when I can't change my circumstances, I can choose to decide how I am going to respond to my circumstances. I've learned to be mindful and ask myself "where is my hope today" to keep me grounded that my Giver and Provider (God) is the anchor of my life and He is in charge of my life and in my triplets' lives. Keep hope and faith alive.

"Hope - if you only carry one thing throughout your entire life, let it be hope. Let it be hope that better things are always ahead. Let it be hope that you can get through even the toughest of times. Let it be hope that you are stronger than any challenge that comes your way. Let it be hope that you are exactly where you are meant to be right now and that you are on the path to where you are meant to be.... Because during these times, hope will be the very thing that carries you through."

Quote by Nikki Banas

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