

'Disney World' TTTS babies



Olivia, and Lea, 1 year, with sister Lauren, 4 years

It all began when we decided to take our then 3-year-old daughter Lauren to Disney World Oct. 5, 2002. I wanted to get pregnant in October so I could have a summer baby. Well, my wish came true Oct. 11, in sunny Orlando, Fla.

Soon after my doctor confirmed my pregnancy, I began to get really bloated and my back was always sore. He was concerned that this might be a bad pregnancy. I had a series of two ultrasounds, two amniocenteses and a trip to the emergency room. The 14-week ultrasound showed twins. Every time, I went home feeling weird that something was terribly wrong, but the doctors could not find anything.

One Sunday morning, I turned on the TV and happened to see "Baby Story." The young pregnant mom on the show was diagnosed with twin-to-twin transfusion

Syndrome. All I could do was think about my babies who could be sick like this. My husband tried to put me at ease, but I kept thinking about it.

Eager to learn more, I looked up TTTS on the Internet. What I found did not make me feel any better because I was experiencing some of the symptoms I read about—bloating, hard belly to the touch and severe back pain.

At my 20-week ultrasound, Dr. Achilles Athanassiou looked at me lying on the bed with my beautiful daughter and my husband by my side and asked, "Have you ever heard of Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome?"

I couldn't believe it. I cried and cried and held on to my husband so tight, just hoping this was a dream.

Dr. Athanassiou telephoned his associates at the Women's and Infant's Hospital

in Rhode Island; they were expecting me. There were a few options, including surgery. Dr. Athanassiou was both comforting and honest. He explained to us that if we waited any longer our twins would die.

We had to go home, pack a bag and drive straight to Rhode Island. As we drove there we cried, we prayed and we thought of the worst—and also of the best—outcome.

When we got to Women and Infant's Hospital Dr. Francois Luks, a surgeon, came in the room and looked at my dying babies on the ultrasound. He and his associate Dr. Carr told us we had to make some life-or-death decisions. I thought I could go home, think about it and come back for the surgery. That was not the case at all.

At 10 p.m. that night I had surgery; it lasted about 2½ hours. They were able to sever about eight vessels that were creating most of the problem. All went well but as we knew there were no guarantees.

I remained in the hospital in Rhode Island for 10 days and then went home to the care of Dr. Athanassiou. It was about six weeks before he could see any improvements in the twins.

Doctors Carr and Luks called weekly for progress reports and gave us the TTTS Foundation information, where we read about other families who had gone through this and even talked with some. I was on bed rest so I sat and read and cried for each of these families, not knowing the outcome of my own. But things progressed.

At 37 weeks a strong, beautiful baby we call Olivia was born vaginally—5 pounds, 12 ounces. Lea was ready, but because her cord emerged before she did, the doctors took her by Caesarean section. She weighed 6 pounds, 4 ounces.

My miracle babies have just turned 1 year old and are doing amazingly well. ♥

Bernadette Bregoli lives in Abington, Mass., with her family.