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Golden Gate Estates grandma delivers surprise baby, restarts motherhood at 50



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Michele Hall looks down at the pregnancy test cradled in her hand.

A plus sign appears. She gasps. *How can this be?*

From the bathroom, she yells for her husband, Jerry, who's in the kitchen making breakfast. They meet at the doorway and she slowly hands him their future.

A plus sign. Positive.

She watches him as he stares down at the tiny symbol that holds so much value. The blood drains from his face.

They look at one another. How can they raise another child? How is it even possible?

She's 50. He's 47.

She's already a mom of four. All her children are grown and out of the house, except for her 14-year-old daughter, Aubrey Hall, the only child she shares with Jerry.

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In 2017, her doctor told her she was in menopause. Based on a blood test result, her chances of becoming pregnant were slim to none.

Oct. 8, 2018, was the day Michele Hall found out she was pregnant. She was already at about 26 weeks. It's a boy.

How did she miss the signs? She didn't experience any morning sickness or weight gain. She also didn't have any signs of menopause or lupus, a chronic

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autoimmune disease she'd been battling for more than 10 years. That was until she realized it could be something else, so she bought the pregnancy test.

In the span of two months — from October to December — the Halls experienced every emotion in the book when they learned they were having a baby boy.

Shock

Shock was the first reaction.

"Everyone was in shock," Michele Hall said about her family's reaction to the surprising news. At this time, she was only weeks away from giving birth.

"Definitely in shock," her husband agreed.

"So in shock," daughter Aubrey said.

"It does make me feel young, though," her father quipped.

"Not me," said Michele Hall, laughing. "I don't feel so young right now."

The Halls, who live in Golden Gate Estates, had less than two months to prepare for their baby.

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While it was a blessing, Michele and Jerry Hall didn't have any plans to expand their family. Once their daughter left the nest, they planned to travel more, maybe go on a cruise.

"But we have to put the brakes on that and start over again," Michele Hall said.

They never questioned whether or not they would keep the baby. It was a no-brainer. Yes, of course, they would.

In a way, motherhood has defined Michele Hall.

She had her first child, Aaron Myers, now 34, at age 15. Then she gave birth to a girl, Heather Yeager, now 28, and another son, Brandon Myers, 24. Her youngest is Aubrey. Her eldest daughter has two children — 6-year-old Maeleigh and Emmalyn, 4, who live in Iowa. Her two sons live in Pennsylvania, where the Halls are originally from.

ter Aubrey, moved to Golden Gate Estates

Michele started home schooling Aubrey. Jerry worked as a cabinetmaker. They lived in a cozy house with plenty of land. Life was good.

Her doctor in Pennsylvania told her she was in menopause. The diagnosis was confirmed by a doctor in Naples. Any chance of her becoming pregnant, they said, was close to zero.

Before a woman reaches menopause, she undergoes a yearslong transition called perimenopause, or the transition to menopause. This process usually starts in the mid-to-late 40s. During this process, a woman may deal with irregular periods and hot flashes, according to the Office on Women's Health, a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

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The average age for menopause in the United States is 52. Menopause is reached once it has been a full year since the last period. At that stage, a woman can no longer get pregnant.

Michele Hall said she didn't have a period for more than a year. For a chunk of that time, as she didn't realize until later on, it was because she was already pregnant.

When she found out she was expecting, she said she felt like one of those women on the defunct TLC documentary series "I Didn't Know I Was Pregnant."

How could you not know you're pregnant? She thought.

"I used to call bull on that until it happened to me."

Fear

After getting past the initial shock, Michele Hall became fearful.

The odds were stacked against her. She had lupus, pre-existing high blood pressure and late prenatal care. Throw her age into the mix.

Was her baby going to be all right?

She saw doctors regularly in the two months leading up to the delivery at NCH North Naples Hospital on Dec. 27. Since her pregnancy was considered high-risk, she underwent a scheduled cesarean delivery, or C-section, in lieu of a natural birth.

his birth, she was told he was about 34 to 35 weeks old. A full-term pregnancy lasts between 39 and 40 weeks, according to March of Dimes.

Naples obstetrician Dr. Thomas “Tom” Beckett first met Michele Hall at his office on Dec. 20, only a week before delivering her son. He runs his own practice and is also a provider with the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida.

Hall beat his previous record of age 48 for the oldest patient he'd ever delivered a baby for in his 30-year career. "Fifty was a whole new decade for me."

Beckett said there are cases where women, in their 30s or 40s, become pregnant after being told their chances were slim.

In Hall's case, he added, "She just released that one egg that did it."

Although she wasn't expecting to have a baby at this stage in life, Hall said she knows how lucky she is. Many women around her age pay top-dollar to have a child via in vitro fertilization. She did it the old-fashioned way.

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The most common cause of age-related decline in fertility is less-frequent ovulation. As women age, they begin to have occasional cycles where an egg is never released. Miscarriage is also more common in women over the age of 35, according to the American Pregnancy Association.

Hall felt alone. Were other women her age having unexpected pregnancies?

She took to social media and posted her story on a private Facebook Naples mom group, weeks before giving birth. Several moms liked and commented on her post, writing words of encouragement and support. A few, in their 40s, messaged her with similar stories, but no one her age.

In the weeks before giving birth, Hall took extreme care of herself, going to doctor appointments regularly and resting as much as she could.

When she'd go out in public, she said she started feeling a little self-conscious. Sometimes people would stare at her belly.

But she had a strong support system.

Excitement

Flowery wrapped boxes and bags of baby toys and gear piled up in the corner of a multipurpose room at Vineyards Community Park in Naples. It was Dec. 15. Hall was expecting any day now and, to celebrate, friends threw her a baby shower.

After the initial shock and fear, she was excited.

"This baby signals a new beginning," she said.

The Halls left most of their family and friends behind in Pennsylvania, so for a while it was just the three of them. Now they were expecting a new member of the family and had a supportive community around them.

At the shower, neighbors, fellow home-school teachers and ice skating friends of Aubrey's celebrated with food, gifts and hugs. Hall's children, except Aubrey, couldn't make it to the shower, but she communicated regularly with them throughout the pregnancy

"She's a trouper," neighbor and friend Robin Currence said of Michele.

A friend, Lynda Rowley, learned the mom-to-be was pregnant in the car on the way to an ultrasound appointment. Hall had asked Rowley to take her somewhere that day but didn't break the news until they were already on their way.

"I was so surprised," Rowley said.

During the shower, Hall was all smiles. Her growing belly was visible underneath a loose dress. She was feeling pretty good, except for the swelling in her feet and ankles and on-and-off heart palpitations.

The Halls grew emotional as they opened their gifts, revealing bath sets, a diaper bag, clothes, booties and a baby bouncer.

"I'm ready to meet him," Michele Hall said.

They named their son Grayson. They originally chose the name Grace if it was a girl, but when they found out it was a boy, they altered it slightly.

Video: Your mom is hanging onto 1,300 keepsakes from your childhood

Anxious

On Dec. 27, Michele Hall gave birth to her healthy baby boy at NCH North Naples Hospital off Immokalee Road.

Based on medical records for the past 10 years, it appears 53 is the age of the oldest woman who has given birth across all NCH Healthcare system locations, according to NCH spokesman Shawn McConnell. It wasn't known whether that baby was conceived naturally.

Due to it being a high-risk pregnancy, Beckett had ordered a C-section. Michele Hall never had surgery before. The idea frightened her, but she had no choice.

The longer she carried the baby, the doctor said, the higher the risk of her suffering from cardiac issues or seizures.

Grayson weighed a little more than 6 pounds and measured 19 inches long.

Following his birth, Grayson suffered one sleep apnea episode and several episodes where he had a slower heart rate, or bradycardia. He was kept under surveillance at the hospital's newborn intensive care unit for 12 days.

He also suffered from transient tekipnia of the newborn, a term for a temporary mild respiratory problem of babies that begins after birth.

Those 12 days were tough on the Halls.

"It goes through your mind that something can go wrong," Michele Hall said, tearing up. She looked down at Grayson finally in her arms at the NICU more than a week after the C-section, on Jan. 5. He was released two days later.

She couldn't see her son for days following the delivery. When she finally could, she never strayed too far. When she was discharged from the hospital on New Year's Eve, her and her husband stayed at the NICU to celebrate with their newborn.

Most nights the couple stayed in an overflow room, a short walk from Grayson's curtained-off room. When they went home for a short break, they still kept an eye on him through the NICU camera system.

Hopeful

Grayson sleeps deeply, nestled in the arms of his mother on a Sunday afternoon in early February at their Golden Gate Estates home. At nearly 2 months old, he finally outgrew his premature clothes and weighed about 8 pounds.

Video: 3 different reactions to mom's homecoming

He's a quiet baby, crying occasionally only. His favorite hobbies are eating and sleeping.

"He sleeps like a log," Michele Hall said.

After cradling the sleeping baby for more than an hour, she passed him to Aubrey, who gladly took the role of the older sister. She sat on the sofa and expertly fed him milk as Food Network's "Guy's Grocery Games" played on the living room TV. Aubrey had rehearsed the role when her nieces were infants.

The only sound was the TV — until Aubrey yelled: "Not it!" She wrinkled her nose as a strong smell emanated from Grayson's diaper.

"Not it," repeated her father, who was in another room.

It was Michele's turn for diaper duty.

The Halls have adjusted to their new normal, and so have their yellow Lab Milly, cat Luna and pet turtles.

"Now we're just settling back into our regular lives after a chaotic 12 to 13 weeks," Michele Hall said.

Before Grayson arrived home, on Jan. 7, the Halls were able to transform their guest bedroom into a woodlands-themed nursery. Stuffed foxes and bears adorned the room. A drawing his sister did with his name on it and images of furry critters hung on the wall over the crib.

The first night at home was the toughest, said Michele Hall, who didn't get much sleep. She was too worried, given everything that had happened at the NICU.

If anything were to happen, the Halls learned CPR from a first responder neighbor. Luckily, they haven't had to use it.

Michele Hall, who turns 51 in May, won't be having any more children. She made sure of that. During the C-section, Beckett removed her fallopian tubes.

"I'm 100 percent sure I'm not having any more kids," she said, even though she's so grateful for her miracle baby. "He's a blessing."