

Delaying motherhood

Why more women are waiting until 35 or even 40

BY JOCELYN GREEN



Jules and Doreen Nagle waited until their 40s to adopt their son, Skyler, now 11. The family recently took a vacation to swim with dolphins in Mexico.

At 50 years of age, Rose Clark isn't spending her days planning for retirement. Instead, she's living life all over again — reading classic novels she passed up years ago, rock-climbing in Arkansas, taking horseback riding lessons — all with sons Daniel, 14, and Josh, 10.

"Having two boys has kept me young and forced me to take risks," Clark says. "The last thing two boys need is a wimpy mom."

Clark is among a growing number of moms who started having children after the age of 35. With a fast-growing trend for women in their mid-30s or older to become first-time mothers, the "average" family is being redefined.

Birth to women in their early 40s doubled from 1981 to 2003. The National Center for Health Statistics reports that in 2005, childbearing by women in their 30s and 40s continued to increase. The birth rate for women ages 35-39 years rose to 46.3 births per 1,000, 2 percent over the rate in 2004 and

the highest rate since 1965. The birth rate for women 40-44 years also rose by 2 percent, to 9.1, the highest rate since 1968, and the rate for women aged 45-49 years increased slightly, to 0.6 births per 1,000, the first increase in the rate since 2000 and the highest rate for this age group since 1970.

Of course, not all of these women conceived naturally. In 2002, three-fourths of the women older than 40 who became pregnant did so as a result of fertility treatments. And it's a booming business. Last year, the fertility industry reached the \$3 billion mark, up from \$1.6 billion in 1999.

While having a child in the late 30s or early 40s was not uncommon in large families of generations past, the difference is the age at which women are having their first child. Reasons for the delay vary. Some women want to make use of their education and focus on their careers. First-time birth rates for women in their late 30s through

their 40s with college degrees are more than twice as high as women with less education.

But not all older first-time moms put off children in favor of a career. For some, such as Cynthia Wilson James, a suitable husband is a prerequisite — and when none can be found until later, it follows that children must wait even longer.

James had it all planned out while in college. Upon graduation, she would wed, develop a successful career and have children, all by the age of 27. Her 27th birthday came and went, and so did her ideal timeline. Instead, she married at the age of 40. She gave birth to two healthy daughters (both conceived naturally) when 42 and 44.

"I always wanted to get married and have children," James says. "One of the myths out there is that all older moms are selfish; we put our careers first. But again, using myself as an example, that's just not how it happened. Not all older women are career-driven and then

look around and say, 'It's getting late, let me hurry up and have a baby.'"

Even though James did not purposely delay motherhood, she believes there are advantages to the way it happened with her. "I don't feel like I've missed anything," she says. "I did most of what I wanted with my career, and I was able to travel. I don't see my children side-tracked now. I can devote time to them."

James founded a Web site, InSeasonMom.org, for first-time moms older than 35 to offer encouragement and information to counterbalance the health risk statistics for the demographic.

While James may have been pinning for children years before she had them, Clark lived contently with her career lifestyle — for a while. "I have grown into motherhood. I am ambitious and career-oriented," she says. "The career is not the golden egg. The golden egg is to see my sons grow up and ful-



Cynthia Wilson James gave birth to her daughters Jewel, now 3, and Faith, 5, while in her 40s.

fill the destiny Jesus has for them."

Still, Clark is grateful for the time she and her husband had alone with each other before children came along. During those six years, they traveled internationally together and paid off debts. Because of their financial planning, Clark is now able to stay home full-time with her sons.

Arlene Allen, director of Assemblies of God National Women's Ministries, identifies with the trend toward delayed parenting. "More women are going to college and when they get out they at least want to wet their feet in their careers, and then begin their family," she says. "When my husband and I married, he was still in school and we decided not to bring a child into our home right then when the stress level was so great. Our goal was education at that time. Gary and I didn't start our family for seven years, and we've never regretted that."

Doreen Nagle and her husband, Jules, adopted their son Skyler from Russia after her 40th year passed. With her book, *But I Don't Feel Too Old to Be a Mommy*, Nagle details the pros and cons of motherhood at a later age, adoption, career options and what motherhood is really like.

Nagle points out that more life experience in a mom translates into more advantages for the children. Older moms can exhibit less focus on self, more patience and self-confidence, and more motivated parenting.

"Being an older mom is not something I think about," Nagle says. "I am no different than any other mom out there trying to raise her children." [tpe](http://tpe.org)

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