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Rachel Weisz

The *Lovely Bones*
star on the darkest
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Providing prenatal care for all moms

Gwen Matthews

The night before going in for her 20-week ultrasound, Gwen Matthews's biggest concern was whether she was going to have a boy or a girl. She was debating names with her husband and two daughters in their new home in Rogers, AR. "Let's name him Beau!" 2-year-old Brittany said, and everyone agreed. The next day, Gwen discovered that her unborn baby was, indeed, a boy—and that he was suffering from a genetic disorder called Trisomy 18. This rare genetic mutation can create a host of problems including heart defects, physical deformities, and mental deficiency. Babies diagnosed with Trisomy 18 have only a 50-percent chance of surviving beyond the first week of life.

"One of the doctors started listing our options—if your baby is not breathing when he is born, do you want to artificially resuscitate?" Gwen said. "I thought, *You have got to be kidding me. How do you make these decisions?*" She gave birth to Beau in September 2003; her son lived 11 days. On his last day, struggling to breathe, Beau opened one eye and looked at his mother. "You do what you have to do," Gwen told him. "Mama loves you."

Throughout the crisis, Gwen's husband, Terry, had been seeking a way to honor the neonatal unit of the Northwest Medical Center in Springdale, AR, where Beau was treated. "The nurses and doctors were top-notch professionals," Gwen, now 44, says, "and they had compassion beyond the call of duty." The couple started planning the Beau Foundation, a nonprofit to help underprivileged women get prenatal care; at the time, one in five pregnant women in their region were not even seeing a doctor until there was a problem or they were ready to deliver.

Within the year, the Matthewses had recruited a board of directors and held a golf tournament and luncheon, which raised more than \$100,000. Soon after, they opened a prenatal clinic in Springdale, where mothers-to-be are regularly monitored by a nurse practitioner free of charge—and given a year's supply of prenatal vitamins—until their 28th week of pregnancy, at which point they are assigned to an obstetrician to see them through to their delivery. The board estimated that the clinic might see only a handful of patients that first year, but 600 women ended up getting their prenatal treatment there. Two more clinics in Arkansas have followed, and the Beau Foundation is on target to serve more than 2,000 women this year. "Helping these women has given us a reason for why we had to go through this horrible tragedy," Gwen explains. "We are completely overwhelmed whenever we hear the numbers of women the clinics are treating. This is so much bigger than Gwen and Terry Matthews now." —*Nell Casey*

Gwen Matthews gives mothers-to-be the care they need.

Is there a REDBOOK Hero in your life? Someone who's making a positive difference in her community—and changing the world for the rest of us? Tell us her story: Email us at redbookheroes@hearst.com.



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