

878-2881

Baby in China for special stem cell treatment

By Stephanie Thiessen CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Tine months ago, Julie and Kerry Teskey found themselves staring at death through the eyes of their newborn son.

Baby Dylan was born with a brain injury and the doctors didn't expect him to survive. His little body was twisted like a pretzel. He couldn't move his arms or legs much, and even changing him was difficult.

So after two months of visiting Dylan in the hospital, the Teskeys took him home to spend his final days surrounded by his family. Each day that Dylan valiantly fought to live, his parents wondered if it would be his last.

"For the first two months we were in a state of mourning. We didn't expect him to survive," Kerry said.

But Dylan had other ideas in mind, and injections, along with physiotherapy. wasn't about to give up so easily. Soon, he began showing signs of improvement.

"We switched gears from a palliative mode of thinking to, 'We have to do everything we can to help him'," Kerry recalled.

Doctors told the Teskeys that Dylan's brain injury — from a lack of oxygen and blood to his brain — is most likely going to present itself as a moderate-to-severe form of cerebral palsy, Julie explained. Symptoms are already evident, and Dylan's parents fear he might not be able to walk or feed himself.

Fortunately, Dylan has shown a lot of that the stem cells be umbilical. growth in the past months and is a loveable child who likes to smile.

He's working with a developmental specialist, and he's starting to move around more. Seizures that used to wreak havoc on his little body are now controlled with medication.

But his arms and hands are still tight, and he can't even hold a bottle. His development is nowhere near where it should

Shortly after bringing him home, Julie began searching on the Web for people in similar situations, and she found them. Soon, she was chatting with parents of brain-injured children about the routes they were taking. There were two that piqued the Teskeys' interest — hyperbaric oxygen treatments and stem cell injections.

Their first step was to try hyperbaric oxygen treatments. They were cheaper than the stem cell procedure — about \$100 per treatment, with about 40 sessions required — and could be done locally. Unfortunately, they didn't yield the

desired results, Julie said.

The stem cell procedure — along with a trip to China, where it would be performed — seemed like the only viable

Julie left with Dylan for a grueling 18hour flight March 29, and will return April 26. "I'm excited. I'm looking forward to seeing the results," Julie said days before departing.

Essentially, stem cells don't yet have a specific function, and have the capacity to turn into any kind of cell in the body, such as blood, heart, or — in Dylan's case brain cells.

So, when injected, they have the potential to replace damaged or dead cells.

The procedure hasn't yet been approved in Canada or the United States.

Right now, Dylan's at the Nanshan Hospital in Shenzhen, which is just north of Hong Kong. He's receiving regular

According to the blog being kept by Julie, all is going fairly well so far.

The price tag for the procedure and trip to China? About \$20,000.

Stem cells are a buzzword these days, and can stir up quite a controversy. What most of the disagreements are about is where the stem cells are harvested from. There are about a dozen sources, Kerry said, including umbilical cords, bone marrow, skin and - what some people disagree with — human embryos.

Kerry said they were able to specify

This is basically a clinical trial, Kerry said. There isn't much in the way of statistics to let them know how often it's successful, but "there's lots of anecdotal evidence," he said.

"We don't expect miracles, but obviously that would be welcome," Kerry said. "If he's (Dylan) able to move his arms, if he's able to feed himself and be able to have some mobility with his legs, I'd feel very grateful."

Dylan's Canadian doctors don't have much to say either way about the stem cell injections, Julie said.

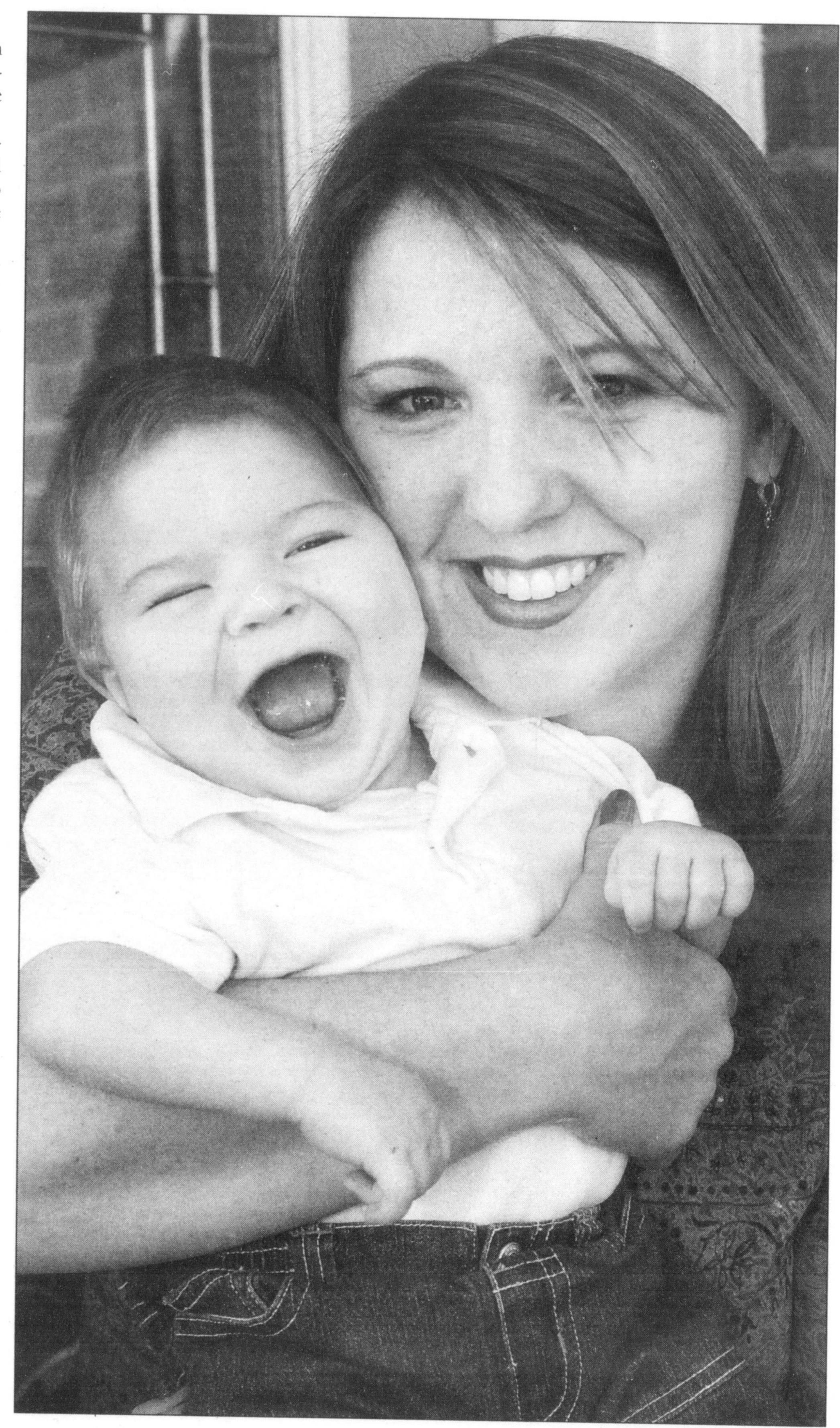
"It's so new. A lot don't know much about it," she said, adding Dylan's neurologist said it couldn't hurt.

So, the couple continues to hope for

As for Kerry, he's running the household — the couple also has a two-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter — on his own until Julie and Dylan return.

"I miss them terribly," he said.

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HOLDING OUT HOPE: Julie Teskey has taken her son Dylan, who has a brain injury, to China for stem cell treatment that he can't get here.

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