

SHE'LL NEVER KNOW THE BLOOD DONORS WHO HELPED SAVE HER LIFE, BUT LUCIE MARTINEAU AND HER CHILDREN ARE GRATEFUL

# Receiving the gift of life

BY STEFANIA RIZZI  
Staff Writer

Sitting cross-legged on a leather couch, nuzzling her sleeping baby and gently kissing his head, Lucie Martineau looks out the window, pondering perhaps what she would be missing had things not worked out the way they did.

On Oct. 11, just after giving birth to her second son, Guillaume, the 40-year-old mother lay in a hospital operating room fighting for her life.

The drama began in June, when a routine doctor's visit revealed the Pottageville resident had placenta previa, a rare medical condition that can lead to serious complications, including heavy bleeding, because the placenta lies low in the uterus, covering the birth canal.

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Martineau was not startled by the news. As a medical scientist, she knew that, in most cases, the placenta shifts upwards into the proper place by the third trimester.

However, the baby was still low-lying when Martineau was entering her 34th week of pregnancy.

Not taking any chances, Martineau's doctor admitted her to Southlake Regional Health Centre at the end of September and scheduled her for a C-section Oct. 19.

During her hospital stay, Martineau was routinely asked by medical staff if she was bleeding or spotting and would always respond in the negative.

But on Oct. 11, 15 minutes after a visit from a doctor, she went to the bathroom and began bleeding.

"When I saw the blood, I hit the panic button. I couldn't feel him move anymore," said Martineau, who feared she had lost the baby. "It turned out, he was sleeping on his back. Once I knew he was alive, I wanted him out."

Martineau was brought into the birthing unit's operating room and was prepped for an emergency C-section.

When getting into position, Martineau felt something tear and then great pain. Doctors quickly realized she had placenta percreta — when the placenta grows through and out of the uterus.

"I was in a lot of pain," said Martineau, who developed the con-

dition because of predisposing factors, such as a previous C-section and miscarriages.

"When I was in the fetal position, I ruptured my uterus. Instead of being a half-inch thick, it was actually paper-thin. I had a hole in my uterus so my blood was mixing with the uterus and, if they didn't deliver my baby quickly enough, he would have started drinking the blood and drowned."

The medical staff immediately delivered the baby and attempted to stop the uncontrolled bleeding by cutting the placenta and removing the uterus.

"As a physiologist, I knew all the signs, so I knew something was wrong. My ears were buzzing, my blood pressure was low. I thought I was going to die," said Martineau, whose heart was pumping out blood as fast as the medical team could pump it in. "My last thought was not fear of dying, but that I wouldn't even get to hold my son."

For the next three hours, almost 50 people — anesthesiologists, obstetricians, vascular surgeons, security guards who blocked the entrance to the elevators as nurses ran to get more blood and OPP officers who were dispatched downtown to fetch more blood products when Martineau had depleted her supply — fought to save Martineau's life.

After receiving enough blood transfusions to fill a human body three times, Martineau was sent to the intensive care unit on life support and was administered her last rites.

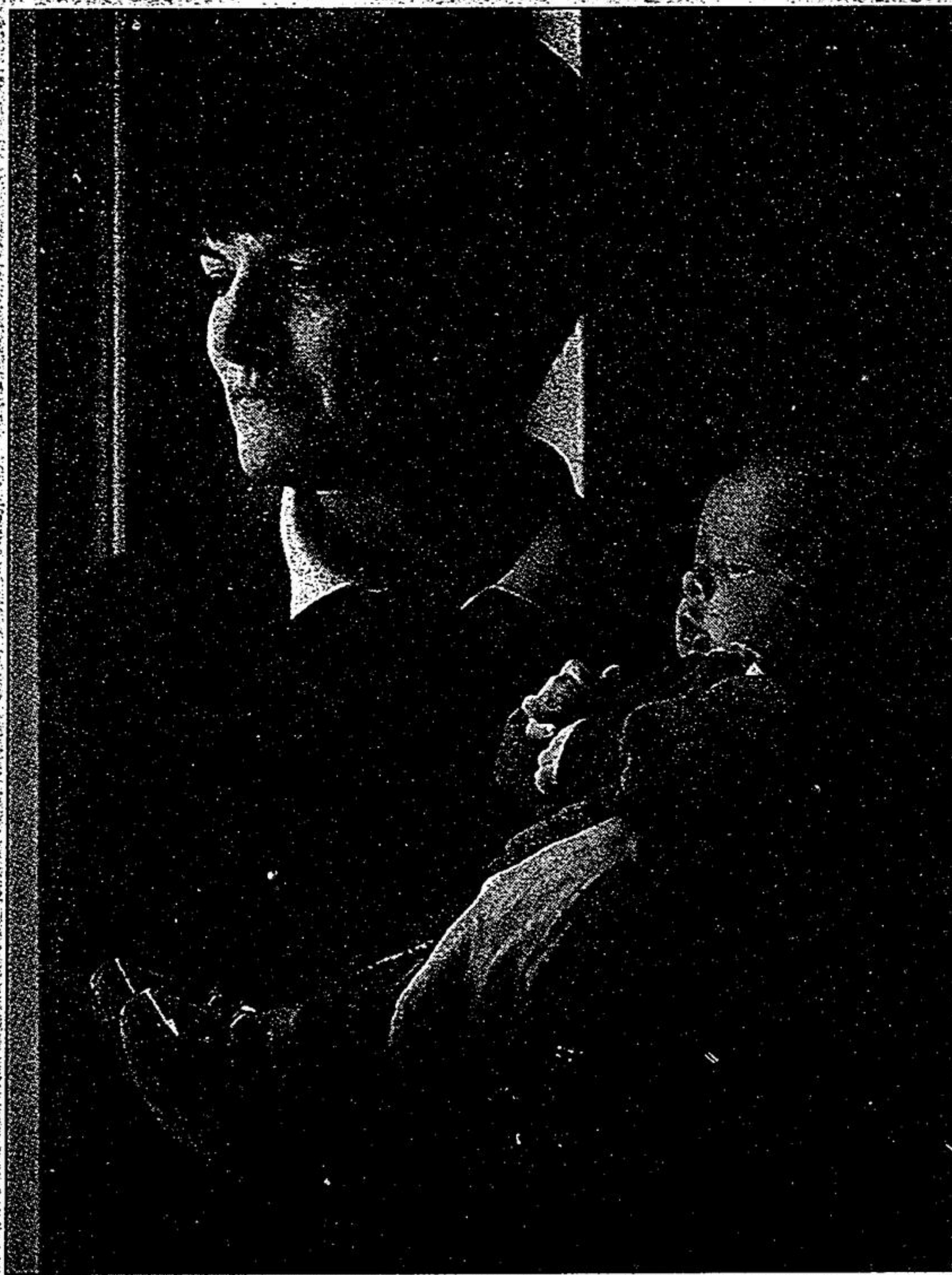
Miraculously, Martineau recovered from the ordeal three days later and was transferred to the maternity ward, where she remained until she was released from hospital a week later.

Judy Swale, manager of the hospital's maternal newborn program, was facilitating staff and gathering resources the medical team needed to save Martineau's life.

"We accessed everything for her that we possibly could," Swale said. "We had patients in similar cases, but nothing to that magnitude."

Swale said Martineau was fortunate that she started bleeding when she did because if it had been after hours or on the weekend, the staff and resources available to her may have been limited.

"I was very grateful for the time of day because it was during the afternoon, on a weekday so more people were easier to get hold of. She needed more than the basic crew," explained Swale, who was impressed with how staff came together. "People who do not normally work together pulled



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Lucie Martineau holds her baby Guillaume. After his birth, Martineau almost died, needing massive transfusions of blood.

together to save the patient. (The staff) rose to the occasion."

Martineau believes she was given a second chance at life and finds no coincidence that Guillaume Oliver Ducharme's initials are GOD.

"God and (Guillaume) were protecting me that day. They made me live so I could be with (my son)," said Martineau, who still suffers from memory loss as a side effect of medication taken throughout the ordeal. "My near-death experience makes you take a step back, thank God and realize that I have some unfinished business and that it wasn't my time."

Martineau wants to turn her life-threatening situation into something positive by encouraging people to donate blood.

"I had the best medical team, but if there were no people who had donated blood, I wouldn't be here today. It's as simple as that. I really know what it means to give the gift of

life," said Martineau, adding she'd like to organize blood donor clinics at work.

"My 3-1/2-year-old would remember me, but Guillaume would never have known me."

The Canadian Blood Services Toronto Centre, which supplies hospitals throughout Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, will try to raise 11,000 units of blood this holiday season.

"It's a great time of year to consider donating," said Canadian Blood Services communications manager Doug Brenner, adding one donation can save up to four lives. "The holidays are busy, there's a lot of travel, so we're promoting the need for blood donations."

"What (new donors) will find is that it's painless and not that difficult," he added. "Once you've donated, there's a good chance you'll do it again."

## Upcoming clinics

Blood donor clinics will be held on the following days in York Region:

### KING TOWNSHIP

Monday, Dec. 11  
King City United Church  
4:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### NEWMARKET

Thursday, Dec. 14  
Newmarket Community Centre  
12:30 to 8 p.m.

### STOUFFVILLE

Saturday, Dec. 16  
Stouffville Legion Hall, branch 459  
9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

### MARKHAM

Monday, Dec. 18  
American Express Canada Inc.  
Noon to 4 p.m.

### AURORA

Thursday, Dec. 28  
Royal Canadian Legion  
2 to 8 p.m.

### THORNHILL

Friday, Dec. 29  
Thornhill Community Centre  
3 to 8 p.m.

For information about clinics in the area, call 1-888-935-1666.

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