

Test Tube BABIES

1 x 60



International

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She was described in the press as “The Baby of the Century.” When Louise Brown, the world’s first successful test tube baby was born in Great Britain on July 25, 1978, the event was heralded as the beginning of a technological revolution in human reproduction. It was also the culmination of a decade-long effort involving scientists on both sides of the Atlantic to conceive babies through in vitro fertilization, or IVF.

This program will interweave the stories of two doctors, the renowned New York gynecologist Landrum Shettles and the British physiologist Robert Edwards. Haunted by the fear that their laboratory interventions in the natural fertilization process would create malformations in the embryo, these pioneering researchers faced other daunting obstacles. Colleagues were reluctant to collaborate on work they deemed too controversial and government agencies refused to fund their research, believing testing IVF on humans was premature. As they forged ahead, Shettles and Edwards also met with fierce cultural opposition. The Catholic Church excoriated them for taking “the Lord’s work into their own hands.” Even their fellow scientists questioned whether they were entering territory that might best be left unexplored. Their work became the locus of debate over the limits of science and a precursor of the current debate over cloning and stem cell research.

Although the early IVF researchers had to weather a political and ethical battlefield, today IVF is a widely accepted medical procedure. In the United States alone, more than 100,000 women received in vitro fertilization treatment last year, and the procedure has resulted in the births of more than a million babies worldwide. Use of in vitro fertilization has revolutionized the lives of women by allowing them to delay childbearing beyond what was long believed to be biologically possible. And, by allowing single women and non-heterosexual couples to have biological children, the procedure has also revolutionized the way we think of family.

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CREDITS

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