

Waiting Womb



Praying at fertility shrines. Ringing bells. Lighting candles. There are many ways to encourage pregnancy when the usual method fails, and Shelley and Andrei Kirilenko tried

them all. But six years into their quest for an heir, they were still childless.

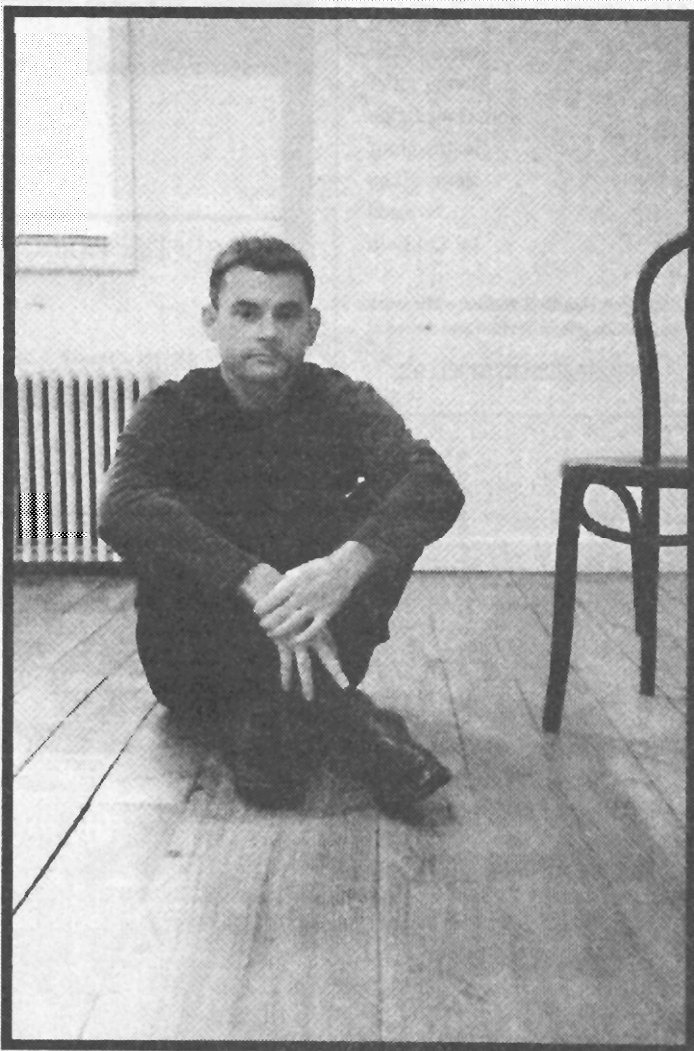
The only thing left was in vitro fertilization (IVF), which is invasive, requires daily hormone injections for a month, and can cost well over \$10,000, often paid out-of-pocket. The success rate depends on a couple's age and health, but it hovers around 30 percent. "After having injections in the same places every day, my abdomen was covered with bruises," Shelley says. "I looked like a battered wife or something."

Still, following two cycles of IVF, Shelley, 44, got pregnant. The Bethesda couple now has a 3-year-old son, Luke. And for their final infertility stunt, the couple, who've made six short narrative films together since 1995, spent \$20,000 making *Technostorks*, a documentary about assisted reproduction.

"We spent so many hours waiting in fertility clinics," says Andrei, a 38-year-old Ukraine native, who directed and produced the film. "I thought, 'Why don't we have a film to watch or something?' Instead, you start reading [pamphlets], and you just get scared."

Technostorks is the Kirilenkos' attempt to remedy the situation. Andrei is in negotiations with RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association to distribute the 50-minute film to its members. He is also working with gynecologists and infertility clinics to show the film in their waiting rooms and hopes to sell cable-television rights.

The film follows three Washington, D.C.-area couples through a cycle of IVF. It's emotionally



Concept Video: Kirilenko hopes to put IVF on cable.

can't really go to a clinic and ask people in the waiting room," Andrei says. Instead, he relied on doctors, Internet message boards, and presentations at infertility conferences. "You never think there's going to be a problem," says one participant about getting pregnant. "I mean, why would you? It's a natural thing." Another woman blames herself: "Sometimes I even think I'm being punished for things I've said or done in the past."

It was tough to be objective, Andrei says, because IVF helped him and Shelley. To counteract positive spin, he enlisted one of his associate producers to act as a watchdog over the production. "I do fully acknowledge that this film is made by someone who... was helped by the treatment," he says. "But we could not bias the film, because we did not know the outcome."

Technostorks, which Shelley narrates, employs a three-act structure that climaxes when one of the couples receives a phone call from their doctor that the IVF has worked. The scene was difficult to shoot because the Kirilenkos found themselves crying along with the couple while simultaneously operating the camera and boom. But two of the three couples did not get pregnant, which fits the statistics. If none or all had gotten pregnant, Andrei would have found more couples to film, he says.

Andrei has given plenty of thought to whether IVF is worth so much trouble. "In our relationship, we could reach the most remarkable emotional closeness, but we are physically two separate people," he says. "I felt that it would be a natural progression of our relationship to create a blend of the two of us." —Rachel Beckman

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