

# Kids In The News

Rachel March

*It isn't every day that children are featured in the news, but when a child does make headlines the circumstances are bound to be extraordinary, if not completely bizarre. Here is an array of curious reports that have captured the interest of the media and the public all over the world—even more curious, of course, because they're all about children.*



## Infant Prize Fighter

*New York Times*

The entire hospital was in an uproar. Doctors, nurses and even the cleaning staff could talk of nothing other than this extraordinary event. A mother had just given birth to an infant with incredible bulging muscles. None of the doctors at the hospital had ever seen or heard of anything like it before.

"It's extraordinary," Dr. Markus Schuelke, a pediatric doctor at the hospital, remarked.

The hospital staff crowded into the infant's room, vying for a glimpse of the unusual child. It was a strange scene indeed. The one-day-old infant lay sleeping peacefully in his bassinet, the muscles of his arms and legs bulging as if he were a well-toned prize fighter. The name of the German-born baby was never released, but pictures demonstrate that his young physique contained almost twice as much muscle as other infants.

A decade has passed since then. Today, the boy is an elementary school student. He still possesses some extraordinary physical characteristics. The muscles in his arms and legs are twice the size of other children his age, and he can lift weights that few if any of his age-group can.

For many months after his birth, doctors speculated as to what might have caused him to be born with such muscles. True, his mother was relatively strong, and she hailed from a family of robust people. Her grandfather, a construction worker, used to lift 330-pound curbstones with his bare hands. Nevertheless, these facts could not sufficiently explain the birth of a tiny baby with the looks of Superman.

Then, Dr. Schuelke recalled a professor he had heard of at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Se-Jin Lee, who came up with a method to double and triple the strength of mice. He accomplished this by neutralizing the chemical myostatin in their bodies. This chemical regulates and prevents excess muscle growth. As soon as the myostatin was no longer active, the mice experienced extreme muscle growth and exhibited unusual strength.



Belgian Blue, or double muscle cattle. The cattle are hefty, very meaty and lean. Researchers discovered that they had inactive myostatin genes.

Dr. Lee was not the first to come up with this idea. It turned out that cattle breeders, decades earlier, had stumbled upon the same genetic trick, developing a strain known as Belgian Blue, or double muscle cattle. The cattle are hefty, very meaty and lean. Researchers discovered that they had inactive myostatin genes.

In any case, Dr. Schuelke examined both the child and his mother and discovered that the mother's body produced a very small amount of myostatin. The child, however, was born with an exceedingly rare condition that led his body to produce no myostatin at all.

For years, doctors have been struggling to unravel the mystery of why certain people develop muscle so easily, while others can lift weights for hours every day and see little or no results. Researchers have discovered that some naturally robust people suffer from a lack of myostatin. Because the little German boy had no myostatin in his body, his muscles grew and developed at an abnormal rate.

The miniature Superman can prove to be invaluable to medical doctors and researchers who have been struggling for years to create a medication that would neutralize myostatin. This type of medication would bring great relief to patients suffering from diseases that lead to muscle atrophy and debilitation, conditions that are usually a result of malnutrition, certain medical issues or sometimes simply old age.

Some predict a marvelous life for this young boy while others foresee significant problems. Some say that around the age of 30, his muscles will begin to atrophy. Others

worry he could eventually suffer heart or other health problems.

Although there is no anti-myostatin drug on the market yet, researchers say that it is likely that at least one of the drugs currently undergoing testing will receive FDA approval in the next few years.

## The Oldest Father in the World

*Times of India*

In 2007, Girija Rajkumari from India, made headlines when she became the latest addition to the family of Nanu Ram Jogi. The reason for this sensation is that her father was 90 years old—making him the oldest father in modern recorded history.

Jogi's record stood until 2012, when Ramajit Raghav, 96 years old and from India as well, also fathered a child. What's more, that was his second child in less than two years; his first was born in November 2010.

Raghav's age is recorded in the Haryana government's social welfare department as 96.

Talking about his daily routine, Raghav said, "I wake up at five in the morning and go to bed before 8:00 PM. During the day, I work in the fields and also take a one-to-two hour afternoon nap." He added that his diet includes cow's milk, fresh and green vegetables and chapattis (an unleavened flatbread). Asked about the secret of his vitality, he said he had been a wrestler in his younger days. Raghav said he completely abstained from alcoholic beverages and has been a strict vegetarian throughout his life.



Left: Nanu Ram Jogi, 90, with his newborn girl. Jogi's record stood until 2012, when 96-year-old Ramajit Raghav from India fathered a child (right).

## The Child Who Feels No Pain

*Associated Press*

Who has not sustained a stubbed toe, a skinned knee or a painful burn and wished desperately for the pain to go away? Physical pain can severely impact quality of life, making it impossible to work and engage in the most basic daily activities. However, the following story shows that pain is a blessing!

Ashlyn Blocker, from Peterson, Georgia, never felt pain in her life. As incredible as it sounds, she can fall and sustain significant injuries, but will not burst into tears. Rather, she'll continue playing happily with her friends.

Blocker's parents were not aware that their child was different until she was eight months old. The parents took her to the doctor because she was suffering from a swollen and bloody eye. When the doctor put some drops into the child's eye to determine the symptoms' cause and severity, he was stunned to see the toddler smiling serenely throughout, as if nothing was happening. What made this especially puzzling was that, as it turned out, she did have a massive cut in her eye.

The doctor recommended that the parents take the child to a specialist, who determined that she was suffering from (or not suffering from...) an extremely rare disorder known as congenital insensitivity to pain (CIP), also known as congenital analgesia, which precludes one from feeling any pain.

Mrs. Blocker says about the consistent absence of pain in her daughter's life: "People are inclined to think, 'Hey, it must be great

