

Katy (below) with newborn daughter Arielle on Feb. 10, 2010, and (at right) with Al at the TIRR Memorial Hermann rehabilitation center. "He," she says, "is my hero."



## BRAVE CHOICE

# A LIFE WORTH *Living*

An impossible decision, an amazing outcome: Despite losing her limbs to a raging infection, Katy Hayes says, 'I'm so glad to be here'





1. "Maybe we're going through this because we're strong enough to handle it," says Katy (having a meal with Al and kids Amber, Arielle and Jake). 2. "I love having time with her," says Katy of Arielle. 3. "In my dreams, I'm throwing the football with Jake, playing with my kids, tickling them," says Katy (practicing diaper skills with occupational therapist Claire Vanlandingham). "It's like my old life comes back to me."

wife adjust to life as a quadruple amputee while taking on the baby, the bills and carpooling duty. But the answer to her husband's question? "I'm so glad to be here," Katy says. "I've had crying spells—it's so frustrating. But I love hearing about my kids' days, watching my son on the trampoline, looking at Arielle's face. Al still makes me laugh. The point is, I'm alive."

On a recent Saturday, the family piles into their van and heads to a drive-in joint for lunch. Al holds Katy's hamburger, then steadies the straw in her iced tea so she can sip—tasks that, despite many hours of physical therapy and practice with her prosthetic arms, are still beyond her. "It's good you're hungry," Al says, then he climbs into the backseat to change Arielle's diaper. Next it's off to the Home Depot, where Al activates the van's hydraulic lift to lower Katy in her power wheelchair onto the pavement. An employee asks if they need a hand. "I need two!" says Katy, grinning.

Happy family outings were what Katy and Al imagined when she learned she was pregnant. They'd hit a rough patch in their 11-year marriage, but planning

**K**aty Hayes held her minutes-old daughter Arielle, marveling at her 22-in., 9-lb. 13-oz. miracle. It was her third baby, but she was as euphoric as a first-time mom, and her husband, Al, who had played guitar to his wife's growing belly, shot photos through happy tears. "I remember," Katy says, "hearing her little cry and being so excited."

That was her last memory before her life changed forever. Within hours of giving birth at home in Kingwood, Texas, she was seized with intense abdominal pain—signs of a raging bacterial infection that would literally consume her. Two months later she woke up in a hospital room—without limbs. "I remember lifting my leg

and not seeing any foot. I screamed, 'Ahhh, my God!'" Katy, 42, says. "I was in shock. And scared." So was Al, who had given doctors the go-ahead to amputate to save his wife from a rare invasive Group A strep infection. "What kept running through my mind," Al, 35, recalls, "was 'What if she wakes up and hates me because she doesn't want to live this way?'"

It's a question Katy has wrestled with in her darkest moments since Arielle's birth on Feb. 10, 2010. Once a massage therapist, avid hiker and all-around supermom to Amber, 17, her daughter from a previous marriage, and Jake, 7, her son with Al, she now relies on her family to take care of her. Al, a school music teacher, has at times nearly buckled under the strain of helping his

#### THERE FOR HER

"I'll never take the little things for granted again," says Al (helping Katy into their van). Says Katy: "Al made the right choice."



## “WHY WOULD I WISH FOR DEATH WHEN I HAVE THESE BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN AROUND ME?” —KATY HAYES

for the baby brought them closer again. After a bad hospital experience with Jake, Katy decided to have this baby at home with an experienced midwife.

It all went according to plan, and when Al called the hospital about Katy's abdominal pain, doctors assured him she was fine. But after a few days, as her pain became unbearable, Al drove her to the hospital and insisted she be seen. Three hours later she slipped into a coma. "One doctor pulled me aside," Al recalls, "and said, 'She's going to die.'" Later, doctors at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, where Katy was transferred for specialized care, told Al there was one slim hope to save her—a quadruple amputation to remove her gangrenous limbs. Pacing the halls, "I thought," Al recalls, "I was going to explode." Still, he kept thinking: The children needed their mother, even in a dramatically altered form, and Katy would want to be around to raise them, even if not in the

way she'd hoped. He sat at Katy's bedside and sobbed: "I hope," he whispered, "you can forgive me."

These days life at the Hayes home is a work in progress. After Al helps Katy shower and she eats her breakfast, a day nurse helps Katy, who contends with lingering pain. Local fund-raisers ([katyhayesfund.com](http://katyhayesfund.com)) helped buy the family a handicapped-accessible ranch home and one of two vans, but Al is uncertain how much longer they can afford the nurse on his teacher's pay. Now that Al is back to work full-time, Amber, a high school junior, cooks, cleans and takes Jake to his martial arts classes. "I feel like a teenage mom, and it's stressful," she says. "But my mom blows me away. She accepted what's happened; she's moving on. She's my best friend."

Talking fashion trends with Amber, playing Boggle with Jake, cracking up over *The Daily Show* with Al, Katy almost feels like her old self. Then

there's her new self: the one who just started to walk again, with the aid of a nurse and her family cheering her, on her prosthetic legs. A few days later, 1-year-old Arielle took her first wobbly steps. "I love that we are learning to walk together," Katy says. "It's a big deal for both of us."

By Alicia Dennis. Anne Lang in Kingwood

### WHAT IS INVASIVE GROUP A STREP?

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The bacteria that causes strep throat and some skin infections usually can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Of up to 11,500 cases a year, some 600 involve the flesh-eating strain that Katy Hayes suffered, according to the CDC. See your doctor for a strep test if a sore throat persists, keep wounds clean and watch for skin redness or swelling. For more information: [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

# MailBag



## ELIZABETH TAYLOR

I felt such a loss as I read your article on Elizabeth Taylor's passing. I will never forget when I saw her in person. Her magnetism was overwhelming. It was like the queen bee had arrived at the hive and all of her subjects buzzed around her in pure excitement. She had this power to draw all attention toward her. Her beauty was transcendent. Dame Elizabeth, you will be very much missed.

**Richard Lovato** Los Angeles, Calif.

Elizabeth Taylor was the greatest movie star ever and was also a ravishing beauty and a brave soldier in the fight against HIV/AIDS. She was simply the best.

**Bill Goulding** via e-mail

**“Elizabeth Taylor was as close to royalty as America has ever had. There won't be anyone quite like her again”** **Ro Derek**, Niceville, Fla.

The outstanding story on Elizabeth Taylor was a fitting tribute. I feel like running through the streets of Hollywood with the issue and yelling, “This is a *Star*.”

**Anna Alisha Swaim** via e-mail

## AMERICAN IDOL

Thank you for your article on *American Idol* alums! They are so talented. Just one oversight: David Archuleta wasn't mentioned. Besides his album sales, Archuleta has been a *New York Times* bestselling author with his book *Chords of Strength*, and he even sings in other languages. Not too shabby for a now 20-year-old.

**Elsa Tovar** via e-mail

## WEIGHT LOSS MAKEOVERS

While I'm happy for the women who have lost weight in your *Shedding for the Wedding* makeovers, I have to comment about their new dress sizes. Their dress labels may say “size 6” or “size 10” but today's size 6 or size 10 isn't the same as

what it used to be. Clothing stores have supersized just like fast foods over the years. But I hope the women will keep up the good work on their journey to better health, which will actually bring them greater happiness than any dress size could ever offer.

**Teri F. Lupoli** via e-mail

## JOHN STOSSEL

As a mother of a child who stutters, I have been thrilled with the coverage of stuttering thanks to the film *The King's Speech*. Your story on John Stossel's speech impediment inspired me, my son and hopefully many Americans. If you are a stutterer or a parent of one, you know the pain associated with stuttering is more from the emotional anguish than the actual stutter itself.

**Stacy Jolley** Omaha, Neb.

## NATHAN FILLION

What a treat to see a feature on Nathan Fillion. I watch *Castle* for his smile alone. And I savor a crime show with a sense of humor and a delightful cast. It's my guilty pleasure.

**Diana Denny** Indianapolis, Ind.

## A MODEL OF COURAGE



Readers were inspired by our April 11 story on mother Katy Hayes and her perseverance despite losing her limbs to a raging infection. “Thanks to the Hayeses for showing us the true meaning of family, love and the value of life,” wrote Elaine Stack of Ballston Lake, N.Y. Added Jacque Krimpelbein via e-mail: “She saw the real gift to give her children was being around for them, no matter what her body may be like now.” For reader Shirley Faauaa Bennett, Hayes's story struck a personal chord: “I am facing back surgery and the story filled me with hope.”

**Correction** In the April 11 issue in *Scoop*, we incorrectly identified the gun Jesse James is holding as a .44 Magnum revolver. In our April 18 issue, we misspelled the show *Downton Abbey* in the TV section. We regret the errors.

## WRITE US

**TO CONTACT EDITORIAL:** Send a fax (212-522-0794), e-mail ([editor@people.com](mailto:editor@people.com)) or mail (Letters to the Editor, PEOPLE, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020). Letters should include the writer's full name, address and daytime phone number and may be edited for clarity and space.