

## Hand Of Hope

A picture began circulating in November. It should be "The Picture of the Year," or perhaps, "Picture of the Decade The picture is that of a 21-week-old unborn baby named Samuel Alexander Armas, who is being operated on by a surgeon named Joseph Bruner. The baby was diagnosed with spina bifida and would not survive if removed from his mother's womb.

Little Samuel's mother, Julie Armas, is an obstetrics nurse in Atlanta. She knew of Dr. Bruner's remarkable surgical procedure. Practising at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre in Nashville, he performs these special operations while the baby is still in the womb.



In the picture, Samuel's hand looked like that of any newborn baby -- "except it was a much smaller baby. It was what people wouldn't consider viable." At 21 weeks, a foetus cannot yet survive outside the womb, but its organs are completely formed and "it looks like a tiny human," says Dr. Bruner.

During the procedure, the doctor removes the uterus via C-section and makes a small incision to operate on the baby. As Dr. Bruner completed the surgery on Samuel, the little guy reached his tiny, but fully developed hand through the incision and firmly grasped the surgeon's finger.

Dr. Bruner was reported as saying that when his finger was grasped, it was the most emotional moment of his life, and that for an instant during the procedure he was just frozen, totally immobile. The photograph captures this amazing event with perfect clarity

Although just barely bigger than his 5-pound, 11-ounce birthweight, Samuel had started physiotherapy for his legs. His parents were much comforted when a specialist examined him days after his birth and pronounced, without prompting, that their boy would walk.



**He is now 20 years old. His name is Samuel Alexander Armas is the child shown in a famous photograph by Michael Clancy, dubbed the Hand of Hope.**

**For Samuel, the debate is irrelevant. The 16-year-old is more interested in maintaining his grades in the gifted program at Alexander High School, winning his next**

**Atlanta Junior Wheelchair Hawks basketball game and tussling with his little brothers, Ethan, 12, and 10-year-old Zachary, who also has spina bifida.**

**Most importantly, Samuel is living proof that a disability isn't always a disadvantage. Every life has purpose and anyone can dream big.**