

Impact Statement

Faiqa Asif, Graduated High School

***Beyond the Microscope: A Legacy of Hope*, 2026**

Watercolor, colored pencil, marker, poster color on paper, 13.5 x 20 inches

Government College of Technology for Women, Lahore, PAKISTAN

Unsung Hero: Jean Purdy

Some of the people who change the world are not the ones whose names appear first in history books. "Jean Purdy was one of those people."

Jean Purdy was a British nurse and embryologist who became one of the pioneers of "in-vitro fertilization (IVF)." Together with Robert Edwards and Patrick Steptoe, she worked on a medical idea that many people considered uncertain and controversial. Some critics accused them of "playing God", believing that reproduction should remain entirely in God's hands. Despite this criticism, Jean continued her work with determination and dedication. Their research eventually led to the birth of Louise Brown in 1978, the world's first baby born through IVF.

I chose Jean Purdy as my Unsung Hero because her story is not simply about science—it is about persistence, courage, and hope. She worked behind the scenes, carefully observing embryos and carrying out the detailed laboratory work that made IVF possible. Her contribution reminds me that being important does not always mean being famous. Sometimes the people working quietly in the background are the ones changing the future.

What inspires me most about Jean is her determination to keep going, even when she did not know whether her work would succeed. She was part of something that had never been successfully achieved before. Instead of giving up when things failed, she continued to learn, experiment, and improve. Her story makes me think about how many breakthroughs begin with someone simply refusing to give up.

Jean Purdy's impact reaches far beyond the laboratory where she worked. Her contribution helped change the possibilities available to people struggling with infertility. The development of IVF required years of research, experimentation, and teamwork. Jean played a crucial role in the embryology side of the work, including observing embryos and helping develop the laboratory techniques needed to support them. Her careful work contributed to the success that eventually resulted in Louise Brown's birth in 1978. That moment was much bigger than the birth of one child. It showed the world that something once thought almost impossible could become reality. IVF went on to become an important fertility treatment for people around the world.

However, Jean's story also reveals something about "recognition and history". For many years, the public story of IVF focused mainly on Edwards and Steptoe, while Jean's contribution received less attention. Yet IVF was not the achievement of one or two people. It was the result of a team, and Jean was an essential part of that team. Her story teaches me that recognition does not determine the value of someone's work. A person can make an enormous difference even when their name is not the most famous one.

My artwork represents Jean Purdy as a symbol of hope emerging from uncertainty. I want the artwork to communicate more than simply what Jean looked like. I want the viewer to understand what she represented. My artwork shows Jean Purdy's journey from science to life. The microscope, embryo, and test tubes represent her patience, precision, and pioneering work in IVF, while the newborns and children represent the families and generations touched by that breakthrough. The road symbolizes how her work traveled beyond the laboratory and changed lives. Through this artwork, I want to show that true heroes are not always famous—their legacy lives on through the lives they helped change.

I want Jean to remain the emotional centre of the artwork. Rather than portraying her simply as a scientist, I want to show Purdy as someone who helped open a new door for humanity. My use of composition, contrast, and symbolism will help communicate her determination and the lasting impact of her work. Creating this artwork has changed the way I think about the people behind major achievements. Before researching Jean Purdy, I might have thought of IVF mainly as a medical invention. Now I see it as a story of people taking risks, facing failure, working together, and believing in an idea before the world knew whether it would succeed. I want my artwork to make people stop and ask: "Who was Jean Purdy, and why don't more people know her name?" That question is part of the purpose of my project. Jean's story can inspire people to understand that their work still matters even when they are not receiving attention or recognition. She demonstrates that progress is often created by people who patiently do the difficult work that others may never see. For me, Jean Purdy represents the idea that "one person's quiet determination can change countless lives." Her work helped turn hope into possibility for millions of people. My artwork is therefore not only a portrait of an individual. It is a tribute to the people who work behind the scenes, the discoveries that begin with uncertainty, and the courage to continue when success is not guaranteed. Jean Purdy may have worked behind the scenes, but her impact helped bring new life into the world.

References:

Bourn Hall Clinic: Jean Purdy, IVF pioneer and co-founder of Bourn Hall. Bourn Hall Clinic.

Our Heritage Human Fertilisation and Embryology. Authority: Science Museum announces the launch of exhibition celebrating 40 years of IVF.

Joy (2024), directed by Ben Taylor: A film dramatizing the development of IVF and the birth of the first IVF baby.