

Never Stop *Believing*

Member article

Aren't some people insensitive! One of the worst comments that I ever received during eight long years of trying to conceive was "are you sure you're doing it properly?" We were, by the way, but the comment just left me completely speechless. It still rankles now, and this is with several years of hindsight.

My husband and I have been together for years and we love each other very much. We met at university and got married a couple of years after graduating, moving to Bristol with our jobs. We'd been married for five years when we decided that we'd like a family. Both 29, I wanted to start "trying" (I hate that word now, it always implies the possibility of failure) before my 30th birthday, never for one minute envisaging that there could be a problem. In those early days we even had one hopeful month when we thought that it had actually happened. I remember walking along the seafront at Weston Super Mare envisaging pushing a pram. That was a false alarm, but at that moment we hadn't even thought that there could be a problem.

After a year of nothing happening we went to see my GP. Then the barrage of tests started. There didn't seem to be any reason why we weren't conceiving. I was apparently OK, so was my husband. We then went through several humiliating months of mucus tests – since proven to be totally ineffectual and actually extremely embarrassing, but at that point we didn't know that they were pointless, so off I trotted to the hospital several days a month to see if anything had happened. Of course it hadn't.

We then moved to Reading, where, famously, one fertility specialist (who should definitely have known better) told me that I would never have children of my own! The lack of tact and bedside manner was completely unbelievable – another in a long line of little tin gods

who thought the science was more important than the patient. Imagine telling that to someone who is by then desperate for children.

I went through the usual gamut of tests, waiting months between each appointment – HSG (not as painful as I had expected), laparoscopy – nothing unusual was found. We were then referred to a specialist fertility unit (fortunately for us in a different town with a different specialist) for IVF. No prevaricating, just straight in with the IVF/ICSI option. Some option! We had our first attempt in the summer of 2001 which failed. I found out in the August, and my dreams of a family of our own started to disintegrate.

And then, just six weeks after that devastating news, and when I thought things couldn't get much worse, my darling dad was killed in a road accident. For months I was numb. The only way I could cope, not only with the sudden death of an adored father and the accompanying court case (the driver of the truck which ploughed into my parent's car was eventually convicted of causing death by dangerous driving and sent to prison), but with the realisation that we may not have children, was to immerse myself in practicalities. Looking back now I'm actually extraordinarily proud of how I managed, holding my mum together, keeping going. We even had another attempt at IVF in the May of the following year, but that too failed. And then we decided to call a halt to all of it, at least for a while, to regroup, decide what we wanted to do, and learn to "live again".

We waited almost two years in total, and then on Valentine's Day last year went for further tests to start one last try. It worked. After seven years and eleven months of "trying" we'd done it. Just as much to the point, I suppose, I managed to stay pregnant too – although I had the most horrendous morning sickness and had

to give up work at six weeks, rather than the six months I had imagined. I was sick for seven months, and then at seven and a half months developed severe pre-eclampsia and the baby had to be delivered by emergency caesarean, both of us spending a further fortnight in hospital to recover. Obviously Mother Nature was never going to give this to us easily.

Our daughter is now nearly five months old and is a complete joy. She's our little miracle, and I look at her and still can't believe that she's here, despite the many sleepless nights, the three hourly feeds, the colic I'm also very aware of how lucky we are – after almost eight years I genuinely didn't think I could go through any more treatment, although equally (a contradiction) if it had failed, I'm not sure if I could have given up completely. I'd certainly never have stopped hoping.

I don't think we'll try again. In those heady and foolish days before we knew that there was a (never diagnosed) problem, I'd always imagined that three boys would be my ideal family. Now we have one daughter. And she's enough. I don't think lightning will strike twice in the same place, and as I get older obviously the health risks will increase. Besides, we've got what we wanted – it's not as if there's a finite amount of luck, but it's someone else's turn now and I couldn't bear the thought that we had further treatment in place of someone with no children.

What we went through will never leave either of us, but I'm proud of how we've managed. Always rock solid, my husband has been my anchor – unquestioningly supporting me throughout whilst constantly reminding me that he married me as a person, and not my ability to have children. I couldn't love him or our daughter more.

Yes, I'm proud of us, and I know my dad would be too.