

## Waiting for a Baby

By Nancy Hine

### August

We'd been trying for a baby for two years this June (2006). Some say this means that we are officially sub-fertile. On the other hand I know some people that tried for much longer before finally conceiving naturally. For me age is a major factor, I'm 38 and so feel I'm running out of time. I started off feeling hopeful and optimistic and have now gone through various cycles of anger, despair and resignation. Each cycle I start off feeling positive, this will be the one and then hit that low when my period comes.

There have been so many months when I was convinced I was pregnant. My body seems to have invented an extraordinary number of new sensations and symptoms that I thought must surely indicate early pregnancy. However, each time I was disappointed. Each period is like a little death now. No amount of positive thinking and attempts to manifest my dream have helped. There is still no baby. I tried acupuncture, as I had heard this could be effective, but still no baby. I was on a really healthy diet, taking all the right supplements, having regular reiki, left my job in case the stress was having an impact, but still no baby. We tried using ovulation tests, taking my temperature, having lots of sex, only having sex on the key dates, putting a pillow under my bottom, lying still for 20 minutes after sex, still no baby. I built up a small library of books on conception and childbirth, but still no baby!

So last November, we decided to go and see the doctor to find out if there was anything wrong. First my partner went to see the GP. It seemed sensible to get him tested first, as this was relatively straight forward. The results came back normal and I found I had mixed feelings. It was great that he was ok, except that this meant there was something wrong with me. One of the things I've found I've struggled with is to separate my difficulty in conceiving with my feelings about myself as a woman. Its hard not to feel that I am in some way inadequate, that there is something wrong with me on an identity level, rather than just something wrong with a part of my body.

I was really quite nervous about going to see my GP about fertility testing, as I didn't know what to expect. I rarely go to the doctor and on the odd occasions when I have been I've often found doctors to be unhelpful and unsympathetic. I was therefore pleased and relieved to find the GP vary helpful. In fact everyone I've come across at the fertility

clinic so far has been sympathetic and helpful too. It seems that this is one area where everyone is genuinely keen to help.

As I had a history of endometriosis the GP referred me to the fertility clinic straight away and also arranged for some blood tests. I had read that you should try for two years before seeing a doctor, but I've since found out that the most up to date advice for a women of my age is to see a doctor after 6 months! I was half expecting to be told that I was too early and I should come back in a few months, whereas in fact I had probably left things rather late.

Our appointment for the clinic came through within about a month. There followed further blood test, some at the start of my cycle, others 7 days after my LH surge. These all seemed to be ok and I was sent for an internal scan. This sounds worse than it is, as the 'probe' (which is huge), is actually only pushed a little way into the entrance of the virgina. It doesn't hurt, just feels a bit odd. The nurse was very nice, so I didn't feel uncomfortable about it. This indicated that I had a small cyst (apparently not a problem) and that there seemed to be a follicle about to release (good news). The nurse we saw afterwards seemed to thing it was all encouraging and suggested that I also have a routine chlamydia test. I decided to get this out of the way at the same time. It was a bit like a smear test and proved to be negative.

We were then booked in for a follow up appointment with a doctor. This was now the third doctor we'd seen including the GP and she seemed rather less optimistic than the previous one we'd seen at the hospital. She thought we needed a further more detailed scan to check on the cyst. I was already on the waiting list for a laparoscopy and she said she would chase this up to make sure that I had it soon.

The good news was that I do seem to be ovulating. The laparoscopy would check out if there are any structural problems. There could be scar tissue left from the laparoscopy I had 18 years ago due to the endometriosis, or there could be blockages that didn't show up on the scan.

At this stage we were left with the feeling that the most likely outcome would be that the laparoscopy didn't show up anything in particular. This would leave us facing unexplained infertility and a decision about whether or not to try IVF. I was not keen on this as I had read about how invasive, dehumanising and stressful it could be. Plus the chances of actually delivering a baby as a result of IVF seemed to be very small at my age.

Over the next month or so, as I waited for the next scan date, I found myself needing to face the possibility that I might not be able to have a child. This seemed to be a subject avoided on most of the infertility forums I visited. It was all about encouraging each other to stay positive and keep trying everything there was to try. I found myself wondering how I would cope if there were no more alternatives and whether I wanted to keep putting myself through all of this. It seemed important for me to explore the possibility of being childless, so that I would be able to cope with whatever happened in the future. At times I could be quite philosophical, but every now and then I would collapse in tears. I read a book 'Pink for a Girl' written by a woman who had gone through various infertility treatments and decided to give up trying. This was helpful and helped me to think that I would be ok. I started reading about adoption; though found this was rather depressing as everything seemed to focus on all the potential problems. I decided to focus on getting on with my life, creating a new vision of the future that didn't have to include children. I was quite proud of myself for managing to adjust so well. Then my next period started and suddenly I was in tears again. So much for having adjusted!

There were times when I felt incredibly angry. It seemed so unfair that I should be denied a child, when so many women get pregnant so easily, especially those who don't even want children, or aren't able to take care of them. At times this anger spilt out into other areas of my life, though luckily I kept these to a minimum. Sometimes, when I thought about not having children, I would feel a deep gut wrenching sense of despair. It was almost a physical pain.

The next scan was carried out by a doctor. We weren't really expecting it to show up anything different and so were rather shocked when the doctor told us that she could see endometriosis cysts on my left ovary. She then said that there also seemed to be some fluid in my tubes, which could indicate that they were blocked. Suddenly we had gone from nothing wrong and probably unexplained infertility to endometriosis and possible blocked tubes. The doctor was concerned that this could have developed quickly since my last scan and so was keen for me to have another scan before my laparoscopy ( we now had a date for the operation, in about 6 weeks time). We thought it unlikely that the endometriosis had suddenly flared up in the last two months, after 18 years. It seemed more likely that the nurse had just missed it.

At first I was relieved that we now had a possible explanation. Endometriosis was good news, I didn't have any symptoms and the

damage was probably minor and could therefore be fixed. In two months I might be 'cured' and be able to have a baby after all. This high lasted till the next day when I collapsed into my worst depression so far. Suddenly it wasn't ok to have endometriosis, none of this was ok, none of this was meant to happen to me. I had a week or two of feeling physically not right and emotionally all over the place. This had actually started a little before the scan, but the scan made it all worse. I think the pressure of trying to put a brave face on it all and keep going had got too much. Everywhere I went there seemed to be babies and pregnant women.

Taking some time to rest and give myself reiki, plus the support of my partner and my family helped me to get back onto a more even keel. I decided it was time to start thinking positively again. I started to visualise my ovaries and tubes healing and to believe that the operation would be successful and I would conceive. It now seemed more helpful to be positive, just as before it had seemed very necessary to be realistic.

This all changed again when we went to see the consultant a few weeks later. His interpretation of the scan results was pretty bleak. It seemed that if the laparoscopy confirmed these results then my best chance of having a baby was to have my fallopian tubes removed and have IVF. This was so far from what we had expected him to say that we were both in shock. It seems that the chances of conceiving naturally after reconstructive surgery are very low, as the tubes normally close up again within 6 months. Also there is a general lack of mobility of both my tubes and ovaries, which hadn't been mentioned before, and this makes conception more difficult too. The endometriosis wasn't mild, as we'd thought, but quite severe. My fallopian tubes would have to be removed, as fluid in the tubes halves the success rate of IVF. My age also meant that my chances of conception with IVF were only 20%. In fact as it was only two months till my next birthday the success rate would be nearer 15% by the time any IVF could be scheduled.

Somehow I had the presence of mind to ask some questions about my own health during this consultation. Did I need to have surgery anyway for my own health? It appeared not, as I wasn't in any pain, though he couldn't guarantee that the endometriosis wouldn't get worse and make surgery necessary. We were asked to make a decision there and then as to whether to go ahead with just a 'look see' laparoscopy as scheduled, or to have the cysts and tubes removed at the same time. This would have meant rescheduling, as it would be a longer and more serious operation. I had no hesitation in saying we would just do the 'look see' first, there was no way I was ready for anything more.

Afterwards my partner and I sat in the hospital café with a latte and chocolate muffin as usual to discuss our reactions. This has become something of a ritual for us. We sit there discussing it all rationally and then as the shock wears off and I start to get tearful we go to the car. I then usually have a cry on the way home. My immediate reaction was that there was no way I was having my tubes removed. That would mean the end of any hope of conceiving naturally. Plus the low success rate made the whole thing seem rather hopeless. So we found ourselves sitting there facing the reality of not having our own children. All our dreams coming to an end. Amidst the sadness and tears there was also some relief. At least now we knew the worst and could face it and move on. Perhaps start to think seriously about adoption.

That night I found sleep difficult. So many negative thoughts going round in my head. I was a failure as a woman, no one could want me. I should have had children when I was younger. When I thought of myself as a small child I felt tearful and sad for myself, full of self pity, for the happy child little knowing what lay in store. At this point I found my meditation practice incredibly helpful. Somehow I was able to see that it was the thoughts that were making me unhappy and to turn them off. I was surprised at my own ability to do this. All those years of meditation and the reading I'd done recently on Buddhism were paying off. I could see how my attachment to outcomes and my run away mind were making me suffer unnecessarily. After all I wasn't in any pain, I was safe and loved. I was finally able to sleep.

Over that weekend we were in a kind of limbo, coming to terms with what had happened. Sometimes I felt surprising calm and other times burst in to tears. Then the doubts started. Was the consultant correct? Were there other alternatives. A few hours on the internet confirmed his statements about fluid in tubes. This did indeed halve the chances of successful IVF. No one seemed to be quite sure why, but possibly the fluid was toxic to the embryo, or stopped the embryo from implanting in the womb. However, it seemed that other centres had much higher success rates. One in particular had a 48% success rate for my age group! Suddenly the IVF seemed a more possible option. Over the next week I also found out about a massage technique in the US which could unblock tubes without surgery, various approaches to combating endometriosis through diet, homeopathy, acupuncture etc. Plus it seemed that acupuncture could remove cysts and sometimes help with blocked tubes. So now we had choices, lots of choices, too many choices! In many ways it had been easier when we had only the one option.

Now whatever we did, if I didn't get pregnant we would wonder if we'd done the wrong thing. How could I turn down IVF with a 48% chance, even though it meant removing my tubes, stopping my natural cycle, taking various hormones, undergoing a general anaesthetic etc., possibly for months on end, plus taking the risks of the side effects, including breast and ovarian cancer according to some sources. On the other hand, how could I even contemplate putting myself through such a horrendous ordeal, subjecting my body to this interference, taking these risks when I felt perfectly healthy? Some days I was absolutely sure I wasn't going to do IVF, it was ridiculous, I would try the alternative approaches and take my chances and if I didn't get pregnant we would just adopt. On these days I couldn't understand why women put themselves through it all. Other days I would feel it was foolish not to try IVF, lots of women did it, so it couldn't be that bad after all. I would be influenced by whoever I'd spoken to last, whatever I'd read last, as well as by my own mood.

So here I am in the middle of this whirlwind of thoughts and choices, with four days to go till my laparoscopy. Trying to stay calm. I'm nervous enough about the operation, fantasising about dying, even though I know it's safer than driving my car! Sometimes I'm amazingly calm, other times I feel like I'm drowning. By late afternoon I feel exhausted by it all. Without meditation, without some sort of spiritual belief I don't know how I would be getting through all this. When it all seems too much the best thing seems to be just to surrender. To lie down, close my eyes, relax and accept that whatever will be will be. To trust that in the long run it will all be ok.

### **September**

So now the operation is behind me and all went well. I wasn't nearly as nervous as I expected to be on the day. Incredibly my blood pressure was lower than when I'd gone for the pre op. Unlike one poor woman who had her operation cancelled because hers was too high. I felt that the angels were with me going into the operation and that I would be ok. I also knew that a lot of people were sending me healing and that was a big help too. In fact I think my boyfriend was more nervous than me. He waited in the ward the whole day. I was also lucky that I was the first on the list, so having arrived at 7.30 only had to wait till about 9am before going down to surgery. All the nurses were very friendly and I felt well cared for.

Coming round afterwards was a strange experience, I instinctively put my hands on my abdomen to start giving myself reiki and I'm sure that helped. I didn't need to take any pain killers, despite the nurse insisting that we buy something stronger than paracetamol just in case. I did

nearly faint at one point though, as I tried to go to the toilet on my own before I was ready.

Over the first 48 hours the gas is definitely the worst thing, odd aches and pains all around the body. Lying down would settle things, though I felt it was important to move my legs around aswell, to keep the blood flowing and energy moving. On the second day a friend came round to give me some healing and by the fourth day I was well enough to go to Wembley for the launch of 'Just a Minute'. I'm sure that my speedy recovery was due to a combination of being fit, treating myself non stop with reiki for two days, having lots of healing sent to me and having the protection of the angels.

I felt pretty awful for two days, but had my boyfriend and parents looking after me. Gradually I began to get my strength back and was able to go to my yoga class after 10 days. I did feel tired easily and didn't get my full strength back for about a month.

The operation actually showed that the endometriosis hadn't caused as much damage as we first thought. My right side is perfectly normal. On the left there are no cysts and the tube is only partially blocked. There is evidence of endometriosis and my left side is well stuck down. So now I'm feeling positive about just trying the complementary therapies for my health and going for adoption. I know there is a chance that I could conceive naturally, so I can have that as a possibility in the back of my mind, but not focus on it, not have my whole life revolving round my monthly cycle.

## **November**

A strange thing happened. As I started to get better physically I found that I started to feel worse emotionally. The sense of calm and peace with the world that I'd had during my operation faded and I was left with a feeling of doubt and emptiness. I no longer felt any connection to the angels, there was nothing to support any of my spiritual beliefs. It became hard work to get on with my normal life and feel optimistic about things. I started to have days when I just felt depressed – there didn't seem to be any point to anything. I would feel fine again the next day, but couldn't understand why this was happening. After a time I realised that I had been suppressing my anger and the depression was the result. The fact was that I was angry that I had the endometriosis, that I hadn't got pregnant etc. Meditation didn't seem to be working any more, because it was no longer thoughts causing the feelings, the feelings were just bubbling up uncontrollably no matter how positively I tried to think.

So I started to question my spiritual beliefs. I wanted to believe them, but the evidence seemed to be against them. It was as I was struggling with this that we had our follow up appointment with the consultant. This had been delayed by two weeks, so was nearly 8 weeks after the operation in the end. We approached this fairly philosophically thinking that there wasn't much new he could throw at us. However, we were wrong. It turned out that the information we'd been given after the operation was incorrect. My right ovary was stuck down – making the chances of conceiving naturally small and I did have cysts on my left ovary. Our options were to do nothing, operate to remove the cysts and try and tidy things up, or go straight to IVF.

In some ways this wasn't that different from what we'd expected, we always knew he would recommend IVF after all, but somehow it felt very different. Now I knew that my chances of conceiving naturally were very small and this made me realise how much I had been hoping that this would still happen. We asked the consultant about the private hospitals offering higher success rates and he was very dismissive. He didn't really give us a good reason, but implied that their statistics were suspect and that you could end up spending a lot more money than you'd expected.

So more latte and muffins and more discussions. I was really in shock again. I managed to talk myself into a positive state of mind by deciding that I wasn't meant to have my own children, because I was meant to help other children. I could do this by adopting and maybe working with children. I actually ended up feeling quite positive and excited. This lasted about a day when the emotion reaction kicked in and I started feeling down again. We had been lucky to get a follow up scan for the next day, but this showed the cysts had actually grown since the scan in August. My first reaction had been to just stop all the treatment and get on with my life, but now I was being told I should have the operation to deal with the endometriosis anyway for my own health. I really didn't want to do this. It seemed that every time we went to the hospital we came away feeling awful, so the solution seemed to be not to go anymore.

My moods swing up and down. I manage to feel ok for a while then something small happens and I burst in to tears. There seem to be a series of small things going wrong, the new chopping board my sister gave me as a present warped and cracked, the tumble dryer stopped working, various things went missing. Catching the train home a woman with 6 young children got on and sat next to me. Getting off the train I was confronted by a woman who looked about 16 pushing a baby in a pram. The Universe really did seem to be having a laugh at my expense.

So none of this exactly helped my spiritual crisis. At the moment I don't know what to believe. I don't know whether or not to have the operation. I see my acupuncturist this week, so maybe that will help me decide. I'm thinking of trying acupuncture and maybe reflexology first and then having another scan in 6 months or so to see what's happened to the cysts. We have another meeting with the consultant at the end of December, but I don't know whether or not to go. I just want to forget it all and put it all behind me.

My initial enthusiasm about adoption has worn off again. I think partly because of a book I've read and because all the websites seem to be so negative. Its as if they don't want anyone to adopt. At the same time I think that adopting may be what I need to do to let go of having my own child. I feel in a kind of limbo. Its not helped by not having a proper job at the moment. I'm meant to be building up my counselling practice, but I only have a few clients. My time is filled doing the IF website, arranging events, running the house and doing my OU courses, but I have no sense of purpose. I feel I need a mission, a purpose in life. At the moment I feel like I'm just going through the motions.

We are doing our best to feel cheerful. We have lots of little outings – the cinema, a pub lunch etc. Sometimes I do forget about it all for a while, but often I feel like just going to bed and doing nothing, sitting watching films all day. At the moment life feels very flat and pointless. Its at a time like this that I'd hope my spiritual beliefs would support me, but that doesn't seem to be happening. I am managing to do my meditation most mornings and my affirmations, but its hard to keep believing that any of it does any good.