

My Dance of Infertility

I really wanted to start my story with a happy ending but at 8 weeks pregnant, on my last donor egg frozen embryo cycle, there was no heartbeat detected on my little embryo. I went through a natural miscarriage after stopping all my IVF drugs. This had been the last embryo that I had in the freezer and I have no other chances.

My Infertility journey lasted 5 years. The first 2 years I battled the most common thing that women with infertility battle, not knowing what was wrong. I visited doctors that all seemed to have different opinions and then upon finding a solution I believed in, I then found that somehow all I had believed in wasn't real. The last 3 years were spent on IVF programs.

I was a world renowned dancer and the first Australian dancer to go to the Middle East, the home of the dance. Dancing with others who were the best in my profession, I braved wars, attitudes, loneliness, isolation fear, loss, love, and more. I met my husband whilst working in Muscat Oman, he was a young, good looking Lebanese musician – it was love at first sight! We married 6 months later in Dubai, spent a few more years working in the Middle East and then came back to Australia to make it our home.

At first, we didn't even consider that we might have a fertility issue. I was in my early thirties but hormonally I just never felt right. I would burst into tears at the most inappropriate moments and have mood swings that I couldn't control. The local GP said that I was probably suffering from depression and gave me anti-depressants, which I did take for a month, but I knew that it couldn't be right.

When I did ask my Gynecologist, why I hadn't gotten pregnant after 3 yrs of being married, he booked me in for a procedure where they put blue dye in through your belly button, to see if your tubes are blocked. He found nothing wrong but he did say "Well, sometimes 2 people just don't go together, I've seen this happen many times, it's what we call unexplained infertility" at this stage I should have been recommended to an IVF specialist. For another year, I went on as usual, still having hormonal problems, one doctor said, I had a thyroid problem, another said I didn't.

I knew no one that had been on IVF, I had no one to ask, I knew nothing about any support groups. I thought I was 35 yrs old, I still had time, I was trying.

Finally I went to one GP who recommended me to an IVF specialist, this was 3 years ago. I had a blood test on the first day of each of my cycle to see if I could start my treatment. The clinic would then say "No" but I didn't understand why. This happened 3 times in a row. I eventually I made an appointment to see the doctor and get him to explain exactly what was happening to me. I walked into his office and these were his exact words to me, "I've come to the conclusion that you will never fall pregnant, the only thing would be to get a donor egg, and that's a difficult road." I sat there stunned!

I burst into tears and walked out of his office as if I had been given some news that someone had died. I walked to work, and thought, this is a bad dream, it's not happening to me! I rang my best friend, she said "That's it, you're closing the shop, we are going to have lunch at Double Bay!"

I had rung my Mum, and she had found out about the Natural Fertility Clinic, I made an appointment to go there the very next day. Telling my husband what the doctor had said was difficult. He said to me, "It's OK, I didn't marry you just for that, I married you because of you, I love you." I think those words made me feel like I had something to live for. Later I think that he re-thought the words. He was the only son of a Lebanese family and I think family pressure had him re-thinking his values. He left me a few months later, the hormonal moods didn't help, neither did the feeling that I was a "waste of a woman". I don't think I was the best to live with, and he just couldn't support me, he thought that I should just get over it, and get on with it. He came back after 6 months of being apart.

So my battle with infertility continued. I spent the next year, getting so healthy, every 2nd week at the natural infertility clinic, I took more vitamins and herbs than I had ever taken in my life, it was costing me at least \$200 a month –, I went to hypnotherapy, meditation, acupuncture - in the end they couldn't find a cure.

Prognosis ? I had high FSH and therefore was diagnosed as peri-menopausal. The natural fertility clinic referred me to a new doctor and a new IVF clinic. Unlike my previous doctor, this new doctor was known to be open to "wholistic" treatments for infertility, I was relieved. As soon as I met my new doctor I felt something about him was different. He explained things to me in pre-school terms, I understood everything he said right from the beginning – all the tests that had been done needed to be repeated but this time, I knew exactly what was happening – I had a high FSH, which meant that even though I was still getting regular periods, I was probably not producing eggs that could be fertilized, or any eggs at all, for that matter.

I decided to go away to Vipassana, a meditation camp in the Blue Mountains, The day I came out of Vipassana, my husband picked me up, as we were walking to the car, I had the worst cramping that I had ever had in my life, and got a full bleed period right there and then. The cramping was so bad, he took me to the nearest hospital, they hooked me up to a heart monitor ("Gee, your heart rate is very slow " " Yes, I've been meditating for the last 10 days in total silence!"). I told them on the first day of my periods I was to have a blood test, as I was an IVF patient, they said, no worries, they could do it for me – they did and sent it to IVF. Up to this point every first day of my periods I was having a blood test for measuring my FSH, normal levels are between say 9 & 11, my readings were always coming back 26, 35 – 16 was probably the lowest I ever had.

The next day, we received a call from my IVF nurse, "It's a 9! you can start IVF!" You cannot imagine our excitement! My husband was over the moon, from that moment on I really felt us bond together on our infertility journey. He had something to look forward to, and I was so happy! He administered the injections and was very supportive. There were only 2 follicles to track throughout the period of hormone injections, one had grown to a good size and we were banking on that one! It only takes one! It was my birthday, the 28th March and it also happened that it was the Easter weekend. We were so excited and happily joking about our Easter egg etc. I was already looking at baby furniture and clothes.

On the day of the egg pick up everyone was there looking at the screen, with baited breath – waiting for the scientist "Sorry the follicle was empty, no egg". I felt like I wasn't there, this was a bad dream, someone had played a really bad joke on me. My husband dropped me home, he couldn't understand why I got hysterical, and later went to work. Maybe things started to go wrong from there...who knows?

But of course, I wouldn't give up , a friend had heard about my predicament and came forth and offered to be an egg donor. I am convinced that people that are egg donors, IVF nurses, scientist and IVF doctors are all Angels on this earth. My clinic placed a big emphasis on counselling in cases of egg donation. I still had that feeling of inadequacy as a woman, I felt very alone. I was with my husband, he agreed to the process, however I felt he wasn't truly there, he was very busy with his work. My emotions about the whole process were something that I had to deal with alone. Anyway, we decided between my donor and myself that we would start in January.

Oh what a process! My friend was going through the whole IVF process for me, I knew what it felt like, but I didn't know what it felt like to have 35 follicles growing! Wow! It was great! Egg pickup was scheduled around the 17th Feb – it was so exciting. But there was to be a tragedy, on Feb 1st, I picked up my husband's mobile phone, and saw some unusual SMS messages, one was suggesting that the night before he had met up with a girl, I called the number, a girl answered, I sent a message to the girl, pretending to be my husband. Devastation, shock, deceit, my whole world was crumbling down around me in one second – my husband? No way, he "wasn't the type " Looking back late nights – yes, working back – yes, trendy clothes – yes, feeling like something wasn't quite right, sexually – well, yes, but I put that down the operation, to straighten my uterus, earlier in the year, and also all the stress of the IVF. I confronted him, he told me it was a one night stand. Wanting to know everything I found out later that he had been seeing her for at least a year.

To cut a long story short, we were on IVF, should we throw away the chance to continue, because of his mistake? Or should I show forgiveness and we both try to re-establish trust and truth?. We continued on IVF. One of the five embryos was transferred and I went away to spend some time with my brother and family, to relax and wait during the 11 days prior to pregnancy testing. During that wait I found a receipt for some jewelry in my husbands wallet, I went hysterical. My pregnancy test was negative. I kicked him out again, he left swearing to me that he wasn't lying, that he would never do something like that, he promised not to lie to me. He came back and we went to counselling. Several times over the next few months, I found messages on his phone, condoms in his car, receipts, more deceit. One morning I was going for a walk and all of a sudden this feeling came over me that I could not explain, it was like "How long do you want him to keep lying to you? How long will you put up with it?" I walked back home, and told him that was it – he moved out.

4 Embryos In Storage

My life for the last 5 years has been about having my own child. I loved my husband so much, and I wanted him to be the father, I always had fantasies of us together with the baby (s) - him being such a loving father, together being a family, our house full of children's laughter.

I still wanted children, but without a partner, I was to tread the rest of this long road alone. I talked to my donor, I talked to the IVF counsellor, I talked to my family – I felt that I still had a support system of

some sort. So began the transfer of 2 embryos, the painful 11-day wait, progesterone tablets and a negative result. I went straight into the last cycle, the last embryos - no break from my previous attempt, the 11 day wait and VOILA!!! PREGNANT!!!

Looking at my life I worked so hard to be the best dancer and I found it hard and challenging but enduring this infertility is the hardest dance of all...

(AP)