

A brief word before we start

To all the mums and dads, and the hopeful mums and dads to be, this is not a reference book, and nor is it meant to be. It's not a guide on how to fall pregnant and stay pregnant, and it certainly won't take you through each and every exciting month of pregnancy with tips and techniques on your health, wellbeing and growing baby.

This story is purely an account of my own experience when trying to conceive. Something I put pen to paper, to help reconcile what I went through, to manage my feelings and internal thoughts through a period that has been a crazy, rollercoaster ride of emotions. Trying for a baby was both a mental and physical journey of excitement, hope and loss, something I had never imagined would be so difficult and sometimes so painful.

Whether you are thinking about getting pregnant, trying to conceive, are in the midst of your pregnancy, or you are fortunate to be holding that bundle of joy, you will understand that each and every couple has a very different experience. I found that my experiences even differed throughout each of my pregnancies. Unfortunately there is no set formula, rhyme or reason when it comes to falling

pregnant, or starting a family and that really is the beauty and the pain of this amazing journey.

This is my journey through early pregnancy: the good the bad and the ugly. This is my personal account of how I felt, what I experienced, the highs and the lows, and sometimes how I dealt with the setbacks I was forced to face on our baby-making road.

I do not wish to advocate any advice throughout this story, or provide any false hopes or crush any dreams. I wrote this to share my experience of a personal topic that many women don't seem to talk openly about.

It was something I realised during my pregnancies and my losses. Many women and men see the subject of early pregnancy loss as taboo, and generally avoid discussing their own experiences. Perhaps it is too hard and too painful to discuss, perhaps it's the knowledge that others will be questioning them on what happened, or what they will do next. I'm not really sure.

Many couples we know didn't tell a soul that they had experienced infertility, loss and disappointment in the early stages of pregnancy. Most, I found, would wait until the end of the first trimester, or even late into the second trimester before sharing their exciting news with close family and friends that they were even expecting. It was a nice little secret most couples kept to themselves in those earlier days of pregnancy. During those exciting times when we found out we were pregnant, I suppose keeping it between myself and my husband would have been something just for us to know, and enjoy that moment. However, I guess I'm a little

different to the norm, and it's probably why you're reading this now.

What I found is that each time I went through the process of excitement to apprehension and loss, it was the support from friends and family that helped me stay strong. My workplace was supportive and understanding and it really wasn't worth the time and effort for me to be secretive about what I had gone through. Especially with the number of hospital and doctor's appointments I ended up attending.

However, in saying this, I appreciate that this was the way I coped with my personal feelings and experiences, and that everyone has different needs and therefore may approach things very differently. There is no right or wrong way to manage pregnancy and loss, there is only your own way.

I hope that my story is helpful in some way.

New Horizons

The world of 'trying to conceive' is a place that is both physically, mentally and emotionally all consuming. It's a place I didn't even know existed until two years ago and frankly one I was quite unprepared for.

At the age of thirty-six, I had no idea of the impact of cycle times or when I actually ovulated, and then there were Basel temperatures, cervical mucus, days past ovulation, implantation and the hope of that elusive 'Big Fat Positive' result! Many couples at certain points in their life or at various ages make that important decision to start a family, and this then starts a cycle for some that results in a very quick positive result and a lovely bundle of joy! For others, it's a tough road filled with hope, heartbreak and turmoil, with numerous unsuccessful conception cycles and early pregnancy loss through miscarriage. So how do you really prepare for this?

I'm not sure you can. Whilst I possibly didn't really understand the world of trying to conceive, you quickly learn as you enter it. I recall discussing with my husband how we would probably be pregnant within the first couple of months. We were so excited! We were very naïve. Many

people had warned me, saying I would have a challenge being 'over thirty-five years', but we were both fit and healthy with an active sex life, so why would we have any problems?

I had a number of friends who had prior miscarriages or fertility problems, and again that hadn't phased me. Of course I'm different, and it will happen for us, I'd thought. We will have a family within the next twelve months. I was so certain of that.

It was seven months before I got my first positive pregnancy result. I was getting incredibly frustrated at that point, thinking it would never happen, and that there was actually something really wrong. We even started to look at alternative options like adoption or surrogacy. A little premature, but that's me all over; I'm impatient. If you were to compare my experience with others, seven months is actually a good result. I had heard of many others who had tried for over twelve months before getting pregnant the first time.

Whilst we didn't have a first successful pregnancy, it gave us hope. That's just part of the story that you will read in the later chapters. What I found is that pregnancy is a journey, with many bumps along the road. The timing of cycles and waiting for results, the hope and excitement of finding out you're pregnant, and then the pain and grief of miscarriage, which often leads to starting all over again; it's not an easy ride for any woman or couple to endure. Nonetheless, it's a passage that many couples unfortunately need to pass through to achieve their ultimate goal, a

healthy baby, starting a family and becoming parents. It's one of the ultimate life experiences and an aspiration I've personally dreamt about from as far back as I can remember.