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When Keily isn't changing nappies, washing dirty laundry and cleaning up toys, she loves reading, writing, walking, camping, home brewing and eating and drinking in quaint pubs.

The Gift of Life

My Journey through Miscarriage, IVF and Infertility.

Keily J. Adey

The Gift of Life



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My children Isla and Noah.



Acknowledgments

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Thank you to my two beautiful children Isla and Noah and maybe any future children I might have (I owe you a book because you're not in this one!), you gave me plenty of things to write about – everyone used to say when I was pregnant with you, that the hard work starts after you have children, but that wasn't the case for me, the hard work was getting you in the first place. I love you two kids more than my heart will allow.

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how much I want children, and most of the time about completely mundane rubbish x

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Nana, I have come to realise that we have many similarities; you enrich my life and ground me. I lost a part of me that I finally have back, whenever I visit you and Grandpa I leave feeling warmth in my heart.

Foreword

This book is my personal story and journey and it means a lot to me to have achieved this massive goal in my life. Writing has been a dream that I have had for a very, very long time.

My book describes how I coped and dealt with infertility, miscarriage, IVF and finally becoming a Mommy.

It is an off the cuff account – in the way I like to write, and in the style I like to read. I hope you like it.

I am writing this book to encourage every walk of life man and woman struggling emotionally, who are trying for a baby, thinking or going through IVF at the moment or in the near future: I hope you find laughter, enjoyment and hope from my experiences.

I was extremely lucky and my dreams came true in the end, I hope yours do too and if they don't, I hope you find happiness and contentment in your life, whatever the outcome.

Terminology: Abbreviations and Meanings

Amniocentesis: Amniocentesis (also referred to as amniotic fluid test or AFT) is a medical procedure used in prenatal diagnosis of chromosomal abnormalities and foetal infections, in which a small amount of amniotic fluid, which contains foetal tissues, is sampled from the amnion or amniotic sac surrounding a developing foetus, and the foetal DNA is examined for genetic abnormalities. In my case, this test was to check for Down Syndrome.

Bicornuate Uterus: A bicornuate uterus or bicornate uterus, commonly referred to as a "heart-shaped" uterus, is a type of uterine malformation where two "horns" form at the upper part of the uterus.

Buserelin: A typical drug prescribed during down Regging. This is also known as Gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonist (GnRH agonist). I was prescribed this drug, though there are many different drugs that may be suitable.

Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS): Sometimes misspelled "chorionic *villous* sampling", is a form of prenatal diagnosis to determine chromosomal or genetic disorders in the foetus. It entails sampling of the chorionic villus (placental tissue) and testing it for chromosomal abnormalities. In my case, this test was to check for Down Syndrome.

Down Regging: ‘Downregulation’ is the process by which a drug, gonadotrophin-releasing hormone analogues, or GnRH analogues, is injected into the woman to switch off her reproductive hormones which are controlled by the pituitary gland, tricking her body into a menopausal state before egg stimulation can occur. Typical menopausal symptoms occur during this time: hot flashes and mood swings, but they are only temporary and last only for the prescribed duration.

Egg Collection: The retrieval of the woman’s eggs; a process performed with ultrasound guidance under conscious sedation and with pain relief.

Human Chronic Gonadotropin (hCG): A reproductive hormone which is controlled during pregnancy that is made by the developing placenta after conception.

Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI): A procedure by which a single sperm is injected directly into the egg outside of the body.

Intrauterine Insemination (IUI): Washed sperm, spermatozoa (living and mobile), are separated from slow moving sperm to be placed into the woman’s womb using a catheter close to the time of ovulation.

In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF): A process by which an egg is fertilised by sperm outside the body: IVF is a major treatment for infertility when other methods of assisted reproductive technology have failed. The process involves monitoring a woman’s ovulatory process, removing ovum or ova (egg or eggs) from the woman’s ovaries and letting sperm fertilize them in a fluid medium in a Petri dish.

Immunoglobulin (Anti d): A medicine which is used in preventing antibody formation in rhesus negative women who have a rhesus positive baby.

Stimming: A process of stimulation where fertility drugs (gonadotrophin or Gonal-F) are injected into the woman to stimulate the ovaries in the reproduction of more eggs than is normally produced during her cycle.

The Stages of Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI):

My Story

My story has eight stages which follow:

1. Down Regging
2. Stimming
3. Monitoring egg stimulation
4. Human Chronic Gonadotropin (hCG)
5. Ultrasound guided egg collection
6. Sperm collection
7. Fertilisation
8. Embryo transfer

Down Regging: During this time I was given Buserelin to suppress the natural hormones produced in my natural cycle.

Stimming: There are a variety of fertility drugs prescribed during this time; I was given gonadotrophin or Gonal-F. These drugs are prescribed to control the growth of the follicles in the hope of producing 10 – 15 viable eggs.

Monitoring egg development: Regular monitoring of the growth of follicles is carried out from around the sixth day of injections, using vaginal ultrasound. The perfect follicle growth is around 16-20mm; in my case I had all different sizes and not all of them contained eggs.

Human Chronic Gonadotropin (hCG): When my follicles were at the right size, I was injected with a peptide hormone, hCG, to induce the final stages of egg maturation; the injection is given 34-36 hours before the eggs are collected.

Ultrasound guided egg collection: Carried out under light general anaesthetic or intravenous sedation; this procedure takes around 30minutes using vaginal ultrasound. A needle is guided using a probe, along the vaginal wall and into the ovary. Each follicle is then punctured and drained of the fluid it contains. At this time an embryologist works to examine each follicle to determine whether an egg is present. I was only able to produce 7 eggs, of which in the end 2 were successfully fertilised before I unfortunately miscarried one.

Although very rare, in some cases no egg will be collected at all.

Sperm collection: The man will produce a sample of sperm (around 30ml) during the time of egg collection.

Fertilisation: A single sperm is injected directly into the centre of the egg, this way the sperm is not required to penetrate any of the surrounding barriers. Once injected the eggs are incubated for a period of 16 hours. Fertilisation occurs if the head of the sperm and the egg fuse together.

Embryo transfer: If fertilisation has taken place the embryos can be transferred through the cervix into the uterus using a catheter.

ICSI may be suitable if you have:

1. Previously failed fertilisation or had a low fertilisation rate with conventional IVF.
2. Have no or a very low sperm count.

3. High levels of anti-sperm antibodies. An antisperm antibody test looks for special proteins (antibodies) that fight against a man's sperm in blood, vaginal fluids, or semen. The test uses a sample of sperm and adds a substance that binds only to affected sperm. Semen can cause an immune system response in either the man's or woman's body. The antibodies can damage or kill sperm. If a high number of sperm antibodies come into contact with a man's sperm, it may be hard for the sperm to fertilize an egg. The couple has a hard time becoming pregnant. This is called **immunologic infertility**.

Introduction

On Tuesday 29th April 2008 I arrived back home from work around 4.30pm; I felt a niggling pain in my tummy – just ever so slight cramps to start with, they didn't hurt, but I knew they were there and it was at the forefront of my mind.

At about 6 o'clock the cramps became slightly stronger but I didn't mention anything to Paul; I didn't want to worry him, and then at about 7 o'clock the pain became increasingly painful and too difficult to ignore.

I told Paul and he immediately started searching the internet for answers or reasons for cramps in early pregnancy: Apparently there is nothing to worry about unless accompanied by bleeding. Various other sites said that it was my uterus stretching, but it felt like more than that; it was wishful thinking on our part, as we knew deep down that it was our worst fears coming true... miscarriage.

During the pregnancy we had suffered a lot with bleeding but had early scans that confirmed and reassured us that the heartbeat was still there and the baby was still growing, but sometimes no matter what you do or how hard you pray if it isn't meant to be, it really isn't meant to be.

At 10 o'clock I was bouncing on my exercise ball and really struggling to deal with the pain and by midnight I was in hot and cold sweats rolling around in agony. Paul called the emergency doctor who advised me to take pain killers and if I could manage to get to the surgery for an examination.

**We knew deep down that it was our
worst fears coming true...**

The pain suddenly subsided and thinking it was very strange and hoping for the best, we drove to the surgery.

The doctor asked a lot of questions and examined my stomach; he pressed firmly and pushed down – he obviously knew that I had lost the baby – baby was stuck and needed a little help along with the natural process. After this I was told to go home and rest and to see our normal GP the next day and just as we walked through the exit, I felt another tight cramp, and my baby came away.

I had miscarried at ten weeks.

I felt very, very empty and just couldn't stop crying. It was a terrible time for us, there was simply no way to console ourselves. I couldn't be near anyone other than Paul because I didn't feel that anyone could even come close to knowing how I felt.

I went over and over it in my mind:

Did I cause it?

Could I have prevented it?

I literally had my head in my hands; I couldn't sleep or eat, I felt like absolute rubbish.

It was just nature being cruel and it simply wasn't meant to be. Work was fantastic; they supported me gave me time off to get my head together, and so we decided to get away for a few days, but first we had to confirm that the miscarriage was complete with a scan at the hospital and as soon as we had the

all clear, we drove to somewhere we hadn't been to before and chose Plymouth, Looe and Foye, and from there explored the coastlines and tried our best to occupy ourselves for a few days. The break really helped us, it gave us time and space to talk through what had happened and it beat moping around at home hands down.

We found some beautiful places to eat, and Paul treated me to all the foods I couldn't have eaten if I was still pregnant: lobster and crab and other shellfish dishes. I didn't want to go back home truth be known, I didn't want to have to face everybody at work and the reality that I was still going to have to sit at that desk and computer knowing I didn't have a baby growing inside my tummy anymore; I felt really empty – if I could have persuaded Paul, I think would have stayed.

Trying Again...

April 2008

Paul and I were getting married on Saturday 16th August, and I felt that the miscarriage had ruined my wedding day and my whole year – knowing I wouldn't have my baby inside me when I said my vows, everything had changed and I hated it.

We were both really surprised when we discovered I was pregnant; happy but shocked, because we had been planning our wedding and my parents had chosen and bought my wedding dress, which the dress makers kindly informed me that the dress wouldn't accommodate a huge pregnant tummy. The whole time I was pregnant was very negative, so I began blaming myself and wanted to call off the day. As it turned out, the next few months of planning and organising turned out to be the best thing, because it took my mind off the miscarriage and I focused on other things, good things.

We started trying again straight after the miscarriage – Paul's body clock must have seriously started ticking as he edged closer to the big **3 – 0**, and in all honesty mine had kicked into complete overdrive. I thought we would get pregnant again straight away, and our families were convinced that it would only be a matter of weeks before we were announcing the news again that we were expecting a bundle of joy.



Our Wedding Day

16th August 2008





Me and Paul floating on cloud 9

Our Honeymoon



He told us it took a year before falling pregnant.

A few months went by and we still weren't pregnant so we decided to see the doctor. He told us it took most normal healthy couples a year trying to conceive before falling pregnant, which so many family and friends kept telling us.

Over the next few weeks, the doctor took blood tests and sperm samples, and everything came back normal and healthy, stating that we could conceive naturally if we relaxed. For months we continued trying and monitoring when I was ovulating using ovulation sticks and basal body temperature charts to make sure we were doing it at the right times, but still we were not pregnant. On my wedding day I prayed I was pregnant – so hard I could have cried; I desperately wanted to tell Paul that I was pregnant on our honeymoon – I wanted to see his face when I told him.

I was practically sober on my wedding night – I didn't want to drink too much just in case... I was obsessed. I imagined my tummy swelling and getting bigger with a growing baby; for the first time in my life I didn't care what I looked like or if I put on weight.

The day of our wedding was amazing; we loved it! It was one of the four most memorable days of my life. We flew to Egypt for the honeymoon; relaxed and didn't think about children or trying for them.

Paul talked me into scuba diving as the reef in Shark's bay in Sharm el Sheikh is beautiful, and it was right by our hotel – I hadn't ever been scuba diving so had to practice breathing using the air tank in the hotel pool; I got out of the swimming

pool and noticed that Paul's face looked stony and quite pissed off, "What's wrong?" I asked.

"That fucking idiot just said, 'is your daughter going to have a go?' How old do I look?" I couldn't stop laughing. I suppose I do look quite young for my age, my mother's genes, youthful looking, with a petite frame. Thanks Mom xx

When we returned home from our honeymoon we made another appointment with the doctor and requested sperm samples to be sent off yet again; we were worried that if it had taken us this long to conceive and then if we miscarried again it could be years before we had a child. The doctor told us that we should relax and it would just happen, and he sent us away again. Annoyed, we wanted to see a specialist; if we were both fine then why wasn't it happening...! The doctor reluctantly sent Paul's sperm sample off to the hospital and a few days later the results came back normal. My blood tests were repeated over the next month which also showed that I was ovulating yet again, so there was no reason to doubt the doctor or the results.

Over the next six months we tried not to think about making babies, but after a further six months or so, and we still weren't pregnant, we finally decided that enough was enough. After heated discussions with the doctor – who kept saying that we were fine, and to keep on trying – we felt that he didn't know anything about infertility (other than what he read on Google – I know that every doctor specialises in different aspects, but it drives me mad when they sit there looking up your symptoms on the internet; I could do that at home instead of making an appointment and taking time off work, wasting my petrol). We were getting nowhere with him.

We were desperate, and wanted answers!

We had been pregnant together previously, and plus, I had been pregnant a few years earlier by a previous partner; if we could get pregnant before, why weren't we pregnant now?

These questions were constantly whirling around in my head and were affecting so many parts of my life, it was all I cared about quite frankly. My work was suffering because I wasn't concentrating, friendships were affected because I didn't have time for them, and I if I was ovulating we didn't want to go out because we wanted to try for a baby over the seven days nearest to ovulation – it was a nightmare!

Inevitably, friends and family had started announcing the good news of their imminent new arrivals; I felt sick, a huge lump in my throat and each time I was completely devastated that I wasn't the one announcing the news that I was pregnant – it always seemed to be somebody else. I am not a jealous person, and I was happy that they were pregnant, but I couldn't help but feel upset and angry – I wanted my own family. I didn't want their babies, I don't want their life, I wanted mine and my own children with my husband, the man that I love, to make a life and memories with them.

What made the situation worse for me was social networking sites; God it makes me sick – you don't get the real version of other people's lives, the ups and the downs, the trials and tribulations; everyone's pictures just show happy family snapshots: this holiday, that holiday, Johnny walking for the first time, Johnny's first Christmas. It depressed me. It highlighted the fact that I don't have a child and I can't take those photos because my life was standing still. It made me feel worse because all I could see was that everyone else is normal and I'm not! I just wanted to talk with someone who felt the same, someone who knows what I'm going through, anyone, but there isn't anyone, and there isn't even a book I

can pick up that someone in my situation has written, who feels the same as me.

We were getting nowhere with him!

Eventually we were referred to a specialist at the hospital; we also enquired about having treatment on the NHS, but the waiting list for fertility treatment was up to four years. In silence, we drove home shocked not quite believing how long it might be before I even started having any investigation into why we weren't conceiving.

Paul accepted that I wasn't prepared to wait for the minimum of two years or failing that up to four years before starting, I would have been wasting time! At the moment I am young but if I waited that long I would be nearly 30-years old and the chances of conceiving then would become lower – as I am constantly reminded by the media. So with all that in mind began to research private fertility clinics: price lists and treatments and quickly realised that if we just needed a little help with the conception process like IUI, then it didn't cost much at all; I had no reason to believe that we would need any other treatment, I certainly believed I wouldn't need IVF because we had already gone through lots of tests that told us that we were both OK, so maybe, we just needed a little help and we would be pregnant and be on the home run.

I trawled the internet for days and found a nearby private clinic that I felt comfortable with and convinced Paul that the results that we were getting back just didn't make sense. I explained that I felt that something was wrong – either with Paul or me, so we phoned the doctor and asked him to send a

referral letter to the clinic with a brief medical history, which he did, begrudgingly, and sent us a copy.

As I mentioned earlier, by now I had had two miscarriages: one with a previous partner a few years before, which I must admit was a very silly mistake on my part that I very much regretted at the time but I didn't realise how useful my past was until now. I was glad of my past as I wouldn't have pushed for a second opinion; it was only because of my previous history that alarm bells started to go off in my head. I believed that something was seriously wrong with me and maybe I couldn't carry a child which scared me half to death; actively trying for a baby was getting me down as every month, and period passed me by

My first miscarriage was in 2004. I had been bleeding for three weeks and presumed that I was having a dodgy period, or that something more sinister was going on like cervical cancer; I booked an appointment to see the doctor, and when the nurse was called in to examine me I nearly fainted when she told me I was pregnant. She explained that I had suffered a miscarriage, and that she thought I was around six weeks pregnant, but I would need to go to hospital for a scan to know for sure if the miscarriage was complete or if I was still pregnant. The next day I went to hospital and the scan confirmed that I had miscarried but it wasn't complete so I would need a dilation and curettage (D and C), a surgical operation which removes the pregnancy. They were concerned that there could be complications; my blood type is rhesus negative, and because of this I needed to have an Anti D injection which basically prevents my body building up antibodies to fight any future pregnancies that I may have. However, I believe that because I had already been bleeding for weeks before I had been given the injection my body had

already built up the antibodies which in turn led to the next five years of my life being haunted by this miscarriage and my silly mistake! I have read that immunoglobulin should be given within 72 hours after any bleeding in pregnancy, but I will write more about that later on in the book.

**It was only because of my previous history
that alarm bells started to go off in my head!**

Everyone I know who have children always joke that, '*practicing was the best bit*', but for me and Paul it really wasn't – I think anyone trying for a baby and wanting one as much as we did, and for people who try for a hell of a lot longer than we did, know exactly where I'm coming from – it is stressful, demanding and above all caused unwarranted arguments month after month.

We felt angry about losing our baby while sitting back and watching others around us fall pregnant so easily, it was extremely taxing. It just seemed so unfair; we had to remind ourselves that they too may have had problems conceiving and even if they hadn't, they deserved happiness every bit as much as we did. It's not fair for us to criticise and judge others when we don't know them or their circumstances, although, it is hard not to when it seems as though you've been dealt the worst hand – my mind was in overdrive and I was beginning to turn selfish because of how angry I felt.

As a couple we had always discussed having children together but decided that If we went down the route of fertility treatment, and if it didn't work, we would stay together regardless – children or no children, I wouldn't want children with someone else, because Paul is the only man for me and I

don't say that lightly. I know a lot of people say that it won't split them up, but when they are faced with the problem and find out who is the cause of their fertility problems they give up and leave. Paul is definitely the one for me!

It was so important to talk about what would happen if we couldn't have children; Paul was anxious that he was the one with the problem and questioned me if I would still want to be with him, and I thought it was my problem and something to do with me miscarrying; we were both adamant we wouldn't leave each other nor did we really want to adopt – we wanted our own children, we both wanted the same things and our relationship was very strong. We knew that we had to explore our options and give it our best shot, so we went down the route of private fertility treatment.

We knew that we had to give it our best

