

“There’s only one thing more painful than having a baby...and that’s not being able to have a baby”

By Vicki Hibbert



# Chapter One:

“There’s only one thing more painful than having a baby.....and that’s not being able to have a baby.”

From a small child I never wanted to have children. I wasn’t maternal in the slightest or broody when I was growing up. I would happily state this at family gatherings where my sister and female cousins would be surrounded by oodles of screaming, smelly, snotty, money pits. Whenever I heard one of them was pregnant, I actually felt sorry for them, convinced that they were missing out on so much. How sad it must be, I thought, to actually choose to be tied down from such a young age. I viewed motherhood as an old-fashioned idea, when there were so many more opportunities for women, far more than even our mothers, I couldn’t understand why they weren’t taking advantage of them.

**The idea of sleepless nights and not being able to go out whenever I felt like it was hell to me.** No, I would be one of these modern women who had a career and a nice house and a nice car who could buy a £200 pair of shoes whenever I felt like it. My peer group felt the same, we all went to university and



achieved degrees. We all went on to, well, to start with low paying thankless jobs that eventually became good, fulfilling well-paid careers. My group of friends, made up almost entirely of couples, met every weekend at the pub or in restaurants. We went on exciting holidays and long weekends. We had the kind of independent lives for which women have been longing for hundreds of years. My twenties were a blast.

## **And then something strange happened.**

I accidentally found out one of my best friends was pregnant. We had been Christmas shopping and a couple of things occurred that made me think something was up (a skill I honed in later years... I can spot a newly pregnant woman at 20 paces!). We went for a coffee and she ordered decaf. She never does that. She also went to the toilet about four times. Later I sent her a text saying “I know your secret”. She denied it but I knew.

Driving home after dropping her off I had an unexpected, overwhelming, uncontrollable longing to have a baby. It manifested itself into physical pain. I felt sick and I was shaking. I had just turned 30 and suddenly having a baby became the most urgent thing. All of a sudden I was ready. I genuinely hadn’t expected that

feeling to ever happen to me but it is absolutely true what they say – when you hit your thirties - you really start to hear that clock ticking. And it was really loud.

**Convincing my other half however took another extremely frustrating year,** during which time several other friends announced their pregnancies. At that point he was not ready at all; we had never really spoken about having children because I had been so adamant throughout most of our relationship that I wasn’t interested. It took some time to convince him that it wasn’t just because our friends were having babies.

Two things happened that started to change his mind. Firstly, his sister had the cutest baby girl, who he fell instantly in love with. The second was at a barbecue the following summer. I received a phone call from another friend letting us all know she was pregnant. She’d had her 12-week scan that afternoon and I just burst into tears in front of everyone. Ok, I’d had a couple of drinks, but it was a genuine response. Walking me home I explained why I was so upset. He hadn’t seen how deep the feeling was until that moment and that night we started trying.

Naively I thought that I would get pregnant straight away... but that was not the case.



## Chapter Two:

“It seemed to me that my sister and cousins got pregnant at the drop of a hat, so surely it would be the same for me.”



**Behind the smiles Vicki (left) could only think about becoming a mother.**

After a couple of months of trying, I distinctly remember sitting on my bed thinking about the me in the future, looking back and mocking the past me for being so optimistic. It would be typical that if anyone was going to have trouble having a baby it would be me. Surely if everyone else in my family were popping babies out left right and centre then, as the statistics show, one of us should have trouble.

### **A year passed and still nothing.**

I started to get a bit worried so I went to the doctor who said that it could still happen, most people get pregnant within a year and the rest within two years. But I was sent for a few blood tests just to check I was

ovulating and some other tests for my general health. They all came back fine and I was told I was ovulating. Just keep trying and relax.

It got to the point that if I was told to relax one more time, I was going to throttle someone!

### **I knew I needed to relax, but the more you are told to relax the more tense you become!**

Then, you become even tenser because you know you are wound up and not relaxed. It's a vicious circle!

Mother nature could also be really cruel. On several occasions I would get my period on the day I found out someone was pregnant, or the day a friend would have a baby.

It was like my body was taunting me, was rubbing my infertility in my face.

My friend's quests for parenthood had not been without upset or drama. There had been miscarriages in their stories, in fact that happened a lot more than you'd think. But in my circle of friends, no-one else had not been able to even get pregnant. In my blinkered and single-minded view, I didn't see that.

**To me it just felt like everyone else could say, right I want a baby and then "poof" they had one.**



**Vicki (left) celebrates another birthday as the 'ticking time bomb' continues.**



# Chapter Three:

**“Words cannot describe how painful and all-consuming it is to want a baby and not be able to get pregnant.”**

**I love my job but my work suffered because I couldn't think about anything else.** I would think about it when I woke up, on the drive to work in the morning, sitting on the toilet, eating my lunch, sitting in meetings, waiting for someone to pick up the phone, driving home in the evening, lying in bed at night.

You start to see pregnant women or new mums everywhere; out shopping, in restaurants, and for me, at work, there was no escape.

You hear people in this situation describing it as a rollercoaster and that is spot on. **You're constantly up and down.** There were many times when I

convinced myself that this month I MUST be pregnant. I would have all or some of the symptoms I thought you would have in early pregnancy, if I had sore breasts and felt a bit sick then I would quietly pray that this month would be it. On some occasions even if I had a bit of pre-menstrual spotting I would convince myself it was the embryo attaching. Then I would emotionally crash when my period properly kicked in, as it always did, month after month after month.

**At first I did pregnancy tests regularly but eventually it became too painful. It** was always negative and I made a vow that I would never take another test unless I was certain.



I did the ovulation sticks and took my temperature. My partner and I took vitamin supplements and tried to eat healthily.

I stopped drinking alcohol and he cut down. He stopped smoking. I kept a diary of exactly when I would be ovulating. I was totally in tune with my body. We were regularly doing exercise. We did everything we could possibly do.

**But then we stopped having sex....**





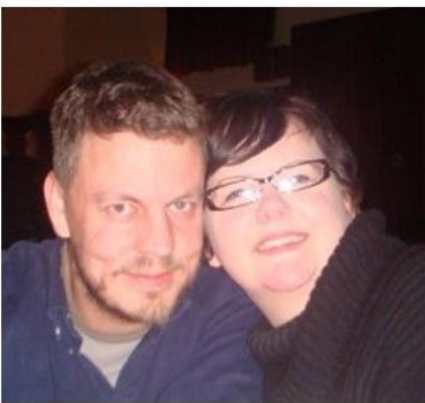
# Chapter Four:

**“After two and a half years of trying for a baby, sex had become less about spontaneity and enjoyment and purely and solely about making a baby.”**

I would text him at work to let him know that we **had** to have sex that night. You would think that it would be every man’s dream, having sex all the time, which initially we did. But it started getting mechanical and functional. Afterwards I would stick my legs in the air while he watched TV, hardly romantic.

**Our relationship started to suffer.**

We still loved each other very much but it was a very difficult time.



**Trying to conceive was beginning to put a strain on James and Vicki’s relationship**

A very good friend once said to me that we are sent these challenges because we are strong enough to handle them. I took comfort from that and told myself that during these dark days.

**Three years passed and still nothing.**

**Then came the most painful week.**

Firstly my sister announced she was pregnant again with her third child. She hadn’t even been trying and the pregnancy was the result of antibiotics for a tooth infection and a Christmas tipple.

**I was over the moon for her of course, as I always was for all of my friends, but it also felt like my heart had been ripped out.**

I called my friend that evening and she suggested we all go out for dinner the following Saturday to cheer me up. When we were out her husband (not very

delicately) took my other half off so my friend could speak to me alone. I knew what was coming and burst into tears in the middle of the pub. My sister and my best friend were both pregnant and both due within days of each other. It sounds dramatic but I felt like I was having an out-of-body experience.

**How could life be THAT unfair?**

After that I knew I had to do something, it wasn’t going to happen naturally. I knew that if I wanted to be a mummy, and I did more than anything in the world, than I had to be a lot more proactive about it. Luckily, because we had been trying for three years, we had now been referred to a consultant at our local hospital.

**We were going to get some help at last...**





# Chapter Five:

## “We were on the right road but it wasn’t going to be easy.”

It didn’t happen quickly. There were lots of other tests we both had to have and that took time. I had a horrible procedure where ink was injected into my fallopian tubes to check if they were blocked. It left me feeling invaded and with a nasty infection. I had ultrasounds and examinations until the cows came home.

**They could come up with nothing; there was nothing wrong with either of us.**

We were told in theory I could still get pregnant naturally, however, I clearly wasn’t going to. Our consultant was brilliant and referred us for IVF.

**IVF, finally!**

We had a choice of hospitals and chose Bourn Hall in Cambridgeshire as it was the closest to home. Bourn Hall is a beautiful old house surrounded by green fields and has an air of calm about it. The moment you walk in you feel welcomed and embraced. I have never felt so pleased to be anywhere in my life.

The initial consultancy was strange. We, along with about 50 other couples, were squeezed into a warm meeting room while we were walked through a presentation about the procedures and processes we would have to go through to make our baby. They didn’t pull any punches. The odds were clearly

stated at the very beginning and they weren’t in our favour. Out of the 50 couples in that room only around 15 would get pregnant in the first cycle.

**We were on the right road but it wasn’t going to be easy.**

We then met with a consultant and went through more personal details and I gave them a blood sample. I was then weighed, only to be told I was too heavy to undergo treatment. The rules are that you have to be within the BMI healthy range and I was just over it. I was cross at the time but it makes sense that the healthier you are the more likely you are to conceive.

I have never been so motivated to lose weight in my life! I lost a stone and a half in six weeks. I went back and we were given a date to start treatment.

**We were back on track.**

The consultancy was at the start of May and we started treatment in the middle of June. I believe this

is quite quick, as sometimes couples have to wait a few months. I had to use a nose spray twice a day, which had a chemical to stop my natural cycle. It was very uncomfortable because I had really bad hay fever and my nose was very sore but I took it religiously twice a day.

At the end of June we went on holiday to Scotland with my parents. We stayed in a beautiful village surrounded by mountains and amazing views, but it was as if I watching from the side lines. I wasn’t living in the now.

**I just wanted the days to be over until I next went back to the clinic, until we started the next step.**

I feel guilty now because my parents love Scotland and had wanted to share this with us for years.

**I just wasn’t in the same space.**



**“The moment you walk in you feel welcomed and embraced” says Vicki, who chose to have her treatment at Bourn Hall Clinic in Cambridgeshire.**



# Chapter Six:

**“I was due to have my five precious eggs removed towards the end of July when I suddenly discovered that I was bleeding. This wasn’t supposed to happen.”**

The day before we were due to leave Scotland I realised I’d run out of my nose spray and hadn’t packed my next batch.

**I went into a panic and we had to leave that evening.**

I’d called the clinic and they set up an appointment with the pharmacist the next day. We drove for 10 hours through the night in driving rain to get back to Hertfordshire and then went to the clinic that afternoon. I remember crying my eyes out in the pharmacist’s room and she was so sympathetic and kind. She explained that the drug I was taking was quite strong and would be making me feel more emotional than I might usually. She made me feel a lot better. In the middle of July I had to start injecting myself in my tummy

every day to stimulate my ovaries. I wasn’t sure if I was going to be able to do this but actually it wasn’t that bad. It was in an epi-pen and didn’t hurt at all.

Towards the end of this process I went to the clinic every couple of days to have an ultrasound on my ovaries to see how they were doing. I had five follicles potentially with eggs in them.

**I remember being disappointed that there were so few as I knew some women had as many as 15 to 20 eggs.**

After doing some reading I found out that in order to avoid ovarian hyper-stimulation syndrome (which can be dangerous, even fatal) Bourn Hall use safe dosages based on individual women’s hormone levels.

I was due to have my five precious eggs removed towards the end of July when I suddenly discovered

that I was bleeding.

**This wasn’t supposed to happen.**

It was very light but if I lost too much blood there wouldn’t be enough of a lining to sustain an embryo.

**I tried not to panic.**

Thankfully, the bleeding stopped after a couple of days and I was called in to have my final ultrasound. The very kind and professional lady doing the ultrasound told me that I was ready and that my womb still had enough of a lining for them to be able to transfer an embryo.

**I couldn’t wait for them to get on with it!**

The night before they took out my eggs I had to give myself a proper injection in my tummy with a proper syringe. This was a very different kettle-of-fish to the epi-pen. We had been told to inject at a very specific time about 12 hours before the egg extraction procedure in order to allow the follicles time to mature and be ready to pop. The fact that I had to inject at a particular time was the only thing that made me actually do it.

**If not I would probably still be stood there faffing about.**





# Chapter Seven:

## “I had five eggs. Five chances.”

### **I was so nervous driving to the clinic that morning.**

I remember it being a beautiful July day but my head was in a bubble. When we got there I was shaking. When they took my blood pressure, they told me I had to calm down because it was too high. In hindsight I don't really know what I was so scared about; I was worried about the procedure. It was an operation and I would be awake, but I think it was more that this was



**All Vicki and James could do now was wait.**

something we had been working towards for such a long time and it was actually happening.

I had an injection of pethidine in my bottom, which to be honest didn't even touch the sides, and was then wheeled down to the theatre. My other half went in the other direction to a suite of comfortable rooms with beds and sofas and oodles of porn. I know who got the best end of that deal! I was breathing slowly to try and keep calm and actually once I was in theatre I was fine, which was strange. There were a lot of people there but they were all very friendly. They all acknowledged me, told me their names and what they were going to be doing. **I felt like I was being treated with respect and not just another name on a conveyor belt of patients.**

I'm not going to lie - the actual procedure was unpleasant. They have to go through the wall of your vagina to get to your ovaries so they don't damage your fallopian tubes. They do of course give you a local anaesthetic but it was still very uncomfortable. I was

told when I first went in that gas and air would be available if I needed it, which I initially waved off. I would be fine. But I wasn't fine. My left ovary was bouncing around and the doctor, despite prodding around enthusiastically, couldn't get to it. A nurse had to lean very hard on my stomach to keep it still. At that moment I was very thankful to have gas and air, which immediately took away the pain.

Every time a follicle was drained it was taken into the lab next door and the technician called through to confirm that it contained an egg. **I had five eggs. Five chances.**

About 15 minutes later I was tidied up and sent back to the day ward where my other half was waiting for me with a cuddle. After a couple of hours I had recovered and calmed down. When they were sure I was ok and wasn't going to pass out, they let us go home.

**There was nothing more we could do; it was now up to them.**





# Chapter Eight:

## “We had only one chance.”

We had been told that the best chance of conception is to implant an embryo at the blastocyst stage – which is at five days from fertilisation. In special circumstances they do sometimes implant at two days.

The day after the eggs were removed I had a call from the clinic to say only two of my eggs had fertilised.

**We were very disappointed; we could see the odds slipping.**

The clinic had decided to implant on day two, to give us the best chance.

The next day was a Saturday and I was due to go and see the musical *Mamma Mia* in London with my sister and my niece, which I had to cancel. My sister had been my confidant during this whole process so she knew what was going on. I didn't want to tell anyone else in case it wasn't successful. I couldn't face telling everyone if it didn't work. I had to make up a white lie about why I couldn't go and my parents went instead.

When we arrived at the clinic we were taken into a sterile room and told that only one of the embryos had continued to divide, that only one scored high enough to be implanted. The other one had stopped developing.

**We had only one chance. I tried not to think too much about what the odds were likely to be now.**

Once again I was lying on my back with my legs akimbo while people

I've never met before tinkered around my downstairs area. My other half was holding my hand as our precious embryo was injected in a whoosh of fluid into my womb.

**That was it; it was now up to the gods.**

We were advised to rest for a while in a lounge where other couples were also resting. There were four of us, four women sat on comfortable reclining chairs. We didn't speak to each other, barely even acknowledged each other, in the way that only English people do.

**Despite that, I knew we all felt the same, Is this it? Is this my baby? Am I finally pregnant?**

I often wonder about what happened to those other girls, if any of them were successful.

I clearly remember lying on my bed that afternoon holding my stomach and willing that little cluster of cells to hold on; just hold on.

I didn't go to work that week, I didn't do anything. I had a massage and went for a couple of leisurely walks. I did everything I could to avoid any kind of stress and I made sure I did the progesterone pessaries twice a day.

**I wanted to give myself the best possible chance to conceive.**

The two weeks before I could take a pregnancy test were the longest I've ever experienced.

The day before I was supposed to



do the first pregnancy test was a Sunday and we had been invited to a family reunion in Essex. My other half had other plans so I went with my sister and her family in their car.

**As the day went on I started to feel really strange.**

I was a bit woozy and flushed and at one point when we were all stood around in their kitchen I thought I was going to faint. On the way home I sat staring out of the window and I started to dare to believe that it might actually have worked.

My other half wasn't back when I got dropped off at home but the first thing I did was grab a test and go to the toilet. You're supposed to wait for your first wee of the day and this was about six o'clock in the evening but I couldn't wait. I did the test and waited a couple of minutes and there was a little cross.

**It was positive... It was positive! I couldn't breathe. I was pregnant.**



# Chapter Nine:

“There was still a long way to go.”



When my other half came home I told him. I should explain this was a very difficult time for him. His mum hadn't long been diagnosed with terminal cancer and the reason he couldn't come to the reunion was because he'd been with his parents and sisters going through his mum's will with a solicitor.

When he came home he was still upset from that experience, so me bouncing around the walls wasn't what he needed. He brought me down to earth but that was what I needed.

**There was still a long way to go, it was so early and anything could have happened.**

My pregnancy was bittersweet.

At the end of August we went away with his family to a beautiful converted barn in Suffolk and spent a happy week with his mum who at that time was still well enough to enjoy the holiday. The night before my 35th birthday his sister opened a bottle of bubbly and I had to decline, which I would never normally do. Then we told them our news. It was very emotional, we all knew that there was a possibility that his mum would not live to see our baby born.

Unfortunately only ten weeks later, she passed away. I was 17 weeks pregnant. The midwife said I couldn't have, but I know I felt my baby kicking the morning she died.

Our baby was there, it felt like it was telling me everything was going to be ok. But it almost wasn't. At 26 weeks I started bleeding, quite a lot. I went to the toilet one morning, looked down, and the toilet was full of blood.

**I'm not ashamed to say I went into a full on panic.**

On the way to the hospital my baby started kicking which made me calm down. After spending a couple of nights in hospital and two weeks off work everything went back to normal. They never were able to explain why it had

happened; it was just one of those things.

But after that I wasn't taking any chances. I let my other half do everything at home, I took my foot off the gas at work and tried to stay as calm as possible for the rest of my pregnancy. The baby spent the whole gestation in breech position head-butting my stomach and giving me terrible heartburn. As a result, I decided to opt for an elective caesarean.

**On 12th April 2011, at 11:23, Rose Elizabeth was born. My baby. MY baby. My beautiful baby girl. My little miracle.**

The pain of the last four years washed away with her amniotic fluid, gone but not forgotten.



**Vicki and James' dreams came true on 12th April 2011, at 11:23 when Rose Elizabeth was born.**





Rose is now two years old and a little monkey. She's very clumsy and doesn't stop talking. She looks like me and has her Dad's feet. She has beautiful curly blond hair and big blue eyes. She is smart and feisty and loving and funny.

**I can't imagine life without her. What would we do without her? What would we have done without her? Where would we be?**

Some people argue that there are enough people in this world and if you can't conceive naturally then it goes against nature to interfere. I argue that those people have obviously never had trouble having children.

**Unless you have been through the pain, and it is a physical pain, of not being able to have your own child, you cannot make that judgement.**

Rose was meant to be, she came at a time that helped heal the pain of her Grandma's passing and helped her Daddy through one of the most difficult times in his life. At my most wistful and poetic, I like to think that she was sent to us when we needed her the most.

**None of this would have been possible without the help of Bourn Hall.**

