



Book Review:

Silent Sorority: A Barren Woman Gets Busy, Angry, Lost and Found

by Pamela Mahoney Tsigdinos (2009)

This book is written as a chronological account about Pamela's personal experience of childlessness, covering the difficult topics of assisted reproduction, relationship stress, miscarriage, and it also touches on adoption.

Her writing style is factual, but emotional, with dark humour that at times is well placed, but for someone very new to ending their fertility journey may be hard to take. I found some of her comments, experience and use of humour difficult to relate to at times because it comes across as very American (eg coping with "baby showers" and her experience of being a full-on business woman), despite this, there was a lot that mirrored my experience with infertility, including her experience of pain and loss.

The author is very honest about intimate details, and it helps to have someone talk about their journey who has been there.

In an online comment about her book, Pamela writes: "If someone had told me ten years ago that I would have a magical life after infertility, I probably would have decked them. Such was my anger and despair over the loss of a fragile but long-held dream and more than a decade of trying, fruitlessly, to conceive with the man I adore. I was bitter, broken and inconsolable."

The "Silent Sorority" of the title is the place we find ourselves in when we end up as childless and struggle to fit in or be recognised by society at large. She discusses what the majority do not want to consider: that even with assisted reproduction and all the hype around achievement, not everyone ends up with a child.

Pamela also discusses society's role in the shame that women feel when they can't have kids – and how tactless others can be (from flaunting fertility around her, to the use of language in commenting on her childless status).

As her journey continues, she comes across as someone who has found strength in a shared community (she sets up her own website and blog, under a pseudonym at first) and shares comments from others about how they have handled the insensitive responses they have had. For example she responds to the question "Have you ever considered adoption?" with the answer "there's nothing wrong with our brains, for Pete's sake, it's our *reproductive organs* that are messed up."

She makes efforts to break the silence around infertility and has gone public with her online presence since publishing her book, see: <http://blog.silentsorority.com/> and is trying to make people more aware of us *non-parents* as full contributors to society. Like Pamela, I struggle with what to call myself sometimes as I fear it may be misinterpreted, or feels negative (such as barren, infertile). In her online piece "Moving On to A Magical Life" contributed to the Ladies in Waiting Book Club, she concludes: "No. I am foregoing a label. I am simply me: a happy woman who is grateful to be on the other side of the hell that I lived with and through. I adore my husband more than ever. I love my life. I cherish my friends. I enjoy the freedom to live unencumbered by expectations and pre-determined milestones. I feel a certain agelessness, a magic that comes with embracing the unknown. Most of all, I am at peace. There is more than one happy ending."

Looking at the comments from readers on Amazon many have found the book helpful and it has been shared with parents, siblings, friends, etc, as a way of helping them to understand and have a better idea of what to say (and not to say!) One reviewer put it very eloquently: "I am deeply grateful to the author for writing this book. My stomach turned when I read some of the stupid comments made to encourage and give hope, the insensitive things said in ignorance or impatience, because I was guilty of saying them myself to my own daughter. I have a much better understanding of what she is experiencing."

I would recommend this book for those of us who are no longer quite so raw from our experience. If you fancy your own copy, don't forget that you can help MTL by buying through the link to Amazon via the MTL homepage: www.moretolife.co.uk or: <http://astore.amazon.co.uk/mtl-21> - you may also like to visit Pamela's blog...

Happy reading!

Karen Law

Member of the MTL Steering Group

<http://blog.silentsorority.com/>

<http://www.ladiesinwaitingbookclub.com/2011/08/moving-on-to-magical-life.html>