

## Rachel & Dave's story

When I was a little girl, did I think I would grow up, get married and have children? Yes I did, didn't everyone? My best friend and I had it all planned out; we would marry boys who were friends, live next door to each other and our kids would become best friends. When I think back now, I wonder at the absolutely delightful chocolate-covered with a cherry on top thoughts that we have as children. Not a care in the world or a worry on our mind. It's a lovely level of innocence combined with a naivety of the real world, which will one day smack you hard in the face.

My own whack of reality came almost a year ago. My husband and I are what I like to call soul mates. Don't get me wrong, I would say I am a realist bordering on a cynic at heart, but when I met my husband almost five years ago, he changed everything. Never in my life had I met someone quite so ideal for me. He is everything I wanted in a husband but thought I would never be able to find. And so our blissful life began. After getting married in 2014 we began trying to conceive straight away. We had so much love to give and knew there would be no child in the world more cherished.

After two years of trying and nothing to show for it, we made a trip to our GP. I was very reluctant; terrified that they would find something and then it would become a "problem". I didn't want to deal with a problem like that; our life was perfect and I didn't want anything to spoil that.

After some initial tests, which showed everything as 'normal', we were given a referral to the fertility clinic since we had been trying for more than 18 months.

The appointment came in within a couple of months and we were again treated to some initial tests at the clinic. After an extremely painful Hycosy (hysterosalpingo-contrast-sonography) procedure, it was confirmed that I had a blocked fallopian tube. Unfortunately this has never been confirmed 100% as when they tried to push the dye in to push the blockage out, I actually screamed the pain was so bad. So they often categorize us as unexplained infertility with likely blocked tube.

Of course I then went on a mammoth mission of trying to find out how I could unblock my tube. I tried herbs, supplements, castor oil therapy packs, and each time convinced myself that it would work. I also read about an operation where the offending tube can be removed and I brought this up to our consultant at the clinic, who tried hard to suppress his laughter while he said that was a pretty outdated method now. The solution was IVF. We were devastated, scared, nervous and felt like we were lost at sea. I never wanted to get to this place; I know IVF works for a lot of people, but we weren't those people. We were impeccably and serenely content in our lives; how could we go through something like this and still maintain that?

Telling people was hard; our parents were devastated along with us, but from the first almost everyone was utterly and completely there for us. Since we are both in our mid-late 30's, we have to deal with a lot of people we know getting pregnant, and that can be excruciating. We tell ourselves "it'll be us soon", but with the 10-week IVF cycle and a 25-30% success rate looming in front of us, it felt very far away.

Our IVF started in March 2017 with the down regulator tablets, followed by the hormone injections. Looking back now, that whole period feels like a bit of a blur. Dave had to do the injections as I couldn't quite face it; overall they weren't too bad, but by the second week my stomach was as hard as a rock and I looked about 6 months pregnant. How ironic. I also felt absolutely awful and was completely fed up of being poked and prodded every couple of days. The egg retrieval resulted in 12

eggs, 6 of which fertilised which we were delighted about. We had a day-3 embryo transfer with the remaining five still being cultivated in the lab to try and reach day 5 blastocyst embryos.

On the second week of the 2-week wait I started bleeding very heavily. I was terrified. I phoned the clinic who confirmed it was all over. We had lost our little embryo before we ever really had it.

The devastation we felt was unparalleled with anything I had ever experienced in my life. I felt like me and my body had failed our little embryo; I hadn't been able to keep it safe and now all those months had been for nothing. The blow was further impacted when the lab phoned to tell us that none of our remaining 5 embryos had made it to day 5. Now we truly had nothing.

As of now, we are healing and trying to come to terms with everything we've been through. IVF Round 2 is on the cards but only once we have fully recovered; I can't even think about beginning that right now.

One thing I can say with certainty however is that I could not have got through any of this without Dave. Prior to beginning our treatment I was worried that the IVF would ruin our perfect marriage. But what I've learned this year is that it is the flaws that make you perfect. We said in our marriage vows that whatever cards we were dealt in life we would handle them together. We have certainly done that, and more. Rather than ruining our perfect life, it has made us closer, stronger and with the knowledge that we can handle anything life throws at us and come out fighting on the other side.