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Having My Baby at 40 Was Worth the Wait

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I had my one and only baby at the age of 40.

I have always wanted to be a mother. As a girl, I didn't dream of a princess gown and a big wedding; I dreamed of having a big family. I wanted large, loud family events like the ones I'd grown up with. I loved the bustle and quirkiness of large family gatherings at my grandmother's house.

My Journey to Motherhood

I didn't get married until I was 34. My son's father and I (we are now divorced) didn't start trying to have a baby until we had been married for a couple of years.

We tried casually at first, and I enjoyed the thrill of having sex without any birth control for the first time in my life. I started taking my basal body temperature every morning with a special thermometer and tracked my fertile days on a website with all kinds of symbols and indicators to tell you when to do it (and when not to) so that conditions would be ideal.

Every time I got my period, I felt like a failure. The longer our journey went on, the more despondent I felt.

After nearly three unsuccessful years of trying to conceive, I decided to investigate fertility treatments. It turns out that my ovaries were covered by scar tissue from the abdominal surgeries I had in my 20s for ulcerative colitis.

Getting Discouraged from the Start

The doctors made it clear that there were more risks in having a first baby at the age of 39. The risk of Down syndrome is higher for people who conceive at 40 (**about 1 in 100**). But treating women like they're doing something wholly dangerous just because they're having a baby can put a big damper on what is supposed to be a joyous time.

On top of that, fertility treatments are incredibly stressful, both personally and physically. The whole process is intimidating and expensive, and they told me at the time that my odds were not great. I had only a 20%–30% chance of ending up with a baby, they said.

The Frustration of Fertility Treatments

We progressed to **intrauterine insemination (IUI)** treatment—the advanced turkey baster method, as I called it. It cost \$800 for each attempt, and we went through it four times. It didn't work. During the last procedure, after the nurse had injected the sperm directly into my uterus with a catheter, I was instructed to stay in the exam room, keep my legs crossed, and prop them against the wall for 15 minutes.

There, alone in my flimsy gown, the nurse turned to me and said: “You know, this is your fourth IUI, your chances are not very good. Have you considered using donor eggs?” We'd already considered it and decided against it.

Later, I cried. It felt so insensitive. My hands were shaking as I got back into my car to race back to work. My stress level was so high that I didn't see the car coming down the center lane and caused an accident. Thankfully, the damage to the car was minor. The damage to my psyche felt less so.

As it turned out, the nurse was right: It didn't work. The doctors told us in vitro fertilization (IVF) was our only remaining option.

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I had already spent more than \$3,000, and this would be another \$12,000 for one try. I held my breath and put it on a credit card. I call this money the best \$15,000 I ever spent. And this is about half the cost of a typical IVF cycle today.

Finally Pregnant

While celebs like **Halle Berry and Salma Hayek** have shown the world that 40-something is the new 20-something when it comes to having babies, my own experience wasn't exactly glamorous.

My pregnancy was branded “**geriatric**.” Though the term “geriatric pregnancy” for a mother older than age 35 is less common now (in favor of “advanced maternal age”), 13 years ago, I saw the word “geriatric” literally written on my chart.

I felt damaged, somehow “other.” The close monitoring made me anxious instead of more relaxed, which was especially sad considering how long I'd dreamed of pregnancy. I believed in my body. It seemed like the doctors didn't.

But overall, being pregnant felt wonderful. I loved the cravings, the baby's movement, writing regularly in my pregnancy journal about what was happening to my body. I was in good health. I worked out and ate a balanced diet. I knew there were risks to my pregnancy because of my age and my previous ulcerative colitis surgeries (I no longer have a large intestine). But overall, I felt healthy.

A Happy Ending

I gave birth via scheduled cesarean section at 39 weeks on a hot, sunny May morning.

It was all worth it.

The night before I gave birth, I took a bath. It was just me and my big belly, the soapy water, and the baby moving inside me. He could never truly understand all I had done to bring him into my life, how hard I had worked, the dozens of self-administered injections I went through, all my worry and planning, or how very, very wanted he was.

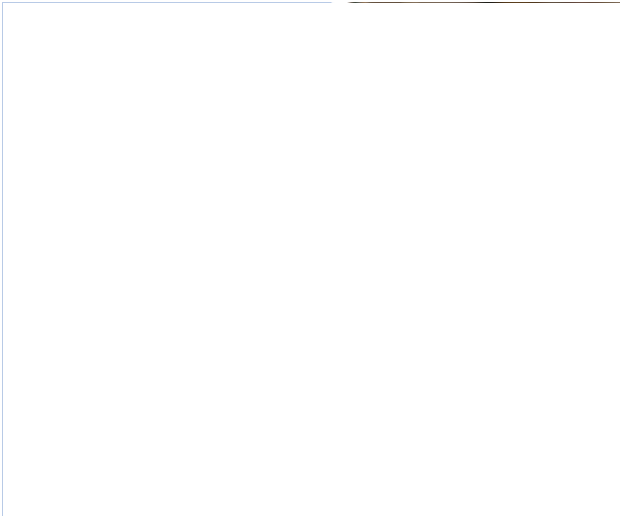
I cried in the bath that evening, knowing it was the last day I would ever be pregnant for the rest of my life—the only time I could ever experience this journey from start to finish. I also thanked my lucky stars for being able to get to this end of the road.

My son turns 13 this year.

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