

REAL LIFE: 'I DISCOVERED I WAS SOCIALLY INFERTILE'

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Not having kids is snap decision

choice. On our wedding day, guests asked me if we'd 'get cracking' now. I took great pleasure in letting them know of our plans to enjoy a different kind of life: seeing friends, going on holiday – all without a child getting in the way.

Then we bought a rambling old farmhouse and I could almost see people's minds implode at the thought that we had bedrooms we didn't want to fill with babies. Some said I would regret it, yet I don't want to sacrifice my plans to travel, my intentions to pay off my mortgage early... and I certainly don't want to have

Middle-aged women twice as likely to be childless today



'I'M SOCIALLY INFERTILE'

Being child-free is not a conscious choice for everyone. Here, Amanda Revell Walton, 45, reveals how not meeting Mr Right in time means she'll never have her longed-for family

I have a vivid memory of being little and declaring to my best friend I was going to be a mum at 28 and have five children. But 28 came and went – as did a string of failed relationships with men who were either unsuitable or unfaithful. By the time I'd hit my thirties, my love life had dwindled to the occasional date, while all around me friends were getting married and then pregnant. When I hit 35, fears that I may never have my own child were overwhelming and I'd often experience panic attacks. 'What,' I kept asking myself, 'is going to be my meaning in life – if not to be a mother?'

Which is why I can totally sympathise with anyone angered by the controversial author Princeton Mom's latest essay, in which she advised women to have children 'while they still can'. Believe me, any woman in this situation will know only too well that she is running out of time. But what is the alternative – using a sperm donor or making do with Mr OK?

But then, aged 36, I fell madly in love. Six weeks after our first date, my boyfriend proposed and from that night we started trying for a baby. I felt giddy with love but also relief that, finally, I was going to have the life I'd dreamt of. Yet 18 months later, and after a barrage of tests, we were given the heartbreaking diagnosis of 'unexplained infertility'. Two rounds of unsuccessful IVF followed before blood tests showed I was actually menopausal. I was 42.

From that moment, any remaining hope I might have had of becoming a mum was extinguished. (I didn't want to go down the egg donation or adoption route.)

My husband and I firmly believe if we'd met earlier, we'd have had a family together. Sometimes, we start to talk about what our child would have been like, but I stop these conversations dead in their tracks. It's too painful for both of us.

Once I'd cried all my tears, I started to determinedly enjoy what I had, rather than mourn what I didn't. While it's not the life I expected, it is a fulfilling one.

The IVF Diaries (Cycle One) by Amanda Revell Walton is available from amazon.co.uk

Are you childless by choice or circumstance? Email us at feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk



'I CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE A CHILD'

It costs £225,000 to raise a child until they're 21. So is it any wonder increasing numbers of women – like Charley Desborough, 33 – would love children but simply can't afford them?

When my niece Eva was born, I fell helplessly in love with her. And cuddling her close, I dreamt of the day I'd start my own family with my fiancé, Steve. Except that's all it is. A dream. Because I'm a victim of 'financial infertility'. As far as I know, I'm able to have a child physically, but my bank balance is a different story. I'm a singer and songwriter. Self-employed, I don't have the security of maternity pay or knowing my job would still be there if I took time out to raise a baby. Steve, meanwhile, is a university office manager and we're fully-fledged members of Generation Rent. The prospect of owning our home in London, where we live, seems as unachievable as having a baby. And what would happen when I wanted to return to work? Childcare costs an average £7,000 a year – by the time we've paid our rent and bills, the money left over is for us to enjoy a takeaway and a bottle of wine. A life of sacrifice is not one I'd want for me or my child. I tell myself the time just isn't right. But, if I'm honest, I can't see it ever being right. I look at friends who've had children and see them struggling with how much they've had to change their lives. I know the sensible thing would be to change my job, but giving up on your dreams is not a lesson I'd want to teach my child.

My family tell me babies don't need money, they need love. While it's a sweet sentiment, the reality is that they need both. So unless something dramatic happens to change our finances, raising a family is simply out of reach.

« PARENTHOOD IS TOO HUGE A RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE AMBIVALENT. YOU'VE GOT TO BE PASSIONATE »

to pick my next home based on the best schools in the area.

It's not a decision we've taken lightly. While a recent study showed that couples like us had only one 10-minute conversation on the subject, Gaz and I have talked at length about how we'll feel when we're older, looking back on a child-free life. And we feel happy with our choice.

Someone once said to me that parenthood is too huge a responsibility to be given to the ambivalent. That's exactly how I feel – hats off to everyone out there taking on the monumental life challenge that is motherhood. I'm under no illusion about what you've taken on: it looks exhausting, expensive and, at times, boring. You've got to be passionate about parenthood to knowingly make those sacrifices. If you're not, the greatest favour you can do society, and yourself, is to choose a child-free life.