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LIVE it

For more great ideas on how to live your life go to thesun.co.uk/liveit

THE BAG ISSUE

PLASTIC is so last season. A reusable shopper is the guilt-free way to indulge in a bit of retail therapy. Retro-style tote bags are making a comeback and we are loving the weird and wacky phrases and designs popping up. Here, bag lady TONI JONES picks out her favourites.

- Topshop floral, \$10
- Keep Calm, \$6, John Lewis
- Because I Am A Girl, \$18, Great Plains (£2 goes to Plan UK)
- Mickey Mouse, \$5, New Look
- Navy and white, \$3.99, Red Or Dead at shoplovecancer.org.uk (profits go to Cancer Research UK)
- I Love Bags, \$5, Accessorize (Fairtrade)

THE INCREDIBLE DIARY OF AMANDA'S WEEK 3: IVF drugs will shut down my reproductive system - now I freefall into early menopause

WHEN Amanda Revell Walton and her husband Paul Simmonds were diagnosed with unexplained infertility after years of trying for a baby, doctors told them their only option was IVF.

The couple were just about to embark on their first cycle when mechanic Paul was diagnosed with head and neck cancer.

All thoughts of creating a new life were abandoned as Paul, 45, battled to stay alive. After a tumultuous 18 months, Paul was given a tentative all-clear and the couple returned to the fertility unit.

Over three months Amanda, 41, kept a diary of the bizarre, funny and poignant rollercoaster ride of trying for a baby using the treatment.

Here, Amanda, from Swindon - who spent £5,000 on her treatment at the Oxford Fertility Unit - shares her experiences to help others going through the process. She was given an 18 per cent chance of success.

DAY ONE: "FRESH OR FROZEN?"

THESE were the unforgettable words I heard on the first day of my IVF cycle.

This was the question barked down the phone at me by the receptionist at the Fertility Unit. For a moment I thought I'd accidentally called the local fish mongers.

I'd just jumped on the IVF conveyor belt and they needed to know if I was going to be using my own "fresh" eggs or some previously "frozen" embryos. I realised I'd suddenly entered a whole new world.

WEEK ONE: RECEIVING THE DRUGS

Two days ago I sent the prescription for my IVF drugs to a pharmaceutical company in West Yorkshire. I paid an outlandish amount of money - £1,180.42. Today Paul and I took delivery of the

drugs. And there were a few surprises in the box. I knew about the drugs I'd have to sniff. And the ones I'd have to inject. But I hadn't realised there were also pessaries. And, horror of horrors, suppositories! As half the drugs have to be kept chilled, we've stored them in our fridge which now resembles a mini pharmacy.

WEEK THREE: SNIFFING

I'm now on D-Day - or rather day 21 of my monthly cycle. It's the dreaded day of taking my first load of IVF drugs.

This is the drug which I have to sniff twice a day. It will shut my reproductive system down and cause my body to freefall into the menopause.

WEEK FOUR: STILL SNIFFING

I seem to be constantly sniffing or sneezing. People must think I've got hayfever, the flu or, worse still, a drug problem.

They'd be right on the latter for, like an addict, my time is now spent worrying about my next fix of IVF drugs.

WEEK SIX: CYSTS

It has now been three weeks since I started sniffing and my body should have "down-regulated" - that's IVF-speak for going into the early menopause.

But tests have shown that I've got a cluster of cysts on my ovaries which are stopping the drugs from entering my system. And the lining of my womb is getting thicker when it should be getting thinner.

WEEK SEVEN: SNIFFING TO INSANITY

I've now been on the menopausal nasal spray for almost double the expected time.

My eyes feel constantly puffed up and I'm not sleeping well because of the night sweats. And when I'm awake I have a constant headache. I'm spiralling into a worn-out depression. One moment I feel like verbally - if not physically - rtping

someone's head off. Yet minutes later I'll feel as serene as a Tibetan monk.

Crazy though this sounds, I'm told this is good news as it means I'm finally becoming menopausal.

During all this, Paul and I haven't argued. I've tried my hardest not to take it out on him, having heard so many stories about how IVF can wreck a marriage.

One morning this week Paul and I had a double whammy of hospital appointments - one at the head and neck clinic for Paul's monthly cancer check-ups, then at the Fertility Unit for another blood test.

WEEK EIGHT: DREADED INJECTIONS

I have been to and fro to the fertility unit so many times for blood tests and scans I feel like I'm on a Groundhog Day.

At long last, though, the pessaries have finally done their work.

My body has "down-regulated" and I can move up the next rung of the IVF ladder and start injecting a drug which will stimulate my ovaries to produce lots of eggs.

WEEK NINE: FINAL INJECTION

It is after 11pm and I've just done the late-night injection.

This drug will make my body ovulate. From now on there's no more injecting and no more sniffing. Double Hallelujah!

WEEK TEN: EGG RETRIEVAL

Two words describe today - surreal and painful. Surreal because the room where I had the "egg retrieval" was so small you couldn't swing a cat in it, yet it managed to accommodate a doctor, a nurse, an



QUEST FOR A BABY



NOMINATE YOUR WONDERMUM

DON'T miss your last chance to enter our fantastic Wondermums competition.

We're looking for the UK's most inspirational mothers in our annual search for Britain's unsung heroes.

Has your mum gone above and beyond caring for you or your family?

Or do you know someone in your area who

deserves recognition for their work helping others?

Past contenders have included foster mums, fundraisers and mums who have set up projects to improve life for people in their local communities.

We have teamed up with Asda to give this year's six finalists a fabulous two-night stay at a top London hotel plus £2,000 of Asda shopping vouchers to spend. Each of our winners will also receive an exclusive invitation to our star-studded awards ceremony at posh London hotel Claridge's, on Friday, May 21.

Just send us a short explanation of why your nominee deserves the title, with your contact details and the contact details of the person you are nominating, and we will

do all the rest for you.

Entries must reach us by this Friday, April 2.

Email us at: wondermums@the-sun.co.uk or post to: Wondermums, The Sun, 1 Virginia Street, London, E9 6JH.

You can also hand in nominations at your local Asda store.

Got a story or an opinion you want to share?

Call 020 7782 4297 email liveit@the-sun.co.uk or text: LIVEIT then your comments to 61008 (texts cost 25p + standard network charge)

IVF FACTS

In 1992 the number of women treated with IVF was 14,057. In 2007, that soared to 37,531.

The average age of a woman undergoing treatment in 1992 was 33. By 2007, it was 36.

Figures from 2007 show 23.7 per cent of all IVF treatments resulted in a live birth, up 0.6 per cent on 2006.

SOURCE: HFEA

anaesthetist, me on a stretcher and lots of futuristic-looking machinery.

Then, what appeared to be a dinner hatch in the wall opened and a woman asked my name and date of birth. I felt like saying "A portion of spam, egg and chips, please."

The woman, of course, was the embryologist, not a dinner lady, and she was going to be taking my eggs, not dishing them out.

I don't remember a lot after the anaesthetist put a needle in my hand, but when I woke my first sensation was searing pain, like someone was sticking knitting needles in me.

The nurse told me they'd got three eggs. I felt jubilant.

When Paul arrived I managed to slur "three eggs" and ask him how his "sperm retrieval" had gone. He said "he'd got there in the end".

He gave me a kiss but looked very concerned. When the nurse helped me to the toilet, my gown flapped

open revealing the large bruises on my stomach from the injections.

Both Paul and the nurse winced. Then Paul blurted out: "It's mad to have to do this to yourself." I was shocked by the passion and anger in his voice.

Later, as I lay there, I heard a woman in the next bed saying she'd produced SEVEN eggs.

I immediately felt like the IVF dunce.

When she started demanding decaf coffee instead of normal, I felt a wave of anger towards her and imagined myself force-feeding her a double espresso while screaming, "Do you think we're in Starbucks?"

FERTILISATION

The embryologist rang to tell us all three eggs had fertilised overnight. When I told Paul, a massive smile came across his face and then I immediately burst into tears. I felt incredibly happy.

EGG TRANSFER

It's two days since the eggs fertilised and today Paul and I went back to the unit for the "egg transfer".

I found myself back in the box room with the hatch as the doctor placed the two strongest embryos in my womb via a long tube inserted through my cervix.

Bridget, who I call the baby godmother nurse, rubbed an ultrasound wand over my stomach so the doctor could see where she was putting them.

When she pointed to the embryos on the fuzzy black and white screen I felt so excited, though I had no idea what I was looking at.

Before I left, Bridget said they were all "rooting for me" which I found touching. She also gave me a photo of the scan.

When we got home Paul and I scrutinised the grainy picture and saw our embryos for the first time.

They look like two little white specks. Two incredibly, amazing, little white specks. But, most of all, they're our little white specks.

Now we have to wait two weeks to see if one - or both - nestles in and becomes a proper pregnancy.

At the moment, though, I don't care

because I have two tiny little embryos inside me and I couldn't be happier!

WEEK 12: PREGNANCY TEST

Paul and I did the pregnancy test together at 7am. It only took seconds for one red line to show up. I'm not pregnant! I felt horribly angry. I wanted to blame God, the doctors, someone, anyone - but I know no one is to blame.

I resolved there and then never again to hope that I may be pregnant. I know that hope is a wonderful thing, but sometimes in life you have to let hope go.

As I write this final entry of my IVF diary I cry. This is the death of a dream but it is not death. There's still living to be done.

And I'm not going to sacrifice living for something I've never had.

I could tell Paul was devastated too. He kept saying: "After everything you've put your body through."

Afterwards, I realised I may have needed, wanted, and loved, with all my heart, to have had a child with Paul but it's just not to be. Instead I have to look at what I've been blessed with. I have an incredibly happy and fulfilling life, with a man who I love more than anything and who loves me the same back.

Despite my sadness at not being pregnant I know how lucky I am to have this love in my life.

THE FUTURE

Two weeks after the negative pregnancy test, Paul's surgeon told him they were 95 per cent certain his cancer had returned to the back of his tongue.

Over the next six months he had to have two biopsy operations but each time - much to our complete and utter relief - they didn't find any cancer.

I don't know if it was this which made me have a complete change of heart - or simply the fact that my deep-seated desire to have Paul's child just wouldn't go away - but four weeks ago I started my second cycle of IVF.

I'm due to have my eggs transferred over the Easter break. We're seeing this as a good omen. Wish me luck.

● We'll let you know how Amanda and Paul get on.