



LGBT Pathways to Parenthood

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgender people share
their personal journeys



Compiled and edited by Heather Walker

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The Equality Network is a national charity working for equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland.

www.equality-network.org

The LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing is a unique initiative to promote the health of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people living in, working in and travelling to Edinburgh.

www.lgbthealth.org.uk

LGBT Youth Scotland is the largest youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Scotland.

www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

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Foreword

How strange it is that the opponents of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexed (LGBTI) rights should so often describe themselves as defending family values. As if we didn't belong to families, we're not daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents, too.

It is sad that the families we were brought up in so often betrayed our need and right for comfort, love, acceptance and support, and were so often instead a source of oppression and suffering.

But that doesn't stop some of us choosing to contradict the past, and create new families that can be such a source of profound joy and liberation.

For myself, I feel so blessed and fortunate in my late partner, my daughters and my grandchild. My daughters especially taught me to value myself and showed me a way forward out of the crippling self-judgment that was a legacy from the prejudice I grew up with. Being a father and now a grandmother continues to be one of best things about my life and one of the achievements I feel most proud of.

But all too often the stories of LGBTI parents are not fully told. That's one of the many achievements of this new resource from the Equality Network: that it gives space and respect to so many beautiful stories of courage, of liberation, and of love.

JO CLIFFORD

Playwright, performer, professor, parent

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¹ Quotes are responses to open-ended survey questions. Many are short, being the only information volunteered by the respondent, apart from name/email address (if given), age, place of residence, gender and sexual orientation.

Introduction

In 2011/12, workshops by LGBT Youth Scotland and the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing in Edinburgh revealed a lack of case-study-led information for LGBT people who wanted to become parents.

While Stonewall's excellent *Pregnant Pause* and *Guide for Gay Dads* filled the gap in terms of legalities and practicalities – and contains some very helpful quotes from LGBT people – aspiring parents wanted to know more. How did LGBT people become parents, what did they have to do, what was their story?

LGBT Youth Scotland and the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing asked the Equality Network to work with writer/editor Heather Walker, to collate accounts from LGBT people who were already parents and others who were trying to become parents (see pp 2-195).

Legal notes on pp 196-206 were kindly supplied by Maclay Murray & Spens LLP.

The stories and quotes in this book represent the results of 20 face-to-face interviews with individuals and couples and 49 responses to an online survey.

Most interviews took place in Edinburgh and the Lothians; two were held in Dundee, one in Fife and two in Lanarkshire. Of the 49 survey responses, 37 came from across Scotland (Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Glasgow /Clyde, Grampian, Highland, Lanarkshire, Lothian, Tayside). A further 12 came from England, one from Canada and one from France.

Most stories and quotes have been anonymised, others not, as requested by those concerned. All children have been anonymised.

Please note that in some cases, time has passed since the events described took place and the law and/or medical practices and procedures may have changed since (sometimes because of those events and experiences).

Our thanks to everyone brave and generous enough to share their stories. Our apologies to those we couldn't contact, purely because we ran out of resources.

Section One

Men's Stories and Quotes

Alfie

As a gay man I always assumed that children would be out of my reach so I never really thought much about having them. I think that the first time I thought seriously about it was when a very good friend of mine (one half of a lesbian couple) approached me to become a sperm donor.

Andrew

I first became aware that I wanted children two years ago, when I was in my early 20s. My partner and I are in the process of moving to a bigger house to begin the adoption process. We got our information from forums, social services and the Glasgow adoption website.

If you want something badly enough go after it, no matter the barriers that people, government, or society put in your way.

Colin and Greig

Colin: We have been living as a couple for approximately five years. We applied to adopt jointly as a couple about nine months ago. Our civil partnership is in August. I'm 30 and Greig is 32.

Adopting is the same process whether you're straight or gay. We've just been given some books from our social worker and one, *Becoming Dads* by Pablo Fernandez, is a diary of a couple going through the adoption process – but they live in England and we live in Tayside, so as great as it is, it's not 100% tailored to the process we're going through. A lot of the emotional side is the same though.

Greig: The social worker has also given us *Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption*, *Building the Bonds of Attachment*, *Talking about adoption to your adopted child* and *A child's journey through placement* [See p 212].

Colin: I have always wanted to have children. Growing up I expected to be a father and always looked forward to this. I started to consider it seriously about seven years ago.

Greig: You always know that you want to be part of a family. That didn't change when I knew I was gay.

Colin: We started thinking properly about applying to adopt, about three years ago.

In my previous relationship, in my early 20s, I talked about it with my partner but he wasn't keen. He said he'd think about it but when we split up, he said he'd never wanted kids.

Greig: We started talking about it on date four! Not about having children immediately or how we'd have them but if we did get serious, did we both want the same things.

Colin: We've been together five and a half years now. We did have reservations about having children – about how people would treat a child with gay parents. Would the child be bullied? Would people accept us as a family?

Once we realised our concerns were about other people and not our own

abilities, we felt much more secure in our decision to have children. There are a lot of children needing loving homes and we feel we can provide this.

Greig: Over the years our straight friends said things like, “If you’re wanting kids, I’ll be the ‘oven’ – as long as I’ve had my kids first.”

Colin: They didn’t want their first child to be ours.

Greig: But then they started saying, “I’d rather have Colin’s child or your child” for one reason or another – and when we looked into surrogacy there seemed to be so many legal loopholes.

Considering surrogacy

Colin: The way we understood it, if the egg donor changed their mind, there’s every chance they’d get to keep the child but if there was a different carrier – if someone else gave birth to the child, in a custody fight it was more likely to go in your favour.

That’s all just our understanding, I don’t know if it’s right. But for me, asking a woman to give up her body for nine months is a big ask. Some people still die in childbirth! I didn’t feel justified in asking someone to go through that, just to become an auntie.

Greig: In *Gay Times*, it seems to be more about women looking for sperm donors than surrogates for gay men.

Colin: And some people, you just wouldn’t want them to be the surrogate, they couldn’t even look after themselves.

Greig: I think I’d want to be really strict with a surrogate. It’s like trusting someone with the rest of your lives, your heart’s desire. I’d be checking she’s had her five a day...

Colin: ...and saying, “That’s your second cigarette!”

Greig: It wasn’t for us.

Colin: My aunt even offered to have a baby for us. She just likes being pregnant.

It was very kind of her but it would have been too odd and by that time, we'd already decided against surrogacy. There's too much that can go wrong.

But it's always at the back of your mind, meeting a lesbian couple and living next door, bringing up the child together.

Greig: Those are the conversations you have at a party.

Colin: In 10 years' time you may not want to live next door.

Greig: I think that's what puts a lot of people off being donors. The couple want to be the parents. They just want your sperm/eggs and then they want you to go away.

Deciding on adoption

Colin: Once we decided adoption was what we wanted to do, we looked online. At first we thought you couldn't adopt jointly as a couple unless you were married, regardless of whether you were gay or straight. You could adopt as a single person but if anything happened to you, technically your partner wouldn't have any legal rights or responsibilities towards the child. At least, that's the way I understood it back then. We weren't engaged at that point.

Greig: We got engaged once we'd been going out for three years. We always thought that if we were still together by then, it would mean we'd stay together.

Colin: We booked the wedding two years ago. As far as I was concerned, we would get married first and then adopt. That was the plan and we were happy with that. I'm a Catholic and I told my gran that at least one of her grandchildren would get married and then have a child.

Greig: Then Colin found out that they had changed the adoption rules so that unmarried couples could apply for joint adoption. When he told me, I couldn't wait!

Colin: I kept saying, "We've so much on, we're getting married" but he was so excited. We found out just before my brother's wedding, the first weekend in September. Greig phoned up social services in early September and they sent us a questionnaire.

Greig: It all happened very quickly initially. I thought it would take a while but we saw a resource worker within about two weeks. Colin was in shock. He kept saying, “I’m fine, I’m fine.” I couldn’t wait.

Meeting a resource worker

Colin: We had a question and answer meeting, where the resource worker answered the questions we had and explained the adoption process to us in outline. She also had a quick look around the flat.

Greig: She asked us what our plans would be for adapting the flat for a child.

Colin: I got the impression it was to make sure we met the minimum requirements, like having a bedroom for the child and not having any other major issue she needed to flag up before we went on to the next stage.

We briefly discussed some of the other considerations too, like should you change the child’s name, introducing them to family and friends, telling the child they’re adopted.

Greig: I think they were trying to suss out whether we would hide information from the child.

Colin: And that we were thinking of the best interests of the child and not just ourselves. After explaining everything to us and answering our questions, she asked us if we still wanted to go ahead, if anything she had said had put us off.

Greig: The level of commitment, of input expected of you, might put some people off – the level at which social work are going to be looking into your lives.

It sounds scary and in depth but at no point did we feel judged or under the spotlight. She was lovely and friendly but she made sure you knew it was not going to be a quick and easy process.

Colin: She said she’d look into our childhoods, potentially contact any long-term partners we’d had. I got the impression that was in case you’d been a step parent or your ex had had children.

She didn't mention finances at that stage, apart from asking if we work but she went into the type of children they get up for adoption.

We volunteer on the Children's Panel so we already knew that adopted children could come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have learning difficulties.

She said that a lot of people applying to adopt are expecting a new-born bouncing baby but that's unlikely to happen. People are not ashamed of having children when they're teenagers or unmarried any more.

Greig: The days of the *Magdalene Sisters* and people giving away healthy children are gone.

Medicals

Colin: After we said we wanted to proceed she explained a bit more about the next step: that we'd be appointed a social worker who'd take us through the process and then we'd see an adoption panel.

We'd need to get medicals. This is usually done by the GP but as Greig has health problems, they'd contact his consultant at the hospital first.

Greig: There are strict deadlines once you have been allocated a social worker – six months until your adoption panel – so they wanted to get the medical information in place before they allocated one. Getting the medical information, especially from consultants, can take months.

Colin: We were a year ahead of our expected application date anyway, as we were applying before we were married, so that was fine.

Greig: I didn't think we'd be given a child after just six months anyway.

Colin: Within a few days, the resource worker sent us a formal application, including forms to get the doctor and consultant to disclose information. The form wasn't scary...

Greig: Maybe six pages? It was self explanatory – it didn't come with its own pamphlet to explain how to fill it in.

Colin: I was shocked but impressed at how short and straightforward it was.

(The detailed forms are filled out by social work later). We posted it back within a few days, then they wrote to our GPs to ask for medicals to be done.

We didn't even need to make the appointments. I did ring but they said that social work would write to them. Then they sent us appointment letters.

Greig: It was like an MOT at a well person's clinic – weight, blood pressure, testing your eyes, reflexes, no bloods. My GP said he could fill out most of my questionnaire anyway as I see him every month.

Colin: GPs usually charge for those kind of check-ups but social work said they'd pay for it.

Greig: They do have targets eg. for weight and heart and if you don't meet them you have to get them redone or have other checks. So if you fall within normal limits it's quick and simple but if you don't, it can take longer.

Colin: When the resource worker came to see us, Greig asked if there were any health limitations and she basically said no, as long as you weren't terminal and could look after a child. Ever since then I've always felt the questions were about whether you would be able to cope with a child, how much you could manage, what kind of child you can look after.

Greig: I had extra tests on my heart because of my health issue. If you go when you think you're healthy and you have to have a heart test three times, don't panic – it may just be that you're nervous.

Colin: I got my medical in a couple of months.

Greig: There was more of a delay in my case, I was a month and a half later but that was because my GP was away. I had to phone the surgery a few times. I finally got an appointment but the doctor was new and hadn't dealt with the forms before so he asked if I could wait 'til my usual GP got back. I did and that was OK but then my form got missed in the handover. They only found it because I chased them.

When I finally got in to see my doctor, she was really excited at the thought of the adoption. It's a small practice and I'm a regular customer so she knows me well, we've built up a close relationship.

Colin: My GP was really excited too. You'd be surprised. Everyone in my office is so excited and so are my family. I don't know if it's because we are

so fabulous or so they can say they know a gay couple who are adopting!

If anyone's worried about being a same sex couple, don't. So far not one person has said anything negative, not even the bitches who are not backwards at coming forwards with their complaints.

Preparation group

Greig: We met the resource worker in September and it was December before we got a letter from social work, inviting us to a training course – a preparation group – which started in January. The only thing that happened in the three months in between was that we had our medicals.

Colin: I think they only hold the preparation group every few months so we went even though we didn't have a social worker yet.

There were five couples, very mixed. A couple who had already adopted and were applying for a second child – and hoping it would all go better this time as everything that could go wrong, had gone wrong the first time.

There was another couple who'd had a child naturally but were struggling to have a second. They wanted a brother or sister for their daughter and she wanted one too.

There was an older couple in their late 40s who'd tried IVF and then gone for fostering. It hadn't worked. She wasn't emotionally ready to give a child back.

The other couple were doing a long-term fostering placement with a child and social work were putting them through the adoption process. They were about to go to panel.

The other couples were at different stages in the process and we were just starting.

Greig: I think going to the preparation meetings at the start of the process really helped.

Colin: The course was all day for three Saturdays in a row plus two Tuesday evenings in between. Although the letter said it was a training course, the woman who led it said it was more to make you think and to make you realise

you're not going to get what she kept calling a "pink and fluffy" child.

Even though we both knew from the Children's Panel that it was unlikely we'd get a pink and fluffy child, part of me still thought we might be the exception.

Greig: She also made it clear that while we may think that we're there to get a child, they were there to get a child the right family.

Colin: A lot of children, especially younger children removed from birth, may come from mothers who were drinking or taking drugs during pregnancy, so the child has foetal alcohol syndrome or other physical or mental health problems.

A lot of children come from deprived backgrounds. They may have learning difficulties or global delay syndrome, where they don't hit the usual milestones. You'll never have a complete medical history if there's a choice of three dads or the mother doesn't give permission.

The child might have emotional issues from being passed around – mum, dad, aunties, grandparents, foster carer to foster carer. After eight homes, ten homes, you may tell them they are here with you to stay but they'll just look at you. It'll take a long time for them to feel settled.

Greig: Attachment is a big thing they touched upon.

Colin: A lot of people expect it to be a Hollywood moment, when they see the child, when their eyes meet the child's across the room and there's a moment of recognition – but it doesn't happen like that. There's no instant bond, like in *Annie*. It can take weeks, months. And it's fairly common that the child bonds more quickly with one parent than another.

Greig: It was really helpful when other adopters came into the group and said how hard it could be. One woman said it was really hard when the child bonded with her partner first and it took a year before they really bonded with her.

Colin: Someone told us that some children may even do better with a same sex couple, with men if they bonded better with men or with lesbians if they felt threatened by men, for example.

Greig: The woman pointed out that even when you're an 'ordinary' parent, you have to take every day as it happens.

Colin: The head of the adoption team came in with a list of children on her books at that time. She stressed there was no such thing as an average child. At that moment in time, most children on her list to be adopted were aged 3 or 4 but it varied.

Greig: They did have a few sibling groups whom they wouldn't want to break up but after the eldest is seven, it's almost impossible to adopt. Then they told us about this magazine the children get put in – and a website I don't want to look at. It sounds like a catalogue, almost.

Colin: I think the process up here is that to match you with a child, they look first in your local authority area and if there's no suitable matches there, after a while they look at a larger area – here it's the North East Consortium.

Greig: Especially if, for the child's safety, they want them out of their local authority area, they look to the Consortium too.

Colin: If that doesn't work, after a time they put the child's picture and profile in a catalogue and on the website.

Greig: The social workers don't like doing that but they say it serves a purpose and what's the alternative?

Colin: If we could go through the whole process without seeing that, I'd be much happier.

Greig: It sounds dehumanising, this strange catalogue of people.

Colin: I suppose it's just the reality of so many kids looking for a home.

Tick list

Greig: They speak about a 'tick list' – that there's almost a tick list of what you'd consider in a child when you're adopting. It's not pleasant but they're not going to match you up with a child you can't cope with and you're not going to want to send a child back.

Colin: We said we'd consider a child under 5 and that we'd take up to two siblings, so two children in total.

Greig: We didn't think much about the implications of a child's health issues until the training group and that's when we realised we couldn't manage a child with a high level of disability. It would be too physically demanding with my own health problems.

Colin: And I wasn't sure I could handle a child with extreme ADHD.

They ask you if you would consider a child with severe learning difficulties, Down's Syndrome, a child who's been abused.

There's very little we think we would rule out at this stage but it all depends on degrees, on how severely affected the child was.

The only consideration I had in relation to us being a same sex couple would be age, that a younger child might adapt better to same sex parents than an older child who may have been with parents who were homophobic, or who may have preconceived ideas about wanting a mum and a dad. I know I had preconceived ideas at that age.

Greig: We have nephews and nieces under 5 who see us as normal. My niece said something to my sister about two men can't get married and when my sister said they could, she just shrugged, "Oh, OK then." Children will accept you as being you if you don't make a big deal out of it.

Colin: The preparation group and the resource worker, they do tell you a lot of worst case scenarios. The couple who were in the preparation group who had adopted before had been told there was a high likelihood of various things happening but none of them had.

Greig: And they were adopting again, so it was worth it. They'd also realised that sometimes when things happened, they were thinking, "Is this because this child is adopted?" when actually it was happening because the child was two. It was normal.

Colin: Apparently, we're quite young adopters. Most straight couples try naturally first, then go through IVF, then adopt, so it's a very long process for them whereas we knew early on that this is the way for us.

Colin: The preparation group expanded on what the resource worker had told us about the application process. You get a social worker, then you go to the

adoption panel, then you start the selection process. We're a long way from that yet.

Greig: Even if they have a child now that they think we're perfect for, they can't mention them because we have not been officially approved.

Colin: We were allocated a social worker in March/April.

Greig: We got a call saying there was a social worker almost ready for us and that they'd get in touch.

Colin: She did and she came to visit us in the flat. She brought a side-kick with her, another social worker. They always come to the first meeting in twos.

It was a very general discussion, covering a lot of things we'd discussed before. I think there were two so they could both agree it was appropriate for us to go forward.

At the end of the meeting they said that they would be happy to go ahead with the process. We made an appointment with Laura, the one who would be going forward with us, to come round the following week.

Then at that meeting, we arranged a series of appointments over the next couple of months, most weeks 'til June. All those visits took place here, around 5pm, so I could fit them round work.

Meetings with our social worker

Greig: The meetings were mostly just talking, with Laura asking us questions. It didn't feel as if we were being interviewed, just chatting, covering some of the things we'd discussed with the resource worker.

Colin: After a couple of weeks of getting to know us, she asked when we wanted to apply for the panel. It has to be done within six months but you don't have to wait six months. She thought we would be ready to meet the panel by August.

Greig: The next week she came back with a date.

Colin: The wedding's in August, the panel is before. She asked if that was OK.

Greig: We didn't know it then but we should know by the wedding, if we've been approved or not.

Colin: Up until that point, I thought the panel made the decision on whether you're approved or not but when we got the date and talked about it, I found out the panel just make a recommendation.

Greig: Social work put a recommendation on the forms they fill in – the Adoption and Permanence Form F – and the panel asks you any questions they have. Then they make their recommendation and it's someone senior in social work who decides.

Colin: We haven't filled out any of the F forms yet. Laura gives us homework on a different topic each week then she fills them in.

Greig: The first homework was about our childhood. Family rules, did you go on holiday – she gave us a list of things to talk about and we talked about them and we typed up our answers (I don't think you have to type them up but we did).

She asks you to be in depth and you write up as much as you can. It's actually quite cathartic to look into yourself.

Colin: One week we had to do our family tree, just back to our parents, another time we had to look into our relationship. We did it separately and then we compared what we'd said. It was amazing how much we said in common but there were other bits when it was like, "You don't really think that do you?"

Greig: You can't think of it as someone being nosy and intruding into your life. It's about making sure it's a good match. They're trying to sell you to the panel.

She asked about our weaknesses, too – what do we think they are, what would be put in place to address them.

Colin: At the preparation group, they told us a story of a couple in England who adopted a child, then six months down the line a health problem appeared that social work knew might develop, so now the couple were suing...

Greig: ...which really upset me. If that had been their birth child, who would they sue?

Every question they ask about your childhood, your family, your relationships, you might not want to divulge but you have to.

Colin: If your dad beat you up every night, you might think, 'I'm ashamed so I won't say' but because you have had that experience, it might make you empathise.

Greig: And if you're going through the adoption process together, as a couple, you need to be honest. You need to know these things about each other or your relationship will fail, your adoption will fail and you're not acting in the best interests of the child.

Colin: I think the social worker is very good at reading between the lines as well.

Greig: She'll ask you questions about your homework, to make sure she gets the true meaning out of it. Not that you're hiding anything but to be sure she has it.

Colin: Though she did say that not every social worker works the same way.

Referees

Greig: We're almost at the end of the process now. We've done most of the homework. The social work department have typed it up into the forms. Laura just has to speak to our referees.

Once you have a social worker, she sends out letters to your employers and personal referees, asking for references.

Colin: The personal referees are not allowed to be family members, not here anyway. Both our personal referees are long-term friends.

Greig: The personal referees are interviewed, ideally in person but maybe on the phone if they already have enough information about you.

Colin: One of our personal referees isn't local, he lives in Glasgow, so Laura will speak to him by phone.

Greig: My employer hasn't returned his form yet. It's things like that that can cause delays.

Colin: Deciding who to ask to be a personal referee took some thought. We have friends who have children and others who don't, some live more locally than others. In the end we decided on two people who don't have children but who know us well. They have seen us with our nephews and nieces and one of them knows me from working with children.

Greig: There are questions on the personal referee form which our friend says it's hard to answer because we're not parents yet, like how we might be on discipline. But if you don't know, it's OK to say so.

Colin: We have been allowed to see all the references which have come back so far. My boss has been great. He filled the form in straightaway.

Greig: Mine has had three reminders and still nothing but he's like that with everything.

Colin: Once social work has filled in Form F, based on our homework, we'll get to see that too and amend it if we want to, before it goes off to the panel.

Other considerations

Colin: When we move, we want a nice area to bring kids up in, where they won't go, "Oh, there's the gay couple with the kid." It's only six years since Greig was getting death threats in the post for being gay.

Greig: It was on an estate. There were 300 letters being sent to my community every day. The neighbours in the street who knew me were horrified. They came round and said, "I had this put through my door early this morning" and they were very supportive but it was an awful time. CID were involved.

Colin: Our current flat is great for a couple. It's really central and we have gay and straight neighbours. The problem is there's only one bedroom.

Greig: That would become the child's bedroom and there's a space for us in the living area but it would be open plan, so not ideal.

Colin: We're on the council's housing list and a couple of housing associations, so we're looking.

We're registered with them as a couple at the moment but once we've been approved for adoption, they'll take that into consideration. We've already started packing. We're renting so if we find somewhere, we might have to move very quickly.

Greig: Once we've been approved, it could be two weeks or two years until we're matched with a child, maybe longer.

Colin: Emotionally the process has been ups and downs as we get excited then try not to get our hopes up, then get excited again. We are trying to be realistic but at the same time, little fantasies about how family life can be do play in our heads. The emotional roller coaster, I imagine, is the same as for any couple trying to adopt, straight or gay.

Social work have been fantastic and at no point have we felt awkward/discriminated against.

Our advice so far?

Colin: Don't be scared by all the worst case scenarios.

Greig: Be open with your social worker and each other. Be aware of your own limitations. Don't be too eager to say yes when it comes to the tick list – be realistic.

Colin: Decide what's right for you as a person and as a couple, rather than for your family and friends.

Greig: Make sure the time's right for you. We've got quite a bit on at the moment but it's working out fine. We're planning the wedding but we're planning a future at the same time.

Colin: Look at the application process as a positive. All the questions a social worker asks, they're all questions I would want to ask if I had to give my child to an adopter.

I found the process very therapeutic, talking about myself and the past and seeing what your referees think of you! Rather than making us feel like we're being assessed about whether we will/will not be allowed to adopt, I feel like

we're being assessed on what our strengths/weaknesses are and therefore what kind of child we can provide a home for.

Greig: Don't get hung up on the idea that some people can just have sex and have a child. When you have to jump through hoops, it doesn't mean you don't deserve a child.

Colin: Although the process may seem slow – we applied in September and the panel's in August – the pace has been right for us. Prepare for it to be a lengthy process, in which every aspect of your life will be looked at. We went into it knowing that and the whole adoption process has so far been very enjoyable.

Postscript

Since this interview, Greig and Colin's panel meeting has been postponed, awaiting paperwork from Greig's employer.

Connor

I am a trans man. I was married to a straight man who is staying with me through my transition.

I first became aware that I wanted children when I was about 17 but we had fertility issues and it took 12 years for our girl to come along! I conceived through in vitro fertilisation (IVF) with intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI).

I would consider coming off hormones at some time in the future to conceive again, likely with a donor embryo.

As a trans man who has always experienced dysphoria² it was tough going through IVF and pregnancy. The outcome (our child) is obviously completely worth it, but if I'd had support to assert my right to have my preferred name and male pronouns used I think it would have been easier emotionally.

My advice? Don't be afraid to seek help, the trans community can be a little intimidating and showing up saying you want to get pregnant can cause strong emotions – but, we are there. We are a support network and you have as much right to access that support as anybody else.

² NHS.uk defines gender dysphoria as a condition in which a person feels there is a mis-match between their biological sex and their gender identity.

Donald

My civil partner and I have two children each. Our kids are now 22, 20, 19 and 16.

I first became aware I wanted children when I was 31. I had married – wrongly!

It would take too long to tell my story. We've faced homophobia by the eldest child and in the education system. It's hard work and difficult accepting others find us hard to accept.

Gay Dads Scotland was our main source of support.

Don't get married to have kids. Accept your life may be easier without children.

Graeme

I'm a gay single man of 32 living in Edinburgh. I recently became dad to a baby by Jane and her civil partner, Fiona (see p 136). We named him Mitchell. Fiona is now also pregnant, expecting our daughter.

I first met Fiona through Michael, one of my best friends, around 10-12 years ago. As time went on, Fiona met Jane and they settled down together. Fiona had a house near Michael at the time, so we'd see each other quite often socially.

One night, after a few drinks, Fiona and Jane said they'd thought about having kids in the future and wanted to know my feelings on being a donor. It was quite jokey at first but I think they were sounding me out and wanted to know my initial reaction.

It was the first time I'd thought about it and I was quite receptive, although I didn't think they were really being serious. I guess I had always wanted kids of my own someday but I'd assumed I would most likely be in a long term relationship at the time with a loving partner and a white picket fence! How wrong was I!

For the next year or so at parties or other social gatherings when we were all together, it was always there on our minds, what we referred to as "the elephant in the room."

I was conscious it was on their minds but I still thought they weren't that serious about me helping them. It was a massive life changing decision and something I didn't think I was prepared for, so I didn't actually think it would come to fruition.

Time marched on however and the girls wanted to know one way or another if I was willing to help them as they had begun to look into alternative methods such as sperm banks.

I didn't know what to think. All I knew was that I was petrified of the outcome if I agreed.

I went to Michael's house for dinner, which I tended to do on a regular basis. Thomas, Michael's flatmate, was a bit older and would often see things differently to my peers, which I always liked.

I turned up this one evening and I had my list of pros and cons written down. This was the night a decision was going to be made once and for all.

I said, “I’m thinking about this but I think I’m looking for reasons not to do it.”

To be honest I was scared. I think when people are scared of the unknown their adrenalin kicks in and it’s time for fight or flight. (I was almost ready to fly!)

Then Thomas simply came out with, “Well, why do you *not* want to do it?”

That single line made me think: there are two friends in my life (Jane and Fiona) and I love them dearly. They were everything I hoped a mother could be and I was optimistic that we would all do a good job of bringing up our kids.

I wasn’t at a stage in my life where I was ready to settle down with one guy, therefore the prospect of having my own children was way far down the line. I figured, why wait until that time, why not agree to this and do it now?

If in the future, if I did end up having kids, I would most likely adopt or use a surrogate – however this way I’m able to help out two amazing girls whom I was loving more and more each day.

It was about helping the girls by giving them what they needed and getting something out of it myself, so I agreed.

Sorting out the nitty gritty

Then we got into the more nitty-gritty parts: visitation rights, names on birth certificates, finances – who pays for the kids, what happens if someone dies or the girls’ relationship splits up?

Currently I’m working seven days a week with two jobs to pay off various debts so the financial side was a big issue for me. I know it sounds bad but I wanted to help the girls without being financially responsible.

I was paying out so much that I just physically couldn’t factor in such a massive financial outgoing each month in order to support two kids. I wanted to help and didn’t want to sound callous but...

The girls assured me that they would be financially responsible and I had nothing to worry about.

I was also worried about visitation rights, how often would I be able to see the kids, for how long and on what days? It all seemed like such a minefield.

I had to keep reminding myself that being a dad once a month may not have seemed ideal but the main thing was the welfare of the kids and how well they were loved and looked after, which I knew we were all prepared to do in abundance.

I like to know things are being done correctly so I looked into solicitors. I wanted to ensure that I wasn't leaving myself wide open to future legal 'loopholes' so if things did go wrong with any aspect of the arrangement, we were all protected legally.

At first, I had no idea where to turn. I didn't know if there were books on the subject, people you can go to, internet sites to look at, I didn't know where to start!

Fortunately, a friend of mine who is a property solicitor put me in touch with a solicitor who dealt in family law. Initially we spoke on the phone and it felt great to have someone finally to speak to about the legalities. She advised me that this was a fairly new area for her but she was extremely interested in cases like mine.

We began to communicate via email. She said she'd have to look into the concerns I had and she would get back to me but it would take a few days. She kept her word and, shortly after, advised me that as Fiona and Jane had had a civil partnership and their names would be on the birth certificate, they would be financially responsible for each of the children.

I had asked her about drawing up a contract between Fiona, Jane and myself but she advised me that a contract would be unlikely to stand up in a court of law if we ever had to use it, due to the fact that Fiona and Jane were the legal guardians of the children. My various legal concerns were all alleviated.

The girls both wanted to get pregnant using an insemination kit. We tried it with Fiona first but it was difficult to narrow down her cycle to the most fertile times. I had to travel across to their house (which is a 35 mile round trip) every other night for 10 days, only to find out eventually the test was negative. Ten days is a long time to go without sex when you're a single gay guy in Edinburgh!

So we decided we would try with Jane as it was easier to pin down her ovulation time.

Telling the family

I hadn't told my family at any point of the process so far. My mother passed away when I was six months old but I'm very close to the rest of my immediate family.

Dad brought my sister and I up on his own for seven years after my mother died but Julie (my stepmother) has been in my life since the age of 7 and for all intents and purposes took on the role of our mother.

Lorna (my sister) and myself have always been close and it was maybe the passing of our birth mother that made us develop such a close bond. I told Lorna first.

I took a Saturday off work one weekend and we took my nephew Aiden (who was two years old at the time) on a day out to a butterfly farm. I had a few things I wanted to tell my sister that day and it was almost a relief to tell her what had happened with Jane and Fiona and that Jane was pregnant.

Looking back on it, I feel guilty for telling her so much in one day but we have always been close and the fact that I hadn't told Lorna up to this point was killing me. I wanted her approval and her advice/input. I was relieved to learn that she was thrilled at the news, although she had many questions.

But I still hadn't told Dad and my stepmother Julie.

When Jane had passed the three month stage of her pregnancy, I went to see my parents, sat them down in the lounge and said, "I've got something to tell you."

Julie always assumes the worst, so she thought there was something wrong with me physically or that I was in further debt.

I started to tell them the story of Jane and Fiona, who they'd never met.

After I had finished, Julie said to me, "So are you telling me I'm going to be a grandmother again?" She was thrilled.

My dad was slightly different. He stood up and went into the bathroom and started retching. I didn't know what to think and when I questioned Julie as to why he was like this, she wasn't really interested and wanted to know more about the baby and the good news. When he came back through, I asked him if he was OK. He said his stomach was off and started asking me about my involvement and visitation etc, all the things that I had looked into previously. Then he went into the bathroom and started retching again! I'm not sure but maybe the shock brought on a bug because he was ill for 24 hours after that!

My parents have supported me all the way but they are very old school, a different generation. Some of my family don't know I'm gay and my parents wanted to keep things to themselves.

I found that quite hurtful but my parents live in a different town and they see my aunts and uncles and grandparents a lot more than me, so I respected their decision. Finding out I'm gay and having two children would be quite a lot for my grandparents to take on.

Introducing the girls

Dad and Julie were keen to meet Jane and Fiona and likewise with the girls meeting my parents. I took a Sunday off work and the arrangement was that I'd drive across to Jane and Fiona's from my place around midday and my parents would drive there from theirs. My sister and her son, Aiden had been invited as well, as they had never met the girls either, so I was looking forward to the day ahead.

I left my flat and went to buy cakes and muffins – I really wanted everything to go well and these were a nice touch for us all to enjoy.

We all got to the girls' house at roughly the same time. I think I'm quite an open person so I'd told my parents quite a lot about Fiona and Jane and I'd told Fiona and Jane so much about my family that (in my opinion) it was almost as if they knew each other already.

We had such a great day. My dad talks to anyone and is very personable and likable. Everyone chatted away and it didn't feel awkward at all, even when my dad started coming out with all his (made up) stories for the sake of laughs! He told Jane that I was a very heavy baby weighing in at 10 pounds when I was born, trying to freak her out that little Mitchell might be the same.

She was laughing and taking it in good spirit. When my sister gave birth to my nephew, he was 10 pounds 2 ounces, so I think that added to the panic!

My family left after a few hours and I stayed for a little longer discussing with the girls how we thought the day had gone. We all agreed it was a great day.

But soon after I started to get panic attacks.

Panic attacks

I had already mentioned my situation to my line manager in my main job. I had told her when the girls had asked me to help them conceive, as she is very level headed and grounded, an extremely calming person. I valued her opinion and advice.

She was very supportive but unfortunately, around that time, the realisation set in that I was going to be a father and the panic started. I began to make silly mistakes. I work in a large office and nobody except my line manager knew what was going on in my life. I knew that my mind wasn't on the job and as a result, I had to take some time off.

I have never had a panic attack before. I wouldn't wish them on anybody. It was like a veil came over my mind – I couldn't think of anything else but the reality of something massive about to take over my life.

There was one particular day that I remember, walking into Tesco with a list of five things that I needed to buy, which should have taken me 10 minutes. However I walked out of the store 45 minutes later with not one of the items on my list. I just couldn't focus on anything apart from the fact that I had a child coming soon and I had no idea how I was going to cope. It was a horrible feeling and I felt so isolated.

Jane suggested I go to the library to see if I could find out more. There were books about men who had unfortunately become single parents due to bereavement. It was all a bit negative. I read a few books on being a single dad and as much as they were some comfort to me, they didn't mirror my situation. There were three parents in our relationship, not one.

The girls were a great help as I guess they had had similar emotions to me at some point and they gave me good advice and support. Talking things

through definitely helps and I would recommend this as one of the best solutions to any problem.

I realised Jane's pregnancy was going ahead regardless of my emotional state. I had to accept it mentally – and I was sure there were worse parents in the world than me, so I guess that gave me some comfort.

I also thought about my dad. He'd brought my sister and me up, single handed, for a good seven years after Mum died, before Julie came on the scene. I took inspiration from him. He'd done it, so could I.

A couple of months passed and Jane was growing ever bigger. I hadn't yet met many of Fiona's family so Fiona's mother and stepfather decided to throw a Hallowe'en fancy dress party one Sunday afternoon. There must have been around 20 people there in total. I had a great time and I was made to feel really welcome, which was great as I was a little apprehensive before going in.

The day ended well and we left to drive back to Fiona and Jane's house in the late afternoon.

Testing times

At this point Fiona was not yet pregnant. We had taken a break from trying recently and we were due to resume with the inseminations in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, I had been having the sex life of a normal, single gay man in Edinburgh – which I was enjoying.

I know what I like and it definitely did not involve a sterile cup so I felt aggravated that I had to start the process again. However, I knew that was what I had agreed to with the girls, so I would uphold my part of the bargain.

I mentioned to Fiona that I felt it would be wise to get myself tested at the gay man's clinic for any sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) as the last thing I wanted was to pass on any infection I may have picked up.

Then Fiona said she didn't think I should be seeing anyone else nor having sex while we were trying to conceive.

I took great umbrage. I understand where she was coming from when she

said this but I also felt that I was being dictated to and I didn't like that at all.

Part of me felt very selfish and I thought, 'You asked me to provide the sperm that you needed but I don't remember agreeing to not living the life that I choose to live' – which I took it as what she meant.

That was another milestone for me, realising that I can no longer just think about myself anymore.

I had two wonderful girls in my life and I wanted to make them happy and give them what they wanted – and an STI definitely wasn't it!

I had myself tested (all the results came back negative, thankfully!) and we resumed trying for baby number two.

Time passed. Jane was getting bigger and I was due to go across to the girls' house for Fiona's insemination but I was ill. I had man flu. I did what I needed to do on the Sunday and was meant to drive back over on the Tuesday but I felt so ill, I couldn't. I just didn't have the energy.

Fiona was very disappointed as it was not what she had planned. We had a few choice words but we'd never stay mad at each other for long so we chatted on the phone on Wednesday and I asked her across for dinner and we did the insemination at my house.

Two weeks later and Fiona was pregnant! That was such a relief for me (and to us all) to say the least. Because Fiona has such an irregular cycle we could have been trying for more than a year.

Delivery plan

Things settled down for me in the lead up to January which was when Mitchell was due to be born. Fiona on the other hand started to have terrible 'all day sickness' rather than morning sickness and I felt so sorry for her.

Jane's due date arrived so Fiona and I texted back and forth each day. However, I was aware they had two other families all vying to know what was happening so I didn't want to text every hour on the hour.

It had been agreed that I wouldn't be at the delivery, which I was fine with. Since

I came out as being gay at 18, I haven't seen many parts of women's anatomy and I didn't particularly want to be in the delivery room witnessing such an ordeal.

Four days had lapsed since Jane's due date when I got a text message from Fiona saying Jane had been taken into hospital. I was visiting family when I was told she was in labour.

That's when the emotional pain started, alongside Jane's physical pain.

Emergency

Fiona said not to come to the hospital because there were complications. It was a difficult birth and in the end they had to use curved forceps to reach inside her to get the baby out. It sounded horrific.

I got a text from Fiona to say Mitchell had been born, Jane was out of the operation and in the ward so I set off for the hospital which was only a short drive away from where I was.

Then I got a text to say Mitchell had stopped breathing, don't come!

At this point I was outside the hospital. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't want to phone but at the same time I felt I had a right and a need to know.

I parked the car, went to the maternity reception and explained that I was the father of a newborn. I went up to the ward and into the bay behind the curtains to find Jane and Fiona in floods of tears, staring into each other's eyes and looking distraught. I immediately thought the worst.

Fiona told me Mitchell had been put on Jane's chest and then he'd stopped breathing. Two nurses had taken Mitchell away to resuscitate him and give him oxygen. The girls hadn't been given any information since.

The consultant came in around an hour after I arrived and said that Mitchell was in the intensive care unit. He was breathing through respiratory machines.

While we were waiting on further information and consoling each other, I looked at a few pictures that Fiona had managed to take of Mitchell shortly after he was born. We asked the consultant if it was possible to see him, so she made arrangements for Jane and me to go.

There must have been around seven babies in the unit, all in incubators, only a few with their parents nearby. It was all so quiet and still. All I remember was the sound of the machines, the various beeps and the intermittent alarms going off. I had no idea what to expect and was so apprehensive, it was such a bitter sweet moment.

We were taken over to Mitchell's incubator and we both looked in on him. He looked so tiny and so frail. He was connected to so many wires it seemed like he was covered in them.

He was awake and alert but we were told that we couldn't touch him or talk to him because they were testing him for brain damage, to find why he stopped breathing. We couldn't do anything that would stimulate his brain.

That was particularly difficult to hear but he was in the hands of the experts and I guess they knew best.

We went back to see Jane in the ward and I was conscious that she and Fiona wanted to spend time together during these difficult hours, so I didn't stay long.

It must have been about 1am by the time I got home. I went straight to bed but I didn't get much sleep. I phoned my work in the morning to let my line manager know what had happened and she said I could take as much time off as I needed, which was good of her.

I went back to the hospital. It was a waiting game. The test results would be back in 24-48 hours...

Nerve-wracking

Fiona is such a worrier that she seemed to be contemplating every eventuality: would Mitchell have brain damage? Would he have epilepsy? Would he have reduced functions? Things I would never even have thought of.

I just wanted to get the test results back and deal with whatever we had to deal with then. Jane was more: "He's a fighter, let's wait and see what happens."

Thankfully the results all came back negative. No brain damage, no abnormalities, which was such a relief to us all.

The consultants couldn't explain what the root cause of Mitchell's problem was and why he had stopped breathing. They suggested a blocked tube or some mucus in his throat, it was "just one of those things."

It really didn't matter to me as long as the test results were all clear and Mitchell was OK. I just wanted to see him and the girls out of there.

Early days

I went back to work. Jane and Mitchell went home a few days later. It was such a relief to know that he was out of the hospital, in a clean, sound environment, with his two mums.

I went to see him a day or two later. I was concerned for Fiona's welfare because there had been so much drama with Jane and Mitchell that it was easy to forget that Fiona was pregnant and at an important stage in the baby's development. She was getting morning sickness (most of the day still) and she was not eating much as far as I knew – but they were all happy to be home.

I didn't go and see them for a while after that because I know what it's like, having so many visitors coming and going all the time, trying to get baby into a routine without becoming too stressed yourself. All my friends were busy buying Mitchell clothes and asking when they could see him. I had to be honest with them and say that we weren't in a 'normal situation.' The girls were keen to show him off to our families but as for my friends, it would be a few months before they would get to see him. Mitchell has two other families and my friends were further down the pecking order.

I saw Mitchell the week he came home and have basically followed the pre-birth agreement we made. I've seen him once a month since, sometimes twice a month which has been great.

On Daddy Day I see him at Jane and Fiona's house. I wouldn't have it any other way at the moment. He needs his time with his mums. He needs his own routine and there's no way I could look after him on my own at my place. He's still breastfeeding for one thing!

He has blue eyes which are a different colour from mine (brown). I learned from my sister that all babies have blue eyes when they are first born and they may change in time, but I still can't see my resemblance in him. I can

see some of Jane's features in him, such as his nose and mouth but I'd never thought of him as my son until recently.

The latest visit I had with him changed all that. It was the May Bank Holiday when I was due to visit.

In the past, I had made fleeting comments to Jane that I would love to take Mitchell for a walk in a baby papoose. (This idea came from a time when I was much younger. I always watched *Absolutely Fabulous* and I have this vivid image of Edina Monsoon walking down the street with Saffy's baby in a papoose looking very chic – it's something that's stuck with me for years). We were going to take Mitchell out for a walk and Jane said, "Why don't you put him in the papoose?"

When I put the papoose on and he was sitting comfortably, it was great as I'd never really felt that 'close' to him before. Even before he went in the papoose, as I was carrying him, he gave me a very distinguished familiar look – Jane said I have the exact same facial expression. I knew exactly what she meant and it was then, at that point when I thought, 'Yes, you're my son. I love you and I have definitely made the right decision. It's all been worth it.'

I'm not saying it's all going to be ideal or easy in the future but I would do it all over again. A massive life-changing decision and not one I regret. Jane has said she's never regretted it either and that's another affirmation for me. However, I don't think Fiona would want to go through that traumatic labour a second time!

Dad and Julie met Mitchell one Sunday afternoon when I wasn't there due to work commitments. I wanted them to see him sooner rather than later but it would have been better if we could all have managed the same day. My sister couldn't do that day either so I was a bit vexed but nevertheless, I was happy that Dad and Julie went.

I wouldn't say my dad is a particularly emotional or tactile person but even he had Mitchell on his knee and cradling him in his arms! The girls said Mitchell was mesmerised by my dad – maybe it was because he has a masculine voice and Mitchell's usually surrounded by female voices (mothers, nurses, grandmothers, aunties etc). Or maybe it's because he has a moustache, I'm not sure.

I really wanted Lorna to see/meet him. She went along with Aiden one afternoon. They had a great time. Fiona was at work but Jane said she should feel free to come and visit any time, which I hope my sister does.

Lorna and my parents live very close to each other and they had been speaking a lot about my situation. Lorna mentioned to me one day, “I feel I’m not going to be a proper auntie to Mitchell. I want a relationship with my nephew but I think there’s going to be so many people in his life. You have to take a back step, so we have to take a back step too.”

Julie had said something similar to me as well, that she’s not going to be a proper gran to Mitchell.

I had to put it in perspective, so I said, “I’m not going to be a ‘proper’ dad either but what’s the lesser of two evils – not seeing your grandchild/nephew that often or not having a grandchild/nephew in the first place?”

I think that was a turning point for my family, that realisation. My parents and sister now have a grandson/nephew. He is literally a 20 minute car journey from them. Surely that’s better than no grandson or no nephew at all?

It was still difficult to hear it from them, though. You want to give your family everything. But without me doing this, they wouldn’t have a grandson or nephew in the first place.

On the day Fiona and Jane were going for the scan to find out the sex of baby number two, I was in the gym. Fiona phoned as I was just finishing the session so I said I’d phone her back. We’d discussed the sex of the baby before and not really been too specific about what our preference was. You always say the most important thing is that it’s healthy – but secretly I wanted a girl, because I’d had such a good relationship with my sister and I wanted the same for Mitchell.

When I phoned back they were en route back from the hospital. Fiona said everything was fine... baby was growing normally... the heartbeat was normal...

I was hanging on to every word she said. When she didn’t mention the sex of the baby (intentionally toying with me!), I was like: “Come on... so is it a girl or a boy?”

When she said, “A girl,” I was so exhilarated! It was such an amazing feeling to know that it was going to be a little girl and a sister for Mitchell.

Mitchell’s my first born and now I’m having a girl, too. It’s so amazing.

I've still got worries. Am I going to be a good parent? Am I going to be able to teach them right from wrong? What if I'm a bad parent?

However I think these are normal anxieties for parents.

Doing things differently

I love my parents but you think, 'I'm not going to do things the way they did, I'm going to do it differently.' In my opinion, my generation is so diverse in attitudes compared to my parents' generation, I think you have to do things differently. We all make judgements about people in today's society – about their skin tone, their sexuality, what they wear. We can be quite harsh. You can't be prejudiced, you can't be discriminatory. At least, I don't think these qualities should be passed on to your children.

As much as my parents loved me and accepted me, it's still an issue for me that the rest of the family doesn't know about what I have done for Jane and Fiona.

I was in a long-term relationship with a previous boyfriend for just under four years. My parents had met him, accepted him and thought he was great – but when I wanted to take him to my uncle's wedding as my partner, Dad said, "If you're going to do that, I don't think you should come." So I didn't. My sister was annoyed at my dad for saying that to me but she was also annoyed at me for not going. The best thing was, another member of my extended family turned up with his partner at the wedding and Dad seemed to have no problem with them.

I understand now on hindsight that he was trying to protect me. He was worried about what people might say to me as we have a very volatile family and the slightest catalyst could have sparked a riot. But if someone did say something derogatory to me and I did get into a fight, would it have been that bad? Would he have defended me if I had needed help? I don't think he wanted to be faced with that situation. I won't bring my children up like that. Sometimes you have to expose yourself to the harsh realities of people's views. You have to cut the cord sometime.

Dad was a single parent for seven years, with two jobs at times and a two bedroom house. Once he was made redundant with no idea where his next wage was coming from and no idea of where to find work. He never took benefits but somehow managed to find work and he instilled that ethic in me.

Fiona has said, “Do you think there will be an end soon to you working seven days a week?” because they would like us to have days out together, to go to a park or the zoo.

I think there will be. I’ve paid back most of my debts and don’t have that much to go.

I haven’t really thought about looking after the kids on my own just yet. I thought I’d have my Daddy Days but I’ve never done this before. I’ve looked after my nephew for a few hours but never looked after two children on my own. I’m not sure how I’ll cope!

The girls have said that the way they hope it’ll work is that we’ll look after them both together and when I’m ready, I might look after one or the two of the kids. Before Fiona said that, I just panicked. I never thought I’d have that.

I remember when we were young, having great holidays in the sun with my family. That won’t happen until they’re older but hopefully it will happen so we all have some great memories together.

I hope the relationship with the girls won’t change. I love them very much and enjoy their company. Laughter is such a remedy sometimes and I can always be sure of that whenever I see the two of them.

In my life forever

I don’t think you can do something like this half hearted. I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t want Fiona and Jane in my life forever. They are two people that I will be connected to for the rest of my life, two people that I can be sure will make excellent mothers. I would confide in them as much as I hope they would confide in me, any aspect of our lives.

It was three years from the first time we spoke about that elephant in the room until the birth of baby Mitchell, so it was a long slow process – not one to be entered into lightly.

For me personally, it would have been so much better to have spoken to more people about my situation in the beginning of the whole process. It took just that one line from Thomas for me to say yes, so Mitchell might have been two or three years old by now, if I’d spoken to more people.

You can't keep something like this to yourself. I found I closed myself off to friends, shutting myself off because I thought my situation would be different from theirs. But you should listen to their views, draw on their experience. Any information is a starting point.

Search for avenues of information, even books on heterosexual relationships, it all helps. This is just the beginning for me...

If you're a gay man thinking of having children and find yourself in a similar situation to mine then do it, either with people you would trust with your life or do it anonymously.

Howie

In a relationship for 18 years. One child but we are considering fostering. I knew I wanted to be a dad. I fertilised the egg. I'm so glad I did the right thing. He's hot and straight and getting married!

I am disabled. My son has risen beyond the call of duty in helping me. I haven't experienced bad vibes but my lad had to put up with a lot of s*** at school because he had a dad that was disabled. I will never forget that and I love him even more. He tried to hide it but I found out.

He seems to be doing well on his own. Seriously, having the love of a child is a wonderful experience.

James

My partner and I are gay men, so we cannot conceive. We do not know anyone gay who has adopted or conceived. We never thought about having kids. Because we live in a one- bedroom flat, and my partner is working in a hotel, we don't have the room or the time to adopt. We can't afford to get a bigger place.

Jay

I see myself as genderqueer, closer to male – a trans man.

I became aware that I wanted children around age 25 and started to think about it seriously at about 28. I now have two grown-up children, conceived with my partner of the time.

Basically, I was so desperate for children – but so pessimistic about finding a long-term partner – I chose the first decent-looking male as an unknowing sperm donor. Low self-esteem made me very difficult to live with, and not being at all at ease in the traditional gender role of mother did not help. Still think I'd have made a better father.

My elder daughter was five when I found myself single again, which was extremely difficult. This forced me into thinking of my children at all times instead of trying to find stability for myself and it had a poor effect on my mental health: I am cyclothymic³. I was also prevented from coming to terms with my gender identity, which caused additional stress.

What helped me were happy pills, the local LGBT association, resources put online by organisations in different countries and having time to think for myself now the children are independent.

³ Mental health charity Mind defines cyclothymic disorder as: short periods of mild depression and short periods of hypomania. www.mind.org.uk

Norrie

I am a gay man in my 50s, with a teenage daughter, Leigh. Leigh's mother, Wendy, is a straight friend, with whom I co-parent.

I've been together with my partner, JJ, since before Leigh was born. I met JJ around the time Wendy and I were discussing having a child so it wasn't about the three of us having a child together. It was, 'This is happening, so if we get serious, Leigh is going to be around.'

I always knew I was gay. I was out to my family, I was very confident about it.

Wanting to be a dad was there, part of me, all my life. I was always very comfortable around children and work with them professionally.

Then, when I was a teenager, I realised it wasn't going to be possible. In the late 70s/early 80s, surrogacy or adoption weren't really options.

That it wasn't going to happen for me felt like a huge gap, a huge loss, throughout my 20s. I had come to terms with it by my early 30s but it was always something I felt sad about. I busied myself with other people's children, living in a big communal house with gay men and a straight couple who had a child.

Then Wendy, a friend in her early 30s, asked me if I wanted to have a child with her. It seemed like something really special to offer and I was delighted.

We'd been friends for several years and I knew she wanted to be a mum and hadn't found the right partner but I knew other women in similar situations, so I hadn't expected it. We were just out one day for a drive, a walk, whatever we were doing – and she just asked me very directly.

I think that from her point of view, there had been previous conversations, where she'd sounded out how I felt about children but I'd been unaware of what was going on.

She'd obviously been through a longer process than me – but I didn't need to think about it for a minute!

I couldn't have done it if I couldn't have been a dad who was really involved but she wanted someone to co-parent anyway. Wendy wasn't living in Scotland at the time and we needed to be in the same place. We waited a year until the practicalities of moving had been sorted and Leigh was conceived at the second time of trying, at home, using artificial insemination.

It's the best thing I've ever done.

We knew the optimum time for Wendy to conceive and we saw it as having one opportunity for it to work that month. It wasn't dressed up in any kind of ceremonial way. It was low key: 'Now it's time to do this.' It didn't work the first time and the second time, it did.

It's funny, the questions you get asked. People think there has been a sexual relationship. There were two camps: one asking practical questions about how we did it and the other, "That's fantastic!" – an emotional reaction to what a big decision it was for us.

Family and friends responded very positively. They were very respectful of the choice we'd made. I met Wendy's family before we tried and she met mine after, when she was pregnant.

It all happened kind of quickly. Because we didn't want to put any pressure on ourselves, we thought it might take a while to get pregnant – and then it didn't!

Positive experience

Leigh was born at home, at Wendy's. I was there with another couple of friends that Wendy wanted there. It all went very well, a very positive experience.

I went along to prenatal appointments and classes. There was nothing about me being gay. I think they just assumed that if I was there, I must be the dad. I was just a man.

Leigh was breast fed until just short of her first birthday, which had implications for where she could stay, so it was about 11 months before she could stay over with me. For the first year I stayed at Wendy's a lot, especially when Leigh was first born and about two nights a week after that.

I wasn't living with my partner JJ at the time but I can imagine that if I had been, that would have been an additional thing to negotiate.

Later Leigh stayed with me two nights a week. I cut my hours at work so I had a day off to care for her for a year or two. Wendy took extended maternity leave.

We worked out the finances as we went along. I wasn't earning very much but the money stuff wasn't an issue. I don't have much memory of it so we must've worked something out. We just got by.

I suppose we just got into a routine from that point. Routines are very important to Leigh. Wendy went back to work. We were lucky in that family and friends helped with childcare. We lived very close together, which made it easier.

Having a child with someone is personal, profound. Wendy and I each wanted a child. We were friends and we thought we were being radical. Really we were doing something ordinary. We were being a mum and a dad. You don't realise how intimate and intense that is. Your life becomes focused on this small person. Time passes very quickly. Suddenly you look at the other parent and think, 'Who are you again?' You have to take a step back and revisit your initial relationship. I think some heterosexual couples get through that and some don't.

We had a parental agreement done soon after Leigh was born. It was very straightforward. It's something you have to do together. Leigh has both our surnames. Wendy's is her last surname so that's the one that gets used at school. I'm often referred to as Mr X rather than Mr Y.

Before Leigh went to nursery, we were both keen to make sure people understood Leigh's family. The last thing we wanted was for Leigh to draw a picture of her family and for someone to say, "Who's that?"

Be honest

That's when I realised there's a constant 'coming out' you have to do. Leigh will always have a gay parent. From the moment the pregnancy happens, there's a story you have to tell. I've been explaining it ever since. The reactions I've had have always been positive. The constant explaining

can be a bit tiresome but it's part of the choice you make and I think it's a responsibility you have to take for as long as you need to take it. Leigh takes it on herself more, now that she's 15.

She hasn't had any problems with it as far as I know. I do explicitly talk about that with her. I made a point of it when she moved up a school and I'm sure I would have been aware if there had been anything. I don't doubt for a moment that she hasn't overheard language that might be offensive or comments about my being a gay dad but there's nothing that ever seems to have bothered her, nothing I know about.

It was something I was always concerned about, because it's not in your control, so it's a reality you may have to face. All you can do is be honest and give your child confidence in the language to use – because if there's any secrecy, a lack of honesty in yourself, that's going to be the weakness that's exploited.

Extended family

It was quite challenging for JJ in the early days but now he's Leigh's dad and she has a good relationship with him. Leigh can't shake a stick without seeing a dad! Wendy has a long-term partner too and they have another child, who will stay with me sometimes. Knowing her too has been important because she's Leigh's sister and we are a family.

When Wendy and I first met each other's families, there was never any expectation that we would be like in-laws. My family were local, Wendy's were not. Leigh has good relationships with both families. She is also part of my partner's family, so there's no shortage of family in her life.

When you construct families like this, you can't overly define the roles people will play. They'll emerge. But you can't under-estimate the biological link between the child and its mum and dad either. When I lived in the communal house, before Leigh was born, it was fascinating to see four gay men working out what kind of uncles they were to the child and the bond the child had with its parents.

When we had Leigh, I didn't know anybody else who had done this. I knew there were other guys in heterosexual relationships who had had children then come out, but no-one in my situation. I know someone else now, who has become a dad recently but he's the only one.

There are clearly some gay men who get it, who want to be dads and others who don't. If you do, there's just a bit more planning that needs to go into it. It's probably the same with heterosexual men – some want children, others just do it because it's expected. As a gay man, you need to have an extra drive or desire to do it which heterosexual men don't even need to think about... No, that's not fair. There are straight men who have difficulty conceiving.

I would do it again – yes! – but I'm getting a bit old now. If I was in my 30s now I would be more proactive. I'd look at surrogacy and adoption. They have a cost, they can take years and a large amount of commitment, even now, but they are real options. If it's something you want, it's something you'll work around. It's a fundamental human need, if you're driven to be a parent.

If it's something you don't want, you shouldn't do it.

My advice?

If you're going to have a child with someone, your relationship will change. If you think that's just in heterosexual relationships, you're kidding yourself.

Being a man who is a parent is more important to the role you play in your child's life than being a gay dad. And you have to work out your role in relation to the mother. I think motherhood is a very powerful connection, different from the one a child has with their dad and you have to work that one out. Everyone's different and everyone's style is going to be different. It's difficult to explain or understand until you're doing it.

Parenting with someone else is difficult. There are going to be hard times and times when you feel you can rely on them. It's not something you do in the short term. You are tying yourself to that person for life, good and bad – and you have to retain your respect for that person as a parent, for the rest of your life, for the child.

Nuno

I met my partner when I was 22 and soon afterwards started talking to him about adopting children.

When I was 26/27, I started considering adoption more seriously, gathering information from websites and by talking to people who knew more about it and had even adopted themselves. After hearing the stories of several adoptive parents and how their decisions were life-changing, my partner and I reached the decision to adopt and embark in this marvellous adventure.

We eventually applied to adopt in Germany (where we were living at the time), but it didn't work out, neither through state social services, nor through private agencies.

We then moved to the UK where we applied through Manchester City Council in 2007 and, after a short period of training, we carried out the interview and assessment procedure.

In 2011 we finally met our children, a two-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl, siblings who were placed with us for adoption in September 2011. The court adoption orders were issued in June 2012.

We cannot say it's been a completely smooth process, but it has surely been a worthwhile one. The assessment is a time-consuming exercise, but it also offered us the opportunity to reflect about our lives, where we come from, who we are, and what we still wish to accomplish in life.

Meeting our children and then starting to live with them and forming a family has not been problem-free either. It requires a lot of patience and preparation, and a strong commitment and willingness to change one's lifestyle and priorities.

Yet, having children undoubtedly gives a new and better meaning to our lives, and no matter if our children are biological or adopted, one is bound to have to deal with challenging moments. I would, therefore, encourage anyone thinking about having children to strongly consider adopting!

The amount of bureaucracy and the time the whole process takes is rather exhausting and trying, but I now consider it necessary to test one's determination. If one isn't willing to go through that, then one isn't probably prepared to deal with what comes afterwards!

Emotionally it's been very exhausting too. The whole adoption process requires plenty of self-reflection and compromising with one's partner. Once the children arrive, patience and energy levels are constantly put to the test. One's relationship is also strained to the limit.

Our experience has showed me that all the training and interview process definitely needs to be taken seriously. No matter how much one prepares, one will always be taken to one's limits, so it's better to invest a lot during the preparation stage.

All the paperwork and emotional difficulties were overcome with plenty of energy, patience, determination and communication with my partner: adopting requires plenty of all of these.

Make sure this is really for you, because the more you get into it, the harder it is to get out afterwards. If this is really what you want, don't give up, it's all worth it at the end. Get ready for a bumpy ride.

Paul

Children have always been a part of my life, as a member of a large extended family. I was married at 19 years and my first child was born when I was 22 and my second when I was 25. I remained married until I was in mid 30s when I had a breakdown and was forced to address issues of sexual abuse as a child and also my sexual orientation.

Being a parent has always been the most wonderful thing I have achieved in my life. I have had to address bias and homophobia but rarely directly, as people tend not to be brave enough to say anything to a 6ft man.

Everyone's situation is different and you should do what is right for you. Do not allow anyone to tell you what and/or when you should say anything. Be honest but keep yourself safe.

Rick

I'm from a family of four. There's 10 years between me and my brother. I've always had family around, the house was always busy with folk coming and going.

You always know you're gay but growing up in the 80s in a council estate in Aberdeen, life wasn't like it is now. Twenty, twenty-five years ago the whole gay thing was different. It wasn't as socially 'acceptable' as it is today. I didn't know there were gay bars where you could meet people and in my teenage years I wouldn't have got in, let alone got served anyway. There weren't any of the support groups around. There was the Gay Switchboard but it was only open once or twice of an evening during the week.

I had no gay friends to talk to about my feelings and I couldn't talk to my straight friends or any of my family about it, I didn't even know another gay guy. I lived under this cloud of 'I'm gay but what can I do?' So I did nothing, hoping it would all go away.

My family wasn't down on gay people but I remember the odd comment in the family about poofs – not derogatory but enough to make me feel it wouldn't go down well if I came out as gay.

Going with the flow

I met Anne, this girl who I worked with and it all just sort of happened. I got engaged in 1990, aged 23, and a year later we got married. I lost my mum the year before to cancer so it had been a difficult time. She was only 58.

I went with the flow of get-engaged, get-married, have-children. It seemed a natural process and I thought the gay thing would go away, or I would hide it, or because I was married I wouldn't have any urges.

It's not that you don't want to be with a woman, it's that – at that stage, for me – you don't really know, because you haven't had your first gay sexual encounter. I felt under a lot of social pressure to get married and have children. And then you do that, and nothing changes – you're still definitely gay.

It wasn't until about a year after I was married that I had my first gay experience. I didn't have any gay friends or know anyone who was gay. I realised I couldn't sit on being gay anymore and that I'd have to do something about it. I stumbled across a gay chat line and arranged to meet someone. That was it. It just happened.

I'd thought that, because I was married, I'd be able to suppress it but once I'd done it and realised, 'I am gay,' I couldn't suppress it. Before, it had been locked up but now I knew what it was like to be with a man, I wanted more. I thought, 'It's not going to be easy to put these feelings away' but I kept trying.

Anne and I had been trying for a child but she wasn't pregnant at that stage. I knew that being with a man was what I should be doing but I was too chicken to do anything about it. So I just carried on with my wife, thinking, 'It will all go away. I'll just do it a few times and get it out of my system.' But that never really happened.

Getting pregnant

Anne fell pregnant but then she had a severe bleed, a miscarriage. It was fairly distraught stuff. No-one prepares you for that. You don't get a handbook. Although the doctor says it's nature's way, when nature says you're not going to have your baby when all your friends are having their babies, it's a difficult time. I felt I had a decision to make – do the socially correct thing and carry on or stop, stop it all and come out as being gay. Despite thinking about it for days and weeks on end I couldn't do it.

When Anne had a miscarriage, I thought it was a sign, like a 'get out of jail card.' The right thing to do would have been to leave Anne then – but I didn't. There was an element of me wanting children but it was tied up in thinking that having children would make it (being gay) all go away.

Anne fell pregnant again and Marie was born in September '93. That turned everything upside down. The focus was on Marie and the gay thing was put on the back burner.

Marie was here and taking her round to see all the relatives, doing all the dad things that you do, felt natural. I was absolutely over the moon.

But you are what you are. You think getting married will make it go away and it doesn't. You think having babies will make it go away and it doesn't. You may think bungee jumping off the Eiffel Tower will make it go away but it won't. You're brought up to think you should do this and you should do that but another part of you is telling you it's not right.

Eventually I plucked up enough courage to tell my best friend Michael. I let him into my secret about four years after Marie was born because I'd started to get very depressed. I wasn't getting involved in family life. I wasn't interested in anything except myself – very selfish.

Michael was very supportive. He was a similar age to me but he had no experience of being gay so all he could do was listen.

Bit on the side

Probably around April '95, I met a guy called Keith who was also not out. We started seeing each other on a casual basis every now and then. He wasn't married, didn't have any children. We got on really well, not just as casual partners but on a social level as well. We clicked. So I had that going on as well: being married, being a dad and for want of a better phrase, having a bit on the side.

Keith had been away for a month with work when I decided I'd tell Anne I was gay. I'd say to Michael, "I'm going to tell her tonight, I'm going to tell her tonight" and then I'd get a phone call from Michael saying, "Did you tell her?" – and, no of course not. How could I do that to her?

Anne and I used to work together but I'd left the job the year before. Once I'd started working for another organisation I had my own routine and that gave me more opportunities to meet men. The more I met, the more I wanted more and more.

Eventually the guilt got too much. I couldn't deal with the lies I had to tell on a daily basis. I realised, if I didn't do something about it quickly, I'd risk ruining not only Anne's life but Marie's as well.

I thought, 'If I get out now I won't ruin her life,' so I left in the summer of '96. I just came home one day and said I'd been to see a solicitor about a divorce.

I couldn't tell Anne I was gay. I thought she'd say I couldn't see Marie again, that I'd be shunned by my family. I didn't know how it would affect my work.

I left Anne, went through all the legal stuff and changed jobs again. It meant working away Monday to Friday. It got me out of the house during the week but I'd go back home at weekends to see Marie.

We made a separation agreement which said I'd have Marie every second weekend and continue to support her financially. It was all very difficult, very difficult for everybody. Anne wanted to know why I had left, Marie wanted to know why Daddy didn't live at home any more. I didn't have any of the answers. I didn't even know what was going on myself.

Truth will out

About three months later I was still working away but I'd come home one weekend to see Marie. I'd bought copies of *Gay Times* and they were in my bag, which I'd left unopened in my room. It was a Saturday afternoon and Anne phoned while I was out shopping and said Marie had found something in my bag and did I want to go home and discuss it? Of course, Marie couldn't have got into my bag.

Anne's first question: "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, I didn't know how to tell you, how you'd react."

I think it was a bit of a relief for Anne because now she knew the reason, though she was still quite upset.

It didn't change things as we had agreed from the start that for the sake of Marie we didn't want to make things difficult for her. Looking back I was quite lucky really. The whole saga could have turned into a very nasty split but that didn't happen – no point – it would only have been Marie that would have suffered.

I eventually returned to Aberdeen to work and got myself a one-bedroom flat around December '96. Anne and Marie managed to get a nice council house where she grew up, so she had a lot of her friends and family around her. We started living as separate entities, with Marie staying with me most weekends.

Marie would have been three by then. It was difficult for her because once I had a flat, it wasn't a case of "Daddy's working away." It was, "Daddy's at his house, why's he not here?" I didn't have a proper chat with Marie about my sexuality until she was about 10. It was just, "Mummy and Daddy aren't living with each other anymore" and she accepted this.

Not coping

I was finding my feet being a gay man, discovering the scene, meeting new guys, developing new relationships. Eventually Keith moved in with me but I wasn't openly gay and there was still a lot of pressure.

After about a year I tried to take my own life. It was an overdose. I can't remember much about it thankfully. But obviously it didn't work and I'm glad that I'm still here. I did it because I couldn't cope. I didn't want people knowing I'd gone from being married, being a dad to being a gay man with a child.

My boss came round to see me afterwards. I explained to him what had been happening in my life. He was very supportive and said if I had any trouble at work, to tell him and he'd sort it. (Ironically, about 10 years ago he came out but he made no mention at the time).

Eventually there was a work's night out and someone asked me if I was gay and it all came out. Surprisingly no-one had a problem with it. It was quite an eye opener. Obviously things had changed in the past five years.

Becoming more confident

As I became more confident about being gay, I started to tell more people about it. I told my brother and my sister. The only person I didn't tell was my dad. There was a 40-year age gap between us. I wasn't as close to him as I was to my mum. I took the view that it wouldn't make any difference to his life so he didn't need to know.

My sister died in the summer of '96 before Marie was born. If I'd been going to confide in anyone back then, it would have been her but it was not to be. Life just carried on.

I moved to Edinburgh with my job in 2001 and settled here. I still had the flat in Aberdeen and I went back every two weeks and Marie came to stay.

Keith and I had split up before I moved to Edinburgh and being a single man I was enjoying exploring the scene in Edinburgh. I joined a support group called Gay Dads as I wanted to get to know other people who were in my situation and how they coped. Marie was getting older and I thought, "How do I tell her about being gay?"

I was very nervous going to my first meeting, and for the first few months I just sat there and listened to what others had to say. There are a whole lot of different experiences and I was amazed at how, after all, I wasn't the only gay guy who had been through the getting married/having kids cycle in an attempt to make the gay thing go away.

Eventually, I plucked up the courage to say, "This is what I've been struggling with."

I went on to explain I was worried about how to tell Marie I was gay. What would she say or think? What if she didn't want to see me again? What if her friends at school found out and she got teased or bullied? Lots and lots of questions.

The advice the other gay dads gave me was: don't make it into a big deal; don't sit her down and say, "There's something I want to tell you" – just bring it up in conversation and see how it goes. So I did.

We were walking to the supermarket one day and I can't recall how I started the conversation but I said, "Normally boys fancy girls and girls fancy boys but now and then you'll get boys who fancy boys and girls who fancy girls. Those boys are called gays and the girls are called lesbians."

I said that sometimes people don't know who they fancy or they get a bit confused about girlfriends and boyfriends. I said I fancied boys but I didn't know that I fancied boys until just recently. I went on to say that no matter what happened I would always love her very much. I said it didn't change anything but it's not something to go telling everybody because not everybody would understand.

She said very little. She was: "Well, all right, I see."

I'd said, "You'll probably need to think about it and you may not know how to deal with it so if you have any questions, ask me or ask Mum because you don't want to keep any questions to yourself."

I think she did speak to Anne about it and since then she's slowly told her friends, who have all been quite accepting and supportive.

Meeting Ryan

I met Ryan in 2005 and we moved in together quite quickly, within four or five months. [For Ryan's story, see p 60]. Marie knew who Ryan was and what our relationship was but I'd take her out on my own or all three of us would do things together, rather than Marie and Ryan doing things on their own, until I was sure things were going to last.

When we realised the relationship was something bigger, we looked for a larger house with a spare room which Marie could use when she was down or so we could have friends to stay. I had given up work to go to university for the first time. It was time for a complete change.

We lived quite happily. Marie was a frequent visitor, coming down for a couple of weeks in the school holidays, bringing herself down on the train as she got older.

Ryan and I had been together about 18 months when he first mentioned wanting a child. It had never entered my mind at all, having a child again. I was graduating soon. I was happy with the lifestyle we had – no ties. We could do what we wanted, when we wanted, go on holiday, go out.

It was quite serious in that Ryan had always wanted to be a biological dad but I had reservations about it all. We spoke about it and spoke about it and spoke about it. I was very undecided. Two men bringing up a child on their own? Would we cope? Would we have support? Would they be bullied at school? What would Marie think? How would the rest of the family react? All the ifs, buts and maybes just kept going round in my head and I didn't really have anyone other than Ryan that I could speak to about it.

At the back of my mind was, 'Well, I know what it's like to be a dad... but I can't deprive Ryan of that, it would be unfair.'

Ryan did a lot of research into the legalities and all the different methods of

conception, like getting a friend involved or surrogacy. From there it was a case of, 'Surrogacy is probably the preferred option' and we met an agency.

I didn't say, "Let's do this," I didn't say, "Let's not do this." It just happened with Ryan's determination.

There were a lot of ups and downs, a lot of hoops to go through. I tried to support him through it the best I could.

As things went on, the process wasn't going to plan or how we had hoped, being let down by prospective surrogates and an agency that didn't know its arse from its elbow.

I could see all the distress Ryan was going through and I didn't want to open myself up to that. I felt it was more important to support him than to generate another roller coaster.

I kept my feelings fairly locked up, even from Ryan, which in hindsight wasn't the right thing to do.

It all seemed to go on for years. Because of all the problems with the agency and then the surrogacy, part of me was a bit: 'This is never going to happen, we're never going to get there.'

Realisation

Once I had met Samantha, the final surrogate, a few times and we had a confirmed pregnancy, it all became certain that it was definitely happening – that's when the realisation kicked in.

We hadn't been doing the happy 'going out and looking at prams or buying clothes' thing. We'd been through hundreds of ups and downs, then bang! It was going to happen.

And that's when I started to open up my emotions. Ryan had the excitement, I knew what it would be like in practical terms. But, how were we going to cope? How could we afford it?

And what would people think? The child growing up, nursery, school, becoming a teenager... I remembered what it was like for me, growing up

on a council estate in the 80s when 'gayness' wasn't as accepted. I thought we would be shunned.

Samantha was somewhere between three and five months gone and I thought, 'There's going to be a baby here by the end of the year.' Time was progressing and it was becoming more real. Money was an issue. We were living in a rented house. Something was just not right.

The stress started to affect the relationship. We even split up for a while.

A lot of my fear was about what was going to happen in terms of becoming a parent. I know that's strange because I was a parent but I knew what was involved.

I told Marie that Ryan and I had split. I was up in Aberdeen for the weekend and I didn't build it up, I just came out with it. I said we were splitting up, that we hadn't been getting on for some time and that Ryan was having a baby. I had to go into the details of the surrogacy arrangement and some of the story of what had been going on over the last few years. It was strange, I had gone from not really getting involved, then to getting involved and excited about it, to not wanting to be part of it at all.

I think Marie was quite taken aback and surprised by it all, because two guys with a baby is a fairly rare thing. It's not something she would have known about where she lived, even if she'd seen that documentary about the two guys down south who'd had children by surrogacy⁴. It was a lot to take in.

Her reaction to the split was mixed. Ryan and I had been together five years and they got on well but Marie was older now. Being a teenager, it was difficult for her to express her emotions and for me to understand them.

Talking again

Ryan and I spent May to September apart but we were still in close contact, in touch nearly every other day. We had the odd weekend away too, to celebrate a birthday. We gradually came back together again. I think that once we'd split, the pressure was off and we could talk about things again.

⁴ Channel 4, My weird and wonderful family – www.channel4.com/programmes/my-weird-wonderful-family/episode-guide/series-1/episode-1.

We moved back in together at the end of August, and then moved into a one-bedroom flat before going away on holiday for two weeks. Then it was me, Ryan and the dog in this small flat. It sounds a nightmare but we saved a fortune and one of the stresses, money, had been taken away.

After we got back together, it was only two months before Erin – the baby – was due. We didn't really have much time so it was all about getting the flat ready, getting stuff into storage and getting the place decorated, buying prams and all the other things you need. It was a fairly brisk two months but it was enjoyable, plenty going on to keep us occupied.

There was still a bit of nervous apprehension there – like how are we going to manage in a one-bedroom flat – but all the fears about how people were going to react had gone. It had all come out when we had split up.

When we split there was surprise, and when I mentioned the baby, there was more surprise – but nobody had had a bad reaction to it, which was a relief for me and made the whole process of telling people a lot easier.

One of the pressures I'd felt was knowing how Marie would react: would she reject the baby? How would my wife react? When Marie realised Ryan and I were back together and this was going to happen, she was like, "Right, fantastic, I'm going to have a sister." That pressure had gone. It was all out there. There wasn't the worry of being shunned.

Work

The people at work were quite excited for us and with all the equalities nowadays, when I talked about paternity and parental leave, it was fine. In a normal couple, if there's a baby coming along, mum gets maternity leave and dad gets paternity and parental leave.

Despite equality laws, there was the fear that they would say I wasn't the father because my name wasn't on the birth certificate – but colleagues and senior management have been very supportive. I had normal paid paternity leave plus time off for antenatal appointments, scans, visits to hospital.

I didn't have to push very hard but the way I pitched it was that in normal circumstances, the father would get to go to antenatal and parental support

but I didn't need all that, I just needed certain half days off to go to these particular things.

There weren't policies at work for what I was going through but there were policies for adoption, fostering etc. If your employer is not very supportive, it's worth mentioning that.

After that the worries were just about how we were going to cope with bringing up a baby, of taking her to nursery and saying, "Hello, I'm Erin's dad and he's Erin's dad." Obviously she's in nursery because we both work and we both hate that. If Erin's ill and has to be taken out of nursery, there's no problem if Ryan can't take time off and I have to.

Yes, there's the worry of what happens when she goes to school and what the people in the playground might say – but once we finally had Erin in her cot in the hospital, the biggest part of the apprehension was over.

Parental bond

There was a bond in the hospital. Ryan was there and he knew what to do as well as any new father does but I was able to step in if it all got a bit chaotic.

Marie was two-and-a-half or three when I left, so I have some knowledge of what it was like, before I left and only had her at weekends.

In the early days, Erin would just eat, sleep and poop as they do but as she's got older, if there's a night when she's not sleeping and Ryan's, "What shall we do?" – well, there's things they don't teach you that you just pick up. Like, when you're winding her and it's not working, you try a different position or leave it a while and try again. Or if she's crying and there's no reason and Ryan's like, "Why is she crying?" I say, "She's just crying."

Now we're like a normal family. The only difference is the difference that other people might make out of it – "Oh, you've got two dads" – but that hasn't happened yet. The fact that it's two dads doing the cooking, changing the nappies, it doesn't really matter.

Not long after Erin was born, a neighbour brought a present over for us and said something like, "Where did you get her from?" or "Who's she?"

I thought, 'You're just being a busybody and said, "Oh, she's ours" and kept walking.

That had been one of my fears, having to say about the surrogacy, "Well, we've not stolen her."

Then and now

When Marie was Erin's age, it was new, it was my first child – and in the back of my head I had all the gay issues going on. It's different this time. It's just like having a baby but without that unexplained side of things. Maybe I'm an 'experienced' Gay Dad now compared to 18 years ago.

The other difference is that Marie is quite involved with Erin. She looks after her, sees her very much as a sister. You wouldn't know she wasn't a sister. From day one it was "my sister."

One of the whole psychological things for me is that if I'd known about being gay before I met Anne, I would never have got married and never have had Marie – but then I'd never be sat where I am today. It's been a hell of a roller coaster getting here but it's alright now. Marie comes down a lot which we all enjoy. I think it's a bit strange for Marie having her family life at home and her family life with us.

As the years have gone on, things have been more settled and relaxed. There's more support for gay men. It's more accepted and with famous people like Elton John and David Furnish doing the same as us, it's not as bizarre. I'm just glad we did it before they did.

My brother hasn't met Erin yet because of where he lives but he's seen pictures and my sister and my nephews and nieces are completely accepting of her, making a fuss of her and all the rest of it.

Anne dotes on Erin almost as much as Marie does. When we go up, we stay with her. Anne is very much a part of the family. Technically, we're still married.

We're not a disjointed family. We see each other a lot. We may not be the norm but what is the norm nowadays?

Ryan

Throughout my childhood, teenage years and adulthood, I had always thought I would be a dad. It was only in my early 20s when I first came out that I realised it might not be as easy for me as it was for other people. I saw my friends and family growing up and having their own families and knew that at some point, I'd be doing the same thing.

I didn't do anything about it for a long time though; I had done bits of research into it every now and again, and I'd known it would be a costly experience so I couldn't really do anything until I was in a strong position financially. I hadn't even mentioned it to my family or any previous partners as it didn't seem there was any point until I was in a position to start taking things forward.

I moved to Scotland early in 2005 with work, and shortly afterwards I met Rick [For Rick's story, see p 48].

I remember that during the first few times we met, he mentioned he had a daughter, Marie. I saw this as a positive thing. I'd never had a relationship before with someone who was already a parent (apart from a brief thing with a woman when I was in my teens). It was never a given that Rick and I would get together and have a long-term relationship but once we moved in with each other, I looked forward to having Marie in my life, even though she lived 100 miles away.

As it was, Rick would go up to Aberdeen every other weekend and stay with her, so any real involvement I had with Rick's family was pretty limited.

I did feel quite excluded for the first two or three years. I wasn't included in birthday parties and family events and I probably only saw Marie four or five times a year, generally when she came to Edinburgh or on the odd occasion that I went to Aberdeen with Rick. It wasn't really until she was able to travel by herself and started coming to Edinburgh more that the two of us built up quite a good friendship.

It's never been a stepdad-type thing, we just got on well and had a laugh during the times we saw each other.

Rick and I had been together probably about 18 months before I initiated the discussion about having a baby. By this point, I was doing well with work and

was in a position where, financially, I could afford to go through the whole process and give up work when the time came to bring up a child.

I wasn't quite sure how to approach it with Rick, and really can't remember the words I used. We had probably four or five discussions about it until we reached the point where he said he would be happy to have a nipper around the house.

For me to embark on any process which led to having a child, it would always have had to have been surrogacy. I wanted a child who was genetically linked to me. It would have felt very different adopting a child, compared to going through the whole process of being involved in a pregnancy and birth.

Even at that stage I knew it wasn't going to be an easy process but I'm such a determined person, I knew I'd end up being a dad.

My first step was to start looking into how you go about it. Internet searches led me to a few straight organisations. This was five or six years ago, before the law changed and two gay men could be intended parents. Back then they basically said they wouldn't entertain supporting a gay couple through the surrogacy process and were only there to support straight couples. It was the first time in my whole life that I had ever felt disadvantaged by my sexuality.

Seeking a surrogate

After these initial knock-backs, I contacted some gay charities in the UK, who also couldn't help. Then one contact gave me the name of a company in London who, amongst other things, had set up a commercial agency for arranging surrogacy. I wasn't convinced that it sounded like the most professional set-up, but at the time there was nobody else I could go to, so I made contact with them in the hope that they would be able to help.

The man who ran the company, Kevin, agreed that they could support us through the whole process, although there was a cost implication for us. He said it was something they had done before and to initiate the process, we had to go down and see him in London. It wasn't long before we headed down there.

The general plan initially was that they would arrange for us to meet potential surrogates who would be happy to have a child for us. We explained that

in terms of the surrogate, we wanted someone who was open and honest, had a supportive family around them and someone who would obviously be a good candidate for in-vitro fertilisation (IVF). We also wanted to make sure it was someone we could get on with and at least develop a positive relationship with.

We also made it clear that we wanted to use an egg donor. I had been certain for a long time that I didn't want to have to ask a surrogate to give away their own flesh and blood, as the risk of them wanting to keep the child in those circumstances was far greater. He assured us that they could arrange that and that it was quite a common approach.

Kevin explained that we would meet the surrogate(s), get to build a relationship with them and then go through the IVF process. He didn't talk about any of the legalities or additional costs, like travel or IVF medication, at that point.

Not long after our first meeting with Kevin, we went to meet the first potential surrogate. This was in June 2007.

I was full of excitement at the prospect of this meeting, although that soon disappeared. We were introduced to a woman called Cora, but sadly within the first 20 seconds we knew this was the first and last time we would see her. She was 42, so not a good age for IVF, and when I asked her the question, "So what does your partner think of this?" she said: "He doesn't know, it's none of his business." That put us off altogether, and overall it felt like a totally wasted trip down south.

Still, she was only the first potential surrogate we had met, so I wasn't too downhearted.

Back to the drawing board

Kevin arranged for us to meet someone else quite quickly. This time it was someone called Pauline, who was 25, married and had two kids of her own.

We met Pauline, her husband and Kevin all together in London and this time it was a good meeting. Pauline seemed quite sensible and her husband seemed supportive which was a bonus bearing in mind our experience with Cora. We came out feeling quite positive. Rick and I had a talk about the meeting on the way home and we agreed to give it a go.

Over the coming weeks we started to build a relationship with Pauline and her husband. We talked on the phone a few times, getting to know each other and discussing the whole process. We also made a 400 mile round trip to go and meet them in their home town which again was a positive meeting.

Later on, in what was to be the last of our conversations over the phone, Pauline started to discuss the financial side of the process and we, as instructed by Kevin, explained that she would need to take this up with him initially. She also started to express concern about Kevin and his company and sadly, shortly after this conversation, the whole thing fell apart.

Kevin called us and told us not to contact Pauline again because she wanted more money. My impression was that there were other reasons why it came to an end which, I expect, related to her mistrust of him and his company.

Next we met someone called Rosie. Her situation was that she'd been through surrogacy before but the IVF had failed. She had a supportive partner, son and stepdaughter and seemed to know what was involved. She was in her late 20s.

Again we got on well. We started to build up a relationship with Rosie over the phone before going to see a consultant in Harley Street in London. The purpose of the trip was to talk about what characteristics we would look for in an egg donor and also so that Rosie could have a scan, to make sure she was healthy and had nothing wrong with her inner workings for the IVF process.

In terms of characteristics we said we were looking for a tall, white European with blond or brown hair, to fit in with my family traits. I was just asked about physical characteristics, not education or anything like that.

All was fine at that point and I was starting to feel like maybe this whole thing was going to gather momentum and bring us a positive outcome. Then, to our total dismay, Kevin was sent to prison for 16 months for stealing all the money his investors had put into his other companies. We hadn't even known he was due to appear in court and only found out about it all when we saw his picture in the papers.

That caused major panic. We thought the surrogacy was going to fall flat on its face but Kevin had been working with someone called Jill who took over the process. She said Kevin was no longer part of the company. Still, we weren't feeling overly confident.

Despite this hiccup, we thought that things would go ahead with Rosie but then she and her partner split up. They got back together after a brief spell but he decided he didn't want her to go through with the surrogacy and that was the end of that. So, back to square one yet again.

In summer 2008, Jill contacted us about someone called Rula. Looking back on all this now, it makes me laugh. She had seven children of her own and we were told she knew someone who was going through the same process, so we could be sure of the amount of support she had. She also had the support of her sister who lived close to her in South Wales.

Jill brought Rula and her sister up to Scotland and we met them at the airport one lunchtime. When we met Rula, we got on well with her: she seemed to have her head screwed on and although she probably wasn't someone we would usually choose to mix with, we liked her. She had a sense of humour and could talk – endlessly!

Lots of excuses

For the next few weeks we had a lot of contact. She was constantly texting and phoning, asking how we were, saying how excited she was about it all. But then when the process was due to start, it all went pear-shaped again. For example, when she was due to go for her scan in London, she didn't turn up. There were lots of excuses. When she did finally go, we had to pay for the pre-IVF medication. The arrangement was that we'd send her the money and she would get the prescription...

You can see where this is going, can't you?

As far as we were concerned, it was all happening according to plan and she was taking the medication. The doctors had lined up the egg donor, who'd go to the clinic, which was in Cyprus. I'd have to go on the same day to give my sperm so they could make the embryos. Rula was due to get to Cyprus the same day or the day after so that the embryos could be implanted.

Then, about two weeks before we were due to fly out, Rula cut all contact. She didn't even bother to tell us why. We subsequently found out that she hadn't been taking the medication at all, she hadn't even cashed in the prescriptions. She'd just taken the money – about £1,000 – for herself. It turned out that this had been going on for about six weeks.

We were then left with a situation where the egg donor, who had been taking her medication, was gearing up for the process, but we had no surrogate. We couldn't at that point halt the process without incurring further costs.

So on 8 November 2008 I went to Cyprus on my own to play my part in creating the embryos. It was probably one of the most lonely weekends of my life. Rick had decided he didn't want to come along, so I had to make the trek to Manchester to fly out from there, driving south from Scotland.

The good news was that as a result of my trip, 11 eggs were retrieved from the egg donor and eight embryos were frozen. It was just a shame at that point that we didn't have a surrogate to help us put them to use.

Then in late November, Jill told us about a potential new surrogate called Claire, a woman in her late 20s who lived in Middlesex. She had a child of her own and although she was single, she had a really supportive family around her and she really wanted to be a surrogate.

Instead of meeting we arranged to talk over the phone initially, which we did in early December 2008. We chatted a few times leading up to Christmas and we arranged to meet up in London in late January with Jill. But, on 28 December, I got a voicemail on my mobile from Jill, saying Claire could no longer participate as she'd fallen pregnant.

It was now getting like a *Carry On* film, only nowhere near as funny.

New hope

In the middle of January, Jill came up with someone else. The next woman was called Jamila. She was also in her late 20s. We arranged to go and meet her in London on the day we'd originally planned to meet Claire. By this stage I was feeling pretty run down but I kept on going as I was determined that at some point in my life, this whole thing would result in a positive outcome.

We met at Heathrow with Jill, Jamila and Jamila's mother and thankfully we got on fine. She was a really nice, strikingly beautiful woman, part Egyptian. I had a really positive vibe about her, although I was thinking by now that I wasn't such a good judge of character, bearing in mind the previous people we had trusted.

Again, we agreed to go forward and things seemed to move really fast.

We chatted quite a lot over the phone and Jamila started going through the medical part of the surrogacy process. This time, Jamila was sent the medication after it had been paid for. I would just pay for her expenses as they arose, like travel to London or Cyprus.

Jamila went for her last scan in March and on 12 April she flew to Cyprus with a friend to have the embryos implanted. I was in a state of disbelief at this point, not believing we could end up with a baby at the end of this.

They transplanted three embryos. Jamila stayed there two days and when she came home she told me she thought she might be pregnant, and that she had a metallic taste in her mouth (which it seems can be an indication that you are pregnant).

I was on edge for the next two weeks until she had her first pregnancy test. Sadly the result was negative. Even though that was massively disappointing, Jamila had restored my faith in human nature.

Jamila went through the whole process again on 20 June and three more embryos were transferred. Yet again, two weeks after she got home, she found out it hadn't been successful.

It was more disappointing this time. We agreed with Jamila that after the second one failed, we would have a break. It wasn't just about the money, for Jamila it wasn't an easy thing to do and, having failed twice, she wanted to take a step back for a while. We were comfortable with that.

We agreed to reconvene in September but Jamila decided she didn't want to put herself through the whole thing again. I understood and didn't make an issue out of it. I had appreciated all the way through that this wasn't an easy process, both physically and mentally, for any woman going through it.

So, back to square one again, looking for another potential surrogate. I think by this time I just tried to take any emotion out of the whole process, as I was finding it increasingly difficult to remain positive.

Finally, in November 2009, we moved on to someone called Samantha, who lived in Scotland, was married and had three kids. She was in her mid 20s.

Initially we chatted over the phone and we seemed to get on fine. She'd wanted to act as a surrogate for one of her aunts but that hadn't happened because her aunt lived so far away, and it would have been impossible.

After a few phone calls we agreed to meet on 27 November. Rick couldn't take the day off work so it was just me and Samantha, meeting up in Buchanan Galleries in Glasgow. We got on fine and had a laugh, learnt some things about each other and parted company that day on very positive terms.

Rick and I went back to meet her in February and the whole process restarted.

Three embryos implanted

We used an IVF clinic which was local to Samantha for the scans and medication, rather than going down to London (which saved a fortune!), although the scans were sent to Harley Street (by this point my funds were running out!). Things moved on very quickly. Before I knew it, plans were in place for the IVF process. Then on 8 March I picked Samantha and her mum up and drove them to Edinburgh airport so that they could fly out to Cyprus. The day after their arrival, three embryos were implanted. Samantha and her mum returned on 11 March.

I picked them up at the airport and drove them back to their place. It was all a bit of a surreal time for me. The weekend before, my best friend of 18 years had died suddenly, only two days after I'd been chatting with him on the phone. In the middle of the airport runs with Samantha, I'd had to drive south to his funeral in Blackpool, and then rush back to get to the airport in time to pick them up.

Just after the weekend, Samantha texted me to say she'd been feeling sick but she didn't want to get my hopes up that it was morning sickness. She wasn't supposed to take a pregnancy test until two full weeks after the embryo transfer, but on 17 March she phoned me while I was at home and asked, "Are you sitting down?" My heart jumped as I knew what was coming next... She told me she had taken a pregnancy test and it was positive!

It was very early days and she said she's do another test to make sure but she said she felt pregnant. As far as she was concerned, we had a baby on the way! I had to run around the house for the next 10 minutes to try and calm down!

Initial reactions

Once I had caught my breath, I phoned Rick to tell him and then my mum. My mum was over the moon.

Rick's initial reaction was, "Oh, jolly good."

There wasn't much emotion in his voice, no real positive reaction. I had really hoped for a much more enthusiastic response but then I supposed it was a big thing to take in, particularly as this had been going on for so long.

For the next few weeks, Rick wouldn't engage in any real conversation about the pregnancy. Whilst I wanted to talk, get excited, plan ahead and look forward to a future with a child, I didn't feel able to because of Rick's general mood. He had been quite distant since the day we were told about the pregnancy. This all continued for quite some time. I was massively disappointed but had to accept that the news of the pregnancy had affected our relationship in a negative way.

Faced with the enormity of what was about to happen, and after much soul searching, I decided I didn't want to bring a child into a relationship where it wasn't wanted by both people, so we split up at the end of April.

I didn't want Samantha to know about this in case it made her think twice about the pregnancy going ahead, and Rick agreed. He hadn't moved out at that point.

After the initial pregnancy test, I had a couple of chats with Samantha to see how she was feeling. She was texting a lot. We arranged to meet about a month into the pregnancy. We agreed again that we didn't want to be living in each other's pockets but that we'd keep in touch regularly.

We had a fairly positive meeting and then after that we went along for the first scan. It's not like you see much – just a blob on the screen – but it confirmed that there was a child in there (and that it was one child, not three!) It was good to see it there and to be part of that process.

It was after that, that things started to go a bit bizarre. That whole period, when I was single, was really scary. I was heading towards being a single dad and I only had a few friends in Edinburgh. It was a very stressful time and I had a total lack of support around me.

Samantha started to raise questions about the legalities of surrogacy. She thought her husband's name would have to go on the birth certificate (it didn't) and that it was illegal to be a surrogate (it wasn't). She was also worried about the money: if the baby died or was born with any sort of disability, would she still get the money?

Sometimes she would send me these cold text messages. Sometimes she was like a wailing banshee about things which could be resolved in a second.

It was at that point that I thought I should get a lawyer involved, to reassure her with official answers. He spoke to her and came up with a surrogacy agreement which dealt with all the concerns she had.

I also got in touch with surrogacy.org and explained that we were going through this process but we didn't really have the support, expertise or knowledge that we needed. I asked them if they could put us in touch with other people who were going through the same thing – for Samantha more than me. They said yes so I phoned Samantha. When I got no answer, I sent her a quick email saying they could help.

What I got back was a text saying, "Don't tell me what to do. You'll get the baby but I don't want to hear from you again." Obviously that was very worrying so I contacted Jill. She couldn't do much but she started acting as a go-between, between Samantha and me. This was probably month three or four.

The cold silence went on for about a month, then she started phoning me up saying she'd been rushed into hospital because she was having a bleed. She thought she was going to lose the baby. She would get checked out though and the scans would be fine.

By the time we went along to the 20 week scan in July, everything was OK and Samantha and I were at least chatting again.

Rick had moved out in June but we were still in touch and he came along to the scan.

The nurse carrying out the scan couldn't see the sex of the baby as the

umbilical cord was in the way but she said she was 99 per cent sure it was a girl. Seeing there was a real baby – everything else just paled into insignificance.

Shortly after that, I started planning to move house to one of the small flats I owned just about a mile away from where I was living (this was me starting to tighten my belt!).

Rick and I had a weekend away and started talking about the baby thing. He seemed to have come round to the idea and wanted us to be together again. We had a number of discussions about it and at the end of August, I was feeling reassured that he was committed to this, so I agreed to give it another go.

Social workers

As all that was going on, Samantha got in touch to say her social workers had found out she was going through the surrogacy process and had major concerns about it, so they wanted to talk to us.

It was a massive shock, even to hear that there were social workers in her life!

What you have to remember is that we had no right to know anything about Samantha apart from what she chose to tell us.

Samantha passed on my details to the two social workers and they phoned me and arranged to come and see us. This was early September, about five months into the pregnancy.

They came to the flat and explained that although they were in Samantha's life, they couldn't say why.

She said she'd chosen to have her child at the hospital she'd chosen because it wasn't her usual hospital – in other words, she'd thought she wouldn't have any contact with her social work team there.

They said that if they'd known about Samantha's plans to become pregnant, they would have done everything they could to have stopped it – but they also gave us the reassurance that nothing would go wrong in terms of handing the child over. If at the time of birth Samantha refused to hand the baby over, there would be an immediate child protection hearing and the child would be given to us anyway.

Our next struggle was with the staff at the maternity unit at the hospital. At the 20-week scan, Samantha and I had discussed the fact that we needed to go and see the staff, to agree what would happen when Samantha went in to give birth. So we went in to see them. Samantha was probably about 30 weeks pregnant.

The staff basically said that their process, when a child was born, was to hand the baby to the mother, where it would stay until it was ready to leave the hospital.

Obviously I wasn't best pleased with this and neither was Samantha. I said to them that in a surrogacy arrangement, the child needs to be handed over to its intended parents as soon as it's born.

We didn't get any further that day but afterwards I phoned Samantha's social workers and explained the situation to them, knowing they wanted the right outcome. The social worker said she'd speak to the hospital. I also phoned the hospital and said I wanted to see the senior manager of the maternity unit, as I wasn't prepared to accept what they were telling me.

Rick and I had an appointment to see the senior manager. They arranged it to coincide with a parenting class with a nurse and a midwife, where they tell you how to feed a baby, change a nappy and put it to bed.

When we talked about what would happen at the birth, they reinforced what had already been said about handing the child to the mother. They hadn't had to handle a surrogacy before and didn't want to step away from their usual procedures.

I asked them to get their manager and told her that she was at serious risk of facing a discrimination claim because they weren't prepared to do anything to recognise the fact that Rick and I were the intended parents.

She went away and made a call to the social workers right there and then. She already had their number. I think the social workers put her right in terms of what needed to happen.

The social worker phoned me and said they'd come up with a plan for the process, from when Samantha went in to give birth to when she handed over the child. Samantha would need to agree to the plan but they thought it would suit us all.

Behind the scenes they got together with Samantha and worked out what would happen, which was that we'd be there in a room in the maternity unit and the child would be brought to us within minutes of the birth, not given to the mother at all.

Surrogate v hospital

Rick and I had a holiday at the end of September and by early October we were in fairly regular contact with Samantha.

She had been having problems with her husband and they'd separated. It was clear that she wanted the whole pregnancy over and she wanted the money. (You pay ongoing expenses as they are incurred but you also agree an overall lump sum that won't be paid until everything was done and dusted, including the parental order, which takes place after the birth).

It turned out that Samantha had been going to the hospital and asking them to induce her early and the hospital had been refusing. She would then change her consultant and ask her new consultant in the hope that somebody would eventually agree. Her due date was the end of November – this was now early October.

Eventually the hospital staff and social workers agreed they should induce her two weeks early just so that the whole process could be brought to an end. There was no medical reason why she needed to be induced.

Work worries

Going on separately but alongside all this was that I thought I was going to have to leave my job, because there was no legal requirement to give a father anything more than two weeks paternity leave, and I wouldn't even qualify for that as I had only started my job at the end of March.

The unexpected good news was that my work agreed to give me three months' paid leave from when the child was born, which was great! Statutory paternity leave is only two weeks and you can also get 13 weeks' unpaid parental leave, neither of which would have been much use at all.

In the week before the planned birth, Rick and I finally had some real discussions about names. We probably had about five or six different options for boys and girls, but I think we generally knew she was going to give birth to a girl, so we focused more on girls' names.

Although we had no proposals for first names, we agreed that the baby would get my mum's middle name and Rick's middle name as her middle names. It wasn't until we were watching telly one night and saw the name 'Erin' appear that we both looked at each other and smiled. That was it, her first name was decided!

Probably twice during the week before she was going to be induced, Samantha phoned me saying her waters had broken so we were hanging by the phone. Her waters hadn't broken.

Due date

We eventually got to the day they were going to carry out the procedure to induce Samantha. It was taking place at 7pm and from talking to Samantha a few times, we expected the baby to be out in a few hours, so we headed to the hospital about 9pm with the car seat, baby clothes, miniature nappies, and everything else we thought we would need.

When we got there, we met Samantha at the door to the maternity unit, smoking. She'd started having contractions and it was a freezing cold night. It was difficult to believe that I'd be leaving this place with a child!

After that it was a case of waiting around for what seemed like an eternity. Samantha went back into the maternity unit and we kept in touch by text. Her mum also turned up and we chatted with her every now and again. At different times Rick went home to let the dog out and then bring her back to the hospital, I went to Samantha's mum's for a coffee, we sat and killed some time in the Asda car park eating snacks and trying to sleep (which I just couldn't do!).

Then at 6.30am, we returned to the hospital car park, co-incidentally at the same time as Samantha's mum – who'd had a text saying it was happening (I hadn't!).

We went into the maternity unit together where Samantha's mum explained

to the hospital staff who Rick and I were. Rick and I were shown into a sort of remembrance room, this place where people sign books to remember babies who had died. It was an odd place to be, considering we were expecting something positive to happen imminently.

Luckily within 10 minutes Samantha's mum came in to say, "You've had a beautiful baby girl! Come and cut the cord!" We'd talked about doing that when we first met Samantha but things had been so difficult that I hadn't ever mentioned it again.

I went in and there was Erin, lying on her back on the bed, screaming. I just said, "Hello, beautiful" and they gave me the scissors.

I have to say: in some respects cutting the cord wasn't a pleasant experience, like cutting a bit of gristle with all the blood going through, but I was glad I did it.

I was back in the remembrance room within minutes. Rick and I had a hug and then I called Mum to give her the news, though I could hardly speak by that point. All I remember saying when Mum answered was "She's beautiful!" from which Mum assumed she had a new granddaughter!

Rick and I were then shown into a room next to the delivery room and within five minutes, Erin was put in my arms.

Beautiful baby

We had a few minutes alone with Erin, and it was all quite surreal. There was this beautiful, peaceful child wrapped in a blanket, in my arms, and I finally realised why I had been so determined to have her.

Apart from an overwhelming sense of love, I also felt a massive sense of achievement, relief and fear (I had no idea what to do next!). After four long years, I finally had this beautiful little baby!

Looking back at the photos now, she looked like a little wrinkly thing with eyes, but at the time the only word I could think of was 'Wow!'

Before long, one of the nurses came in and talked us through what would happen over the next few hours. We'd give her some food, she would be weighed and we should be able to take her home. As simple as that!

The hospital gave us some little bottles of milk and changed her nappy a couple of times as they don't like to let them go until they've peed and poo-ed. In the end, one of the staff said that she might not poo for another day so we could take her home and let them know if there were any problems.

We got her back to Edinburgh around 6pm after a very long day and my memory of the rest of that night is all a blur really. I remember looking at her a lot, thinking, 'Oh my God' a lot and speaking to my mum and my sister.

So that was that, I had someone else to think about now apart from Rick and me.

Registering the birth

Aside from learning how to look after a new-born baby, the one main task for that first week was registering the birth. On the Thursday, Rick stayed at home with Erin and I travelled to Glasgow to meet Samantha and go to the registry office.

We were seen quite quickly, went through the paperwork, confirmed Erin's names – and then Samantha confirmed that she was married, but not to me. That's fine in Scottish law but then Samantha said something like, "Not only is he not my husband but the baby's not mine either." Argh!

I really wanted to have a go at Samantha about making matters complicated but I managed to bite my tongue.

The registrar – this young girl who'd obviously never had to deal with a surrogacy before – had to go away and check things out before she would register Erin but she did eventually do it.

Samantha's and my names had to go on the first birth certificate. Later on, after the legal process, the parental order takes parental responsibilities away from the mother and gives them to the intended parents.

The weekend after Erin was born, we went to see my family and Marie. My family were thrilled to finally meet Erin, and Marie said to both Rick and I that she wanted to call Erin her sister. It made me feel really proud and Rick seemed really pleased. And that's how Marie treats Erin, as her sister.

We applied for a parental order six weeks after Erin was born, posting it off to the courts in the Christmas holidays. This process seemed so easy compared to everything else! Basically a court reporter comes to visit you to check everything's 'kosher,' writes a report to the court and then you go along for a court hearing. Ours was in the sheriff's court and it lasted all of three minutes.

We got there, the judge followed us in, the clerk said what we were all there to do, the judge said he'd read the report and everything looked fine, so he announced that Rick and I were Erin's parents – and asked us if we wanted a picture! We were a bit taken aback. We hadn't even thought about a photograph but we said yes.

And that was that. Erin's been a doddle ever since!

The future

At the time of writing, Erin is now 20 months old. She has been such a pleasure to have around and by all accounts we have been quite lucky as she's always such a happy thing. She's never really been ill, her sleeping routine overnight has been great and she has settled in really well at nursery.

People close to us have just accepted her as one of our family. She gets spoilt by all the attention and presents she is given but she thrives on it. She's walking, talking, singing, laughing and generally a bundle of fun. I really am the proud dad I always wanted to be and I wouldn't have it any other way.

I don't have any particular worries for her future. I sometimes think that she may be treated differently because she's got two dads but we'll deal with it if and when it happens. Our approach with her will be that she's special because she's got two dads, to be proud of it, and that it's good to be different.

Section Two

Women's Stories and Quotes

Alex

Never before had I considered children. Now I'm guardian to Jaz, my sister Reyne's daughter.

Reyne first became unwell about 12 years ago. I can remember picking up the phone one night and her telling me, "I've just fallen over." She started putting things in the wrong place. She couldn't get her head round things. There was clearly something not right.

Eventually, she had a brain scan. It was a kind of brain tumour. It wasn't cancerous but where it was in her brain was extremely difficult to manage.

I started looking after her. We were close. My mum was in her early 60s then and had been doing a huge amount of childcare for her. Reyne had got divorced three or four years before, when Jaz was just a few months old.

I think Reyne pulled me into supporting Jaz because she thought my mum couldn't cope, would be too upset, because Reyne was in fact my mum's support system. My other sister lived a considerable distance away.

Reyne had her initial surgery when she was 34. Initially it seemed to have been successful but she developed meningitis so she was in hospital for a long time. It took a while for things to right themselves. She also spent a bit of time being rehabilitated.

Ten months after her surgery she started to go back to work part-time. Jaz was just starting school at this point. I began to take more of a back seat in the caring but not for long.

Reyne found it very difficult to be back at work and she got quite distraught about that. She didn't have the energy to make what she wanted to happen, happen, at home either. She'd say, "I don't want Jaz to do this, can you sort it?" or "I don't want to see anyone for a few days, can you sort it?" so I had to be a 'bad' person. I certainly didn't become flavour of the month.

Reyne was only at work for a few weeks when she was due to go in for a one-year scan.

She went in for the second bout of surgery just over a year after the

first lot. Over the next four months, she must have had two dozen different interventions, to drain fluid from her brain, to remove more bits of tumour. She kept developing different types of brain infections.

Thinking for two

That's when I started thinking as a parent, not just for Jaz but for my sister too – sitting down with her and having a serious talk, then getting a solicitor to draw up a living will.

Probably my sister's greatest fear was that there would be issues with Jaz's father. She wanted Jaz to have contact but she didn't want her to live with him. I was a bit of a decoy, a way to prevent that happening, so Jaz didn't go from our mum to her other grandparents and then to her father.

Reyne wanted more stability for Jaz's future than she actually had in her present life. This was a wee girl who had already learned how to wear different hats. The divorce was acrimonious. When Jaz would go to her grandparents, they would take her out of the clothes she was in and put her in others without thought of the impact on her.

I never thought of myself as a strong personality, but I had to become an extremely strong character who was quite blinkered in my vision. My sole purpose became not just to look out for my sister but to care for and look out for Jaz, to make decisions about every aspect of Jaz's life because her life shouldn't be any more difficult than what she was having to go through anyway. To retain a sense of normality.

I went to the nursery and said, "OK, here's the situation with her mum... I need a full-time nursery placement so that I can go to the hospital, look after this small person and work at the same time."

Reyne died five months after her second bout of surgeries.

Jaz and I were together all that time, while Reyne was in hospital, me living in her house, ensuring as per Reyne's wishes that Jaz maintained contact with her father for... I think it was one overnight per fortnight or per month and a couple of tea-time visits a week.

He knew Reyne had a brain tumour and that she was in hospital. He was just told what Jaz had to know, to stick to the story.

There were days before she died when I would go to the hospital to see if Reyne was having a good day before taking Jaz in to see her and it was an hour each way. I spent my life on the motorway.

My sister's wishes

You can't bequeath a child in a will but Reyne's wishes had always been that if anything happened to her, Jaz would be brought up by me – which sounded easier when Reyne was alive. By the time she died, I'd been supporting this wee girl for two years and seen her growing up.

A couple of weeks before she died, I got a sense of what was about to happen and I went to see a solicitor, to get advice on what my situation would be. The solicitor was not particularly hopeful as her father was alive and around in her life, on a pretty regular if not active basis.

So I had to prepare for what would happen to Jaz from the moment my sister died – of what would happen as a family, albeit a family who were poles apart. I would have to think about everybody who might feel they would have a vested interest.

One of the things in the background was Jaz's father's absolute dislike of gay people. His family's approach was the same. I said to Jaz's father, as soon as Reyne died, that we needed to sit down and talk about Jaz but he said, "No way. Jaz's going to come and live with me."

Going to court

Within a couple of days of my sister dying, I had to get an interim order to make sure Jaz wasn't removed before time had been given to thinking about what was best for her – not just what we all thought, but what might be right. It was up to me to start the process because without doing that, I had no legal right to look after Jaz.

A couple of weeks later, I took Jaz for one of her usual tea-time visits to her father's and when I went back to get her, she wasn't there. I was met by her father and his father, to say that they'd taken her and she wouldn't be coming back. They said I wouldn't be seeing her again, that I was a horrible lesbian and all that kind of stuff. That's putting it very simply. You can imagine...

It was six weeks before it was resolved. I didn't know where she was. I was devastated.

We went to court for residency. There was an interim order that Jaz would return to live with me until custody was resolved, as I had been the significant adult in her life for the last two years but we had to maintain contact with her father.

What followed was two years of heavy artillery fire. I tried to keep things as normal as they could be for Jaz, though what she was being faced with from them was, "Your aunt's a dirty lesbian." (Imagine... she was only six!)

I wanted to make sure that this wee person's life was as safe and secure as it could be and I felt that I was probably in a better position to offer that than anyone else.

Her father, her grandparents on that side of the family were, I learned, absolutely horrible people. It became really obvious to me why my sister had divorced herself out of that situation and been so clear in her wishes, that while she wanted her daughter to have contact with her father, she didn't want him to bring her up.

When I would go and collect Jaz after a couple of hours at her dad's, he'd start ranting. I'd take her to the car as I wanted to spare her from it. He'd say things like, "You'd better check your car, they can be very unreliable."

I kept doing what I'd promised to support her and continue her relationship with him but every week I'd take her with my heart in my mouth, not knowing if she'd come back.

She loved her grandparents so I even let her go with them to their caravan, as she'd done before – but one day, they didn't bring her back. They gave her back to her father who absconded abroad with her on a false passport. I thought I'd never see her again.

Again, through the courts, we got her back. He kept trying to show I wasn't fit but by taking her out of the country despite the interim order, he was interfering with the legal process.

I had to go through all sorts of psychological interviews but he never had to answer to things he did, like sending anonymous letters to my employers, saying I was selling drugs to young people, because we couldn't prove it was him. I was called up in front of my boss at least twice, because they can't just ignore accusations like that – but even when we got a handwriting expert in, who said it was Jaz's father's handwriting, the courts wouldn't take it seriously.

At one point, two weeks after my sister died, I had to call my boss in the night, after dodging reporters at my house when Jaz was with me. Because of the job I did, I had to tell him what the papers would say next morning.

My mother through all this was devastated. Not only had she lost one daughter but her other daughter had been outed on the front page of a tabloid newspaper. My mother never rejected me but she was a devout Catholic. It must have been really hard for her.

My friends were absolutely outraged on my behalf, saying, "I wouldn't let them do that to me" but it wasn't about me. It was about Jaz. I couldn't retaliate; it wasn't in Jaz's best interests. Nothing to do with me wanting or not wanting children, I was fighting for this wee girl.

Moving away

After a couple of years, Jaz and I moved to a small town nearby. She kept going to the same school. I was always careful to change only one thing in her life at a time. Her mum had died, then – a while after – my other sister, her aunt, had died and a year later my mother, her grandmother died, so she had all that and she was in the middle of a court battle.

Not long after we moved, her father leafleted our street and a couple of streets close by with a copy of one of the newspaper articles and an anonymous note saying, "A lesbian has moved in. Watch out for your children, she's a predator" – or words to that effect.

It was only when Jaz decided that she didn't want to live with her father and

went to court, on her own, aged 9 and said that she didn't want to see him that it was resolved.

At the end of it all, I finally became her legal guardian. We can't find a precedent for a child being awarded residency with a gay guardian when there's a biological parent still alive. Maybe we are the precedent?

Family split

The court told Jaz's father to keep away from her.

She was still seeing her grandparents on trust that they wouldn't force her to see her father. What I didn't know was that they were constantly drip-feeding her: "Your father misses you so much. It's not nice of you, not to see him." They bought her pencils with her name on but it was his surname, which she'd never used in her life.

A couple of years ago, she was due to go to stay with her grandparents and she asked me to put some things in her bag. At the top was a diary and I looked at it, thinking, 'What's this?' and it was full of Jaz writing her concerns about things her grandparents said and did. Lots of stuff that was really anti-gay.

I asked Jaz about it and she broke down. There had been a lot more like that and she just couldn't take it. They didn't think they were doing anything wrong. It was very subtle.

In the end, we wrote to them saying it couldn't go on and now Jaz doesn't see them.

Actually, it was more complicated than that. At one point, they told Jaz they were thinking of moving to our town and it freaked her out. They didn't see anything wrong with it but Jaz was so upset I had to write to them and say they were free to do what they liked but if they moved here, we would need to move away.

One of the good things about the house we're in now is that Jaz is safe. She can go to school and we know she'll come back.

By "we" I mean me and Hazel and her girls. I met Hazel through work. [For Hazel's story, see p 145].

After my sister died I took some time off work. I have to say that throughout all this, my employer has been great, really supportive. I went in to see my line manager, in preparation for going back to work. The conversation I was having was, “I don’t know if I’m fit to be a parent” and that’s when Hazel walked in, my new senior manager. The first thing I thought was, ‘She looks so gay.’ As far as I’m concerned, Hazel was the last person to know she is gay.

I was in a relationship at that point or just coming out of one. I’ve always been gay. When other young people were going off to see their boyfriends, I was going off to see my girlfriend.

I came to know Hazel as a fantastic person, great fun. I knew my job well but we were just getting into a new area of work, so we had opportunities to get to know each other. I thought her outlook – “mañana!” – was great.

We had a work night away and she had too much to drink and told me that she was married and in a mess.

We had a few coffees together and I said she needed to take a step back. She thought she might be gay and she had a kind of old fashioned presumption about what people would think. I said that until that point in my life when I had found myself in court and on the front page of newspapers, being gay hadn’t affected the way my life had gone so maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to take an honesty trip.

I tried to support her but I tried to hold her at arm’s length until I saw she was sorting herself out. If we were going to develop a relationship, it had to be serious. I didn’t have the heart for an affair. I had enough going on in my life; I didn’t need to be caught up in another mess.

Becoming close

By the time we got together, my other relationship had dissipated. Once Hazel split up from her husband, we started to get close very quickly.

Our involvement wasn’t overt, even in front of Jaz, who knew I was gay. She just saw my friendship with Hazel as bringing two new friends for her – Rosie and Isla, Hazel’s girls. We took it very gradually. As Hazel says, it was six years before we really moved in together.

I did sometimes think, 'Oh my God, what am I doing?' I'm a very quiet, peaceful person and I thought, 'Can I do this, take on another two children?'

I'm not a very confident parent. Part of me thinks, 'None of these children are physically part of me so what right do I have to parent them?' I think that's why I parent from a practical perspective, rather than a mothering perspective. So although we have two cars, I'm insistent that our girls need to know how to catch the bus, whereas Hazel might think, 'I'm their mum, I'll do that.'

Parenting is hard work

Parenting has changed me hugely. I'm always worried about the next thing. It's hard to know whether that's about parenting or the experience we've been through.

I look at our three girls and they are wonderful kids, really well balanced, brave, and feisty. I think we are so fortunate. Then I look at Hazel and we are such polar opposites that I wonder if somewhere in between our differences we have been lucky enough to strike a balance. Hazel chose to have children – I was the kind of person who would just get up and go travelling.

I think as gay parents, people think we must be liberal but I'm quite strict. They are not allowed Facebook, I don't want that in my house.

Is it different if you're a biological parent? When I think what I went through to get Jaz, would I have thought differently if I had been her biological mum?

Isla and Rosie have their father, too. We hear them say, "My dad says..." but I can't imagine them saying, "Alex says..."

I know I have invested a huge amount of time and effort in my girls, more so I think sometimes than some other parents. I deal with all three of them the same, because they're not mine. I am intensely aware that because I'm not a biological parent, I have to work super hard to be a good one. Instead of just saying, "Go to bed," I jump through hoops thinking if it's the best thing for them, where most parents probably don't think twice about it.

I don't want anyone, ever, to be able to turn round and say, "You were crap at it."

You don't need a licence for a child – Jaz's father didn't – but I had to prove myself. If I'd remotely stepped out of line all that time with Jaz's father, the sky would have fallen in.

Jaz is 16 now. She has always been a lovely person. I am so glad I went through those years of heartbreak because if I hadn't just kept my head down and kept taking the punches, maybe she wouldn't have had the chance.

Amanda

I came out when I was 15 and that did not change anything with regards to my wish to have children. I was in a serious long-term relationship with a female for four years. We often discussed having children in the future.

My current partner is a trans man, who I have been with for nearly 10 years. We intend to use donor insemination to conceive. We discussed having children from an early stage. I started to get more serious about it a few years ago and the sense of urgency has increased as I get older – I'm now 28.

My partner wanted to delay things for various practical reasons – job insecurity, location, having surgery/hysterectomy etc – and probably emotional reasons as well, and this caused a lot of friction for a while. In the last six months or so we have resolved these issues and finally started on the long road to conception.

Now I think we are on the same page. In the last few months we visited the GP to ask for a referral to a fertility clinic. I had to have some blood tests and we are now waiting for an appointment at the hospital.

Quite a long time prior to that we had asked a gay male friend of my partner's if he would consider being a sperm donor for us. Ideally we would like a known donor so that the child grows up knowing him. My partner is Chinese so we wanted a Chinese donor and suspected that waiting times would be very long for an unknown Chinese donor.

We waited an exceedingly long time for this friend to decide if he wanted to participate, 18 months at least. Eventually, when I had given up on him ever saying yes, I discussed all this with a friend of mine, who then discussed it with his flatmate, who is Chinese. The flatmate told my friend, who then told me, that he would have no problem being the donor.

I had some reservations about this, mainly just because I didn't know the flatmate very well. With my partner's friend so undecided however, the flatmate seemed like our best shot. I was planning to have a chat with him about it when my partner told me he'd spoken to his friend and he was interested after all!

My partner and I decided to forge ahead with what we had to do so that we could have more information to present to the potential donors. We visited the GP together to ask for a referral to a fertility clinic. I felt it was important that we went together but it was difficult finding a time when we could both attend because of my partner's long working hours.

My partner had already seen the GP so she knew his trans status. He described the GP as 'nice' but I thought she seemed rather abrupt.

We explained what we wanted and she told us that I would have to have blood tests to see if I was ovulating. I was a bit put out because I felt like I was being treated as if there was something wrong with me when the only known reason for us not being able to have a baby on our own is my partner's lack of equipment.

The GP also told me that I would need to have a smear test – something I had been putting off for years.

Coming to terms with tests

When we left the surgery I was quite upset. I had known that the GP or the hospital would probably want to do tests to assess my fertility but I wasn't prepared for how it would make me feel. I was angry and felt like we were being 'interfered with.' I'm still finding it hard to come to the terms with the fact that something so personal between my partner and I requires the involvement of so many medical professionals.

I saw the nurse for my blood test and smear test. The smear test was about as bad as I expected, the blood test was no problem.

I called the surgery for my results a couple of weeks later. I was told that I was ovulating but that I had to go back to the nurse for a rubella check. I was irritated that she hadn't done this at the same time as the other test because it felt like an unnecessary delay but I duly went back for the rubella check which came back fine.

Then I received the results of my smear test. I had 'minor changes' which means a re-test in six months to see if things have returned to normal or not. I was not overly worried about having cancer or anything like that but I was

very upset at the thought of a further six month delay before even getting a referral.

I called my partner and he agreed that this was a possibility but suggested I visit the GP and ask her if I could have a re-test more quickly. He helped me calm down but once again I was quite angry at what I felt was 'interference.' If I was getting pregnant 'the old fashioned way' no one would know or care whether I had a smear test first.

I made an appointment with the GP to discuss all this. Much to my relief the GP told me that she had already sent off the referral and the smear re-test wasn't an issue. Most likely I would have had it done before anything happened anyway. Dr Abrupt went up in my estimation that day! She took the time to explain to me what might happen next and to reassure me about the smear test results.

So that is where we are now – waiting for the appointment with the people who will hopefully refer us to the fertility clinic...

Anonymous

I'm bisexual and originally thought children might be something I would do in the context of a heterosexual long term relationship.

When I was single in my late 20s/early 30s, I heard Juliet Stevenson on *Desert Island Discs* (!) saying that if she got to an age where it was too late for her to have children and she hadn't got round to trying, she would feel she had 'mismanaged' things – or something along those lines. That got me thinking.

I was doing a MA in Women's Studies and chose to do my dissertation about women having children by donor or self-insemination. I spoke with a gay friend about him being my donor over a long period of time. Ultimately he opted out and an ex-partner but long-term friend agreed to help me and to be a co-parent. He was living abroad at the time and we had a 'trial' run at insemination on a visit back to the UK that coincided with my cycle. And I got pregnant first go!

Having a child via self-insemination for me was very easy and straightforward. She was wanted, planned and conceived with love and that feels very special. I made sure her dad got parental responsibility via a court order (necessary in 1997) and she has his surname (my choice).

I am now a single parent with a 15 year old daughter. I co-parented with her dad, living in a shared household, for six years and have subsequently lived alone with my daughter.

Her dad was very hands on and totally involved in shared parenting while living with us. It then got less and less when he moved out and got married. His wife never accepted our long-term friendship and never really saw my daughter as part of their family. So my daughter doesn't have a great relationship with her dad although she loves him greatly but she and I are very close and have a delightful mum/daughter relationship.

My daughter likes the story of how she was conceived outside of a relationship and by insemination. She feels it is special too (in a positive way!). She tells her closest friends, who think it is 'cool.'

I have no regrets about having a child outside of a relationship though I wish

my daughter's dad had not been so hasty getting married! We had discussions about how future partners might feel about our arrangement (both of us were single at the time I got pregnant) and he used to say that if a future partner of his could not accept the arrangement then that would not be the person for him. Turns out he has married someone who doesn't accept our friendship and our daughter into her life! So sadly, he is totally out of my life now and minimally involved in our daughter's life.

For several years after he first got married the situation got worse and worse as I battled to maintain his input in my daughter's life. Communication totally broke down and his wife sent me nasty emails, being incredibly negative about me and about my daughter. Eventually I had to end all contact and give up on anything changing or improving.

My daughter still struggles with missing her dad sometimes and wishing she could see more of him but overall is resigned to loving him but finding him hopeless.

Despite the struggles around those relationships, my daughter and I are incredibly close and I am so glad I had her when I did (I was 33) – it's one of my top achievements.

Going it alone

Parenting alone as I have for the past 11 years does come with financial implications but we have enough money to live in a nice area. Her dad continues to pay maintenance, although that hasn't increased in 11 years.

I'm an academic and so there have been consequences in terms of work and not being able to attend conferences etc without a great deal of forward planning and negotiation, so some limitations there. Possibly my career has progressed more slowly – but it has been my choice really to prioritise life at home and be there for my daughter (perhaps more so given the absence of her dad).

I don't have family support but I do have a good network of friends and I have never had to pay for childcare since nursery in the early years.

Having a child has probably impacted on relationships. Given the situation with my daughter's dad and how much her relationship with him changed when he

got married, I have been her main source of stability and security and I have probably prioritised that over relationships. But overall that's OK. My family never really understood my choices and chose to ignore them!

Doing things differently, especially as a single parent, does require resourcefulness and resilience – so the more support you have around you the better. You cannot anticipate every scenario but discuss in advance as much as you can. Go for it!

Anonymous II

I'm on the waiting list for assisted conception treatment at Ninewells (Dundee).

I've been in a relationship with my current partner for three and a half years. We started to think seriously about children a few years ago and decided to ask some of our male friends if they would help us and donate sperm. One came forward and we began to plan. However this fell through and we decided to go to my GP and ask for some assistance. That was a year ago.

I have had several blood tests and we were asked to see a counsellor to talk through some of the issues that may arise with having a child through a donor.

We have been told we should hear in August as I am due for treatment in September. I'm both nervous and excited at becoming a parent. My partner can't wait too.

I hope it all works out and if it doesn't then we turn to Plan B, and perhaps look at adoption.

Anonymous III

I guess I rarely thought about it in my 20s as none of my peers (largely graduates) were starting families. Focus was on working/career/travelling/having a great time.

As I got into my 30s I started thinking, 'How am I going to manage this given I'm a lesbian?' and 'What will my parents and friends think if I do have a family?'

I started trying to get pregnant in 2006.

My ex-civil partner and I were both keen to be parents: I have always wanted to be pregnant/bear a child, and she was keen to be a parent but had no interest in being pregnant. I think this was a good match to some degree, although it had its pitfalls (eg. she simply did not understand my burning urge to have a baby of my own rather than adopt).

We went to a Rainbow Families conference in Manchester which was brilliant, provided syringe kits, info on fertility monitoring, clinics etc, and access to people who had experienced it all.

Finding a donor

We approached a gay male friend (who had a partner) to ask if he would consider being our child's father – with no specifically paternal contact, or demands from us for support, but able to be in touch/friends with the child, and be identified as the biological father in due course.

He (and his partner) agreed and we shortly embarked on home insemination (cup & syringe!). This was made difficult, timing-wise, as he moved some distance away shortly afterwards – but still we persevered.

We had about nine attempts over 14 months or so. It wasn't happening. Another male friend (straight) then offered his 'services' with no strings. He was happy to be identified as the biological father in due course, as long as it meant no specific responsibility.

We switched donor for a few reasons: the original donor and partner were getting a little too excited and not demonstrating signs of understanding separation (“Can we come to the scan?”, “Can we buy the cot/first bike?”, “Can I take the wee one to see my mother”...). Plus, they didn’t understand the urgency with me being mid 30s. They often put other interests/events before our insemination dates, which were of course last minute and unchangeable.

Miscarriage

Around this time, I was concerned that I hadn’t fallen pregnant, so went to the doctor’s to request investigation. But I fell pregnant immediately, the first time with the new donor (cup & syringe again!), before any investigation took place.

I lost that baby in what was a very dramatic, very public miscarriage, two days short of 12 weeks gestation (blood running down legs on a beach in Australia and an ambulance called). I struggled badly with this, as did my then civil partner, although I did not know the consequences of that until later.

After a couple of months’ break, we began to try again with the second donor, and six months later, in December 2008, I fell pregnant – just after I had once again gone to the doctor to see if they would investigate why there was no pregnancy.

Healthy pregnancy, difficult birth

I had an extremely healthy pregnancy, followed by a difficult birth (C section) and a sick baby girl in the neonatal unit for a few days, although she was 9lbs 9oz – a good healthy size!

My family were excited and delighted. My partner’s family were dismissive and homophobic, and largely denied the baby was part of the family, despite our civil partnership and the legal ramifications! They gave token gifts but refused to accept any link or demonstrate any understanding or emotion.

This was difficult – but they were always difficult and a bit homophobic. Our relationship hadn’t been great and I had been so focused on the pregnancy that I hadn’t really noticed or paid attention.

When my daughter was seven months old I had suspicions about my partner's fidelity and found sexy messages to an ex on her phone, in Facebook and in her emails (I never checked until I had well-founded suspicions). I caught her going to see this ex when she was lying about going elsewhere.

She was aggressive (not physically) and controlling when confronted, but admitted she had also had intercourse with a man (!) after I lost the first baby, during my recovery period.

All this I could not cope with, so I left with baby in tow.

It was difficult but the right thing to do. She was not prepared to stand by our family, and I think this goes back to a complete lack of understanding of maternal urges or what it means to be a parent (ie. you come second!).

Happy again

I met a wonderful woman seven months later – my current partner – who has two children from her marriage and we have formed a fabulous lesbian family unit. Our children are well-adjusted and well aware of our relationship.

There will be challenges ahead – but there are for any parents.

My daughter still sees my ex, most weekends for a few hours, but there is no suggestion of a parenting role. I don't trust her to deliver. My daughter is nearly three and she is the best thing I ever did with my life.

Consider these three options

If you're thinking about having children, do your homework and think very carefully about which option you are happy with for yourself and future child:

Complete anonymity – ie. online fresh sperm delivery – where neither you nor your child will ever know who the father is?

Some discretion – ie. a fertility clinic and unknown sperm donation? Your child will be able to find out who their father is at age 18.

Known quantity – ie. private donation, or known donation through a clinic with a male of your choice. This way you know the traits, family medical history etc. You run the risk of emotional involvement, but for me, that was the smallest risk of the three options, when weighed up against the benefits of having a known donor.

Anonymous IV

As a teenager, when I thought about being a girl, I often imagined myself as being pregnant. Like many trans women of my generation, I ended up getting married as a male. When I proposed I made it conditional on there being no children as I didn't think I could cope with being a father (my fiancée knew about my trans feelings). As happens, things changed, and I couldn't deny someone I cared about the opportunity to have children when I so much wanted to be a mother myself.

I have two children. They are both adults now but once they were safely born my wife decided that it was unsafe for them to have a father who was a transsexual and divorced me. The court banned me from having any contact with the children.

I'm telling you this because I have managed to get some contact now the kids are adults, and I want other people in my position to know that there is hope.

Someone suggested that I try agencies that deal with connecting mothers with children that they have given up for adoption. The official charities I tried all refused to help. One started asking leading questions to try to identify me – I think they were intending to report me to the police. However, one recommended a freelancer who was willing to help me. I got email from my son last Christmas.

Obviously it is very difficult. I now have a wonderful boyfriend who would have made a great father. I wish we had been able to have contact with my kids while they were still kids so he could have had that opportunity.

I have no idea whether I would have been any good as a mother, but at least I tried my best for the kids. The divorce court tried to bankrupt me, setting support payments far higher than I could afford and still have a home. Thankfully my ex and I came to an agreement and I paid what I could.

Of course, once I transitioned my earning potential plummeted but thanks to my boyfriend and my mother, I was able to live rent free at times when I barely had enough income to cover the support payments.

I have no idea what my kids have been told about me. I am very proud of them. I guess they probably despise me, but I'll still try to be there for them if they need me.

I'd warmly recommend the freelance counsellor who helped me reconnect with my kids: Carolynne Bull: <http://www.cmb-counselling.co.uk>.

My boyfriend has been wonderful throughout.

Don't give up hope.

Anonymous V

I've always wanted children. We actively started trying to become parents around four years ago. Our first choice was to adopt, as we felt that there were already so many children out there who needed a loving home. Unfortunately, we experienced pretty full on discrimination in the adoption process and after a year of being fobbed off, our paperwork being repeatedly 'lost' and general messing about, we were told outright that no-one would ever want to place a child with us.

We are now trying to conceive through IVF and there's no reason to think that we won't be successful, but we do still wonder about the children who we should have been parents to and feel sad.

There are so many children out there who need parents and yet we were prevented from offering them a home. It makes me angry that social workers who are supposed to be helping these children, actually prevented them from being placed in a loving, stable family.

Bev

Having kids was just a given for me, before sexuality was even part of it. When I started having serious relationships, when I was around 18, I was very aware that I wanted to be a parent one day.

It became more of a reality when I met Esther because we established pretty quickly that we both wanted kids. [For Esther's story, see p 127]

In my relationships before, when exes hadn't wanted children it wasn't really a problem because I wasn't sure I'd be with the person forever – but with Esther, I knew. I couldn't imagine not being with Esther.

It's an overpowering urge for me to have children but because I've known for such a long time that it was going to be with a woman, it wasn't necessarily going to be a biological thing for me.

Esther was keen from the start to be a mum in the physical and biological sense. I'm petrified at the thought of giving birth, so it was a very natural decision for us. I count that as very lucky. I've known female couples where one of them wants kids and the other doesn't... it's hard.

Esther and I talked about it seriously for about two years. Then her twin sister got pregnant and that was it! Esther went, "I'm 31, let's do it!"

Friend or anonymous donor?

We had discussed the possibility of using a friend as a donor. I think a lot of lesbians joke and laugh with male friends about them being donors, so if the dynamic changes and you do talk about it seriously, it can be quite daunting.

To start with, I thought using a friend as a donor could work but we discounted it eventually. We discussed it in detail and I increasingly realised that it wasn't what I wanted – the baby having more parents than just the two of us.

So in the end, the decision came down to a private clinic and we had to accept what was involved in the financial side of that. We were fortunate to have enough money to try three times. We decided we'd rather pay than wait

two, three or four years on the NHS. Mostly the worries were about: what if it doesn't work the first time, the second time, the third time and we run out of money? But it worked first time! I couldn't believe it!

Family reaction

My family are a lot better than they used to be. After Esther and I had our civil partnership, we talked seriously about having kids and I got into a fight with my parents when I said it would be Esther carrying the baby. They were upset I wouldn't be the one physically having it, that it wouldn't be their biological grandchild – especially my mum. To me it makes no difference at all. I'm there for the baby from the birth and that's all I care about. I finally got it through to my parents that I wasn't having a child for them!

Even when we did fight, I thought it would be OK in the end because, I felt, 'Who's not going to love this baby?'

Preparing for the procedure

As soon as Esther found out she was pregnant we were both overjoyed. I feel so grateful she did it, that she's going through all these physical changes for us. When she was going through all the early morning blood tests at the clinic – literally 7am every day when you're ovulating – I felt really bad for her. She was really tired and I couldn't do all the mornings, what with work.

The day we got the news that she was ready for the procedure was very exciting. The staff had talked us through it all and you get your own room to relax in and have some privacy, before and after. The treatment itself only took about two minutes!

Esther had a little bit of cramping because you get inseminated via a very thin catheter. You can lie down for as long as you like before you go home.

Then you've got the two week wait before you go back for the blood test. It was excruciating, the wait, absolutely excruciating. Esther was sure she felt pregnant, felt physical changes within only two days – but I was trying

to block it out mentally. I didn't want to get my hopes up. I kept telling myself it was too early to know.

You can find out if you're pregnant at home using pregnancy tests. Esther started doing them early and they were negative. I remember Esther showed me one test and it was negative and I was more disappointed than I had thought I would be. I thought, 'Don't be ridiculous, it's too early, it isn't going to happen the first time.' I realised I would be more upset than I'd thought if it didn't work. I couldn't imagine going through the waiting process again and again. Esther started doing the tests behind my back rather than get my hopes up every time! I preferred it that way.

It worked!

We found out on Boxing Day. At the two week blood test, they ask you if you have tested yourself. Esther said, "Yes, it's positive" and they were a bit cautious, saying, "Don't get excited 'til you get the official blood test results." They phoned that afternoon to say, "Yes, it's confirmed."

The good thing with a private clinic is you get a seven week scan. Usually people have to wait at least 12 weeks. The wait still feels like a lifetime though! You don't really believe there's a baby 'til there's a bump. At the scan, they check that the baby has a heartbeat, is the right size and in the right place. If it's all OK, then you're finished at the clinic and you move on to regular NHS services.

I'm a worrier so I did think about whether there was going to be something wrong with the baby. I'd think about it all day: 'What if it's not OK,' worrying about what we were going to do if we lost the baby.

By 12 weeks, the baby was practically dancing around! It took 45 minutes to get a good picture of it, it was so active. Now, Esther can feel it moving. It'll be two or three weeks before I can. Esther tells me how it feels and it's difficult to imagine, but you feel as excited as each other.

My parents are very excited. They want to buy baby clothes and I'm saying, "Don't buy too many" because I want to buy lots, too! They're happy we're not trying to find out the sex because that's the way it was in their day, a complete surprise.

Now that Esther's pregnant, people are being a bit over protective – 'I'll do this, I'll do that' and 'I can't wait to be with the baby, I can't wait to come and see you in the hospital.' It's sometimes as if people are vying with each other to be more important in the baby's life.

We're like, 'Hold on, the baby's not even here yet!' We're already very protective. It's made us closer.

It has made me start to worry about the responsibility that's involved. Everyone feels like that – at least they should. Esther will go on maternity leave, so there is anxiety there for me around the time that she's off and me being the main breadwinner; but it's more concern about bringing a person up!

The excitement of finding out who this person is going to be overrides that though. Who is it in there? Hello!

My advice to anyone thinking about doing this is: just go for it!

If you're with the right person – or even if you're on your own – it's definitely not something you're going to regret. You have to be prepared for the waiting, the financial side, the fact that it's all-consuming. Don't worry about all the stories and statistics about success rates and how long it'll take and it might not work. You don't know 'til you try.

Carolyn

About eight years ago my partner and I started to think about having children. We've been living together for 11 years, and in a civil partnership for three of those years. My partner always wanted to have children and knew from a young age that she wanted to be a parent.

After talking about it we decided that I would have first go, although my partner thought she might also like to try later on too.

First, this involved me coming off medication for epilepsy, as we knew the medication could harm a foetus. As doctors thought I no longer needed to be on the medication, having been fit free for a long time, this proved to be quite easy and probably the easiest part of the whole process.

Next, we started looking into fertility treatment and were seen by hospital number one. This, however, got us not very far forward as there was a very limited service available and in the end we needed help in finding somewhere more suitable. This turned out to be hospital number two. At the same time we were able to select our donor and order his 'active ingredient' from the European Sperm Bank.

IUI, assisted IUI and IVF

We have been attending hospital number two for several years and have gone through intrauterine insemination (IUI), assisted IUI and IVF treatments. It has been a very long and difficult process, with much heartache, especially when rounds have failed. There have been many problems encountered on the journey, mainly with my insides, and subsequent investigations and treatment have meant that the journey has taken us a lot longer than we ever anticipated.

On our 12th or 13th attempt (we have lost count) – the last attempt for me, I had decided – we successfully got pregnant with the help of Clexane injections.

We are now six months into the pregnancy and although I am having to get more scans and obstetrician appointments than is the norm, things are looking OK at the moment, so fingers crossed we will have our baby in October.

In practical terms, the journey has cost us approx £30,000 and has involved us having to pay for treatment privately. We have managed to pay for the treatments, but when our baby is born we will probably have to make drastic changes to our budgets as our savings have been eaten into quite a bit.

Work, on the whole, has been very supportive. My partner has not encountered any problems getting time off for appointments etc. I have managed to get time off although at times my boss has been reluctant and has sought advice as to whether or not she needs to give it to me.

In emotional terms, the journey has been a roller coaster. Going down the fertility treatment route has meant spending time on waiting lists to see the first hospital, then being disappointed when no service could be given. At the second hospital we paid privately, which meant we were seen and started treatment more quickly, but issues were discovered about my insides which subsequently caused anxiety and more waiting. Failed rounds of treatment caused further disappointment and heartache.

The final positive result was a surprise, a good one, but with all the problems encountered getting to this point, at times I still expect it not to work out and for things to go wrong, which in a way dampens the excitement of the whole thing.

My advice to anyone starting down this road is, don't give up. Start saving early. Don't assume you will get pregnant first time (or at all). Have a support network to help you emotionally eg. partner (very important).

Clare

I never allowed myself to think about children too much, thinking it wouldn't be possible – until I met my partner in my late 20s and we realised that together it could happen. Now my civil partner and I have one child together and are pregnant with our second child, due February 2013.

We decided we wanted children and looked into a range of options. During a conversation with a close straight friend, he volunteered to be a donor and is the bio dad for our son and our child who is yet to be born.

Claire

When I was looking after friends' children and my niece, I thought about having a family of my own.

I have learning disabilities and don't know how to go about GETTING help or advice on having children. I would love to have a child. I'm bisexual.

Claire II

Julie (my partner) is the only person I've been involved with, who I could imagine raising children with. In fact, one of the reasons I knew I was going to marry her was how incredible she is with kids.

We have always talked about it since our relationship started. We're starting to do something about it now that we've returned to Canada from Scotland. We met in Canada and spent a year in Scotland so that she'd get to know my family, friends and culture in a more in-depth way.

Although I ticked 'woman' on my survey response I am a non-binary gender person, genderqueer. While Scotland has come such a long way in terms of LGBTQ rights and visibility, Canada (and Toronto more specifically) really has more LGBTQ parenting visibility and support networks already in place. We have several LGBTQ friends and acquaintances who have become parents and we can have frank and open discussions with them regarding all our concerns or fears.

We are probably going to try and conceive through a donor but right now it's a financial impossibility. We are still discussing whether to go with an anonymous or open ID donor.

As I don't have a desire to be the birth parent, I have struggled with the thought that the child wouldn't feel as bonded towards me or that it wouldn't feel like as big a part of me. However, I know now that just my intention to have a child is already determining the child we have. Had Julie not met me and had a child with someone else, then it would be a different human being altogether.

We both have felt angry at times knowing that it's not as straightforward for us as with heterosexual couples and that we will no doubt be judged more harshly as parents by small-minded people when we're out in public with our children, but these feelings pass and life is really too short.

Plus we have the luxury of living in a city where there are many LGBTQ parenting support networks and we have friends who are already parents.

Dawn

I didn't want children. I'd been in a relationship with Maxine for five years and I felt everything was solid. She was a bit older than me. I was 29, she was 36 and I suppose I was the more feminine of the two. There was nothing I wouldn't have done for her. She wasn't my first relationship but she was the first woman I really fell in love with.

Our family and friends, straight couples, had children and Maxine suggested it would be nice if we had a child.

At first I thought, 'No.' I wasn't interested. I didn't feel in the slightest way maternal, not at all. Then gradually I thought, 'Well, I'll think about it.'

Maxine didn't want to do it [get pregnant]. She wanted me to have a one-night stand with her cousin or one of the boys I worked with. I thought, 'No!' There was no way I was going to have a random sexual fling with any guy – and that's when the idea of artificial insemination came in.

At first Maxine wanted to use someone from her family but I wouldn't do that either. I decided if I was going to do it, it would be artificial insemination through a clinic where all the checks were done and it would be an anonymous donor. I wasn't going to end up with a disease or a disabled child.

Hoping for a no-go

So we wrote a letter to a pregnancy advisory service in Glasgow. I didn't say I was gay. I just said I was single and due to my age felt ready for a baby.

The letter I got back explained that the doctor in Glasgow did not see single women so I would have to go to Liverpool for the initial consultation, counselling and screening. After that, the inseminations themselves could be done in Glasgow.

In a way, I'd hoped the letter would come back a no-go but I ended up going to Liverpool. Maxine didn't go with me. She was going to but some family thing cropped up so I went on my own.

The counsellor discussed having a child, making sure you're doing it for the right reasons. Obviously I convinced her.

I had the medical checks done, the internal. I came away feeling absolutely disgusted, creeped out by it. I came out wanting a shower. I didn't like the doctor, a man with a nurse present. I just didn't want to be doing any of this.

At the consultation you got to discuss the characteristics of the donor. I just went for the same colouring as myself – same eye colour and hair, not African or anything – same likes and dislikes (I was always good at sports). I wanted to make sure that there would be no strange family traits or strong features, just average appearance.

It cost about £150-£200, the consultation in Liverpool. Remember this is 25 years ago.

I came back to Edinburgh thinking I would just put it all behind me. Maybe it would all go away. But a letter came about a month later, saying I was healthy, there was nothing to stop me getting pregnant. It said I should contact the clinic in Glasgow.

I didn't make the appointment straightaway. I kept saying I would, I was always "going to" ...but I didn't.

Then I came home from work one day and Maxine had made the appointment for me.

Artificial insemination

I saw the nurses and they told me to start to take note of my cycle, so I would know when I was ready to ovulate.

Within four months I was pregnant. You got two inseminations each month, a day apart. I would get the train through to Glasgow and I was there for about two hours. You got the insemination and then you had to lie down for half an hour. I'd do it on my day off, arrange my shifts to fit.

I kept thinking it wasn't going to work. Then I missed my period and I felt sick, awfully sick. I went back to the clinic and they confirmed I was pregnant.

I remember going into the toilets at Queen Street, shutting the door and crying for an hour. I would have sat there all afternoon if it wasn't for the attendant banging on the door and asking if I was OK. I said I had a really bad headache and didn't feel very well. She even offered me a cup of tea. I said I was fine now and got the train home.

I went back to the flat. Maxine was very pleased about it, she was happy.

I didn't tell anyone until after the first antenatal, the 12 week scan – not work, not friends, family, nobody. I kept thinking maybe I'd miscarry and not have to tell anybody anything.

Maxine knew I felt like this but she could talk me into anything, I was so in love with her.

After the scan I told my mother, my sister, my brothers. My mum was a bit concerned about two women having a child.

Feeling ill throughout

I felt ill throughout the whole pregnancy, dreadful. I didn't like it. And then the birth, it was horrendous too.

When I got to my 40th week, I'd been for the antenatal in the morning. It was July, a scorching day but I was shivering. My back was aching. I was told it was because I was nearly ready. They said that if I didn't give birth naturally over the weekend, they'd induce. That was Thursday.

I went home with a really bad back but they wouldn't give me any painkillers. They said it was muscular. It was so sore, I was so uncomfortable, I was up all night.

Maxine must have fallen asleep and woken up again because she realised the pain in my back was every 10 minutes. It was contractions, so we went to the hospital. My waters had broken in the night but I was so tired, I hadn't noticed. I'd been to the toilet and there'd been a flood that wouldn't stop but I was so exhausted I just wanted to get back to the chair.

By the time we got to the maternity hospital I was so tired and in such pain that because of foetal distress I had a C section, a general anaesthetic.

Throughout this I remember thinking: 'I'm going through all this to have a child. If the baby dies, let me die with it.'

In amongst all the mayhem, I remember seeing my granny, who'd been dead 10 years, tapping my hand and saying, "It'll be all right, Dawn."

Haemorrhage

I came round in the ward in a lot of pain from the C section and I didn't even know if I'd had a boy or a girl, alive or dead.

I remember asking, "Do I have a baby?" and they brought the baby and lay it on the pillow beside me. The nurse told me it was a wee girl.

I didn't feel love. I remember looking at her and thinking, 'Christ, I'm responsible for this new life.'

I'd lost a lot of blood and I was still groggy. I didn't feel strong enough to hold her so they put her in a cot beside the bed. The way they put her, she wasn't facing me, I was looking at the back of her head. I was hooked up with a drain from my stomach, a catheter...

When I came to, next morning, there were flowers and cards. My sister Ailsa had come down from Aberdeen but I'd no recollection of her being there. She'd tried talking to me but I was talking gibberish.

I think that's when I was told I'd haemorrhaged. I'd lost a lot of blood but they hadn't transferred me to another hospital because I was too ill. They wanted to transfer me then but I didn't want to go. I said if I couldn't stay, I wanted to go home.

I was there a month. I saw loads of girls come in, have their babies, have C sections and move out. The baby was healthy but I was in there for a month so it was a month before she came out.

Early months

I went home, Maxine came home and it was nice. She took us back to the flat

we had and we settled into a routine with Jenny, the baby. I was on maternity leave. Maxine only worked part time so she did most of the caring.

I went back to work after three months. I used to leave the flat at 8am and not be back 'til 5 or 6pm. Sometimes I did night shifts so Maxine still did most of the caring. That suited me fine because I felt I'd done my bit.

For the best part of a year it seemed to work. Maxine did most of the work. I'd come back at night and do a bit – bath Jenny, change her nappy.

The baby went without nothing but emotionally my attachment to Jenny wasn't there.

Financial strains

Babies are financially very wearing. I bought everything for the wee one. Money wasn't an issue but gradually over time Maxine was asking me for more and more, for the baby or for groceries.

For a little while it suited me to do the extra hours but then I started thinking, 'What on earth's she spending this money on?'

I can remember buying a bag of 50 nappies one night, maybe a Monday and by Wednesday Maxine was asking me for more money for nappies and there were only eight left. I thought, 'How can she be using so many nappies?'

I started noticing more – not just nappies but clothes, creams and lotions. It turned out that Maxine's cousin had a child not much different in age, was on benefits and Maxine was helping her out. And it turned out that during the day, Maxine was going out having coffees, having lunches and I was paying.

It started building up, the bitterness, the resentment.

When Jenny was about a year old, there was a baseball event in Glasgow and I bought a little baseball suit for Jenny. It was a lot of money but she did look really cute. She out-grew it but it was still in the drawer. I really liked it.

I mentioned the suit to a girl at work and I was going to give it to her. I went looking for it but I couldn't find it. Maxine told me she couldn't find it either.

A month or so later, we were walking in Princes Street and I saw Maxine's

cousin. I looked into the pram and there was her baby, wearing Jenny's baseball suit. She told me Maxine had bought it for her.

After that, with a bit of detective work, I found out a lot more about creams and baby bath and clothes that Maxine had said had got ripped or destroyed in the wash. They hadn't, the cousin had them.

I exploded big time. The cousin had a man living with her. I said I wasn't bringing up two children.

It stopped for a while, then more resentment started coming up. Maxine said one time that Jenny wasn't her baby, she was my child – and she was having to deal with it!

The argument built up until I told her to get her stuff together and to **** off. It was my flat, my name on all the bills. I was Jenny's biological mother so I was responsible for the child. It was just an argument but a lot was said. I just couldn't take any more.

Jenny was just over two years old when it happened.

Crisis point

I went up to my parents in Oban for a long weekend and took the wee one with me. I met up with an old friend and I suppose because I was feeling so low, I had a brief affair.

I was torn between Maxine and her but I also felt enough was enough. I called Maxine and told her about the affair. When I came back to Edinburgh Maxine was packed and gone.

I was relieved I wouldn't have to talk to her. She'd only taken a bag of clothes so I knew she'd be back. I phoned a locksmith and had the locks changed. I phoned her sister, asking when she wanted to remove the rest of her belongings.

There was a period after that when she was wanting to come back to live in my flat but I wouldn't have it.

The girl next door was looking after Jenny for me and I was looking into

putting her in a day nursery but all that fell through because financially I couldn't cope with it. I used all my holiday entitlement but it wasn't enough so I had to pack in my job.

Eventually my sister Ailsa realised something wasn't right with me. She came down and got me to go to the benefits office and get sorted. I'd never been in a benefits office in my life. I found it very difficult. I'd never spent that amount of time with Jenny either, being a full-time mother.

I struggled for about a year and then I contacted social services. Ailsa and my brother-in-law were going to adopt Jenny because I didn't feel I could cope. Because it was in the family and they didn't have anything to prevent them taking on a child it was quite straightforward. But a week before the signing of the final papers, I had a heart to heart with Ailsa.

She said once the adoption went through, she would never deny that I was Jenny's mother but there would be no going back. To all intents and purposes they'd be the parents, deciding schooling and everything. I wouldn't be able to dip in and out. Jenny would be their child, not mine.

We sat up all night, talked and cried. I decided I wanted to keep Jenny. I wanted to be her mother. By this time Jenny was four going on five, about to start school. I started to be a proper mother then.

Close call

Before the adoption idea, after Maxine left me, I did attempt suicide. I had gone up to Aberdeen, where my brother-in-law Nick had a garage and sold cars. My sister had taken the wee one out and Nick had gone out and locked up the garage.

I didn't know what I was doing, I was out of it. (I'd dropped about seven stone, I was a bag of bones). I'd gone into the kitchen, taken the keys for the garage, taken a car out of the forecourt, locked up the garage again and put the keys back in the house.

I knew the area. I'd taken a hose from the garage and I took the car and was heading to a spot a mile away. I'd decided the wee one was better off with my sister and brother-in-law.

Meanwhile, Nick had come back and seen one of his cars was missing. He knew I was feeling down so instead of calling the police he called family and friends to scour the area.

What I didn't know was, he only kept enough petrol in the cars to move them around the forecourt. I only had enough petrol to get me just out of the village. Nick's brother found me in the car, sobbing. I couldn't even get that right.

I had a breakdown. It was only after that, that I had thought about the adoption.

Fresh start

When Jenny started school I got a cleaning job. I had help and support from my sister-in-law. There were two gay guys I knew at the time, Oscar and Lee, who were great – I couldn't have done without them. Jenny grew up knowing them as Uncle Oscar – he was like a mother hen – and Uncle Lee.

Oscar at the time was a drag queen, so he was on the circuit. Lee had a job as a civil servant. It was through Oscar that I became a housekeeper for four guys, entertainers who had a flat share. They had jobs through the day and were female impersonators at night.

I'd make cash in hand, cleaning their flat, occasionally helping out with their dresses, keeping them ironed, picking up their costumes.

One of the boys, Don, used to buy Jenny 'Thomas the Tank' juices for when she came with me. These men with Thomas the Tank juices in their fridge! Jenny used to call them 'the ladymans' because she saw them dressed up.

There were some funny times. Don used to wear a mink stole as part of his act and one day Jenny must've picked up the stole from a chair and she was stroking it like a cat. They were in fits of laughter.

Things started picking up. I was enjoying Jenny more. We did have a laugh and some good times.

One night they talked me into getting made up so I looked like I had a 5 o'clock shadow. I used to sing then, too. I was known as Oor Elvis. Sometimes I scared myself as I thought, 'They like me too much.'

As Jenny got older, I thought I should tone it down. I remember we went on a school trip to the zoo and the guy had taken out two snails and was talking about 'this snail and his girlfriend.' Jenny said, "My mummy's got a girlfriend" and everyone was looking back and just smiling.

She went through primary and secondary and all the usual stuff, where they think they know it all.

I had a few relationships in between but I never had anyone stay over that I hadn't been seeing for a length of time. She never came in in the morning and saw a stranger in my bed.

Jenny was about 10 when Don and the boys sold the flat and moved down to London, so I no longer acted as housekeeper. That's when I started working in a care home.

New relationships

Around that time, when Jenny was 10 or 11, there was a lesbian mothers' group starting up in Edinburgh but they were all women who'd been married, had kiddies, spilt with their husbands and decided they were gay and looking for a partner. I didn't relate to them. I'd been with a female partner and gone through insemination, it was different for me. I didn't feel I belonged.

So I went through to a lesbian group in Glasgow and met May, who'd had a child by artificial insemination in London. It was a good friendship and our girls were close in ages but she wanted more from the relationship than me so I stopped contact with her.

My partner now is Emma. We had a civil partnership last year. When I was 18 I joined the army – the WRAC – and Emma was in the same intake. We didn't really get on then because we're very different. I was always out and about doing while she had her nose in a book. Our lives went in different ways. She got married and had children.

We met up again at a WRAC reunion about five years ago. We got speaking and realised, through photographs, that we'd known each other 'way back. We started meeting for coffee as friends and over time it just grew into more. I'm in a happier place now.

As far as Maxine goes, she went to London when Jenny was two and came back to Edinburgh when Jenny was 13. I was in Asda shopping and this woman was looking at me, staring. She was dishevelled and because I was a support worker, I thought she must be an old client. She came over and said my name and I thought, 'Where do I know you from?' It was only when I looked into her eyes that I knew it was Maxine.

She looked older, in poor health through drinking, smoking; she dabbled in drugs. She started telling me I was the only woman she'd ever really loved, she was sorry, we should never have broken up – and she started talking to Jenny.

I didn't see her again, I was in a relationship but I think she and Jenny met up a couple of times. She made out we'd only split up because of things I'd done, which caused a lot of conflict between Jenny and me in her teenage years.

Jenny has no contact with Maxine today but for that period, until Jenny was 16, she caused problems. I tried to give Jenny the freedom to choose but when she went off the rails and got pregnant, I told Maxine enough was enough and to get out of our lives.

Daughter and son

Jenny has a son now – Ruaridh – and oh, he's just amazing! He's seven years old and there's nothing I wouldn't do or give up for the wee man. And the strange thing is, I look into his face and the resemblance is so strong, it's like looking at pictures of me as a child, only with short hair rather than long. He's so much like me.

I dote on him. I can love and care and do things for him, things I could never do with Jenny. I think she sometimes gets jealous of the bond I have with him that I didn't have with her.

But Jenny's OK. She has a part-time job. At times my relationship with her is strained, at other times it's very good. I think our earlier years have affected things. Sometimes we can be very close but she won't listen to me if I think a course of action she's taking is very wrong. She can be so pig-headed. Ailsa says I was like that when I was a teenager. I'd do what I wanted and to hell with the consequences.

I am over 50 but I am more settled now than I've been all my life. It's just taken 50 years to get here.

If I see Maxine now I cross the street. She's an alcoholic, living in disabled housing. She looks that bad, I wouldn't even want anyone to acknowledge I ever had anything to do with her.

But if it hadn't been for Maxine I wouldn't have Jenny or Ruaridh.

Erin

I've been in a committed relationship for nearly 10 years and throughout all of that – even before that, since I was a teenager – children have been at the forefront of my mind. Coming out as a lesbian didn't affect my thinking, it just added the practical question of 'How?'

I have a physical, biological urge to have children but my partner doesn't so it was easy to decide who would be the tummy mummy.

We approached a gay friend as a donor. It was over a few glasses of wine. He nearly fell off the sofa! He'd never considered it and understandably he needed some time. So over the course of a year we spent time together, thinking how it might be.

But things changed for him. He was promoted at work and he began to realise that he wasn't ready – but my biological clock was ticking.

Opting for the NHS

Once he decided, it helped in a way. It had felt like it was so out of our control, waiting for him to decide, that we realised we just wanted it to be us, me and my partner, in our family. It was about me and her and our joint future. So in October 2009 we approached our NHS nurse practitioner. She knew us and she's really LGBT friendly.

I'm lucky because the work I do means I know what's going on. I knew there had been a recent case⁵ in which Glasgow Health Board had been taken to tribunal for not providing assisted conception to a same-sex couple, so I felt confident that I could challenge a decision if we were refused.

It's still the case that some local health boards don't give fertility treatment to same sex couples – their policies just don't acknowledge them and/or they say there's a shortage of donor sperm. (There was a change in legislation – the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act – which meant donors couldn't remain anonymous as a child needs to be able to trace its parents if it wants, once it's 18).

⁵ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/7913082.stm

The nurse practitioner was great. We saw her at our local GP practice and she referred us to a consultant in Dumfries Royal Infirmary. We had our first appointment with her in December 2009. She told us that although Dumfries & Galloway Health Board's policy still didn't include same-sex couples, there was a real willingness to change... but it wouldn't happen overnight.

On the holding list

We were placed on a holding list until West of Scotland NHS boards met to discuss changing their policies. However, it didn't feel as if nothing was happening. The consultant checked my fertility, did blood tests, took our medical histories (both myself and my partner) and in January 2010 she referred me for an HSG test (a hysterosalpingogram) to see if my fallopian tubes were OK.

We were then in limbo for a bit until the policy was changed but in August 2010 we were referred to Greater Glasgow for treatment. Dumfries & Galloway can't do it in-house as they don't have the facilities to store donor sperm.

There was then another six month wait to get an appointment in Glasgow.

By then it was January 2011. They explained the treatment options to us. Through Greater Glasgow, Dumfries & Galloway would fund three cycles of IUI (intrauterine insemination) and, if that was unsuccessful, two cycles of IVF (in vitro fertilisation) – but they wouldn't fund the supply of donor sperm. I argued back and forth about that, as there's no point them funding IUI if there isn't any donor sperm but I realised I wasn't getting anywhere.

I don't know if that's what happens in all local health boards. Women living in Greater Glasgow get sperm free but they say they don't have enough to supply women from outside.

Using a sperm bank

So we had to get a loan to get donor sperm. My mum re-mortgaged her house. It costs about £3,000 to use the European Sperm Bank as they ask you to buy all the sperm you might need for all the IUI and IVF cycles, to make sure you have enough.

You get lots of information about the donor via the sperm bank. A photo of him as a child, a Myers Briggs personality profile, his medical history including his family.

It was another nine months before we get to the top of the waiting list. It's worse in some places, people have to wait longer but there aren't so many women in Dumfries & Galloway.

Even so, I was ready to have a baby when I first asked my friend in 2007 and I still don't have one. Your biological clock doesn't stop. I'm 39.

Eventually we reached the top of the waiting list and I began treatment. It was really bizarre. When we realised the ball was finally starting to roll it was such a high, we weren't ready for the emotional roller coaster. In the space of about two weeks I turned from a normal rational person into mayhem.

Starting treatment

I think some clinics have different approaches and not all of them opt for drug therapy straight away as it is quite invasive – but my menstrual cycle wasn't totally predictable and as I was a bit older when I started treatment, they decided to start me on a series of fertility drugs.

The treatment for IUI began with a nasal spray, four times a day, which stops your natural cycle and gives them control. It basically makes you perimenopausal, complete with all the symptoms. I was a mess.

You carry the nasal spray around with you all day and set alarms to take it. It's really demanding.

I was on that non-stop from the beginning of November to the end of February. Then I went to Glasgow for a scan and blood tests to see if the spray had done what it was meant to have done.

If it has, you start a daily, self-administered injection to stimulate your follicles.

Every two days while I was taking injections I had to go to Glasgow for blood tests or a scan and blood tests. It was a 5 hour journey door to door, so it was a real commitment.

It really helps to have a sympathetic employer. I didn't intend to but I ended up being signed off sick. I get menstrual migraines anyway and with all the hormones I was injecting, I had migraines, hot flushes, mood swings, acute anxiety – just feeling really out of control and emotional. That coupled with the demands of getting to Glasgow for 9am every two days made work untenable.

The clinic didn't want more than one follicle to ripen due to the risk of multiple births. When the scans show one leader follicle is just about right, they give you a booster injection which is designed to make you ovulate. Exactly 42 hours later you're inseminated.

Hopes raised and dashed

You have the insemination and you think, 'Yay!' and you start analysing everything that's going on in your body and manically watch fertility forums where people are posting all kinds of symptoms. You're also desperately trying not to test early as you're advised not to – but everyone is and getting negative results and getting depressed.

You become one of a desperate community of women, desperately wanting children.

It's a lot of pressure. If I'm honest, because I had been waiting so long, when it all started I wasn't prepared for a negative result – and when I got it I was devastated.

You start to think: how many shots do I have left now? What was a possibility becomes a diminishing possibility.

Peer support has been critical to me, straight and lesbian friends who are going through the same process. And the staff at Glasgow have been great. Happy for you to call them up and ask your questions. A really positive thing.

So, I've now been through all my IUI processes with negative results, and the next stage is IVF. More form filling and again, we had to wait to reach the top of the list.

I've been on a break for two months which is good as I've been taken off the drugs and I feel like a normal human being again. But time is still ticking on.

The first baseline appointment for IVF is in the middle of May and I guess the next treatment will start in July. I expect it will be similar to the last time but with greater dosages of hormones to get as many eggs as possible. I think they do the egg retrieval under local anaesthetic, hopefully transferring two embryos when they are fertilised – touch wood.

It's been full on and it's equally hard for my other half. She's not just had the waiting and the disappointment, she's had to cope with a dysfunctional partner. It can be too easy to turn on each other. Luckily we have a strong relationship.

I'm trying to remain quietly optimistic but there are no guarantees. IVF has a higher chance of success because sperm will meet the egg – with IUI you don't even know if fertilisation has taken place.

I'll have two rounds of egg retrieval, hopefully with more than one fertilised embryo to work on.

If it doesn't work... I can't really think about that yet but we'll probably think of fostering and adoption. I desperately want to have my own child, I always have done, so I'll want to exhaust all avenues.

Postscript

I had IVF in August, and they managed to retrieve eight eggs, four of which were successfully fertilised via intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI). I had a rough trot on egg retrieval, and ended up admitted to hospital with morphine for pain relief. I think they perforated something and I struggled for a week or two after to manage the pain.

I got an early pregnancy positive a couple of days before my official test date (ecstatic as you might imagine) and got another positive after a blood test at the hospital. They weren't overly happy with the levels however, so decided to test again four days later and by that time I had lost the pregnancy.

It was the weirdest feeling – so much loss for something that barely even lived, but I suppose all our hopes and dreams of many years were tied up in those two faint lines, only to have them dashed a few days later.

With a bit of time for physical and emotional recovery, I am about to have frozen embryo transfer, and so am on a regimen of enforced menopause followed by HRT yet again.

I'm struggling a bit with it to be fair, and am about to be signed off for two weeks to ensure I am fully rested, particularly because I miscarried last time. All we can do is hope...

Esther

I've always wanted to be a mum. I didn't think about it seriously until I was about 26 and now I'm 31 and 17 weeks pregnant.

Bev and I met four years ago. [For Bev's story, see p 102]. Within a few months we both knew we wanted children, though we didn't know at that stage that we wanted them together.

In my last relationship it was clear that children weren't an option. With Bev I was glad it was. Friends of mine have split up because one wanted children and the other not, or because they were worried about bringing children up in a same sex relationship.

We got married – a civil partnership – last summer. We did talk about having children beforehand and at one point we thought we should start before the wedding, at the beginning of the year, as we'd heard all the stories about it taking forever. It felt urgent. Now I'm glad we decided to stop reading the stuff that was making us panic and focus on the wedding. It meant we could enjoy our honeymoon in Italy and just be together.

Investigating the NHS

At one point, when Bev and I had been together for about two years, before I proposed and a wedding was on the cards, we decided I should talk to my doctor about waiting lists and what was involved on the NHS.

The first thing they did was a urine test on day 21 of my cycle. At the time I was grateful they were taking me seriously but in hindsight, the test wasn't very reliable. The GP had to do it to refer us. Later, our private clinic said they never use those tests as they don't really tell you much.

The NHS clinic said that as we didn't have any donor sperm to give and Edinburgh didn't have an active sperm donation programme, we would be put on a holding list for up to four years.

If there was no sperm and we weren't offered treatment in that time, that was it.

Bev was disappointed, I was half expecting it. One of the frustrations for me is that fertility treatment is different in different NHS areas. We were never told about or given an option to buy in sperm from a foreign sperm bank – at the time I didn't know that could be a choice. But I do know a couple who are using internationally sourced sperm via the NHS.

Which donation option?

After the honeymoon, Bev and I talked openly about wanting children. When we spoke to friends about it, one male couple in particular said, “Why haven't you asked us?”

We did explore this option as they are great friends and would be fantastic extended family – but they were interested in being fathers rather than donors and it just seemed too difficult.

Who would be the grandparents? Would there be four sets? What would happen at Christmas?

In the end, Bev and I had a serious conversation about what we wanted. It was important for us to be really honest with each other. I felt guilty saying no to friends that wanted to have a child, especially as those friends didn't have the biological make-up to have children themselves. I felt selfish but we decided we just wanted the two of us as the main parents.

There was only one way for us and that was donation through a private clinic.

Then suddenly my twin sister got pregnant. I had lots of different feelings. It took her six months of trying and she had free access to sperm! What if I couldn't do it?

Going private

Once you've made the decision to have a child by insemination, you are at the mercy of other people's opening hours and timetables, so we looked at local clinics. The nearest were IVF Scotland in Edinburgh and the Nuffield in Glasgow (see p 210). Prices were similar so we decided to go for the Edinburgh one because it was closer, though it was less well known.

When we looked the pricing was complicated – £600 for intra-uterine insertion (IUI) plus lots of add-ons eg. £200 per consultation then nurse's fees, blood tests etc and you had to see a counsellor – so we estimated it would cost £1,400-£1,600 per treatment cycle. So we looked at our savings and we waited until we had enough for three treatments. I'd done lots of research and that's what it said you needed.

I was obsessed by success rates as they seemed so low. It was confusing as different research would say different things but generally it seemed that 10-15% was a normal success rate for IUI, which is what we thought we would have.

Research

My background research included looking at clinic websites and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, HFEA. The London Women's clinic had lots of information.

There's also a book, *The New Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception, Pregnancy & Birth*, by Stephanie Brill, which covers every way a lesbian, bi or trans man could get pregnant. It is very American so not everything is relevant in the UK but it does make the point that clinic success rates don't reflect lesbian success rates. For most lesbians lack of pregnancy is about lack of sperm not fertility whereas most heterosexual couples have been trying for at least a year and have known fertility problems.

There's a really good research paper about lesbian and straight women getting pregnant that's worth reading, *Intrauterine donor insemination in single women and lesbian couples: a comparative study of pregnancy rates* [See p 212].

The IVF Scotland experience

The Edinburgh clinic offered a free 15 minute tour with a nurse which I'd recommend. I don't know if other clinics do it. It gave us the chance to ask lots of questions. Our nurse was really nice. We'd heard there was only a 10% chance the treatment would be a success but she told us to forget the numbers. She made us feel it was more of an individual process than a game of statistics.

Once we'd had the walk-through, things happened very quickly. At that stage you're not obliged to go forward, you're free to never go back but we had a really good feeling and within 24 hours we'd booked a consultation. We had an appointment within two weeks.

The consultation itself was quite clinical. The consultant just threw a lot of practical questions at us – what my cycle was like, how much I drank. We came out thinking: have we just spent £200 just to have a 40 minute meeting? But we had to see him to go forward.

There was also an internal examination that I wasn't really prepared for – no one mentioned this would happen during the consultation. I think that the consultant wasn't really thinking through some of the issues that could have come up for me – like, 'Maybe an internal exam with a male consultant might make her feel nervous.' I felt it was all quite rushed and a bit rough. I did ask during the free meeting with the nurses if we could have a female consultant but we were told that as the procedures rely on your cycle, it just depends who is available on those days.

They wouldn't do in vitro fertilisation (IVF), although we did ask. The success rates are higher but it is a lot more expensive. We thought, 'Why not just go straight for that if it's going to be more successful?' The consultant said it wasn't an option until we'd tried IUI at least twice because it's invasive – you need an operation to take eggs – it involves hormone injections and, as a young healthy woman, I probably wouldn't need it anyway.

After the consultation I was weighed, had my blood pressure taken and gave a urine sample. This was all carried out by nurses.

Everything came down to the timing of my periods after that. I'd been using my iPhone app to track my cycle for the last six months so I could tell him exactly.

It was so exciting. We hadn't told anyone except one of our best friends yet. I didn't want to detract from my sister's news and it made it feel special: this was just our secret.

Around this point that we found out the clinic was simplifying their prices. The IUI package was less than we'd thought – £960 plus £200 in consultant's fees which covered the first meeting and a review session.

After the consultation, you also have to have a counselling session and a session with a nurse as part of the procedure. We managed to get both on the same day.

We saw the nurse and the counsellor within 10 days of our consultation, which was ideal as my cycle was due to begin soon after that.

Counselling session

The counsellor asks a list of questions, some they have to because the sperm is donated, some about child protection, others to check you're emotionally prepared. Like: "Why have you decided to do this? Have you ever harmed a child? Have you discussed this as a couple?"

I felt she had a list which she used for straight couples that she changed for us, eg. "How do your families feel about you having a child together? How does your mum feel about you having donated sperm? Have you ever encountered homophobia?"

I felt a bit patronised by some of the questions which I didn't think they'd ask a straight couple but maybe that's because I work in equality. Bev enjoyed having the chance to talk about it and we did discuss some things that we hadn't discussed already so that was useful.

Meeting with the nurse

The nurse explains the medical procedure you're going to have in detail, from the blood tests to how the procedure takes place and where it takes place. They also give you advice on healthy eating etc. And you have to choose your donor profile for your donated sperm. Height, eye colour, blood type, job, ethnicity.

The donor has the option to write a 'pen sketch.' That's what swung it for us. Some wrote things like, 'I love playing golf and going to the pub with my friends.' The one we chose wrote to the child, saying they were open to meeting and interested in family history. I liked that.

Of course, if you have money to get sperm from a big European agency you can choose donor characteristics to the ultimate level – education etc

but sperm from overseas sperm clinics is about £600 a go (I don't think that includes storage at your private clinic). Some of the sperm banks we looked at were the European Sperm Bank and Cryos. But in the end we just wanted a healthy baby.

Day 1 exam

You have to go in on Day 1 of your next period, the first proper day of bleeding. You phone and say you need to come in tomorrow for a Day 1 exam and they give you a time; at Edinburgh the appointment and later blood tests were almost always between 7-9am.

One thing I'd say is, if you're thinking of doing this it's worth thinking about the fact that you're likely to need quite a lot of time off work. My clinic was in Midlothian so I had to get up at 5am sometimes just to get there on time.

During the Day 1 exam, they do a blood test for Luteinising Hormone (LH), check you can take a catheter in your womb (for the sperm) and do a transvaginal scan.

The scan is like the one they put on your tummy but it's an internal one. They have a look at your womb and follicles in each ovary and measure them. They don't tell you much. The consultant would say things to the nurse like, "Only six on one side, which is lower than average" and "The blood test had a lower score than expected" without saying if it meant there was something wrong.

The consultant also seemed to have a problem – or be nervous – about the fact that we were two women eg. he held up the probe and said, 'Now you can't take this home ladies,' which I'm sure he wouldn't have said to a female/male couple.

We didn't complain at the time but I did complain later about how impersonal it was and the times we were left waiting at 7am or moved from room to room. Bev was quite worried about complaining as they have all the power – maybe they wouldn't do the treatment properly and use water instead of sperm! – but I thought, 'We've just spent £1,000!' It felt quite good as the results of complaining were almost immediate. Both the nurse and the consultant apologised and we got better service from then on.

After the scan, you're not due in 'til Day 10 but then you have to go in every day for blood tests. They're looking for a surge in your LH hormone which usually happens between Day 10 and Day 18 (middle of your cycle). They phoned me every afternoon to tell me the results of the blood work.

At first Bev was determined to come to everything with me but when it means getting up at 5am to go all that way for a five minute blood test, there's no point. When it comes down to it, you can't both be in it all the way. Things like that can cause a bit of resentment – I was a bit jealous of her cosy bed while I trekked about in the snow – but as long as you talk about it, it's OK.

Your LH level will gradually rise until, 36-48 hours before ovulation, it will suddenly jump dramatically. Until they see the jump, you need to go back in the next day and the next day etc. Eventually comes the magical day when they say they've seen the surge and they tell you to come in tomorrow for treatment.

The procedure itself

Basically you turn up and they put a catheter through your cervix into your womb. Your cervix is open anyway because you're fertile.

We got shown to a private room. I got a fluffy gown to wear and tea and coffee – it was like a five star hotel: very nice. You wait until they're ready for you because there's a queue of women ahead of you and because the technician has to defrost your sperm and wash it. They can't do that in advance. We were waiting around for an hour. The nurses were great though. They checked in with us and made sure we knew what was happening.

You don't need to be in the operating theatre for the procedure but you may be, if the consultant's working in there anyway. I did and Bev got to put on scrubs so it was very exciting!

A nurse gets you ready on a medical bed with stirrups. You wear a medical gown and your partner sits next to you. They show you the vial of sperm with the details on so you know you've got the right lot. They constantly check your name too, so there's no mistake.

The consultant uses a speculum to open up the vagina and puts the catheter in your womb. Then they inject the sperm into the catheter and that's it. The

consultant leaves. It takes less than three minutes. The sperm looks like water.

The nurse covers you in blankets and you can lie there for up to 10 minutes with your partner beside you, before going back to your room. They stress that once the sperm's inside you it can't fall out when you stand up but it was quite nice, lying there.

You can stay in your private room or the lounge as long as you want. We stayed for about an hour because I just felt better lying in a horizontal position. Then we got the bus home.

Within two hours of the treatment I had cramps like period pains. You obsess about symptoms and I was convinced I was pregnant by Day 4. Bev bought 27 cheap pregnancy tests and two Clearblue Digitals. I was doing two a day.

Waiting is a scary time. Bev in particular was very upset at the prospect of it not working, more so than you think you'll be when you're prepared for it.

When I was obsessing about symptoms, I spent a lot of time on the LGBT forum at Fertility Friends. They have a page, the 2-week-wait (2ww), for people waiting for the results. It's good because you have lots of crazy thoughts after insemination. You analyse everything, from waking up a bit early to a slight tenderness in your boobs or a funny taste in your mouth. Am I pregnant or is it just my period?

Results

It worked first time! We found out I was pregnant on Boxing Day. I did a test and there was just one line and I chucked it in the bin. Then I woke up at 6am thinking, 'I didn't leave it long enough, not three minutes.' So I fished it out of the bin and it was positive! Of course I did another few after that just to be sure!

You have to go back to the clinic for a blood test 14 days after insemination. They measure for a hormone – I think it's the pregnancy hormone, human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG). It was exciting. We'd known for three days but because part of you is thinking, 'This can't be real, it can't have happened already,' it's really reassuring to hear them say, "The hormone level is high, it's definitely a pregnancy."

Once that's done you only have to go back and see them five weeks after insemination, when they do another transvaginal scan to look at the baby. In pregnancy terms you are already seven weeks pregnant as they count from the first day of your last period. At this stage the baby is only like a butter bean but they check its heartbeat and that it's not an ectopic pregnancy.

There's lots of form filling at that stage eg. status of civil partnership for the birth certificate. The consultant shook our hands and said congratulations, which was a nice way to end.

That said, a nurse – she was being nice but she did keep saying, “I'm so glad you are able to do this,” which made us feel a bit uncomfortable. You do wish they wouldn't make you feel different but you'll take anything after they give you a positive result – but again, maybe I'm being over sensitive because I work in equality.

There's no pregnancy care from the clinic after your seven weeks. Until then you can call them anytime if you're anxious. They give you forms to show your doctor to show you're pregnant but they're not in contact with your GP, it's your responsibility to give your blood test results to the GP.

I'm now 17 weeks along and I've seen the scans and heard the heartbeat but it still doesn't feel totally real. I'm still in shock a bit, especially as it happened first time.

I told Mum and Dad after seven weeks. It was our big secret until then. I remember thinking, ‘How the hell are we going to tell them now, when they have had no warm up that we are trying?’

I just blurted it out after dinner one night. My dad's jaw hit the floor and my mum was happy hysterical. Then they started reminiscing about having twins! This will practically be the same thing, as my sister and I have due dates exactly 11 weeks apart.

We don't want to know the sex of the baby. Having known so much about the process, it's nice to not know and have a sense of anticipation.

I'm due 4 September. We're just excited to be having a baby. We don't care what comes out.

Fiona and Jane

Fiona: My partner Jane gave birth to our son Mitchell in January and I am seven months pregnant with our second child. They have the same father – Graeme, who is a friend – and he will have contact with them through their lives. [For Graeme’s story, see p 22]

We spent three years planning and discussing it before we got pregnant. We both always wanted children and as a couple we talked about it from early on, before we got married. We’ve been together five years and had a civil partnership three years ago. We’d probably been together two years when we started to do the research.

Known donor, or a clinic?

We went to see the doctor and she gave us the pre-pregnancy blood tests and we were put on the donor waiting list. However, when we spoke to them about using Graeme as a donor, they removed us from the list as they don’t inseminate with known donors in the Edinburgh region. This differs between councils as they have different funding priorities

I’ve known Graeme for about 10 years and Jane’s known him around five. He’s very handsome and has a really lovely nature.

We wanted to be the main parents but we also wanted Graeme and his family to be involved in the children’s lives so they will know their heritage. We wanted their upbringing to be as ‘normal’ and happy as possible, and didn’t want them to have questions about where they came from that we were unable to answer.

It all started as a bit of a joke with Graeme. Then, after six months of joking about it, we asked him seriously and he agreed.

Jane: He did change his mind a few times, twice that was significant. The first time was before we started trying the inseminations, the second was when I was four months pregnant and we were supposed to start trying for Fiona to conceive.

The first time was probably because a mutual friend worried him by asking questions, especially about his financial responsibilities. That's one of the reasons why we did a lot of research into the legal side. We wanted to know all about our own parental rights and responsibilities too, for example: if we didn't go through a clinic, would the biological parents be on the birth certificate? Who is responsible for the child, especially financially? Could Graeme take the children from us? We discovered there are a lot of gray areas.

We did a lot of research online and we contacted a family law organisation in Edinburgh but they didn't have the correct information to help us, and would have to do their own research to find the actual legalities. We already knew more than them. It's still a very new area.

Fiona: Then we heard about the specialist fertility lawyers, Gamble and Ghevaert, in England and we spoke to them over the phone. They gave us some free advice but mentioned that there were loopholes in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, and a Skype conference call to find out more would cost us £500. We decided to look into it ourselves instead.

The important thing is because we have a civil partnership our names can go on the birth certificate. If we weren't civil partners, my name couldn't go on the birth certificate unless we had used a clinic.

Jane: We did look at clinics once, when Graeme changed his mind the first time but I really didn't like the idea of having an unknown person as the father. Boys in particular need to know who their dads are. Fiona's dad wasn't allowed contact with his dad and we have other friends who haven't known their fathers and it's caused them a lot of problems.

Another thing was the thought of donors having other children and our kids having half-brothers and half-sisters they wouldn't know about.

Then there was the money. Clinics seemed to cost up to £3,000 a try, depending on where you went. A lot of money that could be spent on the kids themselves.

Fiona: We also looked into a website called co-parents.net, which is like match.com for people of any sexuality who want to find a sperm donor, surrogate or someone to have a child with. It really freaked us out. It may help some people but we found some very strange people on there!

Jane: We also wanted our children to be biologically related, which we couldn't guarantee with a clinic. We have friends who went back to a clinic wanting the same donor, but they'd run out of their donor's sperm.

Fiona: Luckily Graeme changed his mind about trying for a baby. But when he came to us he said, "I really want to give this to you as a gift." He saw himself as a donor so we had to talk him into having some involvement with the children, while reassuring him that he wouldn't be financially liable and responsible for meeting their everyday care needs.

Getting pregnant

Fiona: Initially we planned for me to get pregnant first and then we would try with Jane 4-6 months later, but as Jane is a couple of years older we figured it would be better for Jane to try first in case it took a year to work. Plus, if she wanted to have a second child, it would be better for her to have her first before she was 35, as it becomes harder to conceive after this time, and the risk of the child having a disability is increased.

Jane: I got pregnant first time but a lot of research went into how to make this happen. You have to work out when you are ovulating, which is normally 12 to 14 days after the first day of your last period, depending on your cycle. Ovulation sticks are then used to test exactly when you are most fertile. When the sticks show a positive result you have a 48 hour window when your chances of conceiving are higher. The sticks are expensive to buy in chemists but you can get them cheap online.

Around the time I expected to be fertile there was a week when Graeme was 'on call.' When the tests showed positive we phoned him to come round and, using a kit of sterile cups and syringes we'd bought on the internet, we carried out the insemination.

We researched methods to ensure we would maximise the chances of getting pregnant first time. It helps to keep the sperm warm and to make sure the syringe is as far up as possible and the sperm is released slowly. It is recommended that you have an orgasm then lie with your legs up for at least 40 minutes afterwards. It is also advisable to carry out this process again within a 24 hour period.

Jane: We got a Clear Blue early pregnancy test at 10 days. I was convinced I

wasn't pregnant because I was getting cramps like period pains. Much to our delight and surprise the test came up positive. We were preparing ourselves for it to take up to a year to work as allegedly the chances of conception are lower through artificial insemination than sexual intercourse.

Celebration and stress

Fiona: At the time of the insemination, I felt very involved but there were other times when I felt powerless. The month before we tried successfully, Jane and Graeme decided they wanted to wait a month as Jane didn't want a Christmas baby. At this time I felt like I had no control over the situation and it was the first time I recognised that there would always be three of us in our relationship. However, after talking things through extensively we all learned to respect each other's views and feelings.

I struggled a bit at 8-12 weeks, too. I think we were all coming to terms with the pregnancy and we were busy redecorating the house. The pregnancy was now a reality and I couldn't work out what my role was. A lot of people saw it as Jane's baby, not ours.

Having discussed this with friends in similar situations, it seems to be common for the non-biological parent to have these feelings. We'd just assumed we would both be equal parents, like a heterosexual couple having a baby but in reality everyone else in society doesn't view it this way so the non-biological parent can feel a bit detached.

I also felt a lot of uncertainty about whether I would get pregnant too.

Jane: There was added stress as Graeme changed his mind about trying for the second baby when I was four months pregnant with Mitchell. We'd always agreed we would have the children close together but the reality of becoming a dad caused Graeme to have second thoughts at the time we were due to start trying. He hadn't come to terms with becoming a dad to one child and felt overwhelmed by the thought of fathering two children so close together.

Fiona: His stress and reconsideration were fuelled by wrong information that he would be financially responsible and we could pursue him for child maintenance. Graeme would never be liable as we are civil partners and the non-biological mother can go on the birth certificate as the other parent and

therefore has all parental rights and responsibilities. We had some difficulty confirming this but sought advice from the specialist lawyers in Kent (Gamble and Ghevaert) and provided this information to Graeme in writing. Graeme also met a solicitor who confirmed this information was correct, and this reassured him enough to agree to the second insemination.

Jane: There's a loophole in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act which means that if Graeme could prove he'd had sex with me, or vice versa, he could gain parental rights and responsibilities and would therefore be financially liable. Obviously this did not happen and could not be proven on either side.

Fiona: Once we included Graeme in our research, he felt more at ease. We just hadn't thought about how he was feeling. Once he felt reassured, he agreed to try again.

Jane: The reason for having the children so close in age was so they can offer each other support as they grow up.

Fiona: And for practical and financial reasons. Jane will take a year off work with Mitchell and I'll take a year with this one [pats bump], so there will be six months when we are off together. This will allow us the time to bond with both of them and we won't have to rely on childcare.

Jane was about five and a half months pregnant when I got pregnant. We didn't think it would work first time but we are ecstatic that it did. We've found out we're having a girl, due in July.

Jane: Our parents are all delighted. Friends and family are all really supportive. And we've got a new family with Graeme's relatives. It feels like there are 10 grannies and granddads.

Fiona: Both our employers have been really supportive as well. I've been quite ill through my pregnancy and needed a lot of time off work as morning sickness comes all through the day and hasn't subsided as the weeks have gone on! It's been nice in some ways as it's meant I've had more time with Mitchell.

Jane: My pregnancy itself was fairly normal, although I had nosebleeds and I was tired from travelling a lot with work.

Fiona: Jane had an horrific labour.

Jane: I was in labour for four days and Mitchell was eventually delivered by forceps. He was in the wrong position which made it really painful. I had to have a blood transfusion afterwards.

Two hours after he was born Mitchell stopped breathing and was rushed away to Intensive Care. We didn't know for an hour if he had been resuscitated. It was terrifying.

Fiona: Eventually the consultant arrived and explained that Mitchell was breathing but would need to be closely monitored for the next few days. Jane was too ill to leave the ward but I went to see him.

Graeme hadn't been with us during the labour but came to the hospital when he heard about Mitchell. He explained who he was and was allowed to come into the ward and see Mitchell with me.

Jane: Mitchell could breathe on his own after he was resuscitated but he had to have an ECG because they thought he'd had a seizure, then blood tests in case there was an infection. He was cold – they had to keep his temperature down or it would increase the risk of seizure. He was on a heart monitor with all these tubes coming out of him. We couldn't even touch him. It was horrendous.

Fiona: The following day the nurse wouldn't tell me what was going on. She said that she could only tell the legal parent, that they wouldn't even tell the father unless he was married to the mother. I said I was the legal parent, that I was married to the mother and that they were discriminating against me. That seemed to get them moving. The consultant came and they apologised. There had been a change of staff on shift so information hadn't been passed on. I asked them to put it on the chart.

I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't been assertive and mentioned discrimination.

Jane: After 48 hours I was eventually able to hold Mitchell skin to skin. It was such a relief.

He's fine now. It was probably just the trauma of the forceps delivery. They'll check him until he's one but apart from getting flu at five weeks and being back in hospital which was worrying, he's fine. He's really advanced and he's reached all his milestones.

Fiona: There was just one other occasion when I felt that they (the NHS) were condescending. When we went for Mitchell's three month check, although Jane had explained I was his other mum, the nurse commented, "Oh, you're helping Mum for the day," which I found a bit patronising. Despite Jane explaining our situation they just didn't seem to get it.

Jane: It wasn't malicious, though – it's ignorance really. It's still quite a new thing for people, same sex parents.

Fiona: I've decided to have a home birth after what happened in the hospital. The community midwives have been lovely and really supportive.

Advice for others

Fiona: If you are using a donor or someone you know, you have to really agree the details with them. If you have any doubts, don't go through with it. Although there were lots of ups and downs with Graeme, we all want the same thing for our children.

Agree on the money, the contact time, what level their family is going to be involved.

We don't expect Graeme to provide any financial assistance. That won't change, even if we split up, which was one of his worries. But he does want to be able to take the children for days out and to pay for that, which is fine. Our only expectation is that he maintains a loving relationship with his children.

Jane: We've also talked about whether he'd be involved in decisions on schooling etc and whilst it's our final decision, we do consult him and ask his opinion. Although he has no legal right to contest any decisions we make.

It can seem quite daunting because there are prejudices and you do worry about how your children will be treated, but our neighbours are great. Families are so much more diverse now.

Fiona: We've also spoken about moving away. Graeme has talked about going travelling, though I don't think he'd do that now. His family lives close by, so he's here frequently anyway.

He was worried we would move away and he would have no contact. We explained that the reason we wanted a friend to be the father is so he would always be involved in the children's lives.

Jane: We want the children to know their dad as we feel this is their right, even if it makes things a bit more complicated for us. The children's welfare has always been at the centre of our thoughts.

Hannah

As a pregnant woman, people think I must be straight. It annoys me sometimes.

I am very happily married to a man with a child and a bit [pats bump] but I've never considered myself to be straight. I'm bi.

When I was young, my mother would tell me that one day I would meet Prince Charming – or at least [smiles, then says in a Jewish accent] a doctor, a lawyer, a professional man. It took me a long time to come out to her.

When I did it was on the phone and I was in New Zealand. Her reaction amazed me. She said, "Are you? That's interesting. I envy you."

After all that time with me worrying about telling her, she blew me away.

She must have been married about 37 years by then. I often wonder what would have happened for her if she had been born 30 years later.

One of the greatest teachings I had was with my first girlfriend. She had had a child and the relationship with the father was over. She said, "Hannah, it's not about being bisexual, it's about falling in love with a person."

People have said all my life, "If you're bi you must be sitting on the fence" but I know I'm not 100% straight and I know I'm not 100% gay. I'm just open to possibilities and they change every day.

I've been lucky enough to meet a man who likes a strong woman. It's not an open relationship but we are open to possibilities, me with women, him and men.

When you become pregnant people tend to see you only as one thing. Sometimes at the school gate I want to shout out, "By the way, I am not just a mother!" [Laughs]. "It just struck me, they think of me the way I thought of my mother."

Hazel

I didn't think about having children until I was married. My husband was probably keener than I was. We had two girls. I had Isla then we decided we wanted another. After Rosie was born, my husband had a vasectomy – that was one of the things thrown in my face when we split.

I'd questioned my sexuality when I was 28, prior to meeting my husband. I hadn't had a full sexual relationship then. I'd been living as a single person.

I'd gone through a difficult situation at work with a gay woman. We became close as friends. I told her that I really cared for her and she freaked, saying I'd got the wrong end of the stick. It was excruciating. If her reaction had been different, I probably wouldn't have got married, wouldn't have had any children.

When I met my husband, I thought, 'This is fun, this is all right,' so I thought that was that – that the woman at work was just a crush.

After six months, my husband was quite seriously ill and I did fall for him then. It probably pushed things along. We got married. We had the kids after three years.

Time passed then a couple of things happened and when I was 39 or 40, I realised I was gay but I'd been suppressing it.

Realisation

I went away on a work thing and met a Swedish woman. I thought, 'Wow, she's lovely.' Nothing happened but I wondered why I hadn't felt like that with anyone else – like my husband. It was quite funny. I went home on the plane thinking, 'What was that all about? Forget about it, Hazel...'

Then I met another woman. We had some residentials through work, so it happened. We slept together and suddenly it was real. It was like comparing apples and oranges. It was right.

It explained why I'd never been very interested in boys at school. I hadn't been interested in girls either but boys didn't have that added wow factor they

seemed to have for other girls. I just lived a single life throughout my teens and most of my 20s and was quite happy. I just didn't go there.

I came back from the residential feeling dreadful. I had never strayed, hardly even looked at anyone else. I wasn't worried about the kids at that point. I was worried about my husband, about committing adultery – and with a woman. Did that make it better or worse? What was I going to do?

I met up with her a couple of times after but she lived too far away for us to be together. It carried on for some time as a phone relationship but it got messy.

Her long-term partner found out. They split up. I think there were other things going on.

My husband didn't know but he sensed something. I was more distant. I didn't want a physical relationship with him. I knew I couldn't go on with a heterosexual relationship.

I told her my marriage was on the rocks but she couldn't cope with the idea of breaking a family up. We talked at length about my children, and I thought a lot about breaking up the family unit, leaving my husband, causing pain. She felt guilty, didn't want the responsibility of the children, who were four or five and six or seven by then.

It was all a big change for me as I hadn't had a troubled life before that. I'm easily contented.

Ending and beginning

I knew Alex at work and I confided in her. She'd had her own experiences of a family splitting up. It wasn't the same but she was very supportive. Gradually we grew closer. It's complicated because Alex and I got together as me and my husband were splitting up. [Alex's story can be found on p 79].

I told my husband the marriage was over and he moved out. The girls stayed with me. They were five and seven. They were devastated.

It was very stressful. There were lots of hurdles, different levels of complexity – my husband, the children, work.

I was Alex's boss's boss so I had to come out at work. I had to go to my head of department and tell them what was going on. They were good. They said, "People have relationships at work all the time," but eventually I did have to move as the director wasn't comfortable with me having line management responsibility for Alex. Now I wonder if there was a bit of homophobia there, you can't know.

When I split up from my husband, I didn't tell him I was gay, I just said the marriage was over, that I didn't love him anymore, because I didn't want him to be the one to tell the children. If I'd told him, it would have been out of my control.

Alex said it's how the adults act that matters, so the children have always had contact with their dad. Alex has experience, as she had to fight Jaz's dad for custody. Jaz is her sister's child.

It took six years before Alex and I moved in together properly and that was really dictated by the kids, not just the timeline of selling our respective houses and buying one together.

Jaz has always known Alex is gay but I don't know if she ever spoke to my kids about it. She's a great kid and she gets on great with my two. They knew each other before we got together, because they met at a show.

We created situations with the children – visited each other, met up to see Santa at Christmas. It was gradual. They had the opportunity to become good friends. It helped that we lived in a really safe place, so we could give the kids a pound and send them off to the park together while we had some time alone.

Telling the kids

As time progressed, we knew the children would begin to question the nature of our relationship. We were spending a lot of time together, going on holiday twice a year, seeing Alex more than any other friend.

One day, when Isla was about 11, we had friends visiting and the kids were upstairs. Isla came in as I was embracing Alex – nothing passionate, just kissing her neck. The next day, Isla was really quiet. She had a really long chat with Jaz and I think they discussed it.

I sat down with her later and asked her why she seemed troubled. Was it about me and Alex and whether we were together?

She burst into tears and said, “No, no, please say it isn’t true!” She was worried about being bullied at school but what troubled her most was her father finding out.

He and his family have quite bigoted views. “Gay people are all right but why do we need to see them kissing on *EastEnders*?” – that sort of thing.

I said there was no need for her father or people at school to know. It wasn’t a deeply guarded secret but it wasn’t any of their business. Things were not going to change on a day to day basis. I said Jaz knew about Alex and she was really cool about it but Rosie didn’t need to know yet because she was too young.

Once she got over the shock, Isla bounced back really quick. A few days later I was doing something in the house and she asked if she could help. Then she said, “My mum’s really cool, she’s good fun and she’s gay!”

She’s an intelligent kid. It was like a nine-day wonder.

Gradually she told some friends. I have to say that so far, none of our kids have had any problem. We did worry they’d get a bit of bullying but no, not once.

About two years later, we decided Rosie needed to know. The two older girls were worried about not being able to speak freely and said, “She needs to know.” Besides, Alex and I were sleeping in the same bed.

I just picked Rosie up from the after-school club one day and said, “There’s something I need to tell you” as if it was, “We’re going to the pictures.”

I said, “I’m gay” – and she reacted the same way as Isla. She burst into tears, saying, “Please, please, please say it’s not true, I’ll get bullied, I don’t want Dad to know.”

It helped that Isla could say that she’d known for two years and when I said, “Hadn’t you guessed?” she admitted that part of her knew.

I didn’t want to hurt them, to inflict this pain on them. It was something they would have to live with for the rest of their lives. But I knew they needed to know and it was a huge relief once they did.

Rosie had a bit of a harder time than Isla as she was closer to the local community and she was worried about the school having to know. I said if someone asked, she could tell them but they didn't have to know, it was none of their business.

We were worried about Rosie because she's a softer personality. She was getting bullied by boys at school anyway and some of her friends came from families who were gossips, so we gave her advice on who to tell.

Eventually, her friends and their families were quizzing her so we said, "It's OK, just do it." Our house was on the market by then and we knew we were moving anyway – but actually, it was completely fine. It was no problem.

One wee girl went up to Isla and said, "Is your mum a lesbian?" and she said, "Yes" and the girl just chewed her gum and said, "I like that."

Another thought that because the girls referred to each other as cousins, it was worse. They thought that we were related and lovers! We had to put them right.

Another time, Rosie was a bit worried about having a friend over for a sleepover because she didn't know. I said, "Well, if she asks and she doesn't like it, you have plenty of other friends." She thought about it and said, "OK." The girl stayed over and it was fine.

The girls have had so many positive experiences that if they had a negative one they could cope with it.

Life today

The time that it all took, bringing the two families together, has been good for the children. Jaz still defers to Alex and mine defer to me but I've had no problems with Jaz. Whereas with my two, their mum and dad split up – for Jaz, I was an addition to her life.

We took some time choosing our new house because we knew we'd need to accommodate so many personalities. Alex and I are very different. She likes peace and quiet and she plays the piano, I like the TV on and the kids chatting. The girls all needed to have their own rooms because they'd had them in their other houses and we couldn't take that away from them.

The last person to be told I'm gay was my ex-husband. We timed it so I got divorced first, before I told him. The girls were really scared about him knowing but he was, well, OK. It helped that I had been out of the marriage a few years by then. A lot of the anger and bitterness had gone and it helped him to understand why the marriage had gone down the pan.

The person who reacted worst to me being gay was my sister. I told her before telling the children and she threatened to tell them. She blamed Alex. She thought Alex had 'turned' me. She said, "How long have you been that way?"

That was really difficult for me. She has a mild learning disability and I think that means she can't work out our relationship. She loved my ex-husband and really missed him. She said vitriolic and hurtful things but she doesn't cope with change well and she was in shock.

Now, the girls see their father every Saturday and they each go for tea on a different night during the week, so they can each develop their own relationship with him.

At first, he'd only take them overnight once a month as when we split, he was: "You want this, you look after them, don't expect a penny from me." There's still a bit of that, even after all this time.

I don't think the kids have been damaged by it all. I think they've grown, that they are richer people in many ways. They just laugh at things now.

If there's ever a "Why do you do this?" or a "How do you do that?" – like how Alex does a great Louis Armstrong impression – it's always, "It's because she's a lesbian!"

Jacqueline

I have always thought I would have children from an early age, as a child I knew I wanted children. As I got older and came out I thought that whilst it's not impossible to have children, the chances of having children had slimmed somewhat.

My partner and I had a civil partnership ceremony three years ago. We have been together for over 13 years. We currently have a 20 month old daughter and will be trying for another baby in the future. My partner Nicola carried the baby and will carry the next one too.

Jo

Being transgender is something I've been living with all of my life. It took a long time to realise and when I did, 'transgender' wasn't a term in everyday use.

I remember early on, looking in the mirror and seeing a person and knowing it wasn't me because it was a boy. I remember stealing a doll and getting into real trouble. I have no memory of it but my brother says I used to argue with my family because I wanted to play with girls' toys. I was obviously very unhappy being a boy.

I was sent away to boarding school when I was eight. In those days it was considered wrong for boys to be too close to their mothers. At the time it was like what's now known as reparative therapy [a controversial, pseudoscientific 'treatment' which aims to change sexual orientation].

It was probably when I was about 14 and in school plays that I began to realise I'd be happier as a girl. That terrified me and made me feel great shame. I began to associate being on stage with that fear and shame. I thought that if I continued to be so conspicuous, people would know I wanted to be a girl and they would hate me.

That was in the early 60s. There was no general awareness of transsexuals so the only option for me was to try to suppress it and try to live what was seen as a normal life.

Now I look back and think, that's 40 years of my life that's been lost because I now know that I can act, that I enjoy acting – but at the same time I'm thankful because that's what made me a good playwright, that and being transsexual. It made me a good parent as well.

First love

When I was 18 a lovely man called Mike fell in love with me. I really liked him but he feared for his job, and with reason. (Homosexuality was still against the law at the time.)

My wife was the first person I had a proper relationship with. Before I met her, I had come to realise that I'd probably never have a sexual relationship – but we fell in love with each other and she was the first person I told. We were at university. I was 21, and she was a bit older, 23.

When I told her she said, “Yes, I knew there was something feminine about you, that’s why I’m attracted to you.”

That was the beginning of the long journey of me coming to terms with who I am. I came out to her very quickly because it was tormenting me.

It was very wonderful to discover, after a lot of trying, that we could have sex. Establishing full sexual relations took a long time.

First child

In January 1980, my wife became pregnant with our first child. We weren't trying to have children. Our lives were very unsettled. I was trying to be a writer and she was an artist and journalist. We were living in a lot of poverty.

But a child loves you. They don't pass judgement. That's very liberating when you carry all the stigma of being a transsexual. When you are loved, that helps you to have the confidence to work.

What cripples us is internalised transphobia. By that I mean that from an early age I had this sense that I wasn't quite right as a boy, that playing with girls' toys was sick and shameful. I believed society's view that I was a bad person, that I couldn't be loved. From my conversations with other trans people I know that's very common. It's common in all oppressed groups.

My partner was a very strong feminist. We were determined that in bringing up our children, we would not follow traditional gender roles. For half the week, I did the things a mother would do, which was unheard of then. For the other half of the week I was writing.

In 1985 we had our second child. I would recommend anyone, transsexual or not, to be as involved in bringing up their children as they can be. Being a mother to mine was amazing for me, for them, for all of us. I loved looking after my daughters. It gave me huge happiness and pleasure.

I also remember pushing the pram and feeling that I was the only man in the world looking after their baby. That felt very isolating.

I was in the closet as far as the rest of the world was concerned. I so wanted to come out to my children from the very start but because of the prejudice that existed when they were young, I waited before telling them.

Coming out

My eldest was bullied in her first school. She went to school with an Asterix the Gaul lunch box and she suffered because they told her it was a “boy’s lunchbox.” This made me very aware of bullying and gender issues.

I didn’t want my daughters to suffer because of my transsexuality. I didn’t want to expose them to any bullying or to be ostracised by their friends and I couldn’t come out to them and ask them to keep my identity a secret. So I didn’t tell them, dressed as a woman outside the home and would pick them and their friends up from school dressed as a man.

This became more and more unbearable, so when they were both in secondary school and firmly rooted in their friends, I came out to them. This was around 1998/99.

I told my eldest daughter first. We’d been to see a lovely film called *Ma Vie en Rose* [a Belgian film about a child who was born male, who insists that she is supposed to be a girl]. I said to her, “You know, that could be my story.” It was very hard for her at first. She was very distressed. She’s great now.

I think my younger daughter found it easier. She took it in her stride. I remember performing a show about being transgendered in 2003. She and her friends all came along to see the show and were so supportive of it, fiercely protecting me against a journalist they perceived as hostile.

If I was starting a family again now, I would be open with them from the outset. I think my eldest daughter found it hurtful because I’d concealed it from her for so long.

I wanted to fully transition when my wife was still alive but she said if I did, it would mean the end of our relationship. So I put it off. Soon after, she contracted her brain tumour and died, so I am so glad I did what I did and waited.

After her death in 2005, it simply became unbearable for me to continue living as a man. So I told my daughters. Everyone has to find their own way to do it but when I decided to transition, I told them, "Whatever happens, I love you profoundly." I said that however much I might physically change, I would always continue to love them and be their dad. And that's how it's been. We remain a happy and united and loving family. I have a new partner and my daughters are very fond of her.

Obviously, I couldn't come out to my friends before coming out to my daughters, that would have been wrong. By that stage I'd also started going to support groups. I'd met all sorts of people who lived double lives, keeping it from their families and I thought, 'That's no way to live.'

The good friends were absolutely fine and not at all surprised. It was the same when I transitioned. The bad friends just stopped seeing me.

I wish I'd been able to come out to my mum. I think she would have understood. She died in 1962, when I was 12. My dad died in 1986.

I have three big brothers. One of them was very upset about it. He's Christian and couldn't accept it for a while. I also have a step mother, a half-brother and a half-sister. I am not in touch with them anymore but in a sense I think I'd separated myself from them before I transitioned.

Both my daughters have grown up to be well adjusted, successful and happy individuals in stable and loving heterosexual relationships. My being transsexual caused us all suffering and difficulties but this came from the prejudices in the world around us. I feel my daughters have benefited from my being a transwoman, and from my willingness and delight in being able to play a 'motherly' role with them as well as being their dad.

When my eldest daughter told me she was expecting a baby, she said, "Dad, you're going to be a grandma." It's been wonderful, having a grandchild and it's been lovely, the way my daughter sees it. I am her dad but I am her son's grandma. She was very clear about that when she got married and when she registered the birth. It's very touching. I love it, actually.

My grandson is growing up in a completely different society and culture from the one I grew up in. The world is transformed. Back then, there was a profoundly transphobic feminist writer, Janice Raymond, who was forceful and eloquent. I didn't have the confidence to cope with the kind of hostility we encountered in those days. I didn't come out to my friends until I was 50. Now, it's possible for me to be the person I am in a way which wasn't possible when I was young or when my children were small.

I hope that when my grandchild grows up, he's free to express himself however he wants, that society is more open and forgiving and generous. I hope the work I do, the being open in public, helps that come about. Even now, girls grow up in a different environment from boys. There's not the same visceral fear if a girl is a tomboy for a bit too long, that there is if a boy wants to play with girls' toys.

It's very important to me that I've had the children with me at key points in my artistic career. It wasn't until my first child was born that I discovered I was a playwright. It just happened. I had a translation of a Spanish play put on at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. I would go to performances with my eldest daughter in a sling and hear people laughing at jokes I'd written and that's when I knew I was going to be a playwright.

It happened again with my younger child. I had a big hit with a play at the Traverse Theatre and again, I had my baby daughter with me in a sling at the theatre. Now, I've just had my first grandchild and another play is about to go to the West End and Channel 4 is interested in a short film.

I think my writing has helped me and changed me enormously, mostly because I have written about being transgender directly, partly because success has helped me to cope, to see things in a different way and not always take the negativity on board.

I can remember being laughed at by a group of girls when one of my plays was being performed at the Lyceum. I thought, 'You're laughing but I am entertaining 250 people every night – what are you doing?'

Jo II

My civil partner is Scottish but we live in England.

Our first son, born to my partner by an anonymous, identity release American donor in 2006, was later adopted by me. [Identity-release or open-identity sperm donors are willing to have their identity released to adult offspring]. Our second son by the same donor was born to myself earlier this year. We are not planning to try for any more children ourselves though would consider adoption or long term fostering in future.

My partner had about six intrauterine insemination (IUI) treatments followed by two in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatments, then a very problematic pregnancy. I had one operation and four IVFs, followed by my pregnancy, which seemed straight forward compared to our first son.

We became civil partners while my partner was pregnant. I changed my surname after that. At that time, I could not be named as the second parent on the birth certificate so I adopted our first son. By the time our second son was born, the law had changed and we are both parents on the birth certificate.

Emotionally, when treatment does not work for long periods, it is very difficult. It put strain on our relationship with friends who had no difficulty having children.

When you go to a clinic the process is very medical from the start. Many of the processes have unpleasant side effects or are painful and involve taking time off work at short notice. It is all quite stressful. The treatment process was very demanding physically, emotionally and financially, but we feel very lucky to have two wonderful sons.

The huge financial cost has given us about £20k additional debt, which makes our finances very tight.

We have a very strong relationship and quickly learnt to seek support from friends and family. My advice? Don't put everything else on hold whilst trying to have your family.

Johanna-Alice

It is one of the hardest things about transitioning gender for me – so many years of my life spent on-hold, hoping to meet someone, dreading what sex would be like with the wrong genitals and desperately wanting to be able to express the part of me that needs to be a mother.

Very soon into transition – as I came to terms with the reality of surrendering my ability to become the parent of a child that would truly be my hypothetical partner's and mine – I just couldn't reconcile transition and infertility because they are two things entwined intimately and irrevocably in who I am [a male-to-female trans woman].

I did something about it at almost the last possible moment, and delayed starting to take hormones for a few weeks so I could have the opportunity to bank sperm in the hope I'd get to use it one day.

I was the first woman to approach the Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health [Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh] in this way, and they were unsure how to deal with my request at first. An ethics meeting was convened and it resulted in my being told I'd be helped. With hindsight I'm glad it was done that way, because it set a precedent for others who might wish to do as I did.

It wasn't easy. Getting at the sperm was one of the hardest things I've ever done. Everything you hear about sperm donation is true, the room, people knowing what you are doing in there, even the magazines in a closed box (morbid curiosity made me look). And I had to do it twice because my sperm count was low. But it's done and that last little bit of what my genitals can do for me is safe in a freezer until I need it – and I really hope that one day I will.

My current situation is one of quiet desperation, hoping that I'll get surgery sometime soon, that I'll finally be able to cope with the idea of a physical relationship, and desperately hoping I'll meet the right girl.

Yes, it was all worth it, the delays, the stress of waiting, the dysphoric experience of getting the stuff out, and all the interaction I had with others who knew why I was there. Because whilst I'll never be able to carry and deliver a child, I can still be a parent, and still be a mother.

Gender-reassignment is a flawed process in which we try to make

compromises between what is possible and reality. For me, this was something I had to do *because* I'm a woman, not because I wanted to preserve something of being seen as male.

I knew, however difficult it seemed, it was something I had to do to be comfortable with the rest of my transition. That probably sounds odd. It's not though, I just have the urge to have children and that was the only way I could balance that need with the need to transition.

My GP did all the referrals and stuff. A lovely nurse at the Simpson Centre (Edinburgh) made it as easy as she could for me. And the doctors and consultants who decided to help me made it all possible.

If you're at all not sure about how you will feel in the future, preserve your potential for parenthood now. No one is going to force you to use it if you don't want to.

Jules

My feelings towards wanting to be a parent are profound. I have an instinctive urge to be a mother, which feels very physical, undeniable even. But I also have a strong desire to be a part of a family unit that my feelings and my world have created and contributed to.

It's funny, but I sometimes have just as much of an urge to be a grandparent as I do a parent, because my own experience of family is bigger than two parents. I have grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins and close family friends who make up this big world of care and love around me, and I'm so excited to extend that care and love by bringing a child of our own into it.

I began to think seriously about it when I realised I was with the person I want to spend my life with. I guess you have so much love with another person that it naturally finds new ways to express itself; renewing, evolving and finding new ways to anchor you both. We are engaged to be married and with that new step, we'll be stepping closer to creating our family.

We don't have any children at present but we plan to conceive through a donor next year. If my body allows, I will conceive first and then we'll see how things go.

We are only beginning the journey toward parenthood so I can only comment on the situation right now. However, I already have an underlying feeling of anxiety around the hurdles and hoops we may have to jump through in order to make our family a reality. Hurdles in the form of getting over comments (from those close and those who don't know us), opinions and others' perceptions of morality, and hoops in the form of clinical processes, anonymous participants in what is essentially the most intimate act and decision a couple will make in their life.

I expect there will also be the inevitable challenges that would-be-parents face, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but I think the additional weight of other people's judgements of your relationship (and whether THEY think you SHOULD have children) is a substantial, often very difficult and unjust weight to bear.

My work at the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing has opened up some really helpful and supportive conversations for me, around parenting and

the decisions that have to be made. Through events like the LGBT Family Planning Event and LGBT History Month's Story-telling event, I have really benefited from hearing real stories and meeting people who have experienced parenting and making a family in a variety of ways.

I have close friends (a same sex couple) who have had children and being able to witness and share in their experience has been a huge support and source of encouragement for my partner and I, as we think seriously about getting pregnant and making a family.

If you're thinking about starting a family, use resources but also get in touch with a group like Rainbow Families (Edinburgh) or with LGBT community groups. There are lots and lots of LGBT people thinking about (or already) parenting and there is always more support than you perhaps realise. It's worth it, even if it's just to have a chat with someone.

I also recommend taking a breath and speaking to your GP or nurse about it, because when I mentioned wanting a baby with my female partner to my nurse, she was very helpful and encouraging and was really keen to support us in any way that the NHS can. (Despite the shocking fact that NHS Lothian do not provide a useful range of fertility treatments and services presently, they can provide tests, check-ups and all sorts that the private sector will charge a lot for).

Kay

I realised I wanted children when I was about 30. I have a son. [Gay woman with a transsexual male-to-female history, aged 35-44]

Kim

I have a daughter aged 17 years. [Gay woman/lesbian aged 45-54]

“L”

Q: When did you first become aware that you wanted children?

A: I was happy to be a co-parent.

Q: When did you start to think about it seriously?

A: When my ex-partner started discussing it seriously, approximately two years ago.

Q: What is your situation now?

A: I have a daughter with an ex-partner who refuses to let me see my daughter.

Lorna

I'm a gay woman, living with a partner. I realised I wanted children two years ago. Was deemed too old at 45 for fertility treatment. In the process of adopting.

Laura and Jean

Laura: We got together 8 years ago and we have a little boy who is 4 going on 14.

People want to know about the nitty gritty, like how did it happen? Generally turkey basters come into it somewhere.

Another common question is, “What does he call you?” We worried about that for a while, what he was going to call us. But we kind of left it and he decided for himself. So Jean is Mum Mum and I’m Mummy. Unless he’s having an attitude – then I’m Laura and she’s Jean!

People are very reluctant to ask about the donor. It’s like he’s a non-entity. Even for family, it’s a question they skirt around. But people need to ask these questions if they want to know what to do to have a child.

When we got together, Jean already had a son who was 18. She wanted another child and I wanted a child so we knew it was on the cards from early on. I think we even started buying baby clothes before we did anything else.

Jean: We started by getting a dog, a cat, fish, all that...

Laura: And we started looking on the internet, not looking for a clinic but to try to have a relationship with a donor. Not as a parent but because our child needed to know where they come from.

Jean: We didn’t use someone we knew because we thought it could go horribly wrong. We went through everyone we knew thinking, “What if this or that happened?” We ruled it out pretty quickly. It would be too complicated.

Finding a donor online

Laura: We were looking for the donor for 12 months. This was the longest bit. We found him through the Rainbow Network Forum. It took us a while to check him out. You feel quite vulnerable. This was the internet! Who was this person? But once we met him, we knew. We met a couple of other guys before him but it didn’t feel right. With him, we just clicked – it was instinct.

He donated for a clinic. He'd been challenged on the forum for donating privately – he'd done campaigns about donating. He's straight but passionate about fertility and anyone being able to have children. He believes that if he can help anyone overcome barriers to having children...

We were clear with the donor about what we wanted and he was laid back. He was clear too. He also had a wicked sense of humour like us which is great because you can't approach a situation like that [turkey baster] seriously.

He lived six hours away so that was a barrier but we were really lucky in that I got pregnant straightaway. We called up and told him I was ovulating and he said, "Fine, OK," and we did it and went to work next day as if nothing had happened.

We've been lucky. In the hospital when I went into labour, the midwife had had her kids the same way.

We're from a rural area which can be very backward but we've been very open and people accept us. The more you make of something, the more of an issue it is. We just said, "Laura is having a baby in so many weeks – does anyone want a coffee?" and got on with it. Now we just say, "This is our family" and people accept it. If we were uncomfortable or embarrassed it wouldn't be so easy.

Keeping in touch

After our son was born, our donor had two children of his own. We wanted our son to know where he comes from so we kept in touch with our donor and our son has met his half brother – a bit weird as they look quite similar.

We have kept all the correspondence we've had with the donor so our son can see it. It's important to be honest and open with him. When he was three, he was talking to a friend who had a daddy. He was, like, "You have a daddy? Really?"

I asked him what he thought about having two mummies. He – looking puzzled – said, "I don't have two mummies. I have a Mum Mum and a Mummy."

Jean: It's been an incredible journey. I've seen it from both sides – I've given birth and I've been a supportive mum and it really is a privilege.

Lee

Unsure when I first became aware I wanted children. Probably once I came out to myself and realised that having a partner and family was possible. Until then, I thought that I would just live alone (when faced with the heterosexual expectations of my future).

I started to think about it seriously once my partner and I entered a civil partnership. We are waiting to begin the process of treatment. So far, it has been very positive – our GP, the fertility assessment in Larbert and initial meeting at the fertility clinic. They treat us positively and we are not made to feel inadequate or a hassle in any way. It is a process that seems – so far – to be focused on us and our future as parents, but it is stressful to think about travelling to clinics for treatment while trying to maintain working commitments. I have discussed our intentions with my line manager.

Our main sources of information have been two same-sex couples in different stages of the process. One family has just given birth, another is in the third trimester.

My advice to anyone who found themselves in my situation would be: it will be discouraging and slow if you are going to go the self-funded (not private clinics) route. Get informed and speak about EVERYTHING with your partner (if you have one). You will both have different preconceptions that you are not aware of. Be really reflective about what you expect, think and visualise about the present, treatment and the future.

Linda

I have a seven year old daughter with my ex-husband. When we reached the stage in our relationship where we felt children were the next step, we started trying almost immediately and I fell pregnant a year or so later.

I have always known that I wasn't straight, but I had never been involved in a serious same-sex relationship. My husband and I broke up when our daughter was one.

Until I met my partner I was a single mother. When I met my partner, nearly a year ago, I knew the time had come (at 33!) to out myself to friends and family. Thankfully, most of them were completely supportive and lovely.

Most of the concern expressed was about how my daughter was going to deal with it. Since I have raised her to be tolerant and not to judge (and as she was only six and doesn't quite grasp the 'different' nature of our new family yet) she hasn't even batted an eyelid.

My partner has moved in with my daughter and I, and we're settling down into a happy family unit. I know my partner had never considered children before she met me, so this has been quite a journey for her.

There are not a lot of resources for LGBT step-parents. I know this is one of the hardest things my partner has had to face. She's running blind. We only know of one other couple who have been in our situation, and they live in America.

Lindsay

I'm sort of bisexual as I have had sex with men but I identify as a gay woman.

I didn't want children. I got pregnant from a drunken encounter and it wasn't diagnosed until I went into labour.

I'm now the proud co-parent of a gorgeous and hilarious two year old girl.

Louise

I'm bisexual. I have always wanted children, ever since childhood. I have thought about it seriously for many years, but never been in a position to do anything about it, due to being either single or in relationships which did not allow for it to be realistic. This changed when I started seeing my current partner, and we decided very quickly that we wanted to start a family.

We were lucky enough to conceive naturally within a couple of months of deciding we wanted children, and now have a beautiful nine month old son.

Louise II

I am a bisexual woman who is married to a bisexual man. When I was 26 and he was 24 I became pregnant unexpectedly and we had a daughter. I always wanted to have kids.

Now we have a seven year old, and plan to have another baby in the next year.

Lynsey

Children have always been part of my life plan.

I first investigated the possibility of co-parenting with my ex-partner and a gay man, but sadly it didn't work out. My ex-partner was eager to have children but wasn't interested in carrying the child herself.

I am very aware of my age (37) and the impact that could potentially have on my ability to conceive, so had started to wonder if it would ever happen.

My current partner is several years younger than me and, although she identifies as genderqueer and has a complex gender identity, she would dearly love to carry a child, so there is a real possibility that we will work towards this goal within the next few years.

Lucanne

I first became aware that I wanted children around the age of 27. I have two children by my former partner – through a heterosexual relationship. The children are now adults of 24 and 27 years.

Maria

When I was growing up it was taken for granted I would find myself a suitable husband, get married and have children. I was 19 or 20 when my boyfriend and I first talked about our shared future. We married when we were both 22 and had three children in six years.

I have three adult children and a grandchild. I wouldn't consider having another baby now but would consider co-parenting if I was with a younger partner who wanted a child.

My relationship with my children was very difficult when I first came out and got worse when I started a gay relationship. However, now they're in their 20s things are fine.

I got involved in various LGBT projects and learnt that I was not alone and had nothing to be ashamed or guilty about. This helped me to stay strong until things got better. Find a group who can provide you with support and friendship. My main sources of support were others who were in similar situations and straight friends who didn't start treating me differently when I came out.

Meryl

I was in a stable relationship in England and we looked together at how to have a baby. It took 10 years for me to find out that I could not get pregnant. I tried home insemination with two donors, a clinic for sperm and hospital investigations.

The hospital ethics committee made the decision that I could not get IVF on the NHS as I was a lesbian and they would not allow me to pay for it within the hospital.

I finally tried to get pregnant by having sex with a man in a toilet, which left me feeling I had gone as far as I could. I had to face the fact that I would not have a baby.

My friend had my baby for me

My friend talked me into allowing her to have a baby for me, which she did and I now have a son. We followed the surrogate process. I gained parental responsibility and when he was over a year old I registered to adopt him. We believe we were actually the first in the North West – my son says, in the country!

My ex-partner was not out when my son was a baby and I refused to have him live with anyone who would deny his relationship or mine, or let him see any sense of shame for who we were or how we lived.

This was resolved when my partner changed jobs and came out. We then lived as a family and she adopted him once the law allowed. I had a lot of emotional difficulty with my partner's adoption but ended this by seeing that it made a lot of difference to my son. We all changed our name so we have the same name. We separated but still share in his life.

I guess the emotional context is the incredible despair I was feeling through all the years I could not conceive. And of course the absolute joy when I held him in my arms, having watched him be born. Though I still have a sense of loss for not being pregnant.

The surrogacy process, health professionals, social services for the adoption and the legal process could have been fraught with discrimination but my fears were unfounded as they were all excellent.

The one thing I did learn was to be careful of solicitors fees – sadly learnt too late! The solicitor cost about £2,000 – the court process for parental responsibility. Social services assessment for adoption court cost £75. I was financially a single parent until he was about 5. We lived in a house with no central heating but we got through it.

Luck and honesty

Of course the process continues. I decided in the beginning to be honest at all times with my son and at each agency we meet in our lives. We have been 'lucky,' or maybe honesty prevents discrimination...

The next step is secondary education. I do have anxiety about the amount of people who will now have to be in our lives. I am lucky as other people have led the way and the school has several children with same sex parents.

Our situation is complicated by us being separated but my son has half-brothers at the school from his birth mother's family (we are still very close) and from his birth dad's new family. He calls them brothers and has a good relationship with them which, I think, gives him confidence and me some feeling of security for him.

From my family's point of view, my mum was a little doubtful but they have all treated him as my child and I have had no difficulties.

Mhari

I've never not wanted children. When I had my first same-sex relationship, thinking about whether or not I'd have children in a same-sex relationship was a big part of working out what my future would look like.

About three years ago, my partner was in her mid-30s, I was in my early 30s, and we'd both finally got stable jobs and bought a house. We spent a long time discussing how we'd like to get pregnant and what sort of family structure we'd like.

We're trying to conceive using donor sperm (unknown donor, using a local fertility clinic). We plan to have children in the near future, but obviously it's not 100% in our control.

Mo

I've always wanted children. I'm from a big family, I'm close to my parents, all my siblings and nieces and nephews. I have a great relationship with my partner's family, as she has with mine.

We considered having children for many years. More often wondering, 'Wouldn't it be great to have children?' than serious discussions. We only really started thinking about it when civil partnerships became a possibility – and then when we were married.

We'd been together for 14 years before then, and finally we could say we were married, or in a civil partnership – rather than just 'living with a partner.' We needed security for our children.

Joint adoption

With civil partnerships, there was the possibility of adopting jointly. I would not have considered having children without this. It was extremely important that we could adopt jointly. I suppose because of acceptance and security – not within our very long term relationship, but within society in general. We like being married!

We became more confident and talked seriously about adopting. We approached Coram, an adoption charity in London, shortly after our civil partnership and after a few meetings, went through the approval process.

When we met Coram, we knew it was right for us. Our families were initially worried, for different reasons. They worried (as I did for a long time before deciding to adopt) how children would feel having two mums, and the reaction of other parents and children. There was also the worry for the two of us, around adoption itself.

I was also concerned we'd take children needing families from couples who couldn't have birth children. This was more than a little naive – there are so many children who need families – particularly 'hard to place' and older children.

We never seriously considered any other way of having a family – adoption felt right.

We were extremely lucky and adopted our two boys, then aged five and six years, soon after being approved as adopters. Our boys have two parents, two mums. We have two great boys – now aged 10 and 11.

The process of adoption, the stresses and changes, was staggering. Family has been supportive. Friends, too, very much so. I feel even closer to my family since we adopted.

I hope many other gay couples seriously consider adoption. It is a great option – but not easy. Very hard work. It's worth it. Adoption is a blessing and a joy, most of the time.

Adoption tested a relationship we thought was rock solid, particularly in the first 12 months after suddenly becoming mothers to two young boys. We were lucky to have a firm and strong relationship – we've known each other since university days – but it was so hard at times we thought we would never feel like a family.

We couldn't be more of a family now, I don't think. The boys have our mannerisms, and we theirs. They've grown with us, and through us. I can't imagine not being a mum now.

Our children's schools have been great and we've had no concerns or problems with other parents. Our boys' friends either don't know or don't care about what or who's at home.

Our particular circumstances are not an issue, either when living in London, or since moving to Glasgow two years ago. We were a little worried if Glasgow might be accepting – but I'm delighted to say, Glasgow's not let us down! No bother at all – and plenty of friendly parents.

Our boys still show the effects of their early losses and traumas, and there's a general lack of understanding and support, I feel, around this for adoptive parents.

But our children are amazing! Hard work and with problems, as many adopted children have – but thriving.

They are “a pleasure and a treasure,” as we always tell them.

Nikki

Well when I was 18 I discovered I had polycystic ovaries. I hadn't actually thought of kids properly 'til then so I started thinking it was time to talk to my partner about it. They weren't keen so I left it and eventually we broke up.

In time I met my now wife Louise, a transgender woman, who was then Paul and just starting to transition (male to female).

We got together and spoke and we both agreed if we were going to have kids, it would better to be sooner rather than later due to Louise wanting to attend the gender clinic etc.

So within two months of us trying, we fell pregnant but didn't realise until we were 7/8 weeks pregnant.

We are now 23 weeks, due a son and on the gender clinic waiting list.

We were judged by all our friends. Some even went as low as to say a miscarriage would be a blessing for the baby as it would be too confused with a "dyke mam and tranny dad." I said, "It's two lesbian mams, nothing else."

There is hardly anything out there for trans people and their partners. We've been told that we don't fall into the LGBT category as its anatomically a woman and a man.

We've even had hospital staff ask us about the situation, asking Louise, "Are you in fancy dress?" Then when we say no, it's: "Oh, OK then."

When I say, "That's my wife, the other mother of my child," they look at me funny then lean in close and ask, "If she's your wife, how did you get pregnant?"

I say, if you're happy with the situation, don't let anyone get you down! You'll be great parents no matter what branch of the LGBT umbrella you're under!

Sarah and Lucy

Sarah: We've just gone through fertility treatment and Lucy is four months along.

Lucy: It's a boy. My mum wanted us to have a girl because she thought it would be easier with the situation – two mums.

Sarah: We've been together for eight years and married for two. We started to look into it in October. We went online to look for a donor but were worried about the legal implications and issues that could arise with the donor in future. We wanted all the information to be straightforward so decided to go through a clinic.

I said to Lucy, "Why don't you go to your doctor?"

Lucy: I hadn't thought of that – but after all it was a medical procedure, so we did. He was really supportive.

You can have the procedure on the NHS – but you just go on a long 'holding' list and in reality there's no funding – but the doctor arranged for us to have the HSG test [hysterosalpingogram] to make sure my tubes were OK and blood tests so we didn't have to pay the clinic for things that could be done on the NHS.

At one point a gay friend at work did offer to be the donor but he changed his mind when he saw children playing in the park, so we went back to the clinic. After that it was quite quick – two months.

The doctor at the clinic itself worked for Spire IVF Scotland at Danderhall, Edinburgh. It cost £200 for a meeting with the consultant then more to see a nurse who told us everything anyway. We fed back to the clinic – it would have been better if we had seen the nurse first.

Sarah: Going through the forms, we felt completely alone but we felt that if we went through someone we knew, they'd want to co-parent. With the clinic it was all anonymous. We just had to choose a donor from information given to us – like height, skin colour, hair colour.

If our son wants to find his biological parent when he's 18, we'll support him.

Lucy: There were blood tests every day for a week to find out when I was ovulating. No drugs as I wasn't infertile. My cycle was regular. The procedure itself was like a turkey baster only in a sterile environment. We were lucky as I got pregnant the first time.

Sarah: Lucy's parents wouldn't associate our child as being their grandchild if I carried him. The decision was as simple as that.

Lucy: We didn't tell our parents we were going for fertility treatment so when my brother told them on Skype that the baby was already on the way, they had to come to terms with it. He told them because I was so stressed about them, I wasn't sleeping and he said that wasn't good for the baby. He was brilliant.

It bothers my mum a lot that she doesn't know who the donor is but it doesn't bother us.

Shona

I had a good childhood in a warm stable family, so I saw it as part of my adult life to have the same. I wanted children from when I was a child myself and I started to think about it seriously when I married Robbie's dad. At that time I would have identified as bisexual. I now identify as lesbian.

We were living in London and moved back to Scotland, near our parents, with a view to starting a family. I really longed for a child. I really wanted to have Robbie.

It was a straightforward pregnancy but after wanting a water birth, I ended up having an emergency caesarean. Robbie was very healthy from the start, which was the main thing.

Fairly soon after, I had quite a bad bout of postnatal depression. In retrospect, some of that was related to my sexuality. It was a hard time and it's still quite recent. I don't want to talk about it. I just wasn't happy.

Leaving Robbie's dad

The depression lasted about two years and then, 15 months ago, I left Robbie's dad because I knew I really wanted to be with a woman. Not a particular woman, just a woman.

Since then I've been happy.

If you have a young child and you're not happy in your relationship, whatever that may be, it's really important to make yourself happy because then the child will be happy.

It was quite an upheaval for a little boy to go through and that was something I had to take into account. He's been great, quite resilient. He's well loved. He sees his dad 50% of the time and I see him 50% of the time.

I respect my ex-husband. I was with him for a reason and we have a reasonably good relationship.

I have a girlfriend now, Caitlin. It's been a gradual introduction to Robbie, to make sure we get it right.

Trying to be a parent and dating, trying to have relationships is a big challenge in itself. Trying to keep the two sides of your life apart, finding the time as much as anything! I would never introduce Robbie to anyone for at least six months.

I'm looking for different things in someone from the start. It has to be primarily a relationship I want but I'm also looking for someone who is responsible. They have to have a stable personality, be fun, ideally used to being around children.

Dating as a single parent

Caitlin knew from the beginning that I have a child. Everyone I have dated has known from the start and it put some people off. It's better to be honest about it.

When you meet the person you want to form a relationship with, you start to introduce them. It's hard because Caitlin lives across the water. I've been there and she's been here but it's early days.

Robbie knows Caitlin is more than just a friend. I've tried to explain it to him in his own terms, his own language. We're kind of feeling out what we want to be between the three of us and it's not easy.

We hang out together, the three of us, doing the things I'd usually do with him like going to the park. We went to the women's football at the weekend. It's important not to rush things, to involve the child.

I found people very accepting of the situation and supportive to the LGBT family; people who I didn't think would be, have been.

My parents have taken the longest to adjust to it because I'm emotionally closer to them and it has a bigger effect on them than on acquaintances. Robbie is their grandson. They have to be grandparents in an LGBT family and explain that to the world. They are gradually starting to speak

to close friends about it. They met Caitlin at the weekend and they knew who she was.

Before I met Caitlin, I knew this was the shape of the family I wanted. I went to Rainbow Families in Edinburgh as a single mum and I found that quite helpful.

My job is being a GP so I see lots of different bits of life. I'd say to LGBT teenagers or whoever to come out as soon as possible so you can create the kind of family you want to have.

Wanting a family shouldn't be a barrier to coming out. The fact that I wanted a strong, safe nuclear family is one of the reasons I didn't come out.

There are people who have been through the same thing, who can relate to what you're going through. You don't have to stay where you are.

There are resources out there like Rainbow Families, the Stonewall website and YouTube. Look up The Real L Word and Beaver Bunch. There's a particularly nice video of Michelle and her mum, talking about coming out.

I'd also recommend a book called *Living Two Lives: Married to a Man and In Love with a Woman* [See p 212]. It's about women who come out and it's made up of people's stories. They're very honest. It's very touching. Reading about how they acted at different stages was useful, because it's not an easy journey.

Stevie and Lauren

Stevie: I wanted kids since I was wee, maybe about 15. I'm 20 now. I've got nine brothers and sisters. I used to have a business with my mum and we worked it so that I could give my sister her feeds. We did the same with my wee brother.

Lauren: We got together in June last year. My wee boy was born in July, not long after. I'm 17 now.

Stevie: We were mates before and started going out when Lauren was pregnant. I knew in my head that I wanted to be with her before she was pregnant but I just didn't have the balls to ask her.

Lauren: We'd known each other two or three years. I got pregnant, experimenting with a friend. It was complicated, a stupid mistake. I was at the stage, when I asked Stevie out, of thinking about whether to keep the baby or have it adopted. We decided to keep it.

Stevie: She thought she was going to lose me and that was why she thought of getting rid of the baby but I managed to talk her round when I said I would be there for her no matter what. I'd known for a year that I wanted to be with her.

Lauren: I knew years ago, just after we started talking the first time.

Stevie: Lauren didn't want another baby after the baby was born but I did.

Lauren: I didn't, not after I had to have a C section. The pregnancy was rough. My baby was premature.

Stevie: We were lying in bed one night, watching a film, *Knocked Up*. I went downstairs for some water and she went to the toilet. We didn't know it but her waters had broken. In the film, the woman's waters had broken at the same time.

Lauren: I didn't realise it was my waters breaking – I thought I'd wet myself!

Stevie: I got concerned because she didn't move all night and her bump had disappeared: it was just a baby shape.

Lauren: I had an appointment with the midwife the next day. She said the baby was OK. I was having pains from when my waters broke but not serious ones. Then I started having shitty ones and we called the midwife again. She said he was coming – the baby. He was six weeks early.

Stevie: I had had to leave, because of work. I was virtually living at Lauren's mum's, apart from when I had to go south to work. I got a phone call at 9pm to say Lauren was going into hospital. I got there the next day. I met her mum downstairs in the café and she took me up to her.

Lauren: The day after, I got my C section. I was in labour for four days. They gave me a jab and tablets. I didn't have an epidural because I freaked out when I saw the needle.

The baby was feet down and his cord was wrapped round and pulling at my belly button. If I'd pushed him out it would have ripped me and killed him, so they had to do the C section.

Stevie: I was sitting with her mum and her sisters, a bag of nerves. I had to get a cuddle off her sister because I didn't know what to do. It was my first experience of the whole lot. No-one came to tell us how the baby was. We even had to stop Lauren's midwife to find out if Lauren was OK. They said they couldn't tell me much because Lauren hadn't come round but the baby had flatlined and had to go to intensive care.

Lauren: He was out, not breathing, for 40 minutes. They told me while I was still coming round and asked me if they could pass the information on.

Stevie: You don't remember anything about the two days after that.

Lauren: I can't remember anything after they told me he'd flatlined apart from going to see him for five minutes. I remember holding him, leaving him in there, in intensive care but nothing after that. I was away with the fairies because of the drugs.

He had all these tubes in him. He had a thing on his foot, a splint on his arm, a drip in his leg, pads on his chest, a hose thing for breathing. He was in intensive care for five weeks.

Stevie: We had to wait until he weighed 5lb 10oz 'til he could come out of hospital. Even then there were complications. It was his second week home.

He was feeding and there was food or mucus stuck in his throat. He just flopped in his gran's arms. He'd gone blue.

Lauren: It was horrible. He was taken back to hospital. He's been back three times. The day after he had to go back because he wasn't peeing. There was nothing in his nappy. They got medicine for him and it seemed to work.

Stevie: Your mum said he was taking the mick because he came home and peed. Then he had to go back in again because he had reflux. He projectile vomited all over me. From there we just had to be careful how much we were feeding him. We had to go back to the premature food. Now he just eats everything.

Lauren: He's OK now, there's nothing wrong.

Stevie: He's nearly walking. He's a happy boy now – he was quite narky when he was wee.

He's staying up north with his gran while we sort out the flat, then he'll come down and live here.

Lauren: We just see him at weekends at the moment but he'll come here when we've moved everything in and he'll go and see them at weekends.

I want to carry a child too

Stevie: I started nagging Lauren as soon as he was born, about me having a child too. I think she felt insecure because she thought I wanted to have a child with a man, so we didn't talk about it for a while but once we'd cleared that up, we started talking about it again.

Lauren: We want them [the children] to have the same skin tone as us, so they don't look too different.

Stevie: We've got someone – a donor – in Edinburgh, someone in Glasgow and someone in Dundee, who we've discussed it with. One I know, the others we met through some online sites which are registered and where all the donors are checked. They check out if the family has genetic problems and they have medical checks.

I knew before Lauren got pregnant that there were ways I could go about it because I'd seen a programme. I decided on this way more for Lauren, so we can do it ourselves through artificial insemination.

The person [potential donor] I know, we were having a discussion about how I wanted kids and how I wanted them to have my skin colour. It was just a general conversation and he said he would do it but he'd have to speak to his wife. He's married with kids. He wasn't sure if she'd allow it, him not seeing the kid or her knowing he had a kid out there but not by her.

We spoke about if he did go ahead with it, would he want to have contact.

Lauren: I'd prefer it if we had a donor who then walked away and had no contact.

Stevie: It might be OK if they wanted contact once in a blue moon, sent a birthday card...

Lauren: I don't know if I would be comfortable with that. It might cause complications.

Stevie: There was a donor in Edinburgh who said he wanted to buy everything until the baby was born and then walk away but we didn't think that was fair.

We've got a number one donor who really wants to do it, who's constantly in contact asking when we're ready. And we've decided we really want to start next month, after we get the flat ready. We need to find out my ovulation days and then tell him we're ready to start. Now that we have our own place, we might have him over to stay.

Lauren: I'm not sure about that. He was OK about staying in a hotel.

Stevie: We've thought about it so long now. This month we're just counting the days. I've got a test to find out when I'm ovulating, so we know when it will be next month. I've got syringes to use on the night.

My advice is to do a lot of research online or even just go to one of the youth groups. Get into some of the forums and ask around. Find out about the different ways of doing it – it's not just sleeping with a guy or IVF, there's artificial insemination.

It does put a strain on a relationship so make sure you are steady before you do it. Trust is the main thing. Be supportive of the other person, especially when they're pregnant – be prepared for mood swings!

Lauren: You still need to do everything a normal couple does while you're pregnant, have fun, just more carefully.

Stevie: Realise the partner needs to bond with the bump. I found it quite easy. I would put my head on the bump and talk to him, feeling his foot move against my finger. He knew my voice straightaway.

Lauren: Enjoy the pregnancy while you can. Make sure your partner's not going to run.

Stevie: Start saving now. Just make sure you've got a steady income.

Lauren: Some people think a baby just costs a couple of pounds here and there, they don't realise how much it costs.

Stevie: Research it. You need to talk about it all in depth, to know you both want it – not one person wanting a baby and the other being put on the spot and saying "Yes, let's do it," then chickening out.

Lauren: If the wee boy asks, we'll tell him about his dad but if he doesn't I don't see the point. His dad is not showing any interest so far and he only lives a couple of doors away.

Stevie: We're not really wanting the complications of one child knowing their dad and the other one not, or one getting more presents than the other one.

Lauren: My family's been really supportive.

Stevie: My mum has never really accepted that I want to be with a girl and doesn't really acknowledge that we have a kid already. She's been brought up the way her mum was brought up, the old way where girls shouldn't be with girls and boys shouldn't be with boys. She's just stubborn when it comes to this. She doesn't even mind when it's outside the family, it's because it's me. My cousin's scared of coming out because of the way the family treated me when I came out. I've got concerns about when my children go to school, about being bullied.

Lauren: I don't think our wee boy will be picked on.

Stevie: I know quite a lot of gay people who have got kids. I don't think they've had any problems.

Lauren: I know someone in my family who hasn't had any problems and her wee boy is 10.

Stevie: There were a couple of women who came out and their kid got picked on. They moved away. My home area is bad for people who come out, so it would be bad for bringing up a kid. I was getting on a train and someone threw a bottle at my head.

I think when the wee boy gets to a certain age, we'll be wanting to move away. My brother's in Australia and I've got a career that means I can get a transfer across there.

Tracy

My daughter was my blessing in disguise and totally saved my life.

I had had an abusive childhood and had struggled through that. Then when I was 17, I really liked this girl and when she asked me out, I couldn't wait. When I met her, she met me with a group of her 'friends' and I ended up being assaulted by them all. I didn't want to be part of a community that did this to each other. I thought this was the norm.

So I met a guy six weeks later and conformed to what I thought life should be and what society wanted me to be. I had my daughter at 23 and she has been the thing that kept me going, my tower of strength.

I was in my 'marriage' until I was in my early 30s when I finally couldn't bear it any longer. My daughter is totally cool about me and my sexuality and just sees me as her mum.

Trish and Lesley

Lesley: We have been in East Lothian for the past three years but we met in London. Trish is from Scotland originally and I'm from overseas. Our son Angus is five, our daughter Iona is seven months. I'm 47 and Trish is 39.

Trish: It's something I'd always thought about, having children. I didn't come out until I was 22. Before that I'd gone along with the usual, assuming boyfriends, marriage, children. When I came out my vision in terms of having children didn't really change.

Lesley: I found out quite early that I couldn't have children. I had a thrombosis when I was 17. Then the doctors found out I had polycystic ovarian syndrome as well, so I came to terms with not having children when I was really young. When I came out I thought, 'Well at least it's not a waste.' In my country being female is all about being fertile. You're not fulfilling your godly task as a woman unless you have children!

Trish: When we got together, I raised it right away but there was no urgency. I was 26-27, so I wasn't ready to have children anyway. I said, "Let's see what happens."

Over time I felt the urge more. Then, when I was 31-32, a lesbian friend of ours had her first child. That was the start of thinking about it more seriously. I had Angus just before I was 34.

Initially we asked a gay male friend of Lesley's in her home country, who said, "Thanks for asking but no thanks, the distance is too far."

We asked another gay male friend in California but after a health check, he found he had no decent sperm!

We contacted a sperm bank in California too and even went through rigorous health checks and one insemination but it didn't work. We tried them because they had a scheme where after a year you exchanged details with the donor you had chosen so you could have a relationship with him and that was quite important to us. Then we realised that having a donor in California was just too difficult when we were based in London, and that led to our decision to register with a London-based private clinic.

We went through the initial stages and again had one insemination but the whole experience was so horrible, we just knew it wasn't for us.

Lesley: It was just so clinical, so impersonal. Using a sperm donor we hadn't met wasn't for us.

Finding a donor

Trish: I registered with an NHS clinic in East London but they wouldn't accept us because of my weight. The cut off was 16 stone.

We decided to start looking for our own donor, so we went on the computer for the first time. We tried Sperm Donors Worldwide because two friends had found donors through them. This felt like more of a risky thing to do but gave us the control over the process we wanted and a hopefully a much more personal experience.

We emailed three men and met up with them. The first two were absolute no-no's. On paper they ticked the right boxes but I didn't feel any warmth or engagement with them and that was important.

On reflection now, I realise that despite feeling quite a desperate urge to conceive and have a child by this stage, we did manage to find a good person and the best way to do it, for us. Lesley really helped us to stay grounded when my emotions took over and at the same time, she understood the urgency I felt. It wasn't all smooth sailing though, there were stressful moments and I pushed a lot but the strength of our relationship helped.

Lesley: You are genetically wired to look for things in a mate, to resonate with them. We didn't feel any connection until we met Matt. Then it was almost immediate for both of us. After that it was just the small details we worried about.

Trish: Matt is in the same professional role as me. We connected and it was the beginning of a trusting relationship.

Matt's straight. He has an older son by his first marriage and his second wife Sandra has a daughter from her first marriage. He's helped several other

lesbian couples and he donated sperm anonymously to a sperm bank before the law changed, allowing children to trace their parents when they're 16.

Lesley: The fact he'd donated to a sperm bank recently meant he had documentation about his sexual health, so we knew he was clean.

It was also important to us that his wife knew and it was all above board and out in the open, so nothing would come out of the woodwork later. He was happy to participate any way we wanted him to.

Trish: Matt's 50 so he would have been in his early 40s then. We agreed we were happy to go for it, so we did – and I conceived first time.

Matt met Lesley in London with the sperm after work. It was in a camera-film container. Lesley brought it home on the train.

Trust

Lesley: I kept it warm in-between my breasts, at body temperature. The journey was about half an hour, so we knew it should be just about all right.

Trish: There was a stressful point, with me at home worrying: was Matt going to be there? Was Lesley going to bring back the sperm on the train? But there was a level of trust that has grown since and Matt has never let us down.

When Lesley got home, we used a baby medicine syringe from a pharmacy, so it was sterile.

Lesley: We made it romantic, we had champagne. We did it the old-fashioned way only using implements!

Trish: I raised my hips and lay there for the whole evening.

Lesley: She could hardly wait to do the tests, she was so impatient.

Trish: When I tested negative on day 11 or 12, I cried. I felt quite disappointed. I went jogging again (I'd been trying to lose weight), cleared out the loft and then drank a whole bottle of red wine that night. I'd always had regular periods and a 28 day cycle, and when I did a test again on day 15, it was positive!

We let Matt know pretty soon after, by text. We had to tell him we wouldn't be meeting again for sperm. We had intermittent contact with him during the pregnancy – letting him know we'd had a scan, when the due date was. He didn't intrude on us in any way. The trust grew as he left us alone. We'd agreed there would be some sort of relationship between Matt and the baby but that it would emerge over time.

It was a very straightforward pregnancy with Angus, up until the labour. We planned a home birth and everything in the run up was fine.

Lesley: I went into the hospital with Trish towards the end, though, and thought there was an underlying something, in terms of how we were treated as a couple – which prompted Trish to propose!

Trish: Lesley is the romantic one, I'm more practical.

Lesley: When I first proposed to Trish earlier, she said, "No, there's no need" – then one day towards the end of her pregnancy, I came home and she insisted, "We have to get married!"

So we got married in the February, partly in case there were problems with the pregnancy, so I wouldn't have to refer to a family member if things went wrong. Until then, I kept having to spell it out, that when I said I was her partner, I didn't just mean her birthing partner, I was her lover – we were lesbians.

Trish: We started the labour at home but unfortunately the community midwives made errors and did not offer the support we needed, so we ended up in hospital for two days. Angus was born by emergency C section.

I'd always said to Lesley, "Whatever happens to me, you have to stay with Angus."

Lesley: It was brilliant because the staff gave him straight to me from the womb. I cleaned him and weighed him, it was incredible!

Trish: I was still on the table, they were still suturing me.

Lesley: I think they had started to take me seriously by then. There had been a series of unhelpful medical interventions before a really great midwife interceded to get Trish into surgery and I had to get quite assertive. You have to be confident in your role as the partner. If the birth mother gets into difficulties you have to step up.

On the whole we've found midwives are more concerned about you, the person, than the doctors.

Once we got home with Angus, we got caught up in life with a baby. We didn't think about having other children at that stage.

Matt saw Angus every six months or so. We took photos of them, so we could show them to Angus later on.

Lesley: We've also made him a family book with information in it about all of us and our families, grandparents and aunts and uncles. Periodically he'll be really into it, reshuffle things about in it – then he'll put it away.

Trish: Now he's five, he has questions about parents and babies and how he came about. We've been very honest with him, saying Matt was a very kind man who gave his sperm to us, and mummy grew him in her tummy. I think it's important to answer children's questions with facts, but in an age-appropriate way.

Matt used "Daddy" to describe himself, which we were uncomfortable with in the beginning, because we were very clear that we were Angus's parents – even though we wanted Matt to know Angus and Angus to know him. But we've grown used to it and it's what Angus calls him. Any alternative would be quite a hard concept to explain to a five year old child.

Angus calls me Mummy and Lesley, Mummy-Ma or just Ma.

Moving to Scotland

Lesley: When Angus was about 18 months old, we moved to Scotland, where Trish was born. We wanted to bring Angus up in the countryside, where he could feel free and look at bugs and live a good life. We'd both been brought up in the countryside and we were feeling quite tired of London.

Trish: We moved to a little cottage my mum had on the coast to start with. Then to a small seaside town, not far from Edinburgh. I went back to work four days a week.

Lesley: It would have been nice if other LGBT families had been here but that wasn't an issue. We have a few lesbian friends here, and some siblings, but most of our friends here are straight.

Whoever is going to be the parent involved in the local community has to be strong. There can be some resistance if you're out. The waters can part if you're asked, "So what does your husband do?" and you say, "She is a..." It's taken a long time to build relationships.

Trish: And we're not people who don't integrate, we like to be part of the community.

Lesley: You have to participate and you have to keep at it.

Trish: You have to be a positive role model for your children, too. You have to be a normal family so your children feel they're a normal family and the community do too.

We've always been very open. I went and had a meeting with Angus's head teacher and said, "This is our family and our son is coming to your school. She said, "There are children from all sorts of families in our school, he will be welcomed just like anyone else" and then to our surprise his teachers went out and bought some books – that was lovely. The teachers said, "We haven't had a two-mum family before but here we are" and they were very welcoming. I feel that's a two-way street.

I also did a 'show and tell' with Iona, after she was born, to Angus's class. We talked about what babies like and read a story about families by Todd Parr. All Angus's friends know Angus has two mummies and a daddy.

Lesley: We've always been very open, we don't make too much of an issue of it, we just live. A friend of Angus's said the other day, "I think you're really lucky that you have two mums, I think that's really cool." I think *that's* really cool!

Angus is really happy to discuss the fact he has two mums and a dad. He's not embarrassed, he's confident. We want our children to have full lives, not feel they're different – because they're not different. Their home life is exactly the same as every other family's.

Trish: When we moved, we still saw Matt every six months and then we met his wife, Sandra. We went to his home and had lunch, so the relationship progressed. Gradually we started to think about having another child.

It did feel different the second time, because we felt we were asking Sandra as well – it wasn't as simple but it was still something we were all willing to do.

I started monitoring my cycle again. The website, Taking Charge of Your Fertility – www.tcoyf.com – was brilliant, so I read the threads and used their diary chart.

I would take my temperature and look at my cervical mucus so when all the signs were really strong I would know when I was ovulating. I'd send Matt a text and we'd drive the 400 miles to see him. We'd stay in a hotel for one night or two and he would bring the sperm sample to Lesley, just like before. Getting the sperm, looking after the sperm, that was always her role because that way it was a shared experience, a shared responsibility.

It took me four cycles to get pregnant with Iona. Once we were pregnant we didn't see Matt for about a year. The whole process of conceiving was quite stressful this time around. We all needed a bit of space afterwards.

I saw the GP and then I was referred to the community midwives service. They were absolutely brilliant, both in terms of care and in terms of us being a same-sex couple.

There's nothing much to say about the second pregnancy really because it was all straightforward. The whole experience with the hospital was a lot less stressful, too – I had to have a C section again but it was planned and there was none of the consultant arrogance there was in London. There just seemed to be more acceptance about the fact that we were a same-sex couple, more openness.

Lesley was there for the C section and she was given Iona right away. With postnatal care it was the same rule for us as for heterosexual couples, so she wasn't able to stay overnight.

A midwife at Simpson's [maternity unit, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh] tells me there are quite a few lesbian couples coming through now.

We didn't know in advance that we were having a boy with Angus but we found out with Iona and kept it to ourselves as Angus had said he wanted it to be a surprise.

When we first met Matt, he had graying hair so we hadn't expected it when Angus was born with red hair. Then when we saw pictures of Matt as a boy, he had red hair, which he grew out of.

Angus looks like Matt and Iona looks a bit more like me. Angus has a lot of

his Ma's traits though, as she has been the one at home raising him for the past three years. He has her accent and they are very close.

Getting pregnant as a lesbian couple in a small village has been an experience, and I am glad to say mostly a positive one. I find it quite funny that people really express their approval that Iona has the same father as Angus. I guess it's just the norm. If we hadn't been able to have Iona with Matt, I'm not sure we would have used another donor. It would have felt like having a whole new mountain to climb.

Now we have Iona, that's the family complete – both from an age perspective and because two is plenty! We are very blessed.

Our advice?

1. Keep an open mind as to how you're going to have children because there's lots of different options available. What's important is sticking to your values eg. if you want a known donor, stick to that but be open to the possibilities of how that might happen.
2. Don't wait.
3. If you're positive and open about who you are, that tends to be returned by others.

Legal Notes

The following information about (1) Parenthood in assisted reproduction, and (2) Adoption, is adapted by the Equality Network from articles by (1) Caroline L S Henderson and (2) Peter Murrin, solicitors in the Family Law Unit at Maclay Murray & Spens LLP.

Maclay Murray & Spens LLP have also provided the Equality Network with information about parenthood and guardianship, and on the importance of parents making a will, which is available on request or via www.equality-network.org in the section on Your Rights: Parenting.

Please note that the law in this area is complex, and these notes only give an outline. It is always a good idea to get legal advice yourself from a lawyer with experience with LGBT parenting issues.

Parenthood in assisted reproduction

The legal definition of parenthood in circumstances where a child is born by assisted reproduction, including donor insemination, is complicated.

The legal definition of the mother of a child is the one who gives birth to the child, whether the child is conceived naturally or following assisted reproduction. It does not matter whether she has any genetic connection with the child – in law she is regarded as the mother “for all legal purposes” at the time of the child’s birth.

The legal status of ‘mother’ will only be lost through adoption (or in the case of a surrogate mother, through the making of a parental order, detailed below).

The child’s other parent in a legal sense, whether male or female, will depend on the genetic material used in the assisted reproduction, but more importantly, will depend on the marital or civil partnership status of the mother. The main determining factor of who a child’s other legal parent is at

the time of the child's birth is whether or not the mother is married or in a civil partnership. If she is, then it is her husband or civil partner who will legally be presumed to be the child's father or other parent at the time of the child's birth, irrespective of whether he or she is biologically connected to the child or not.

This means that if a woman gives birth to a child conceived by donor insemination, then if she was in a civil partnership at the time of conception, she and her civil partner are the child's legal parents. The sperm donor is not a legal parent of the child.

If a woman who is not in a civil partnership gives birth to a child conceived by donor insemination, the situation is more complex. The other legal parent depends on whether the donor insemination was done through a licensed fertility clinic, or was 'do-it-yourself'. If a licensed fertility clinic is used, the mother can nominate another person to be the child's other legal parent – typically this would be her partner. If the donor insemination was not done through a clinic, but was do-it-yourself, then if the mother is not in a civil partnership, it is the sperm donor who is the child's other legal parent, not the mother's partner.

Donor insemination

The legal position of donor insemination is complicated. Whether or not your donor has any legal rights to a child conceived by donor insemination can depend on a number of things, including whether the sperm is used within the regulatory framework of the 2008 legislation or not (and that can include whether or not the donor is known to the woman), and how the insemination took place. But most importantly it depends on the legal status of the mother at the time of conception.

Clinics

If a woman gives birth to a child conceived artificially by donor insemination through a licensed clinic in the UK then the sperm donor is not a legal parent of the child. The child will have one legal parent at the time of birth, that

is, the birth mother. If the option of a licensed fertility clinic is used, a single lesbian mother can nominate another person to be the child's other legal parent. Typically, this would be her partner. If however the woman who gives birth is married or in a civil partnership at the time of artificial insemination through a clinic, then her husband or civil partner will automatically be regarded as the child's father or other parent in law (provided they have consented to the treatment). In these circumstances a child will have two legal parents at birth.

Anonymity of the sperm bank donor (at the time of conception, but only insofar as the legislation provides) ensures that if the donor insemination is carried out at a licensed fertility clinic then the donor will not acquire legal rights to any child born as a result of this method of conception and will not be regarded as a legal parent to the child.

If a woman gives birth to a child conceived artificially by insemination from a known donor through a clinic then the most important factor in determining legal parenthood is the marital or partnership status of the recipient of the donor's sperm. If the woman is single, the donor may still be regarded as the legal father even if he has signed donor consent forms. The known donor can be named on the birth certificate. If the birth is registered jointly with the donor, he will automatically acquire parental responsibilities and rights in relation to the child. He will be relinquishing any treatment in law of him as a licensed sperm donor and will have identical rights and responsibilities to the child as that of the mother.

“Do it yourself” donor insemination

A sperm donor who donates sperm outwith the regulatory framework of the 2008 Act (not through a licensed clinic in the UK) is the legal father of any child born as a result of artificial insemination. This is the case if the woman is single, even if she is in a relationship. If this is not the intention of the parties then conception should be undertaken at a UK licensed clinic and the relevant parenthood election forms should be completed.

The partner (rather than civil partner) of a lesbian conceiving at home would have no legal rights to a child born by these means and would require to apply for parental responsibilities and rights as a “relevant person” in terms of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or consider adoption of the child

Pre and Post 2009 law for civil partners

The law for donor insemination affecting civil partners changed on 6th April 2009. If a child was conceived after 6 April 2009 in cases where the woman is married or in a civil partnership and her husband or civil partner has consented to the treatment, it would be the husband or civil partner who would be regarded as the second legal parent. They can be named on the birth certificate. The insemination must be by way of artificial means, either through a licensed clinic or “do it yourself”.

If the child was conceived through “do it yourself” insemination before 6 April 2009 the civil partner has no automatic recognition as a legal parent. She would be in the same legal position as the partner of a non civil-partnered lesbian and would have the options referred to above.

Finally, it is important to note that any person who is involved in parenting a child may apply to the court as “a relevant person” to be granted at least some legal parental responsibilities and rights, for example the right to have contact with the child. The court will only grant this where it thinks such an order would be in the child’s best interests and that it is necessary for such an order to be made. There have been cases where a sperm donor who was not named on the birth certificate has later been granted parental responsibilities and rights by the court after he had played a role in looking after the child. The court can grant such an order even if the mother and her partner oppose it. In such circumstances parties may wish to consider the legalities of such an arrangement in advance by considering a Preconception Agreement. This can limit any legal responsibilities a donor may have or, conversely, a Co-parenting Agreement can ensure the donor’s status in respect of the child he intends to father.

Surrogacy and parental orders

Surrogacy is where a woman carries and gives birth to a child on behalf of another couple, with the intention that parenthood will be transferred to that other couple shortly after birth. This transfer is done by a ‘parental order’.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 ('the 1990 Act') introduced the concept of a parental order. A parental order is the legal mechanism for transferring the status of 'mother' from the surrogate to the commissioning parents. The 1990 Act only provided for cases in which the commissioning couple were married.

Since 6 April 2010 under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, the category of people who can apply for a parental order was extended so that civil partners, and mixed-sex or same-sex couples living as partners in an enduring family relationship, as well as married couples, can apply for parental orders.

Before a parental order can be made various conditions require to be fulfilled. Parental orders will only be made where:

1. The application is made by a married couple, civil partners, or two persons who are living as partners in an enduring family relationship and are not within prohibited degrees of relationship in relation to each other (that means, not closely related, eg brother or sister, parent and child, etc);
2. The child has been carried by a woman other than one of the applicants as a result of the placing in her of an embryo or sperm and eggs, or through artificial insemination;
3. The egg or sperm of at least one of the applicants was used to bring about the creation of the embryo;
4. An application for a parental order is made within six months of the birth of the child;
5. The child's home is with the applicants at the time of the application and at the time the order is made;
6. Either or both of the applicants are domiciled in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands or Isle of Man at the time of application and at the time the order is made;
7. Both the applicants have attained the age of 18 by the time the order is made; and
8. The woman who carried the child and any other person who is a parent of the child have freely, and with full understanding of what is involved agreed

unconditionally to the making of the order. A mother cannot give agreement to a parental order less than six weeks after the birth of the child.

Other rules about surrogacy

The Surrogacy Arrangements Act 1985 prohibits the entering into or negotiating of a surrogacy arrangement on a commercial basis. In other words, the surrogate mother cannot be paid a fee for being a surrogate, although all her expenses related to the pregnancy can be paid by the commissioning couple.

It is criminal offence to negotiate a surrogacy arrangement on a commercial basis. It is not an offence for somebody to enter into an arrangement, but it is an offence for a third party brokering a surrogacy arrangement and to profit by helping someone else make a surrogacy arrangement. Non profit making organisations (such as COTS - www.surrogacy.org.uk) are legal so long as they do not charge for their services, although they may charge a membership fee. It is also a criminal offence in the UK to advertise that you are a third party willing to facilitate the making of a surrogacy arrangement, or that you are looking for a surrogate mother or are willing to act as a surrogate mother.

The Act also states that surrogacy agreements entered into in this country are unenforceable. This means that the surrogate mother always has the right to change her mind about the arrangement, and keep the child, up to the point where she agrees to the parental order, which will be at least six weeks after the birth.

If the surrogacy arrangement fails and the surrogate elects not to hand the child over following birth, an application to court (by either party) may be made to determine with whom the child should reside and what would be in the child's best interests: would it be in the best interest of the child to reside with the surrogate or with the commissioning parents. Although unenforceable in the UK a surrogacy agreement can demonstrate the clear intention of the parties at the time the surrogacy arrangement was entered into which may be of relevance in determining a later dispute.

It may be possible to enter into a surrogacy arrangement in a country outwith the UK. However, there have been numerous cases which highlight the

difficulties of dealing with the laws of two different countries, which may not be compatible. There are many countries in which a surrogacy arrangement is enforceable domestically, unlike in the UK. There are also countries where surrogacy agreements are illegal. This can effectively mean that a child may be regarded as 'stateless' and have no rights in either country.

There are very complex rules about bringing a surrogate child into the UK. The child will not automatically be a British citizen and in some cases parents may have to apply to the Secretary of State for special entry clearance – a time consuming process preventing the return of the new family unit back to the UK to start their new family life together. Specialist advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity.

Caroline L S Henderson is a senior solicitor within the Family Law Team at Maclay Murray & Spens LLP.

Adoption

Background

On 31 July 2011, 16,171 children in Scotland were in the care of local authorities. The largest grouping (37 percent) was that of children between the ages of 5 and 11 years old and the second largest was between the ages of 12 and 15 years old (32 percent).

In the year 2009-10 only 466 adoption orders were granted. Of that number 103 were children between the ages 5 and 9, and 7 were between the ages 10 and 14. The majority of the adoptions were by male / female couples, with only 12 being by same-sex couples (8 female / female and 4 male / male).

Adoption and fostering represents an avenue for those couples who cannot have their own, to bring children into their lives and to give them a home as well as love, care and support. More same-sex couples now consider adoption for these reasons, and as more adoption agencies actively promote the availability of adoption to same-sex families, it is worth reviewing what is required to adopt.

What is adoption?

The current adoption law in Scotland is found in the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (the “2007 Act”). Adoption is the legal process through which a new and permanent family life can be provided to a child who cannot be cared for by their birth parents or biological family. A court order transfers parental responsibilities and rights (the responsibilities to the child and rights of the parent in respect of the child) from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. What this means is that the person adopted is thereafter treated as the child of the adoptive parents in the eyes of the law.

When deciding whether to make an adoption order a court must have regard to the whole circumstances of the case but specifically shall regard the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of the child as its paramount

consideration. Other considerations will include (but will not be limited to) the child's views (where appropriate, having regard to age and maturity), religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background as well as the value of the stable family unit in the child's development. In essence, everything that is relevant will be taken into consideration.

The process

There is no shortage of adoption agencies in Scotland and in most cases the process begins with a simple enquiry. Many adoption agencies are charities such as Barnardo's or The Scottish Adoption Association (Edinburgh and the Lothians) but most operate on behalf of local authorities. Glasgow City Council's agency is Families for Children while Dundee City Council's Change Their Lives provides good advice and assistance for applicants in that region.

Exact details can vary slightly between agencies so individual experiences may differ slightly from what follows but, substantively, the process is uniform. Following the applicant's enquiry there will be a meeting with the agency. The purpose of this is to exchange information and will hopefully enable an application which will be assessed by a social worker.

The assessment process will include visits to the applicant's home by the social worker (usually six times), medical history checks, a medical examination and a background check. Three character references are also usually taken. It is generally expected that the process will take a minimum of six months following which the social worker will prepare a Prospective Adopters Report with the applicants. During the period, applicants will often be invited to attend parenting classes and workshops designed to prepare the adoptive parents for the step they are about to take and to familiarise them with common problems which may arise as a result of the change that will take place in their lives.

The applicant will then be invited to attend an adoption panel meeting which will recommend either to approve the applicant or not based on the report and the applicant's circumstances.

It is worth pointing out that it can take time to be matched with a suitable child – couples will often have preferences in terms of age ranges and the agency will have a duty to ensure that the match of parent to child is suitable.

This can be a frustrating period for the applicant(s) having spent several months in the assessment process. Once the child is found by the agency, a further meeting is held between the agency and the applicants and a report is made by the agency to the adoption panel which will, in turn, make its recommendation on whether the placement should be made.

Following on from that, a series of meetings between the child and the now prospective adopters will usually occur (often in the company of the child's foster carers) to allow the child and the prospective adopters to get to know one another. If all goes well, the child will then move in with prospective adopters. Once that living arrangement has subsisted for a number of weeks (10 weeks is quoted by some agencies), the prospective adopters may apply to the court for the adoption order in respect of the child. It should be kept in mind that a child's parent or guardian with parental rights and responsibilities can contest the adoption up to the point where an order is applied for. Nevertheless, once an adoption order is granted by the court, the child legally becomes a part of their adoptive family.

There is no doubting that the process can seem arduous and even frustratingly formal but the welfare of the child is paramount and the purpose is to create a permanent family arrangement. The benefits to the prospective parent and child are beyond measure.

Who can adopt?

Sexual orientation and gender identity are not barriers to adoption but are circumstances which will be taken into account in the 'whole circumstances' of the case. The 2007 Act allows for single people, married couples, couples in a civil partnership and cohabiting couples (mixed-sex or same-sex) to adopt. With high profile same-sex couples adopting and raising children, social attitudes surrounding what does and what should constitute a family unit are undoubtedly changing.

The minimum age for applicants is 21 and there is no upper age limit. However, agencies and the adoption panel will take this into account, alongside health and well-being, as part of the assessment process. Being disabled, overweight or having an illness do not preclude an applicant and agencies will often suggest that an applicant discusses the demands and expectations of adoption with an adopter with similar circumstances (Adoption UK's PAL service is one facility which has a particular focus on this area).

Finance is obviously important for many families. An applicant does not need to be wealthy or a homeowner to adopt. However, it will obviously be necessary to show how a child would be supported going forward. An applicant will be asked to show that there is adequate space and means to care for the child although in some cases assistance from a local authority will be available.

Adoption leave

In terms of leave and payment, the rights in respect of adoption mirror those of maternity. An adopter (or one member of a couple who adopt jointly) may, if they meet the eligibility criteria, take up to 52 weeks adoption leave (made up of 26 weeks ordinary leave and 26 weeks additional leave). Statutory adoption pay will also be available for a maximum of 39 weeks and is currently (2013-14) paid at the rate of £136.78 per week (although some employers may offer better as part of the terms of an individual's contract). An adopter will be eligible for said leave and pay where they are newly matched for adoption through a recognised adoption agency and where they have been in continuous employment, with their employer, for a period of 26 weeks (ending with the week in which they are notified of the match).

The other member of a couple who are adopting jointly may be eligible for paternity leave or additional paternity leave – despite the terminology, the leave is available to same-sex female couples as well as men – if they meet the required criteria.

Peter Murrin is a Private Client and Family Law solicitor at Maclay Murray & Spens LLP

Contacts

This resource was produced in partnership by:

Equality Network

30 Bernard Street
Edinburgh EH6 6PR
Tel: 0131 467 6039
www.equality-network.org

LGBT Youth Scotland

40 Commercial Street
Edinburgh EH6 6JD
Tel: 0131 555 3940
www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing

9 Howe Street
Edinburgh EH3 6TE
Tel: 0131 523 1104
<http://lgbthealth.org.uk/>

Information for gay parents/potential parents

Stonewall's *Pregnant Pause – a guide for lesbians on how to get pregnant* and *A Guide for Gay Dads*, may be found on their website (below), together with information on adoption and fostering, donor insemination, co-parenting, parental responsibility, parental rights at work, parenting and family research, residence and custody, step parenting.

Stonewall Scotland

Mansfield Traquair Centre
15 Mansfield Place
Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8019
www.stonewallscotland.org.uk

Useful websites, forums and other resources

The following organisations' websites, forums and resources were mentioned by LGBT people during the course of interviews or in survey responses.

BAAF Adoption and Fostering – Scottish Centre

113 Rose Street
Edinburgh EH2 3DT
Tel: 0131 226 9270
www.baaf.org.uk/scotland
www.baaf.org.uk/info/lgbt

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Finsbury Tower
103-105 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8HF
Tel: 020 7291 8200
www.hfea.gov.uk

COTS (Childlessness Overcome through Surrogacy)

www.surrogacy.org.uk

Surrogacy UK

www.surrogacyuk.org

IVF Scotland

Shawfair Park Hospital

10 Easter Shawfair

Edinburgh EH22 1FE

Tel: 0131 316 2507

www.spirehealthcare.com/IVFScotland

London Women's clinic

113 – 115 Harley Street

London W1G 6AP UK

Tel: 020 7563 4309

www.londonwomensclinic.com

Nuffield Health Glasgow Hospital

25 Beaconsfield Road

Glasgow G12 0PJ

www.nuffieldhealth.com

Tel: 0141 530 1387 (Assisted Conception Unit)

Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh

51 Little France Crescent

Old Dalkeith Road

Edinburgh EH16 4SA

Tel: 0131 536 1000

European Sperm Bank

Falkoner Allé 63, 2 floor

2000 Frederiksberg

Copenhagen

Denmark

Tel: (+45) 38 34 36 00

www.europeanspermbank.com

Sperm Donors Worldwide

www.sperm-donors-worldwide.com

Co-parents.net

www.co-parents.net

Cryos International – Denmark ApS

Vesterbro Torv 1-3, 5th floor
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Denmark
Phone (+45) 86 76 06 99
<http://dk.cryosinternational.com/home.aspx>

Coram (adoption services)

49 Mecklenburgh Square
London
WC1N 2QA
Tel: 020 7520 0300
www.coram.org.uk

Rainbow Families

LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing
9 Howe Street
Edinburgh EH3 6TE
Tel: 0131 523 1100
www.facebook.com/LGBTrainbowfamilies

Gay Dads Scotland

www.gaydadsscotland.org.uk

Fertility Friends (online forum)

www.fertilityfriends.co.uk

Resources

Becoming Dads, by Pablo Fernandez

A Guide for Gay Dads, Stonewall

Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption – Extraordinary yet Ordinary, edited by Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermott

Talking about adoption to your adopted child, Marjorie Morrison

A child's journey through placement (UK edition), Vera I Fahlberg MD, BAAF.

Building the Bonds of Attachment – Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children, Daniel A Hughes

Pregnant Pause – a guide for lesbians on how to get pregnant, Stonewall

The New Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception, Pregnancy & Birth, by Stephanie Brill

Intrauterine donor insemination in single women and lesbian couples: a comparative study of pregnancy rates, Ferrara, Balet and Grudzinskas, Human Reproduction Vol 15, Issue 3, pp. 621-625
(<http://humrep.oxfordjournals.org/content/15/3/621.full>).

Living Two Lives: Married to a Man and In Love with a Woman, by Joanne Fleisher

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Brackets () indicate that this refers to the speaker's partner.

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* No-one we interviewed during this project, or who responded to our survey, said that they were HIV positive. Information for people who are affected by HIV, who are thinking about having a baby, can be found on the Terence Higgins Trust website, www.tht.org.uk.

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Equality Network, 30 Bernard Street, Edinburgh, EH6 6PR

www.equality-network.org / 0131 467 6039

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