

LIFE after loss

*Carolyn Mayling conceived through IVF at 53.
But it took a tragic loss to make it happen...*

After the death of my daughter Rosie, I could never have imagined bringing another child into the world. Aged eleven she was diagnosed with vasculitis – a rare autoimmune disease – and our family were thrust into a frightening hospital world of sick children. For six months, Rosie was subjected to scans and operations, fear paralysing us at every prognosis. Then, six days after she was discharged from hospital with blood thinners, she suffered a pulmonary haemorrhage leading to a cardiac arrest. And on May 14th, 2003, she died.

As I describe in my new memoir, *The Future Is Rosie*, the horror of losing our darling daughter that day has had an irreversible impact on the family. In my grief, I tried anything and everything. I turned to spirituality, found solace with a group of other women also suffering from child loss and set up Rosie's Rainbow Fund – supporting sick children in hospital and beyond – in our daughter's honour. Helping others lessened my own pain a little.

Meanwhile my elder daughter, Ellie, was left without her sister and best friend. Joy drained from all our lives; the silence in our home was deafening. Yet gradually, in the void, a voice began to come through. It was Rosie's voice, confirming the thought that had been at the back of my mind: maybe I could have another child. Clear as day, I heard her tell me: "You can do this."

Initially, I felt guilty, as if I was betraying both Rosie and Ellie. Yet the

possibility of new life meant that Rosie was still with us, guiding our lives, and I knew that I had to try. At first Ellie found this impossible to accept, while my mum thought I was "utterly cuckoo", but they soon came to support our decision. So, age 47, I arranged a meeting with my GP, aware that she might see me as delusional.

To my relief, she agreed to back me all the way, referring me to Princess Christian's Hospital in Windsor. The doctor there explained that my chance of conceiving naturally was "one in a thousand": I would need an egg donor.

My sister immediately volunteered. Sam is 10 years younger than me, but 38 was still considered old for egg donation. Moreover Ellie, at 15, was disturbed that her sibling would also be her biological cousin. And the doctor also explained that my husband David, Sam, her partner Phil and I would all have to undergo extensive counselling.

The clinic took four eggs, fertilised three and implanted two, freezing the third for another attempt. Two weeks later the dreaded words 'not pregnant' appeared on my test. All hope seemed to vanish and the belief that Rosie was helping me went with it.

In August 2006, by which time I was 51, a second try brought the same crushing result. Any further attempt would mean finding another clinic – one which would treat couples over 50. I was also going to need a new donor.

We were recommended to a fertility clinic in London which treated women of my age. The waiting time in England was three years, but at the sister hospital in Cyprus it was only six months. David agreed that we'd give it one last shot out there.

In February 2008 we received an email from a donor willing to offer us an 'exclusive donation'. We alone would receive her eggs: they would not be shared with another recipient. The cost, however, was prohibitive. Our only option was to wait for another donor and share with another recipient.



Rosie

I weighed up the pros and cons, reflecting on the idea that my child might have a half-sibling somewhere in the world. How would I tell my child about the circumstances of his or her birth?

A month later, a possible donor emerged: a woman from Moldova. The clinic also found a recipient willing to do a 'shared cycle'. Again the questions came: Who was this donor? Why was she offering her eggs? Would I struggle to bond with the child, knowing that it lacked my family's genes? But this was our only chance. Let the egg harvesting and remote fertilisation begin.

In April 2008, we flew to Cyprus for the fertilised egg implantation procedure. It was Easter, and the sight of colourful eggs everywhere struck me as a positive sign. Moreover, the Cypriot doctor was confident that I would fall pregnant.

Two weeks later, to my great joy, the word 'pregnant' appeared on my test. Every drug and test – not to mention the cost – had suddenly become worth it.

My son Dominic was born in December by caesarean section, and all my concerns about conceiving through IVF vanished the minute I held him in my arms. Ellie now had a younger brother with whom she instantly fell in love, and the whole family bonded once more.

As for Rosie, I felt her standing beside me, more present than ever to welcome her brother into our lives. The years ahead would bring further challenges, but nothing then or now could change this single fact: the future is Rosie.

■ *The Future is Rosie*, by Carolyn Mayling (Alliance Publishing Press, £11.99), is available via Amazon and to order through all bookshops. For information on the charity visit: rosiesrainbowfund.co.uk

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Best friends, Rosie and Ellie



Carolyn with son, Dominic

