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I Gave Birth At 54, After Losing My 11-Year-Old To Vasculitis

Carolyn's daughter Rosie died from an autoimmune condition in 2003. Years later, in her late forties, she decided it was time to try for another baby.

By Natasha Hinde

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CAROLYN MAYLING

Carolyn Mayling (left) and her daughter Rosie (right)

In My Story, readers share their unique, life-changing experiences. This week we hear from Carolyn Mayling, 68, who's based in Maidenhead.

My daughter Rosie had never been ill in her life – with anything.

When she was 11, she was rehearsing for a pantomime (we run a school for the performing arts) and started to get these strange symptoms. It manifested itself like a chest infection at the beginning and we didn't really think too much of it. She had this cough – we thought she'd just picked up a virus, but it got worse and worse. She was still ill after Christmas and was referred to a specialist.

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Eventually – after insisting on lots of tests – they did a CT scan, by which point she was very breathless and couldn't breathe properly. They said they'd found these pulmonary embolisms in the arteries going into her lungs, which was why she couldn't breathe.

We were told they had to blue light her to the hospital in Oxford.

CAROLYN MAYLING

Rosie (left) and her sister Ellie (right)

From being just sat in a doctor's room, it was suddenly like everything took off. It was really scary. She was sent straight to intensive care to be monitored. But they still didn't know what was wrong.

We were in hospital a really long time. The doctors thought it might be some sort of cancer – so they had to do surgery. When she came out, they said they didn't find cancer but they did find blood clots which they'd taken out.

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We were celebrating, thinking: 'it's over, we've got the blood clots out and she's going to get better.' But two days later the blood clots came back when they were scanning her again, which was really terrifying. Eventually they diagnosed her with vasculitis, which is an autoimmune disease affecting the blood vessels.

Rosie was discharged in late April 2003 and came home for six days. She still

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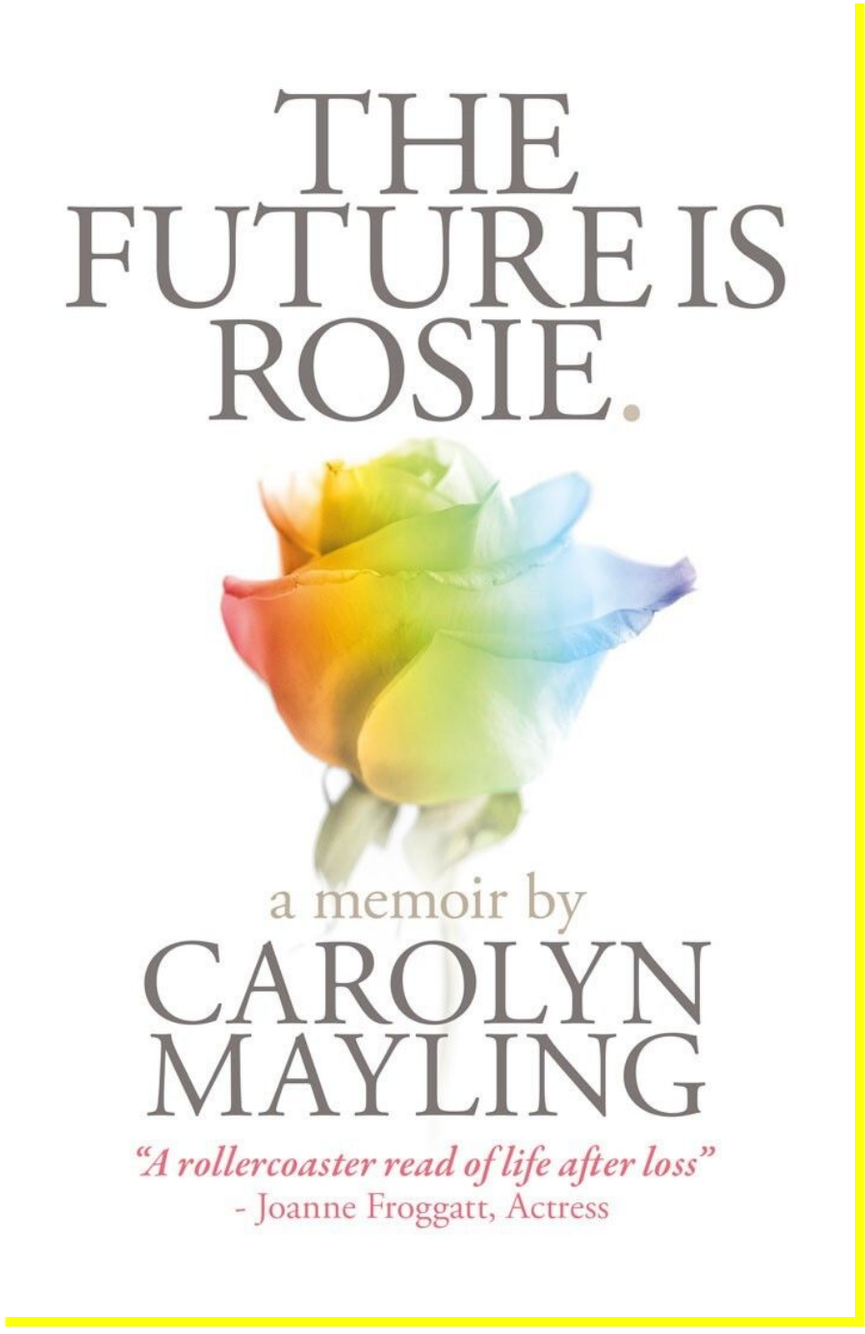
wasn't right – she was very thin and weak – and then she had a pulmonary haemorrhage at home. We managed to get her back to hospital and they took her straight to intensive care. She had a huge cardiac arrest. She spent nine days on the ventilator, it was complete life support, and then after that time she was eventually pronounced brain stem dead and we had to make the decision to turn the machine off.



CAROLYN MAYLING

Carolyn has written a book 'The Future Is Rosie,' about her experience of life after loss.

There was no support for bereaved parents, there was no support telling us what to do or how to cope with the death of a child. We left the hospital with a pile of papers and went back to our life – although it wasn't that any more. Two days after that my husband had a heart attack and ended up in hospital saying he didn't want to live. I told him he had to because we had another daughter to look after and he couldn't leave us. He came through that, came out of hospital the day before the funeral and we got through the funeral.

Ellie was 14 when Rosie died – they were very close. All of a sudden our house was silent: no toys, no mess and all the stuff that goes with having young kids. We'd always had a house full of kids playing, dancing, singing and making a mess – and all of a sudden, it was just nothing. It was awful.

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When Rosie was five and Ellie was about seven or eight, we went on holiday to Cornwall. One evening there was a psychic medium on in the hotel lounge. We went to this medium and she looked at us and said: “There’s going to be another child and it’s coming to you after a long gap.”

We said: “Absolutely not. Maybe it’s a grandchild?” and she said: “No, it’s not a grandchild. It’s going to be your child and it’s going to be a boy.” I wrote it down in a notebook and forgot about it.

After Rosie died, I had this compulsion that I had to have another child. Not to replace Rosie, because she was irreplaceable, but just to fill some sort of void and bring us back into the now and give us a future, really. By that time I was 48 and my husband said: “You’ve got to be kidding, it’s not going to work.” And I said: “Let’s just see shall we.”

I went to the doctor and expected her to say “don’t be stupid” but she said if it was what we really wanted, she’d help us get the ball rolling. We went to see a IVF specialist who said we could do IVF, but couldn’t use my own eggs because of my age. So we were looking at conceiving with a donor egg.

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My sister, who was 38 at the time, said: “Why don’t you use my eggs?” She donated her eggs and we went through two cycles with two transfers. Upsettingly, neither of them worked. I turned 50 and my sister said she couldn’t go through it again – it took too much out of her body and made her ill.

I then found out there was a clinic in London that treated women over 50. They said they could help but had a three-year waiting list. Or they could do it straight away at their sister clinic in Cyprus. So we went with that option.

I had a choice between using an exclusive donor who would give me all her harvested eggs or a donor who would share her harvested eggs with myself and one other person, which halved the cost.

I couldn’t afford to have an exclusive egg donor so I chose to share the donor’s eggs with another recipient. We ended up doing a cycle using a donor from Maldova. This amazing donor – who remains anonymous – donated a batch of eggs which were split and some of them went to the other recipient, and some to me. Two eggs fertilised, which was amazing, and we were told when they said ‘go’ we’d have to fly out to Cyprus.

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We flew out and the guy who was doing the transfer said: “You know this is going to work.” And I said: “After all we’ve been through, I think it’s a very risky thing to say to me.” And he said: “No I’m telling you, this is looking really good.”

Two fertilised eggs were implanted in myself and we stayed there for a few days, resting, before flying back home. After 11 days I took a pregnancy test – and lo and behold, I was pregnant. I was just about to turn 54.

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I was overjoyed. My husband went into shock and didn’t talk for about an hour-and-a-half and I thought he was really upset about it. It was like: “Oh my god, it worked.” But I kind of always knew it would. I always got signs and messages from Rosie all through the years. I’m a big believer in spirituality and stuff. All this time I’d been getting rainbows on the way to my prep sessions at the hospital. After Rosie’s death I got a bit addicted to spiritual stuff and many mediums had predicted there’d be another baby, a boy, so I kind of always knew it was going to happen.

I found an amazing obstetrician who looked after me during my pregnancy. Extraordinarily my pregnancy was no different to my earlier pregnancies. It was exactly the same. I was being looked after a little bit more carefully than I was with the first two, because I was younger then. But it was just a normal pregnancy.

I was teaching dance at the time but stopped teaching fairly early in the pregnancy because I’m a tap dance teacher and didn’t want to be bouncing about as much. But honestly it was just normal. I had a Caesarean section because my obstetrician said it wouldn’t be safe not to – and that was all fine. My son was born in December 2008.

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People had said to me when I was thinking about having another child: *do you think it’s a good idea? Don’t you think your child will have a problem with having a much older mum? That his friend’s parents won’t relate to you?* But I haven’t found any of that.

Now I’ve got this amazing child who I love to bits. I was a little worried I wouldn’t love him like I loved my other children, but I did – and it was never an issue. He’s now 14 and is doing really well. Interestingly, he’s not at all into the performing arts. But he loves animals and is really good with them. His egg donor was a veterinary surgeon in Maldova.

I said to my ex-husband (we divorced in 2013) when Dom was born that he needed to grow up knowing his history because I didn’t want him suddenly finding out when he was 16 that he wasn’t genetically mine. He’s grown up knowing. I didn’t actively have the conversation he was from an egg donor, but I’ve always drip fed the information.

If you're reading this and hoping to conceive after 50, my message is: don't give up. Do your research. There are always ways of doing it. Don't take no for an answer if that's really what you want to do – and then just go for it.

Rosie always used to say: "Don't talk about it, do it." That always resonated with me, especially throughout IVF.

So I did it.

Carolyn Mayling is the author of The Future Is Rosie published by Alliance Publishing Press Ltd (£11.99) and founder of the charity Rosie's Rainbow Fund. She was interviewed by Natasha Hinde and her answers were edited for length and clarity. To take part in HuffPost UK's My Story series, email uklife@huffpost.com.

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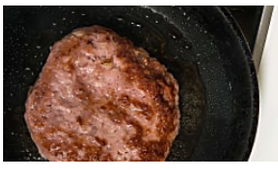

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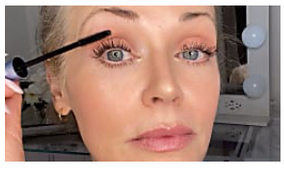

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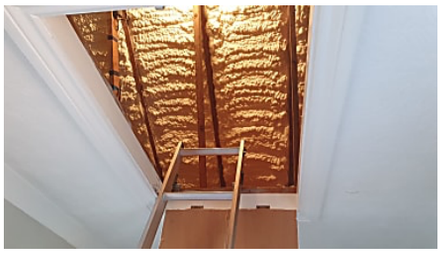

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