

Hello Reader,

I am an azoospermic male and I hope it might be helpful to hear something of my story and how I came to find myself writing these notes. I will try to be open as I write but in some areas I may not say too much because I would be crossing boundaries from **my** experience and response to that of others eg my former wife and also the children. So here goes;

As a young man I always wanted to be married and have children. My parents had met and married very young. They were happy together and I had two sisters and a brother. It is perhaps no surprise then that I should marry after my first year at University, aged 19, and embark upon what I hoped would be a long and fruitful marriage with at least two children. After I had finished my first degree we decided that we would start to try for a family and we had no success. After about a year we went to the doctor and tests were started on my wife. She was soon on Clomid and we were temperature charting every month. She had all kinds of tests including finally a hysterosalpingogram which she described as being the worst to date. All the while I expected us to be successful.

However, after about two years someone got around to asking me for a semen sample. I obliged. A few weeks later they asked me for another and I obliged. Then we had another appointment to see the head man at the Women's Hospital where our infertility investigations were being conducted. We were shown into the head mans office by a rather large and nervous looking nurse. The head man sat at his desk and two other male doctors were standing behind him. I remember very little of the meeting except for the following. At some point he turned to me and said 'There's no chance whatsoever for you. You have just a few sperm and they are all dead'. Then he turned to my wife and said 'Don't worry about it. You are an attractive woman, get yourself a career and forget about having a family...'. I don't recall anything else other than having the distinct impression that the nurse was angry at the doctor, presumably for his handling of the meeting. That was the day when everything fell apart. My whole life's plan was down the drain. No children meant no life. I had never considered that life was really about anything else. My career was my way of providing more material support for my wife and family. I knew that it would never sustain me alone. What I also recall is a certain amount of anger and humiliation for what seemed to me to be a stupid two year delay in testing me. All those temperature charts and using cushions and waiting for at least 30 minutes after intercourse were rubbish – it was all doomed to failure. For some reason the memory of these events made me feel humiliated, virtually emasculated.

It is at that point that I can only say I went into the 'black years'. Oh, sure I carried on with my career, I still played squash and went drinking with friends, but it was all a daze to me. It is rather difficult to explain now as I look back, perhaps I don't want to because it is just too awful and I don't want to go there again? I do recognise that my self-image as a man took a real beating. I am sure that is why I became much more aggressive as a squash player. I wanted to grind my opponent into the dust. I no longer just wanted to beat him. I started buying sports cars instead of family saloons. I hotted them up so that I could overtake everyone and everything on the way to and from work each day. It scared the wits out of my wife, rightly so because I was mad, but I was well switched off from her as well by now. We were going to have to adopt and it was going to take years.

Parents and friends were next to useless. Not their fault and I knew that even at the time. I recall going home to tell my parents and my dad talking for hours about how 'There problem was stopping babies!. Every time I hang my trousers over the end of the bed mum was pregnant again. Thank God for the pill, it was an absolutely marvellous invention and helped us a lot. Of course now I have had the chop mum doesn't even have to take the pill. That's important to because of the health risks....' I could not really believe my ears. I was alone. So the black years continued.

I got a research job and we had to move. One consequence of that was that our adoption application was stopped. We had moved into another area and had to start again. My wife was not pleased but since I was in medical research we were able to jump waiting lists and we started AID treatment. I completed questionnaires and had interviews so that the sperm donor could be selected appropriately. We even paid for some sessions at Harley Street and

used all the money we had saved for a deposit on a house. No luck. When we used to go home my mum would say 'You are looking a bit thin and drawn, are you OK?'. I would shrug off the comment but scream inside 'How the hell can I be OK?'. Not mums fault, I was alone. The black years continued.

It was about this time that I became aware of a friend at work and realised that he was quite unusual. He did not fit into any of the usual 'boxes' that I would put people into. He was a married man with children and worked in my department. He was a relatively quiet and gentle man and certainly did not fit into the more macho image that I had of men or manliness. Nonetheless he proved over about an 18 month period to be a good friend, empathic and sympathetic. I became conscious I suppose that I was learning something from him. Eventually it occurred to me that he might be a Christian (I certainly was not!) and over the next year I trod a path that led me out of the black years and to becoming a Christian. An outcome that I would never have guessed in a million years. My wife followed two years later.

By this time we had been on the adoption list for four years and had given up on the AID. Then at last along came our first daughter and I can tell you that was a most glorious and wonderful day. We had to first meet the foster parents that were looking after her and at one point my wife, the social workers and foster parents were engaged in some deep chat about something and so I had a few moments holding this baby girl in my arms. It was during this time something went 'click' inside me and I fell completely in love with her! It was a really good day.

We adopted another daughter about four years later. An equally wonderful time but by now the cracks were showing in our marriage. I found that with the arrival of the daughters I was moved to one side. Suddenly my wife had all that she wanted and my role became the bread winner. The marriage finally failed when my first daughter was 11 years old. Was that a consequence of infertility? I cannot really say because at my age, and with the benefit of hindsight, I can see that the relationship always had problems. However, the infertility was devastating and it can be hard to recover from such trauma. People knew that we had adopted because of me and that always left me feeling an outsider too. It impacted upon my confidence as a man and a father too. That was 14 years ago now.

Life really took off for me with my second wife and her two children. So, I am a wicked step-father now as well, but we have been very happy together. I am affirmed as a man and a father so the story has moved on to a better place. Oh, its far from ideal in many respects as you can no doubt see. There have been all kinds of repercussions and all of the children are caught up in it too through no fault of their own. After 30 years of infertility it was only this summer that I first spoke to a man about my infertility and he to me about his. He has his own story and I hope he might share it with MensFe but it was fantastic to hear both of his struggles but also his progress. Unlike me he did not divorce and re-marry. He even said to me 'You know, I can now say that I am glad to be infertile. After all these years I can see just how much better a MAN I am now, than I would have been if babies had just come along'. I can echo his comment now that I am not alone and the black years have fallen far behind me.

A final word if I may. I have not written this because I wanted to. I am not keen that it should be on the web, or anyone else, and so gain me some kind of notoriety. I have written it because I was alone for so long and I don't recommend it. I just wanted you to know that.