



how far would they go for a baby?

After a year of trying, Sheryl Berk and her husband became members of a very popular club: The Reproductively Challenged.

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What's wrong, Aunt Shewool?" my then 2-year-old niece Emily asked. I was sitting on her bedroom floor, surrounded by Barbies and Barney books, crying. "Nothing, Em," I replied, forcing a smile. For more than a year and a half, my husband, Peter, and I had been trying to conceive. Now, watching this toddler pirouette in her tutu, I couldn't bear the thought that I might not be able to have a child of my own.

I never expected to feel this way. For the first two years of our marriage, I had a million reasons why I wasn't ready to be pregnant. I'd taken up boxing and was in the best shape of my life. I had a novel to write and a mountain of credit card bills to pay. Peter wanted to start trying, but I put on the brakes. We were young (I was 30; he was 33). What was the rush?

But when we did start to try—shortly after my 31st birthday—it didn't happen. Not after six months, not even a year. "Practice makes perfect," Peter would joke, but I couldn't stifle

my frustration. Almost every night, I'd greet him at the door in tears or a tirade.

"If you stopped worrying," my mother suggested, "it would happen." I took cleansing breaths and listened to Andrea Bocelli arias. Nada. Friends offered everything from anecdotes ("My cousin went through the same exact thing . . .") to alternate sexual positions ("It's how I got pregnant with each of my three boys"). "Do you have to tell all our friends?" Peter complained. "It's embarrassing."

After a year, my gynecologist sat us down to talk options. Most couples, he said, get pregnant within a year. We were—according to the medical community's definition—infertile. He ordered a battery of tests, from blood work to X-rays and cervical cultures.

Peter took it in stride ("Some couples spend 10 years trying," he said). I, on the other hand, sprang into action. I charted my ovulation, checked my cervical fluid and took my

temperature every morning. Peter thought I was being overzealous, but timing, the experts said, was everything—whether or not we were in the mood, we had work to do! When you're trying to get pregnant, sex isn't about making love; it's about making babies.

Every month, I'd pray this would be it. I'd buy an early pregnancy test if I was a day late. Peter didn't understand why I'd start crying when a friend announced she was expecting. He didn't get hysterical in the diaper aisle at Rite Aid. Wherever I turned, everyone but me was having a baby: I wanted to kill Rachel on *Friends* and Miranda on *Sex and the City*.

"Don't you get it?" I hissed at Peter. "I feel like a failure!"

"This isn't a competition," he replied calmly. He was right, but it sure seemed that way.

The doctors failed to find the problem even though every test on me came back negative.

odds of conceiving to 20 percent if we were lucky. Peter's semen would be "washed" with chemicals, concentrating the strongest, fastest sperm (he dubbed them his "gold-medal winners"), then inserted through a catheter into my uterus to fertilize one of my eggs. We were to return for two inseminations a month (before and during ovulation), at \$600 a pop.

As we neared the six-month mark, we went skiing in Utah to recharge. I didn't notice my period was late until Peter reminded me. "It's the high altitude," I told him. But when we got home, I raced to the bathroom without taking off my coat and took a pregnancy test. I paced, waiting for it to register, while Peter unpacked. "Don't get your hopes up, OK?" he said softly. I held my breath as I looked at the stick.

There they were—two pink lines. I screamed and waved it in Peter's face. "You're kidding," he gulped. Then he ran out to buy two more



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Yet it felt as if the pressure landed on my shoulders. (My fallopian tubes were being flooded with dye during an excruciating procedure to detect blockages; Peter just went to a collection room and watched hot videos.) Since all of the tests were tied to my health, I would spend hours begging for reimbursement every time my insurance company declined coverage.

I assumed Peter wasn't hurting as much as I was, until one day, after meeting with a urologist, he said quietly, "I would understand if you wanted out of our marriage, if you needed to find someone else who could give you a baby."

"I love you. I want your baby," I assured him.


After four months and about \$3,000 worth of tests, my gynecologist urged us to move on to "assisted techniques." So Peter and I reported to one of New York City's biggest infertility practices. It was standing-room-only in the waiting area, which I admit made me feel just a little better. Clearly, the statistics I'd read (about 6.1 million people experience infertility each year) were true.

Meeting with doctors, we plotted our plan: Pinpoint when I was ovulating, then do intrauterine insemination (IUI), which would up our

tests, "just to be sure." These, too, were positive. We laughed and cried and held out a whole week before telling our family the wonderful news: We were going to have a baby!

"She's absolutely perfect"

On December 17, 2002, we welcomed our little girl, Caroline Miriam, into the world. After 14 hours of labor, the doctors gave me an emergency C-section because Carrie was showing signs of distress. Peter gripped my hand tightly as I lay, shaking and sobbing, on the operating table.

When Carrie arrived, they rushed her away to clean her and Peter followed. Minutes later, my husband returned carrying a little bundle in his arms and knelt close to my face so I could see her. I looked at Carrie—she had big blue eyes and a rosebud mouth—then at Peter. "She's perfect," he said, kissing the baby, then me. "She's absolutely perfect." And looking into my husband's red-rimmed eyes—elated, exhausted and brimming with tears of joy—I fell in love all over again. 

Trying to have a baby? For tips on boosting fertility, log on to lifetimemag.com.