

Louise donated eggs to give a stranger a baby. Now, with bitter irony, she can't have her own

By [Amanda Cable](#)

PUBLISHED: 20:33 EST, 12 September 2012 | **UPDATED:** 02:37 EST, 13 September 2012

Whenever Louise Milano sees a boy aged about 12 in the street, she finds herself staring intently at him, searching his face for any clues that he just might be her biological child — the son she has never met.

It is 13 years since Louise, then a vibrant young career woman in the prime of her fertility, donated her eggs to help a couple she didn't know have a child.

Since then, in the bitterest of ironies, all attempts to have children of her own have failed. Louise has spent more than 30,000 on six rounds of failed IVF treatments, and donors have even given their eggs to try to help her become a mother.

But at the age of 44, Louise remains childless. She now believes that her dream of cradling her baby in her arms will never be realised.

Instead, every year, she is left to ponder one haunting date: September 9, 2000 — the day on which the biological son she has never seen was born.

Louise says: 'I would love him to contact me when he's grown up. I think of him so often, and when I see a boy of a similar age walking down the street, my heart flips.'

'I think of him on his birthday every year. I imagine him tearing open his presents, hugging his parents and enjoying his party. I wish more than anything that I could see his face on this day, and share some of the joy he's experiencing.'

'I know he's loved, and that makes me happy. It's just that I'd do anything for the chance to experience the happiness of motherhood myself.'

Louise was married and working as a high-flying estate agent when she made the decision to donate her eggs. She had met her husband David at work at the age of 28, and they married two years later, in 1998. The couple settled in Norfolk, where Louise still lives.

'Neither of us wanted children at the time,' she says. 'We were both enjoying our careers and our social life. David's friend Paul and his wife Catherine became our closest friends, and every weekend we'd do something together.'

'Unlike me, Catherine was then desperate to conceive a child. She'd had two courses of IVF, but both had failed.'

Once, when the two couples were having dinner together, Catherine took Louise aside and asked if

she'd be willing to help them have the baby they longed for by donating her eggs.

Catherine explained that she needed donor eggs to conceive, but that the NHS waiting list for them was two years long.

'In those days, strict ethical guidelines from the clinic treating Catherine banned me from giving my eggs directly to a friend,' says Louise. 'I could only donate anonymously.'

'Due to these rules there was a shortage, and to encourage women to donate, the clinic had devised a scheme whereby friends could donate to other women on the waiting list.'

'The eggs would be used to help another infertile couple to get pregnant, and in return the clinic would allow Catherine IVF treatment using an anonymous donor.'

'I said "yes" immediately,' Louise recalls, 'and Catherine threw her arms around me. I had no maternal yearnings then, but I realised Catherine felt an absolute need for a baby.'

'I thought I had plenty of years for a family of my own, and in the meantime I was happy to help my friend.'

Over the next few weeks, Louise underwent treatment at the fertility unit at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

A course of hormone injections was administered to boost her production of eggs, with side-effects which included bloating and discomfort.

Louise says: 'I cried a lot because of the hormones I was given, but I didn't regret what I was doing for a single moment.'

'David supported me completely. It was a chance for his best friend to become a dad, so he was equally grateful for what I was doing.'

In November 1999, a surgeon removed 19 of Louise's eggs, to be shared between two couples undergoing fertility treatment.

Louise says: 'A nurse gave me two cards written by the families I was helping, and each of them was so heartfelt they made me cry. Both women thanked me for giving them the chance to become mothers. They wrote that they could never find the words to express what it meant to them.'

One of the couples failed to conceive, but the other was successful.

On September 9, 2000, Louise received a phone call from a nurse at St Barts telling her that a baby boy had just been born, conceived from an egg Louise had donated.

The nurse wasn't able to give her any further details, and it was only when Louise put the phone down that the full implications of what she had done sunk in.

'Until then, egg donation had been something clinical and practical — a means to help a dear friend,' she says. 'But suddenly I realised I had a biological son I would never meet. It unnerved me, but at the same time I was delighted for his parents.'

The nurse wasn't able to give her any further details, and it was only when Louise put the phone down that the full implications of what she had done sunk in

'I told myself that one day, when the time was right, I'd become a mother too.' Within a couple of months, there was more good news. Catherine fell pregnant with twins conceived from donor eggs as part of the scheme that Louise had agreed to.

Louise says: 'When she rang to tell me, I cried with joy. I went with Catherine to her scans, and when her twins were born in December 2001, I was one of the first people to see them.

'Cradling one of the tiny babies in my arms, I felt a new emotion. For the first time I felt a yearning to hold a child of my own. I thought "This will be me one day".

'Seeing Catherine's joy, and the ease and love she showed with her son and daughter, made everything worthwhile.

'She and Paul chose me as godmother, and I shared with them the delight of the twins' first smiles, their first words and their first steps.'

But Louise's joy in her role as godmother masked the pain of the collapse of her marriage. David had started his own computer business, but long hours and stress drove the couple apart. In August 2002, Louise's marriage ended.

She says: 'I was single again. But now I didn't just want to fall in love, I wanted a baby of my own, too.'

Then in June 2003, tragedy struck when Catherine was rushed to hospital with meningitis and died soon afterwards. 'It was the most ghastly loss of my life,' says Louise. The children are now being brought up by their father, and Louise still sees them regularly.

Two years later, as she was coming to terms with the death of her friend, Louise found love again — with Alex, a 29-year-old building contractor. She was 38 by then but unconcerned by the age gap. She and Alex fell in love, and immediately started trying for a baby.

'I'd produced 19 healthy eggs at the age of 31, so I didn't for one second believe that we'd have any trouble conceiving,' she says.

'But every month, when I discovered I wasn't pregnant, I felt the same sickening disappointment.'

Gradually this disappointment became a gnawing fear, and by April 2008, when she was 40 and still hadn't become pregnant, Louise went to see her GP about IVF.

'He told me: "I'm sorry, we don't give IVF to women aged 40 and over." To be honest, it felt like a slap in the face.

'I'd helped out the NHS as an egg donor, and granted the gift of life to another woman. Now, when I desperately wanted a baby of my own, the NHS wouldn't help me in return.

'They were happy to exploit my fertility when I was young, but now that I wasn't so fertile, doors were suddenly slamming in my face.' Louise's only option was expensive private fertility treatment. She and Alex spent 7,500 of their savings on a course of IVF at a clinic in Cambridge.

Once more, drugs were used to stimulate Louise's ovaries. Three eggs were harvested, then mixed with Alex's sperm. There then followed a two-day wait to see how many eggs had fertilised.

Louise says: 'I firmly believed that IVF brought about happy endings. There was no doubt in my mind that this would work, and Alex and I would soon be decorating a nursery for our own baby.

'Instead, the consultant rang and said: "I'm afraid none of your eggs has fertilised." The shock left me reeling. He then suggested I consider using donor eggs.

'I felt cheated. At that moment, my dreams of holding my own biological child ended. It was an irony so bitter that it made me feel physically sick.

'I realised how devastated the women I had helped must have felt when they learned that their fate lay

with anonymous donors.'

But then, happily, Louise's younger sister, Helen, 30, offered to donate her eggs. This time, direct donation was possible.

'I was overcome with gratitude,' says Louise. 'It was as if I'd been given another chance of motherhood, and I couldn't thank Helen enough.'

Louise remortgaged her three-bedroom house to pay the 8,500 for private fertility treatment.

Helen's eggs were harvested and mixed with Alex's sperm, and this time nine eggs were fertilised. Louise says: 'I actually screamed when they rang me with the news!'

Two of the embryos were put into Louise's womb. She says: 'Two weeks later, I did a pregnancy test at home and watched as a positive line appeared.'

'I'll remember that feeling for the rest of my days — it was the happiest moment of my life.'

'But a week later I began to bleed heavily and was rushed to hospital, where a scan revealed that I had lost my baby. I was distraught, but still determined not to give up.'

Two eggs from the previous batch of nine remained, so Louise remortgaged her home again to fund another round of treatment. Sadly, neither of the two embryos resulted in pregnancy.

As Louise's dream of motherhood crumbled, so too did her relationship with Alex. 'The fertility treatment tore us apart,' she says. 'Alex loved me and wanted to see me happy, but I was obsessed with IVF.'

'We had no money for holidays or to enjoy life. Getting pregnant was my sole driving force, which killed the passion and the romance and the love between us. As a result of the incredible strain, we split up.'

'We had no money for holidays or to enjoy life. Getting pregnant was my sole driving force, which killed the passion and the romance and the love between us. As a result of the incredible strain, we split up.'

Louise was again alone, but still resolute in her desire to become a mum.

She says: 'I thought of the little boy I had helped to conceive, and the fact that he was out there somewhere made me all the more determined not to give up.'

In June 2011, Louise flew to Greece for IVF treatment with donor eggs and sperm at a cost of nearly 2,000.

But the treatment failed, as did three further IVF attempts. To date, she has undergone six IVF treatments costing more than 30,000.

She remains single, and admits she is still struggling to come to terms with the huge financial and emotional price she has paid for her dream.

'I don't regret donating my eggs when I was 31, but I wish the NHS would point out to young career girls eager to help others that one day their own fertility might be in jeopardy.'

'If I'd had the chance to freeze my own fertilised eggs, I might have had the opportunity to become a mother myself.'

'I work as an ambulance emergency call centre operator now, and it can be tough. A few months ago, for example, I heard a baby being born on the other end of the phone.'

'I heard his first cry and his mother's sobs of delight, and I had to gulp back my own tears.'

Louise is now considering adoption, having realised that despite her long-held dreams she is unlikely ever to have a child of her own.

'All I want is to hold my own baby, and feel a little hand slipping into mine, or to hear a sweet voice call me "Mummy",' she says.

Meanwhile, she's hoping that the boy born from her donated egg will one day trace her.

'I'm not allowed to look for him — but I'd love to meet him and hold him in my arms,' she says.