



# Nothing Great in Life is Easy

## **...anyone who has struggled to conceive knows that.**

After nearly a decade of unsuccessful fertility treatment including eleven rounds of IVF, multiple miscarriages and an ectopic pregnancy that almost took my life, I feel I know it more than most.

But as another year passes and I am sadly no closer to knowing what it is to feel the kick of life inside me or to say hello to my newborn baby for the first time, I am also conscious of how much my life has changed since I spoke out about my infertility in my book, *The Pursuit of Motherhood*. Since then I have become a trustee of Infertility Network UK, a columnist for *Fertility Road* magazine and have spoken at numerous events and in the press and media. The struggle I've been through over so many years is no longer a shameful secret, it's an open and accepted

part of my life. And it's made things better – for me and everyone around me. It truly has.

So what happens next? I am conscious that with every day that goes by, my hope of biological motherhood is receding. However, as the menopause has no hard and fast deadline and is different for every woman, it's difficult to move on. I'm also aware that there are many ways to become a mother. If my partner and I are not able to have our own children then we could also consider adoption, egg donation or surrogacy.

But, in the first instance, in what I can only describe as part childhood dream, part midlife crisis, I have decided to swim the English Channel to raise money for families struggling to have children and for



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children without the families they deserve. Less people have swum the 21 miles from England to France than have climbed Everest. It is one of the toughest physical and mental challenges in the world and no easy feat for anyone, especially a self-confessed hater of exercise and the cold, but I figure my IVF experience has prepared me well – it's definitely one of the other great physical and mental challenges that any woman can face.

In particular, I want my swim to help raise awareness of the emotional impact that infertility has on couples and specifically to raise money to improve the support that is offered to people going through it. I am also swimming to support vital work being done for children whose parents have been unable to give them the best start in life.

There has been a lot to learn – including that, on average, the swim takes fifteen hours, but for a slow swimmer like me it could be many more; that you can't wear a wetsuit (because Captain Matthew Webb who first swam the Channel in 1875 didn't so if you want to be an 'official' Channel swimmer you will need to follow suit); and that however much training you do there are many things beyond your control: the weather, the tides and the bane of every athlete's life, the risk of injury. In this respect, aspiring to swim the Channel is also very much like trying to have a baby. There are no guarantees. However hard I train, I may not get to France.

However, what I've started to realise both about my pursuit of motherhood and my Channel Challenge is that the journey is just as important as the destination. It's a waste of life to focus all your happiness on the moment you finally get to hold your baby or pick up a pebble on the other side. Now when I'm in the middle of a long, cold, arduous training session, I think of the beautiful quote by Omar Khayyam, the Persian philosopher and poet: 'Be happy in this moment for this moment is your life.' I wish I had been able to feel that more when I was in my darkest days of struggling to conceive. If I had my time again I would.

One of the other things I discovered when I started training is that open-water swimmers need to eat. A lot. For someone who loves food and has spent much of life struggling to be slim, this has been a source of celebration, and liberation! In fact it has also inspired an idea which has become linked to the next stage of my pursuit of motherhood and sowed the seeds of a sequel to my first book. I have started to write to a range of famous women from different walks of life to ask whether they'll support my swim by meeting and eating with me to help me put on weight in preparation and to talk about life with and without motherhood. Some are mothers,



some are not and the aim of the conversations is to help me decide what I should do next in my own pursuit. Do I need to find some way, somehow to become a mother (even if it's not a biological one) or can a life without children be equally fulfilling?

Captain Matthew Webb famously said 'nothing great in life is easy.' It's written on a memorial in the High Street of Dawley in Shropshire, the town he came from. He was right about the Channel – it absolutely isn't. And although he died long before IVF was invented, that's another great British achievement that is far from easy.

But the questions I will be asking myself when I'm attempting to swim those 21 miles this summer is: Where is my current challenge going to lead me next in my pursuit of motherhood? Is it too great an experience to give up on? And with eleven failed rounds of IVF behind me will it finally be my turn for one of my dreams to come true and get to France?

### **Jessica Hepburn**

To support Jessica in her Channel Challenge go to her JustGiving page:  
<https://www.justgiving.com/Jessica-Hepburn-INUK>

Jessica's Channel swim is scheduled for August 2015 and if you would like to follow her progress and support her fundraising efforts for Infertility Network UK then please see her website and blog: [www.thepursuitofmotherhood.com](http://www.thepursuitofmotherhood.com) or follow her on twitter @JessicaPursuit #jessicaswimsthechannel2015