

# My dream came true when I had another baby at 50

**YOU'D never think it to look at her, but Juliet Le Page is Scotland's oldest new Mum.**

## Juliet has travelled a long road to have a family

On the day after her 50th birthday she gave birth to Julia Kitty Rose. I met Mum and baby at home in Edinburgh last week. Julia is now two months old and a lively, bright-eyed little girl. After facing the hard truth about her fertility, Juliet can't believe how lucky she is to have such a beautiful daughter — and a two-year-old son, Rafe.

### Social life

"I was the woman who didn't want babies," she told me. "I liked my life just the way it was. I had a good job, friends, an interesting social life. I didn't envy friends when they had children — I preferred my cats. Then I met my husband Richard, nine years younger than me, and he wanted a family. I began to think there was more to life than work and play but I thought I'd left it too late. Juliet is an attractive, fair-haired woman with a soft voice and unflappable manner. Her

home is filled with paintings, flowers, books. Family photos adorn the piano. Julia lay on her playmat, kicking, and watching the tabby cat sunning by the window as her mother calmly explained the heartaches and struggles of women faced with a ticking biological clock and the knowledge they may not be able to conceive. Juliet grew up in York, trained to be a physiotherapist and worked for the NHS. She moved to Edinburgh in 1989 and enjoyed life there.

"When I started dating Richard in 2003, for the first time I felt, 'I'd like to have a baby with this man.' Juliet was in her early 40s and having problems with irregular, heavy periods.

"Richard and I attended the Assisted Conception Clinic in Edinburgh and saw a consultant at the Royal Infirmary. 'It didn't come as a big surprise to learn the quality of my eggs was poor. 'We decided not to go



The Margaret Clayton INTERVIEW

for IVF, which takes a lot of time, but to conceive through egg donation. The process took three years with the NHS. "There were several delays — one donor mum got mumps and the process was stalled. Then I had a problem with fluid in my uterus. At one point I wondered — will it ever happen?" Eventually it did and, to her great joy, Juliet was told she was pregnant. "It was the best news

in the world. Richard and I were thrilled and imagine how we felt when Rafe was born in June 2006. It felt like a miracle. We were a family."

Being in her late 40s Juliet didn't think she'd any chance of having another baby.

"First time, I was the one to persuade Richard but to my surprise, after Rafe's birth, Richard said, 'Let's do it again'. I went to my GP and he said, 'Sorry, you're too old'.

"I'd been working with an infertility support charity called Cradle and heard about the Instituto Marques in Barcelona. We looked at their clinic and others in Spain, visited in December 2007 and were very impressed.

"The transfer of eggs was carried out successfully on March 3, 2008, and Julia was born on November 19.

"The transfer takes no longer than 15 minutes. In many ways it's no different from experiencing a cervical smear. It's a similar process.

"The embryologist

Juliet realised that time was running out for a second child but egg donation and transfer at a Spanish clinic produced a happy ending in the form of baby Julia.

places eggs, fertilised by being mixed in a gel with the man's sperm, into the womb using a catheter. Richard and I watched on a small screen by the bedside. It was astonishing.

"There's a big debate about how many eggs should be used. The UK wants to limit it to one because of the danger of multiple births, but some clinics believe it should be two or three.

"The clinic in Barcelona advised two. I've never understood why some women decide to donate their eggs. Is it for financial reasons?"

"I really don't think so," said Juliet. "They're not paid, they only get travelling expenses. I believe they do it to help another woman who is in need.

### Social life

"It's not that different from why people agree to donate their organs. In Spain the figures for organ donation are very high, so perhaps this is why a large number of young Spanish women are familiar and comfortable with the concept.

"In both Britain and Spain you don't know anything about the donor apart from the fact she is over 18 and under 35.

"The average age in Spain is early 20s, in the



UK it's late 20s and Spain has a better success rate of healthy pregnancies because of that."

"When Juliet had embryo transfer here it cost £3000. In Spain it costs anything from £8000 to £10,000. But time was a crucial factor.

"Because of my age it

was imperative we didn't waste time. In the UK the age limit for receiving egg donation is 45, in Spain it's 50.

"I burst into tears when I knew I was pregnant with Rafe. Second time around I was so relieved. I hadn't even discussed what we'd do if I failed, but at

the age of 50 I reckoned it wouldn't be wise to go beyond that limit. We've been very lucky."

To give "luck" a helping hand, Juliet prepared for conception with Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture to help her relax. She had reflexology and a

nutritionist advised on healthy eating. "I did gentle jogging, yoga, Pilates and swimming to keep fit.

### Counselling

I went for counselling, too, because the whole experience can be emotionally draining.

"You have so many hopes invested in this longing to have a baby."

Her own experiences of the difficulties of becoming pregnant prompted Juliet to learn more.

She studied infertility issues, had a short work experience at an Edinburgh clinic and

now runs a small business called Fertility Concerns from home.

"I bet every woman who has experienced infertility has heard from someone to 'just relax' or to 'stop trying so hard and you will get pregnant'.

"Our 10-week programme is based on one pioneered by American fertility expert Dr Alice D. Domar, which is used worldwide.

"It's aimed at helping couples take back some control of their lives and clinically reduce symptoms of the stress, depression and anxiety which come with infertility. "Unless you've gone through fertility-related problems yourself you have no idea how distressing it can be."

## Classes

Classes are held in Edinburgh and Glasgow and Juliet hopes, with Lottery funding, to offer more classes and extend them to Aberdeen.

"Initially six couples took part. Four of them had been trying for over two years and one for seven years. Five out of the six now have healthy babies. It's very rewarding."

I must admit that before meeting Juliet I had very little understanding of infertility issues. But speaking to this intelligent and caring woman who has travelled a long road to have her babies, I think I've learned something.

But does she worry that medical procedures might have gone too far in tampering with nature?

## Cancer

"Same argument applies to cancer," said Juliet quietly. "Would you choose to have no intervention?"

"In Africa, women who don't have babies are often cast out. Our culture is different but that doesn't lessen the impact on a woman who may feel worthless if she can't have a child.

"It can be heartbreaking for a couple."

Richard and Juliet's determination to have a family has had the happiest ending possible. Rafe, now two, and Julia are beautiful children. And Juliet has no problems being an older mum.

"I do the 3 am feeding shift and Richard does the 10 pm. I persevered with breast-feeding and supplement it with formula.

"Rafe loves helping change the nappies and I seem to have plenty of energy. I think I have more patience now than I would have in my 20s and I'm more contented to be at home with my babies rather than going to the theatre, cinema or out for meals.

"I haven't encountered any prejudice at being an older mum. I believe the oldest mum in the world is a 70-year-old Indian woman.

"I think that might be pushing it a bit."