

## 'LIKE JENNIFER ANISTON, I KNOW THE SHIP HAS SAILED'

**Sarah Lawrence, 47, a counsellor, lives in Kent with her husband Jim, 49, who works in financial services.**

"I never dreamed I'd have something in common with Jennifer Aniston, but after reading about her secret infertility journey at the end of last year, I felt a deep connection with her. I know the hidden struggle and heartbreak all too well.

Since the age of 12, I've suffered with my periods. At 19, I started taking the Pill to help with erratic cycles and pain. When I met Jim through friends in 1995, neither of us was even thinking about kids, but after I stopped taking the Pill aged 28, as it was affecting my mental health, my biological clock kicked in practically overnight.

After we got engaged in 2010, when I was 34, we decided to start trying for a baby. I hadn't fallen pregnant by our wedding the following year, but I was still optimistic, though whenever someone mentioned pregnancy or children, it hurt.

In May 2012, I was thrilled to finally see a positive pregnancy test. Then, at six weeks, we lost the baby. I was heartbroken, but still had hope. While we didn't feel able to share the miscarriage with friends and family, I had to tell my boss because I needed time off from my job in financial services.

Back at work two weeks later, a colleague patted my stomach and asked if I had any news. I fell apart, and as I finally told someone, we both ended up in tears.

I had a growing sense of shame about my infertility. If someone asked: 'Do you have kids?' I'd change the subject, plaster a fake smile on my face or just walk away. It never got easier.

Meanwhile, my cycles were getting worse. I'd been seeing doctors for years, but never got answers. In late 2013, I decided to see yet another gynaecologist, who referred me for a laparoscopy to examine my abdomen and pelvis. I was told I had stage four endometriosis and wouldn't be able to have children naturally.

Devastated and in denial, I tried acupuncture, homoeopathy and reflexology. I bought crystals for fertility and followed a special diet. Like Jennifer Aniston, I 'threw everything at it'. Eventually, I started seeing a counsellor, and working with her helped me accept that what the doctor had told me was true.

We had been offered IVF on the NHS after the laparoscopy, but decided not to pursue it, as during my last investigation we'd found out only one of my ovaries was working, so the chances of it being successful were small. And after everything we'd been through, I couldn't face going through the adoption process. Jim and I would not be having a baby - and we were able to draw a line under it.

In 2015, I developed adenomyosis - endometriosis within the muscular lining of the womb - and in November 2017, aged 42, I had a hysterectomy. Only then did I start opening up to people. Some were shocked and sad for me. Others were angry that I hadn't told them. That reaction ended some relationships, as I refused to be forced to defend my decision.

## 'A colleague patted my stomach and I fell apart'

Jennifer Aniston's comment that 'the ship has sailed' struck me deeply. She's accepted what has happened in her life, just as I have in mine. But it isn't easy. Events like christenings and the anniversary of my miscarriage still cause me pain.

Unfulfilled at work, I decided to make a change. I started coaching in 2018 and qualified as a counsellor in August 2020, specialising in those who aren't child-free by choice. I used my heartbreak to find a new direction - and I'm dedicated to helping others find theirs."

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With husband Jim

