

Sarah Crowley: mother at 50

SAGA Magazine

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Sarah Crowley with her son Andres, who she gave birth to at 50.

Sarah Crowley, 54, a former sales director in travel technology, gave birth to her son Andres at 50.

‘No, that’s correct, 1962 is my birth year.’ The midwife looked askance but smiled. It was an easy calculation – it was 2012.

Most of the maternity-ward staff were certain they must have misheard what I said; after all, no woman gives birth to her first baby at 50, right?

It was an Olympic year for me in so many ways. A quest that had begun seven years earlier with my husband, whom I met when I was 43, was culminating in what would soon be the premature but healthy arrival of my son Andres.

My life had afforded me wonderful opportunities to travel and see the world. I chose a career in travel as I couldn't imagine anything better or more fun. The years passed as they do; my early thirties saw every single one of my friends marry and go on to start a family. Not me. Of course, I always thought in the back of my mind it 'would happen' one day, but never dreamed that day would come in the year I turned 50.

By the time I was 40 and newly single, I decided that I might have to consider a life without children. It didn't sit well. I read about how we need to grieve and feel the loss but inside, like a dark and shameful secret, was a deep desire and belief that I would someday become a mother. I just knew it, but told no one. People saw me as this career woman without a maternal instinct, but they couldn't have been more wrong.

The deep desire never left me, but nor did it obsess or inform my life. Once I let go of the idea of meeting Mr Right, I met Esteban.

After being together for a year we talked about starting a family. Esteban was 31 and loved the idea. Nothing worked naturally as month on month I plotted my ovulation. Visits to the IVF doctor at 44 showed I had seriously compromised fertility and the specialist suggested we go straight to an egg donor.

Many rounds of failed egg-donor treatment followed, which took a toll on me, on our relationship and on our bank account. There was no one to share my sadness and isolation with, as everyone I knew had conceived naturally. My one friend doing IVF also fell pregnant. I felt as if I was completely alone, but when to give up hope?

I promised myself after going to see a reproductive immunology specialist that if the treatment wasn't successful this time, I could at least say that I had tried everything possible. But it worked.

I'm 54 now and Andres will soon be four and starting school this month. Becoming a mother has transformed me and how I view the world. This precious gift of life that I so nearly missed is cherished every day.

Older mothers: the statistics

One look at the statistics, and a new trend is clear – women are often waiting until their thirties, or even forties – before becoming pregnant.

The average maternal age in the UK has risen dramatically over the past two decades.

Between 1987 and 2008, pregnancies in women aged 35 or over rose from 8% to 20%, and pregnancies in women aged 40 or older trebled from 1.2% to 3.6%.

Government figures for births in England and Wales in 2014 show that:

- 52% of babies were born to mums aged 30 and over.

- 21% of women who gave birth were aged 35 and over.
- For the first time, more women aged 35 and over gave birth than women under 25.

The US has also seen a trend towards older first-time mums. In 2012, 24% more women had their first baby when aged 35-39 than in 2000. And in the same time span the number of first-time mums aged 40-44 has increased by 35%.