

4 JAN, 2009

How I threw away the map and found the road to serenity

Letting go of the illusion of control led to a long sought-after happy event for **Kate Johnston**.

HALLELUJAH! I'm more than 12 weeks pregnant and it took a year-and-a-half of trying naturally and three IVF embryo transfers over six months to get there. But what did it really take? Of course, many different things had to come together. Timing is a tricky business.

People said I'd fall pregnant when I relaxed. I agreed. But it's like the *Seinfeld* episode in which George's father, played by the inimitable Jerry Stiller, walks around flailing his arms in the air shouting "Serenity Now!" with a look of furious desperation on his face. The more you try to force

relaxation, the more absurdly under pressure you feel.

People said, "Just forget about it and it will happen". I knew what they meant. But it's pretty hard to forget when you need to inject yourself daily, take nasal spray morning and night exactly 12 hours apart, and have surgery to remove eggs.

Who knows why it happened when it did? It could be because I had regular acupuncture — in April 2008, ABC1's *Cambyst* program *Improving the odds of IVF* stated "a British Medical Journal reported that acupuncture with IVF increases the chance of pregnancy by 65 per cent". I've

heard that Monash IVF has since begun offering the ancient healing art to their patients pre- and post-embryo transfer.

Perhaps it helped to write about my frustrations to the *Sunday Age's* readers ("There's more to life than being a mother waiting to happen", 14/9/08). In doing so, I refused to let the IVF game define me. Both the act of writing the article and this resolve had a therapeutic effect.

Or maybe it was because I recognised that the final say was out of my hands. See, my first IVF pregnancy test had shown some rise in the pregnancy hormone, but not enough to make it official. For a week I waited in limbo to find out if the hormone would continue to rise or drop (it went down). In those incredible seven days I understood to my bones

that there was nothing I or anyone could do: whether this little embryo continued to grow or didn't was up to something else — Mother Nature, we could call it, so as not to start a religious debate. All I knew is that I wasn't in charge.

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We're all control freaks to varying degrees; it's the human condition. But how liberating to experience this freedom of nothing to do. I had known it intellectually, yet I still held on to the belief that if I didn't do something — especially

hope and wish — it wouldn't happen. But why and when things happen or don't is the mystery of existence. And to surrender to the mystery and live within this new understanding was, if nothing else, a beautiful relief. It was "Serenity Now".

Was it this letting go that made the difference? I can never know. Everything I've done or not done up to this point has led me here. My attempts to reduce stress did help: I was lucky enough to be able to cut back on work and I made conscious efforts to slow down and breathe deeply. But shedding the illusion of control meant I could say "Que sera sera" and really mean it. This was "relaxing" in the way my loved ones had so well advised. No amount of "being good to myself" or spa treatments (though I love them) caused that

internal shift from fear to faith; only an experience of humility in the face of forces beyond my comprehension did that.

Days before the successful pregnancy test, I couldn't believe my partner Mat suggested that if it didn't happen this time he'd heard about a white witch in the hills who worked fertility miracles. It's easy to laugh about that now but we would have tried anything.

Recently, in the obstetrician's room, I saw a look of absolute wonder on Mat's face as he watched our tiny baby appear on the screen. And I saw that all humanity rests within the great mystery, from which we are never separate, and to which we need only pay respect and our lives can be enriched beyond measure.

Kate Johnston is a Melbourne writer.