

# WHY I CHOSE *LOVE* instead of **BABIES**

When Katherine Baldwin, 45, fell for a man who didn't want children, she had a choice: love or motherhood. Sometimes life's questions have no perfect answer...



**P**erhaps when Bill said, “I can’t promise I’ll change my mind about kids,” I should have paid more attention. We’d first got together at a music festival nearly two years earlier. Right from the start, there was a spark – he was tall, and broad-shouldered, with a kind face – but it was just a brief fling. I knew from friendly chats children were not part of his life plan. They were very much part of mine and, at 41, I couldn’t afford to mess around.

I thought that was the end of it, but when we met 18 months later on a group cycling holiday in Guernsey, the feelings were still there. As we toured the leafy lanes and stayed up late talking in our tents, I began to wonder if our relationship deserved a shot.

Here was a single, 47-year-old man who, like me, loved exercise and being outdoors. One I had a connection to. By now, I was 42, and the quest to find a partner and make a relationship work had overtaken my life. I was plagued by endless questions: is it too late? Am I still fertile? Will I regret it if I miss the chance to have a baby?

Surrounded by women in the same position, I decided to write a book about what I called ‘the baby gap’ – that period of uncertainty that kicks in when we start to wonder if we’ll ever give birth, and what it will feel like if we don’t.

I talked to fertility doctors and counsellors, women who were childless and living with regret, those who’d worked through their grief, and those who were child-free by choice. I met women who’d frozen their eggs, shopped at sperm banks and adopted on their own.

I pored over statistics and studies and even tested my fertility – marginally better than average for my age –

but I wasn’t ready to go it alone, even though I was no closer to meeting someone I wanted to spend my life with.

Exhausted by it all, I made a choice: I decided to shelve the baby question for a season, have some fun, and see where things went with Bill.

What followed was a happy haze of camping weekends, cycling trips, swims in the sea and picnics on the beach. Once, we spent three days in a field in north Wales as rain lashed our tiny tent. On the long drive south, we both shared how, to our surprise, we’d loved every minute of it.

We started to talk in a tentative, jokey way about foreign holidays and shared homes. But as I got in deeper, I needed to know if children could be part of that picture, too.

**I ASSUMED THAT SINCE WE’D GROWN CLOSER, HIS FEELINGS FOR ME WOULD HAVE SOFTENED HIS OPPOSITION TO KIDS**, but he hadn’t changed his mind and said it wouldn’t be fair to hint that he would. I told him that many men were reluctant dads until they held their newborn baby, but “a lifetime of parenting”, as he put it, wasn’t for him.

“Just give it time. He’ll come round,” advised one friend, pregnant at 42 with a man who’d been against a baby at the start. “I don’t have time!” I replied.

Or did I? I’d often quoted statistics that gave women my age a 5% chance of getting pregnant every month, but more recently, I’d read an article by US psychologist Jean Twenge who pointed out those studies dated back several centuries, to a time before electricity, antibiotics or fertility treatment.

I knew from my research, though, that relying on data or test results was a dangerous game – we were all unique. And while waiting had worked for some, »

I'd met several angry women who'd stayed in a relationship, hoping in vain their partner would change his mind, only to split up when it was too late. I didn't want to go down that path and end up resenting Bill – and myself.

But what about the women who hadn't had children and had never looked back? There was a part of me that started to see the upsides of a child-free life with Bill: road trips across the States, windsurfing holidays in Greece, cycling tours across the Alps – no school runs or catchment areas.

## STUCK AT A CROSSROADS, TOO SCARED TO COMMIT TO EITHER

**PATH,** I rang up a 'maybe baby' coach I'd come across while researching my book – someone who helps others decide whether they want children or not. California-based Randi Buckley suggested I visualise meeting my future self in 10 or 20 years and ask her advice about the path I had chosen.

"This helps you see what you desire for your life long-term. It taps into your deeper wisdom," she said. Once I knew what I truly wanted, I'd find it easier to move forward.

I sat down and did the work. I asked my 52-year-old self which path I should take and I explored what was important to me, looking at career, finances, freedom, partner and family. Pretty soon, I had a clear image of what I wanted most: to give and receive love – with a man, but also with children.

It felt freeing to know what I wanted deep down. But there was sadness, too. With Bill, I'd felt loved and able to love. I'd learned to live more in the present and enjoy what I had. But I'd always be waiting for him to change his mind about children – and he'd be hoping I'd change mine – and that wouldn't be good for either of us. So in a sad phone call, I shared my hopes, he stood his ground, and we agreed to part.

I had no idea whether I'd meet someone and have a baby, whether I'd come round to the idea of going it alone, adopt or eventually embrace a life without kids, but I felt proud for taking what felt like a real leap of faith.

Single again, I threw myself back into dating but I kept hitting roadblocks – I didn't fancy the guy who was keen on me and desperate to be a dad, while I felt a magnetic pull towards a man who wasn't ready for a committed relationship.

As time went on, I began to see I was searching dating sites for a man just like Bill. I couldn't get our relationship out of my head. It didn't help that Bill and I kept meeting up at festivals and weekends away with friends, ending up kissing every time we did. I didn't



Katherine and Bill enjoy the upsides of a child-free life together



"We don't always get everything we WANT in life but perhaps we get what we NEED"

seem able to resist him and vice versa. We had fun together and I felt happy and at peace in his company.

Then, at 43 and a half, after a summer on my own and several bad dates, a realisation began to set in:

it might be too late for me to have kids, but it's not too late for me to be in love. Why was I waiting around for Mr Right and a picture-perfect family life that might not be attainable when Bill was standing right in front of me?

And the truth was, whenever anyone asked me what I really wanted, I didn't say a baby. I said freedom, adventure, companionship, love, travel and sex.

I decided to listen to that inner voice and take another leap of faith, only this time in a different direction. I took a deep breath and threw myself wholeheartedly into the relationship.

I'd realised over the years that love involves risk, and I had to make a decision and put two feet in if I wanted a true partnership.

## I CONFESS THERE WAS ALWAYS A PART OF ME THAT THOUGHT I COULD HAVE IT ALL

– Bill and then a baby in the future – but I'm now 45, and he's 50, and we're loving just being together.

And if you ask me what I want today, I'd still say a camper van, a surfboard and to travel across America with Bill, rather than to get pregnant and have a baby. So maybe I do just want to live my life, feel loved and be happy for all the wonderful things we have, rather than worry about what we don't.

It's impossible not to think about babies at times – I see doting mothers everywhere and it's hard not to think I'm missing out on a miracle of life – but then I could be single and childless, lonely as a single mum or in a loveless partnership. So I prefer to make the most of my lovely relationship and accept that we don't always get everything we want in life but perhaps we get what we need.

The thing about choosing between a baby and a relationship is that there's no definitive answer – no right path or perfect decision. Both options have their upsides and downsides. But if I've learnt anything it's to live in the moment, to feel grateful for the joy I have today and not to miss the happiness right in front of me by constantly focusing on something that may be just out of reach.

The baby thoughts still come and go but, most of the time, I'm delighted with our family of two and accepting of not being a mum.

For someone who struggled to find true companionship for years, being in love like this feels enough of a gift. 📌

*Katherine Baldwin is a writer and dating and relationships coach; Katherinebaldwin.com*

Enjoy more stories in the Red free weekly newsletter. To sign up, text RED and your email address to 84499\*