



## **EP 015: A Story of Perseverance, Donor Treatment and Writing with Sheila Lamb**

This is the Fertile Mindset Podcast, where we explore all the emotional aspects of fertility to support you on your path to parenthood. My name is Sarah Holland. I'm the Fertile Mindset coach and a mother to two children after my own fertility challenges. I hope you find all the support and inspiration you need within this podcast, to carry you forward on your fertility journey towards your own successful outcome.

It's also my wish that through listening to these episodes, you rediscover how to enjoy life now and live it to the full while you wait for your baby.

Now let's begin today's episode.

Sarah: Hello, and welcome to episode 15 of the Fertile Mindset Podcast, where it's time for another interview and this time I invited my friend Sheila Lamb to join us. We had a chat about her own fertility journey, what the experience of fertility treatment was like for her and how she transformed that experience into support for the fertility community, through her writing.

Sheila became a mother after six years of fertility issues, multiple treatment cycles, and finally a successful donor egg cycle in Spain at the age of 47. Her story is honest and so inspiring, and I think you're going to love hearing it. And if you then like to talk more with Sheila and I, she will be coming into the private Facebook group for my Fertile Mindset Sanctuary membership on Tuesday, the 30th of March at 8:30 PM UK time. If you are a member of the Sanctuary on a paid membership level, you will be able to join us there and it will be lovely to continue the conversation and answer any questions you have after listening to this interview, which I hope you enjoy listening to right now.

Hello, Sheila, welcome to the podcast. It's so lovely to have you with us today. How are you?

Sheila: Hi, Sarah. Thank you for inviting me. I'm very good thank you very much. All the better for speaking with you.

Sarah: Yeah, it's been a long time since we've actually seen each other in person, Isn't it? We used to meet up all kinds of fertility events in London and things like that. But yeah, obviously none of that's happening right now, but hopefully we'll get to meet again sometime in the not-too-distant future.

So, I mean, we had a little chat before we came on to record here, but you know, the main reason that I invited you on is because I find you to be such an inspiring person, very honest, um, very authentic about your own fertility journey and your own fertility journey had its twists and turns didn't it? And it, you know, you had to overcome obstacles and you explore different avenues to conceive your baby and finally have your lovely daughter. And I know

that your story is really inspiring to others as well as what you've done afterwards, which we're going to talk about the whole kind of journey that you've been on, both your fertility journey, and then also what you've done afterwards, which is amazing how your life still now is around supporting the fertility community. So, we have loads to talk about.

So, shall we start with your own fertility journey then? Where did that begin, and what happened for you?

Sheila: Yes. Yes. Okay. Well, I was a bit late to the game, I suppose. I was about 40, 41. Um, my husband was at 11 years younger than me, well he still is obviously. So obviously, you know, bit younger meant that he wasn't maybe on quite the same page as me when, when we met a couple of years before. Anyway, so after I hadn't, we hadn't got pregnant, you went to the doctors who told us to keep trying, I wasn't happy with that. I do have a background as a midwife and a nurse so I kind of had a little bit, obviously, more information than maybe some people have. Anyway, long story short, we did go to the facility, were, uh, sent to a fertility consultant specialist who did the usual tests.

Now this is back in like 2005, 2006. That was quite a long time ago. We were given the diagnosis unexplained. Went to a clinic in London and we did our first cycle of IUI, which wasn't successful. They used, suggested we immediately just go to IVF. So, we did IVF, but because I was, I was 41, maybe 42 by this stage, we were advised to do the pre-implantation genetic screening, which was very new at that time. So, we, our first IVF cycle we had ICSI with the PG uh S, I think it is? Screening. And I, we had six embryos that were tested. I can't remember exactly how many eggs were collected, but six were tested and only one was normal but at five days, it was still only 10 cells so, it had possibly even stopped developing. But anyway, the clinics said, well, you know, we'll put the embryo back. So, we did, but I think before I even did the test, I had my period, so that didn't work. So, we went back for a visit and they said we really suggest you do donor egg, which we didn't want to do so we tried naturally for another couple of years. I did acupuncture, I did Chinese medicine which tasted disgusting. I can still taste it now. You know, tried to de-stress. Everything that you're supposed to do, nutrition-wise, organic foods et cetera. With hindsight, what I never really looked into was any sorts of counselling or any sort of mind work. It was all to do, obviously with the, you know, sort of foods, nutrition et cetera.

Sarah: I think most people do, don't you, because you've just been told that due to your egg quality, they thought that egg donor would be the best route. So of course, you're going to think, well, what would improve the quality of my eggs and cell health and so on. So yeah, it makes sense to go down that route. Yeah.

Sheila: Yes, and of course this is prior to all the support online that there is.

Anyway, funnily enough, I was reading an article in the paper, in the Sunday paper, and it was an article about this clinic in Spain. And they were talking to an English nurse who worked there and then we talked about donor egg. And I do firmly believe in the universe and things being put in front of you that are there at that time. And this is like two and a half, three years later, so, I was like 45 by now. No sniff of a positive pregnancy at all. So, I spoke to my husband about it, and we contacted the clinic, and we went to the clinic, long story short, went to the clinic, I decided to do donor egg there in Spain. At the time, and still is anonymous, and in the UK, it wasn't anonymous anymore with the donor eggs and that didn't really worry me so much, but I think it did worry my husband. He was less keen on knowing who the donor was. So obviously, you know, it's taken us three years to get them to this point. So, it's certainly not a quick change from trying to conceive with your own eggs to considering using donor eggs.

So, we went to the clinic and it was, it was amazing because it was, it was like, one doctor, this nurse, couple of embryologists. It was so different to the London clinic, which was busy,

busy, always busy. And it was actually quite nice, and it was in Marbella so, we went to a nice place and had a nice little holiday.

So, we, that was our visits, like initial visit. We came home, got a phone call, said yes, we've got a donor for you. So, we did the donor egg, and we went ahead, did the cycle and miraculously. Oh, we had acupuncture, which I'd never done before. We had acupuncture before the cycle and after the cycle, she was an acupuncturist who worked with the clinic. What I liked about the clinic as well was that we always managed to speak to the doctor, or the nurse and yeah miraculously I got pregnant. Gosh, what a shock! But the HCG level, the blood level, obviously, the blood result wasn't as high as it could have been and unfortunately uh, six and a half weeks I had a miscarriage, and I went into research overdrive. I just started, you know, I'd only had the one miscarriage. I wasn't trusting having another one. So, I came across a miscarriage consultant here in the UK. We made the appointment to see him because, Oh I also, I also read Dr. Allen Beer's book 'Is your body baby friendly?' which was all about the natural killer cells, Thrombophilia, Immune issues. Which I know there's a very divided thought on it, and, and I think that is the case with infertility anyway, because everyone's different, and where you're thinking of trying to make a baby, you're actually involving two people to try and do something. So anyway, I had all these tests, was convinced they'd be something wrong with me and there wasn't, and they all came back within normal limits. But by this time, I'm 46. He did say that if the clinic was happy for me to do the drugs as if I did have an issue, a blood clotting issue, then he was fine because the drugs were steroid, Aspirin and incidentally, I take an aspirin with that pregnancy, with the first donor cycle, when I did get pregnant. So, in my mind, I was like halfway there, but the aspirin wasn't enough.

So anyway, the clinic were fine. They couldn't come up with any other reason why the donor egg cycle hadn't worked. We didn't have any embryos to freeze so, we had a different donor. Went back and it was actually at the time. Do you remember that Icelandic volcano and nobody could fly in Europe? We were supposed to be flying to Spain.

Sarah: Oh, gosh.

Sheila: So, talk about stressful.

Well, fortunately our time to fly. So, when we were due to fly over, they had opened the airspace, just. But we were obviously looking at driving there, getting the Ferry, driving there, et cetera, et cetera, which might have been quite an exciting thing to do, but anyway, fortunately the airspace opened. So, we went back. We did the cycle. So, it was a different donor. I had acupuncture before I had acupuncture after, two day, two cell, two day old embryo. Each time two embryos were put back. And the nurse said, when she called up, she said, we want you to come in today to have the transfer for two days. One of them jumping up and down shouting pick me, pick me. And I'm sure it's a girl were her words. So, we went in, had the embryo put back and in Spain, unfortunately, your partner, your husband, can't go with you to have the embryo transfer but we obviously saw the embryo on the screen, et cetera, et cetera.

And it was, and it's much nicer. It was nicer at that time because I was, I was able to lie down. So, I stayed there for about an hour. I had the acupuncture afterwards. There was, you know, when we did IVF in London, it was like they popped the embryo back and it was like, bye. And you were booted out kind of thing so, it was much more relaxing. And I didn't really remember having any symptoms, but I, every afternoon I laid down and I listened to a CD at the time, which is a bit old fashioned, isn't it? A visualization CD and I used to listen to them, visualize the embryo snuggling in. And so anyway, we came home, I never tested. I never test. Um, the only one time I did test, I actually dropped the pregnancy test stick down the loo. So, it could never be used anyway, so I just never bothered testing. And so, I went, I went off for my appointment at the clinic, at the hospital rather, local hospital to have my bloods taken. And then the clinic rang and said, so how did your results go yesterday? And

I'm like, But I've just had it done. And they said, but you're supposed to have it done yesterday. So not only do I never test, but I actually tested a day late. So, it's like, we're waiting for the GP to call, so anyway the GP called, and the GP said You're pregnant! and told us the results, and the results were like 800 or something like that so, they were super high. And so I rang the clinic back and everyone was really happy and stuff. And so, then I was worried that I was going to miscarry again. Obviously, although I did feel very different this pregnancy. So, I spoke with my GP and the miscarriage consultant, and I said, I don't want it to come off Clexane. Which is a blood thinning injection, and the miscarriage consultant said but you can, you can come off at 12 weeks. But I said well I don't want to. And I said to the GP, I don't want it to come off it. And then I spoke to the consultant at hospital. I was always under the consultant because by this time I was 46, I was due a week after turning 47.

So, I always saw the female consultant and she said, if you want to carry on taking the Clexane, that's fine. So, I took the Clexane until I was 34 weeks pregnant. And again, all these things, I don't know whether the steroids, the Clexane, made a difference. I have no idea. But in my heart of hearts, I think it did.

Sarah: You know what's striking me about your story Sheila? Listening is, you know, obviously it's not the medication protocols themselves, because like you said, we're all so different. We all need different things. So, we're not recommending any particular, you know, protocol right here. However, your approach, both feeling kind of really comfortable with your Spanish clinic, feeling very different to how it felt in London, having that direct contact and it being so personal. And then you also doing lots of research yourself, doing great research, seeing the right people, bringing back all that information and really wanting to be heard with what you had found out and wanting to be part of the process, because this is your body and your baby, and although we can't prescribe medication ourselves, absolutely, you know we need to be guided by what is the right direction to go in. I think we do need to feel that we are a part of it and not just feel like we're handing our bodies over to these fertility clinics and doctors, and we don't even understand what's going on. And I think, although you said you didn't do much work on the mindset piece, that's a huge part about our mindset. Isn't it?

It's like, do I feel safe? Do I feel comfortable? Do I feel listened to? You know, and I, that's something, a massive kind of lesson. I'd encourage everyone from what you're saying here is, is to take that away and just make sure that you feel you're with a clinic, because that will listen, and you feel supported and that you do speak up and you use your voice. And of course, you listen to them. To the advice given back as well, but you feel like it's a partnership because it's such a different experience, isn't it? When you do it that way. And I can tell that you had that two-way conversation going all the while.

Sheila: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I mean, you know, I didn't then sort of see it that way at the time.

It was just that I was just determined to become a mum, however that happened, you know? and, but I also think if you are at the very beginning, obviously, I'd gained all this information over time, you know? And unfortunately, a lot of people's journeys are like mine. They are five or six years on long, sometimes even longer. And if the first cycle doesn't work, or you don't know enough and you think, well, that was a waste. If it doesn't work. You know, don't beat yourself up because you don't know, what you don't know. And that just comes with time and experience and all the wonderful information out there now. because there wasn't all this information, so sometimes it feels like there's a little bit too much information, but you find the information that's right for you. Don't you?

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So, let's go back to your early pregnancy then with your daughter.

Sheila: Yeah. So, I yeah, so I was able to take the blood thinner injection up to 34 weeks.

And being 46, nearly 47 I was convinced I was going to have problems and I was going to be on bed rest for the whole of it. And I was going to have a really bad time. I didn't! People didn't even know I was pregnant. I was really disappointed. That's, you know. I had to like stick out my stomach to show people I was actually pregnant.

So yeah, so she's now 10 years old. I didn't have a good labour, but that's another story, but she's here. She was safe and sound and that's. Yeah, that's the main thing. And we didn't have any embryos to freeze after that cycle either, which is quiet, but I look back now, I think I'm sure we had quite a good number of eggs. But anyway, um, so we never actually had to make that decision about. Do we use those embryos, or do we let the frozen embryos go? You know, because as I say, I was like 47 when I had her.

Sarah: And listening to your story, obviously it's hugely inspiring, especially for anyone who's perhaps a similar age or considering looking at donor treatment or travelling abroad, you know, this is a real-life story and a real-life success story as well. And how you follow that path. But you said right at the start when it was first suggested to you to try donor eggs, recommended to you stop using your own eggs, move on to donor, that it was a big, no, first of all. And you needed to go away and see what you could do naturally first.

I mean, what was the switch for you that when, when did it feel like enough? You know, like this is enough now, I'm going to change path.

Sheila: Yeah. Well, um, I think it was because I, I hadn't got pregnant, and I'd never, ever been pregnant. It's not like I'd miscarried or anything like that, you know? So far as I know, I'd never, ever been pregnant and it was just a case of this is not, this is not going to happen and do I want to be a mum, or do we want to be parents somehow and to be honest, I think we were a little bit naive about the donor egg situation because we didn't know anyone who'd who had done it. So, we couldn't speak to one. Obviously, the clinic had had, you know, lots of people go in. In fact, I later, somehow, I think it was on a Facebook group. I somehow came across a girl who gone to the same clinic as us, a couple of years before. She was like almost one of the first English people to have gone to this clinic and she had twin girls. But at the time we didn't have anyone to speak to so, we were really guided by the clinic. And yeah, I mean we had the worries that everyone has these days, you know, what would the child look like? Will the child looked like me? And I used to have to tell myself, well, you know, we could have a child with my own egg who doesn't like me anyway, it looks like my husband.

Sarah: No, there's no guarantee is there.

Sheila: There's no guarantee, and people see, if people are worried about what will people think, people will see what they want to see because I met people who didn't know she was a donor egg and when she's like maybe two, three years old and they say, Oh, doesn't she look like you. And I go, yes, yes, she does, doesn't she?

Sarah: The same happened to me, Sheila, with my adopted son. I'd have people saying, I remember I took him for his first pair of shoes to be fitted. So, he was really tiny. And the lady fitting the shoes looked at him and went you've got beautiful eyes, just like your mum. And they're actually different colour eyes. I was like, how can she even see the same? But like you say, people see what they want to see, don't they? So, yeah. But yeah. You know, you went through what, the steps you needed to, you got to this point, you have your beautiful daughter. But I know that's not the end of the story for you. In fact, it almost felt like the beginning, from when I met you and what I know for you that you're this author and this advocate and massive supporter of the fertility community, you dedicate so much time and so much energy to sharing with others, just like you are here today. Um, so could you tell us a little bit about that part of your story? It feels like a story of two halves almost. What happened after you became a mum?

Sheila: Well, I didn't. Well, actually my husband and I had a business that was sold soon after she was born. So, I didn't actually have a job to go back to. And we'd been through all of this and we were like, well, I don't actually want to go back to work, as such, and have a career. So, I'd always, I'd always been aware of a magazine that had been around at the very end of trying to conceive, before having Jessica and I was like, here, maybe I could do a magazine, but bearing in mind, I'd never done anything like this before.

So, my Husband is the technical one, and obviously, I was sort of the one who was passionate about. And really it was about trying to get information out there to people. So, I did start a magazine, which is how we met, because then I came across you when you were doing your summit, and it was like, how do you know all these people? And when you kindly wrote an article on EFT for the magazine.

So, I did the magazine for two years and it was, it was more of a labour of love because again, this is like 2000 and where are we now? 2015-16. So, I loved putting it together, and I loved, you know, it was lovely to connect with so many people, doing so much. But at the end of the day, I had to, it was probably just a little bit too much for one person to do. I think I did about eight issues.

Sarah: Yeah. A huge amount of work went into that though, I can remember as each issue was released. It was, and I guess what you would have wanted when you were on your journey, because like you said, there wasn't so much information out there, was there? You know, 10 plus years ago it was much harder to access it. And then when you realise that, yes, suddenly I guess the advent of social media and the internet, and I'm bringing out all that information to the public domain. And if you could present it all together, to make it easy for people I can, I can understand why that was a part of your story.

Sheila: Yes. Getting them all into one place because you know when, I mean, the internet obviously was around when we started. But all, all you could, all I remember finding was, Pay \$99. Get this and in three months you'll be pregnant. And that was all there was, there wasn't anything else.

And yet, when I was doing the magazine, I was coming across people like yourself, people who were experts, people who, you know. And so, it was kind of like trusted information, which you don't always know in the end, if it is trusted. But obviously, I was always coming up with, what can I do for, what can we do for next issues articles. So, I ended up with a spreadsheet of just things that people might want to know about.

So obviously I was looking at the spreadsheet when I was finished doing the magazine and I was like, hang on a minute. I could still put this information out there for people, but I'll put it in a book, and it ended up being my first book, which is my fertility book and that's just literally a glossary. An A-to-Z glossary of all the terminology from acupuncture, all the way through to zinc and everything in between. And because I was, as I said, I had been a nurse and a midwife I wrote it in an, obviously, very jargon-free manner, so you should be able to pick it up and more or less understand, you know, I don't know Azoospermia or something without having to go down the rabbit hole of the internet. You know, and there's illustrations in there as well. And I self-published that book myself and put it on Amazon and I was like, okay, how do I let people know? Because it's, you know, it was, I think it was Kate from your fertility journey. I think she said join Instagram and I was like, Oh no, please no, I'm on Facebook. I can't, Twitter, I can't cope with anything else, but I went on Instagram. I joined Instagram. I was just blown away by how kind everybody was and how people were sharing, not the protocol as you say but how they were feeling emotionally. And obviously that was like, it was like, 'My God, this is how I felt'. But I didn't know that was how people felt when I was dealing with infertility and IVF and stuff. So again, I just kind of thought, can I get this information in a book for people who aren't on Instagram, for people who don't know? And that was where my 'This is' series came from.

Sarah: Wonderful. And now you are a really prolific author with a whole list of books, like you say, so this is, so you've got This is. Did it start with 'This is trying to conceive?'

Sheila: That's right, Yes. So that's just about trying to conceive, nothing else. And then there's, 'This is IVF' because a lot of people who do struggle to get pregnant do need IVF or IUI. And then there's, 'This is the two-week wait' because if you do IVF or IUI, you have to have, unless your cycle is cancelled, you would go through a two week wait. And then the recent one, which I published in, uh, September-ish of last year, October, is 'This is pregnancy and baby loss'. And the next book, and actually, it's not quite to do with this series. It's a book I'm specifically doing for the black, Asian, ethnic minorities. So, it's all ladies from the ethnic, those ethnic minorities have written about their experience all the way from trying to conceive all the way through to stillbirth and neonatal death. Because we all experienced the same emotions going through the whole, you know, all the way from trying to conceive, to pregnancy loss. If unfortunately, you've had a miscarriage. But there are other stigmas and taboos for women from those ethnic communities where it's not spoken about enough and it's not understood enough.

So, all my books, although they are short stories of people's experience. So, if you're going through it, you can relate, resonate with one of them, or two of them, or even more. These, I hope they all also raise awareness. So, you could give them to somebody else, to find out what it's like.

Sarah: Yeah. I was thinking awareness. Yeah. Outside of just the women and the men who are trying to conceive, but also into the community that's supporting them. I mean, and that's where you come in with your background of even midwifery. Of even at that point when they are pregnant and they're being supported to have that knowledge of what it's like to have been through a fertility journey and then be in labour with this precious baby, it's having that understanding, isn't it? So, I think, yeah, the fact you're so visible now, with this wonderful series of books and I hope they are getting out there into the right hands. And, and that's why I wanted you here partly as well to, to share that so that people can see there is so much more information and support than they realise it's available. It's literally everywhere now. And like you say, some will want to find out on Instagram and connect with what is a really beautiful community there, or other social media platforms. Others may not want to do that, may not want to be online, but they would really appreciate a book to still connect them, you know, with all of that knowledge and all of that support. So, it's a wonderful thing you've done. You've dedicated so many, I'm not even gonna say hours. Years of your time. So much of your time, into creating these really beautiful resources and I know that you have a giveaway at the moment. Don't you? Of your 'This is trying to conceive' eBook copies.

Sheila: Yes. I'm giving away 10,000 free copies of 'This is trying to conceive' eBook and that was just. Yeah, it was again, just to. I mean, I actually started it in November, which was national fertility awareness week here in the UK, but it will go on obviously until 10,000 copies have given away. And it just kind of blows my mind that I could help 10,000 people. You know so, it is available from the link you've got there, which just takes you to a landing page, which does get you to put your email address in, but you can unsubscribe, I really don't mind. I don't think, in fact, I love it when people unsubscribe from sort of, email sort of newsletters I've got, because they email me sometimes and say, I'm unsubscribing because I'm pregnant which is wonderful. I think, you know, I don't want you on my list.

Sarah: Yeah, it's the only kind of connection with people Isn't it in fertility where you have, they're not going to need you for too long? So, we love connecting with this community, but it's even more amazing to see when they kind of graduate on onto motherhood.

Sheila: Absolutely.

Sarah: So, what I'm going to do, Sheila is. Include all of the links to this wonderful 10,000 eBook giveaway that you have. I'm going to include the link to claim that and the links to

your website and your other books, and your social media, all on the podcast page, which will be at episode number 15. So that will be a [www.fertilemindset.com/episode-015](http://www.fertilemindset.com/episode-015) or just go to the podcast page on my site and you'll find it there. Because yeah, this is, it's such a wonderful resource and I'm really pleased that we can get that out there and if that book is useful and inspiring, then, of course, there's the others in the series. And I was just thinking if I can put an idea forward for another book for you, Sheila? I was thinking about it, the whole concept of donor treatment in itself is huge, and brings up, just like you were saying, you know, with the minorities as well, it brings up such unique challenges. That's simply you got people who simply look at IVF as a standalone treatment, don't really necessarily understand all the other thoughts, all the other challenges and things to work through that you need to get to in order to go through a donor cycle or just to decide whether that is right for you so yeah, I'm going to put that one in the hat.

Sheila: I think I've already got a list of another five to do, so yes donor conception is definitely, and, and as I've grown, and sort of realising what people want, then I will just go back, and I will just add stories to these books. You know, they're kind of like a work in progress. They were finished work now, but they can always be added to because, Okay there's just so many stories out there.

Sarah: Yeah, there are definitely, and we hope to feature more on this podcast as well. It's been such a pleasure to listen to your story initially and then hear where you've been since then. It's just so beautiful, so inspiring. And I know that you're going to be around for the fertility community, on an ongoing basis. Great to see you or all the wonderful events in London, where we used to bump into each other again soon. Yeah. Really lovely to have this conversation with you, Sheila. Thank you for everything you do for the community, it's such worthwhile work. It's a real pleasure to chat to you as well. So, take care. Thanks so much for joining us.

Sheila: Take care, everybody. Bye-bye.

Thank you for listening to the Fertile Mindset Podcast.

If the topics talked about here sounded like I was speaking directly to you and your thoughts, then I would really love to invite you into the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary.

This is my fertility support membership, where you can free yourself from stress, worry and any emotions that don't feel helpful, so you can then create a naturally supportive mindset, your Fertile Mindset.

In the Sanctuary I'll guide you through using the emotional healing technique I use at Fertile Mindset called EFT, and you'll soon be feeling less stressed and more joyful.

If you're not already in the Sanctuary, do come and join us now, starting with the BUD level of membership, which is completely free of charge.

Go to [www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary](http://www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary) to join, and then watch the welcome class, which will give you a fast start into taking back control over the emotional side of your fertility.

I look forward to seeing you there, and at the next episode of the Fertile Mindset Podcast.