

'Natalie will be a mum one day'



Natalie's mum, Angela

Last week Natalie Evans, left infertile by cancer treatment, lost her battle to use embryos fertilised by her ex-fiancé. But her mum, Angela, reveals an egg donor has offered to help her become a mother

GIDDY ON LOVE AND romance, Natalie Evans and Howard Johnston planned their future and dreamt of marriage and children. They wanted two kids – a boy called Jack and a girl called Paris, after the city where Howard proposed in June 2000. They began trying for a baby, but then doctors found pre-cancerous tumours on Natalie's ovaries, and she was

forced to have them removed. The couple created and froze embryos beforehand in the hope of starting a family later. But eight months after the op, they split up and Howard, now 30 and single, withdrew his consent for the embryos to be used, denying her the chance to become a biological mother. Natalie, 35, now waits in dread for the official letter that will coldly state her six embryos, fertilised by Howard and kept in a hospital freezer in Bath, have been destroyed.

"Just imagine how Natalie will feel when she gets that letter," says her mum Angela Elmes, 59, from her home in Wiltshire. "I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. "My children and grandchildren are my life and I've always taken it for granted that my kids will have children. To see Natalie's pain and not be able to do anything is devastating." But Angela reveals there is still a chance that Natalie will one day become a mum – despite having her ovaries

removed, she'd still be able to carry a child. "A woman has come forward offering to be an egg donor for Natalie," says Angela. "It's an absolutely amazing offer. I'm still optimistic that one day Natalie will have a child. That would be the perfect ending. She's wonderfully natural with children and babies." However, Natalie, who works in telesales, and is currently single, is taking time out to consider her future. She started trying for a baby with Howard over five years ago. When she couldn't conceive they both went for medical tests, which revealed she had pre-cancerous tumour on her ovaries. Before the op to remove her ovaries, the couple decided to fertilise some of Natalie's egg with Howard's sperm and store six embryos so they could still try to have a child together. After the split, Natalie was unable to accept she couldn't be a biological mum, and has fought tooth and nail to be allowed to implant the embryo without Howard's consent. It's a battle that's seen Natalie go from the High Court to the Court of Appeal and twice to the European Court. The Grand Chamber of the European Court was Natalie's last hope. But a week ago that last desperate bid was turned down. After the hearing, distraught Natalie sobbed: "I was fighting



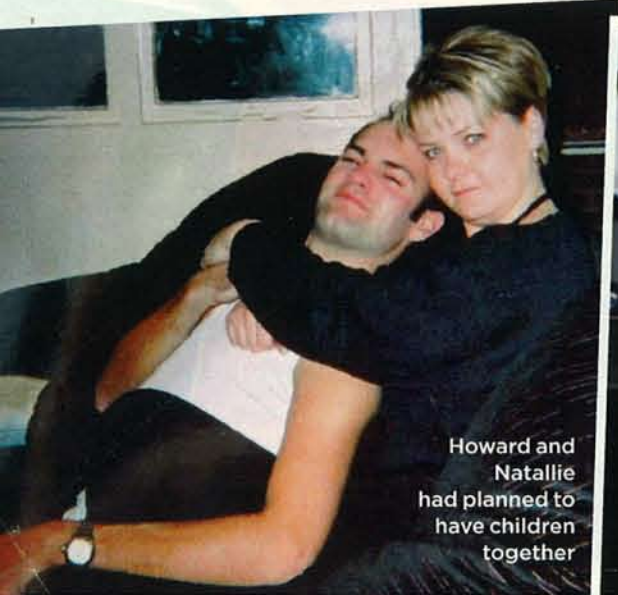
To see Natalie's pain and not be able to do anything is devastating

for my right to be a mother." Howard's refusal to let her use the embryos has devastated her whole family. "It was heartbreaking," says Angela. "It doesn't help her pain that she's the only one of my four daughters who has not had a child. Natalie tried everything to keep her potential future babies alive. "When she was little, Natalie

would play happy families with her dolls. She loves babies and children and is so close to her nieces and nephews. "When Howard proposed to her in Paris she couldn't have been more happy. I was thrilled too. He was handsome, loving, intelligent – you couldn't have wished for a better son-in-law," says Angela.

"We all took it for granted they'd have children. They talked about it. They wanted a boy and a girl and had even chosen their names. You couldn't help but think what beautiful babies they'd have." Angela's still seething that Howard could deny her daughter the baby she so desperately wants.

"I despise him for what he's done to my family. We'll never forgive him – we feel he's knifed us in the back. He's broken Natalie's heart. How could he treat her so badly?" she says. "We're so angry because it was her last chance to have a child of her own. It's just so sad. What harm would it do Howard for him to say 'Yes.' Natalie didn't want anything from him – just her last six eggs that he chose to fertilise with his sperm. "Natalie's tried everything to get him to change his mind – she's texted him, emailed him and begged him through lawyers, but he never answers." Now, all Angela can do is support her daughter. "The last five years have been a real roller coaster and Natalie has put her life on hold," Angela says. "She's been left reeling as she tries to face up to the harsh truth that she'll now never be able to have a baby that is genetically her own." Angela adds: "We've always known that even if Natalie won the court case and was able to use the embryos, her chances of having a child would have been slim. But if she could have changed the law and helped other women like her, it would have been worth it." ■
By Louise Hall



Howard and Natalie had planned to have children together



Natalie, here with her niece Naomi, adores her sisters' children

The couple's embryo battle – in their own words

HOWARD JOHNSTON
"I can absolutely understand people saying I've been heartless. I realise I'm denying Natalie the right to have a child with me. But I want to be able to choose when and with whom I become a parent. When I have a child I want to be a responsible father not just a sperm donor who plays no part in his or her life."



NATALIE EVANS
"I'm distraught. It's hard for me to accept that I will never become a mother. I was fighting for my right to become a mother and the rights of the embryos. I ask Howard to consider whether he could ever permit me to have the children I so dearly long for and which he was happy to consent to when the procedure took place to create the embryos."



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