

## FIRST UP



PHOTOGRAPH: KIRSTY ANDERSON

## What it feels like to ... HAVE A MISCARRIAGE

NICOLA MCGOWAN, 29, CLYDEBANK

**M**Y husband and I have been trying to conceive for two years. The first miscarriage was just after we got married and we've now had four. We were on honeymoon in Cuba and I was nearly 12 weeks along. It was the safe point. I started to bleed and there were no English-speaking doctors. We were in a tourist area and there was only one tiny clinic.

I knew what was happening. I was crying and in so much pain. Once we got to the clinic, they scanned me and told me, "There's your baby," and gave me a picture. My husband

was relieved but I knew something wasn't right.

I went to the toilet and it landed in my hand. I screamed for my husband. He came in and I was sitting on the toilet. He said, "Is that it?" I said, "I think so." That will always stick with me.

I wanted to go home but I couldn't. There was only one flight a week to the UK.

When we went back to the hotel I was so empty. It was horrendous but I couldn't stay in the room the whole time. We had to eat.

Luckily, when I did go out my husband had told the people we had

met there. They were coming up to me and it was nice that people were genuinely upset for me but I didn't want to be there.

I wanted to try not to leave the honeymoon in such a downer. I wanted to deal with it when I got home. But I couldn't. I'd see people enjoying themselves and there was a woman who had a newborn baby and everywhere I went she was there.

When we got home, we had to tell everyone. We had announced it at the wedding. I phoned my mum from a payphone in Cuba but we had to wait until we got home to tell everyone else.

met there. They were coming up to me and it was nice that people were genuinely upset for me but I didn't want to be there.

Telling everyone was like reliving it. I would feel I was doing OK but when I had to say the words "we've lost the baby" it was so much harder. I know you're not supposed to tell anyone until you are 12 weeks but we thought we were at that point. It was our first pregnancy so you don't think you're going to lose it.

When I think back, Cuba is such a horrible memory and it shouldn't be because it was our honeymoon.

A part of me feels like I left my baby in Cuba. We bought booties when we were there and we buried them with a note to the baby to close the chapter. A part of us wants to go

back in a few years to see it but right now it's too painful.

Although we have had three more miscarriages since then, nothing compares to the first. I had names picked. I was supposed to come home and have my scan a week later.

The miscarriages have made my marriage stronger. After Cuba, we went through a really hard time. I didn't talk about my feelings but we sat down a few months later and talked and since then we have been far stronger.

Visit [miscarriagesupport.org.uk](http://miscarriagesupport.org.uk)

DANIELLE GIBSON

### ■ FIDELMA COOK

## “Our rural regions are the last bastion of honest French cuisine

**T**HIS morning, opening the shutters revealed the cocoon of mist that had enveloped the area. Used to it as I am now, I still give thanks I don't have to plough through it to get to some office miles away.

For I know that, if here, it will stretch for miles, only briefly opening, which is somehow more disconcerting than the opacity. I also know that, as in the past few days, the sun will burn through it by 2pm to reach a temperature up to 21C.

In the mist the silence is even more profound than usual but, strangely, it's a more comforting one, a safer one.

The fields that stretch to the hills and valleys all around me no longer exist in sight. One can see clearly for perhaps up to six feet. Yet one feels rather protected, hidden behind this barrier and having no need to go out ... anywhere.

Once upon a time I would have railed and cursed at any obstacle to my leaving anywhere, pacing in angry frustration at nature's meanness and trickery. But if rural France teaches you anything, then it is surely patience.

When driving behind a combine harvester or a tractor, visitors of mine pull out then pull in, desperately seeking a moment to overtake, often slapping the wheel in exasperation.

"What's the problem?" I ask. "You're on holiday. There's no hurry; no place to be."

The response, I can guarantee, will be: "But that's not the point."

They can never articulate, though, what the point actually is.

And I have long forgotten, hidden in a world where the point for all is to move carefully and hopefully through the seasons; to hope the weather works with the crops this year and not against them; to survive without old friends or family dying.

It's a strange, almost old-fashioned way to live and sadly we're seeing the last generation to do so.

When Miriam's granddaughter

visits in the holiday, she sits silently glued to her smartphone, tip-tapping her conversations, flicking to films and videos. In the kitchen Miriam cooks and bottles preserves in a frenzy akin to the women of old who knew such time was limited, as the coming winter cut off the fecundity of the year.

The girl has little interest in what is on her plate, which in itself stuns my neighbour, who is always thinking of the meals to come and ways to delight Pierrot. For her, as there always will be, there are three full meals a day ready for a set time. Meat, as is right in a hunter's house, will be served for at least one meal, vegetables slightly less so and potatoes only rarely.

Fruit will be made into compotes, tarts and – surprisingly – the crumbles we like to think of as our own.

We muse on this, discussing the recent report that around half the adults in France are now overweight and one in six is obese.

We guffaw at that old canard that Frenchwomen don't get fat and cruelly describe to each other the ones we've seen.

We agree that it is, undoubtedly, the change in how many French now eat, allied to the rise and seeming foreign charm of the fast-food chains.

When I first came here, most supermarkets had a meagre shelf of ready-made microwave dishes and perhaps, though not often, a shelf of sandwiches behind

their plastic screens. Now whole sections are devoted to such easy, quick food, showing an ever-increasing demand. I see them stacked more and more in the trolleys of young mothers, often young overweight mothers. Behind them come their mothers and grandmothers with a smaller haul of bags of vegetables and fruits, almost always seasonal.

I am not one to talk, as you well know, given my own bizarre eating habits, but peering into those shopping trolleys tells us all we need to know.

Miriam would die (probably murdered by Pierrot) were she to serve up a sandwich for lunch. In the summer, salad is plucked outside her door; in the winter, lunch may be only soup and baguette. But the soup is packed full of their own vegetables; the stock from the chicken and duck served at a past meal. And at night there may be a daube that has been twice cooked for hour upon hour and left for a night in between.

My way with food has never been, and let's face it will never be, the relationship my neighbours have.

However, that doesn't mean I can't understand its worth and mourn its undoubted passing in many households. Our rural regions, in truth, are probably the last bastions of honest French cuisine and our older, whippet-thin women a testament to that.

So it is why I get a strange pleasure when mist-hound and insulated in my old farmhouse, still complete with hooks where ham once cured. When I go out and smell the wood smoke I realise I'm in the dying days of a world soon to be lost.

It's sad but inevitable. I sigh as I go back inside and pull the oven chips from the freezer.

[cookfidelma@hotmail.com](mailto:cookfidelma@hotmail.com)  
Twitter: @fidelmacook

