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Older moms a new movement

Having a baby after 40 no longer news.

By John Sammon

The Santa Cruz Sentinel



WATSONVILLE, Calif. — At one time, women older than age 40 giving birth was a headline-making rarity. But today is a mainstream phenomenon.

"It's really changed dramatically in the last decade," said Angel La Liberte, manager of the website Flower Power Mom, the truth about Motherhood after 40. "Many more women are having babies after age 40. It's a modern little baby boom."

La Liberte said recent breakthroughs in medical treatments and expanding knowledge of the human body have completely changed previous assumptions about late motherhood. The website is titled in recognition that older mothers are often baby boomers who grew up in the counterculture era of the 1960s.

"This is an online community," La Liberte said. "The website's purpose is to empower and advise women who are in the process of becoming mothers over the age of 40, are expecting, who want to become pregnant, or already parenting."

La Liberte, 50, had her own children when she was 41, and then again at 44. Her son is 8 years old and her daughter is 5.

"If you're an older mom, you might wind up dropping your kids off at a day care center next to other mothers young enough to be your own daughter," she said.

La Liberte previously ran a nonprofit support group for divorced couples in England after her first marriage ended.

"I married young, but it didn't work out," she said. "My husband didn't want children. I divorced at 30, and I wasn't in a rush to remarry. I didn't meet my current husband until 10 years later."

A stay-at-home mom, La Liberte said she receives emails from all over the world from older women who want to be mothers. She said such women must first become realistic with themselves.

"After 40, your fertility goes down," she said. "But there are options, egg and sperm donations, even adoptions. The latest big trend is that more and more women who want to become older moms don't have a male partner, but they can still become pregnant by sperm donation."

An informative video on the website discusses the ramifications.

"There's been a lot of age discrimination against older mothers, and the myths and the stigmas need to change," La Liberte said. "You might go out with your newborn and somebody comes up and says, 'Grandma is having a nice time,' thinking you're the child's grandmother. You feel like saying, 'don't call me grandma.'"

She sometimes receives angry emails telling her women older than 40 have no business having children. However, La Liberte said that more people today, including the media, are coming to understand that older motherhood is not a rarity or passing fad.

"You learn you're not alone," she said. "The medical establishment is sometimes not very positive about older motherhood, and talking about the risk can cause anxiety. When I had my kids I did not relax when I should have enjoyed it."

La Liberte said fear of Down syndrome should not become irrational.

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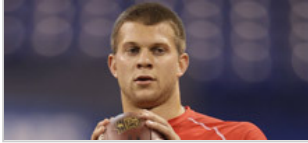
"There is a higher risk with age, and there's a test you can take before birth to check for Down syndrome," she said. "I had that test. It can be tough and emotional to take. There was no way I was going to give my baby up, but there's also no point in chewing your fingernails over it."

La Liberte said ongoing dialogue on the website is valuable.

"Communication is important," she said. "I post to the blog twice a week, and the blog talks about these issues."

For information, go to www.flowerpowermom.com.

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