

# My husband cheated on me I still needed to love him as

**T**here is a routine in Jenny Powell's household that, while officially reserved only for special occasions, is nonetheless becoming increasingly frequent. In the evening, the television presenter's nine-year-old daughter Connie will get

by **Antonia Hoyle**

into Jenny's bed with a bowl of popcorn. They paint each other's toenails while watching a romantic comedy film.

The following morning, Jenny's

younger daughter, Pollyanna, will run in and wake the pair. The three then eat toast under the duvet together before the day begins.

It is a scene of delightful domesticity, but one that has taken much soul-searching, and a great deal of heartbreak for Jenny to arrive at and learn to enjoy.

When she was seven months pregnant with Pollyanna, she discovered her husband, businessman Toby Baxendell, was having an affair with a woman 15 years his junior.

The settled family life she had taken for granted for 13 years fell apart. Three months later, Toby left to live with his new girlfriend. Jenny, meanwhile, was forced to come to terms with the reality of being a single mother in her 40s.

Perhaps inevitably, she spiralled into depression. Too anxious to eat and at times too weak to get out of bed, she found herself on the brink of a breakdown. It is only now that her divorce has come through and Pollyanna is 18 months old, that she has learned to adjust to her new life and relish the future that is so very different to the one she envisaged.

'I thought marriage was for ever. The last thing I wanted was to become another divorce statistic,' she says. 'When Toby moved out, it felt as if I had been bereaved. I felt like a failure and everything crumbled around me. I was hysterical. I screamed and cried until I had no more tears left.'

'But I knew I had to carry on for the sake of our children. They kept me going and now I can honestly say that I'm happy again. I feel liberated, independent and younger and I am looking forward to the future again.'

Sitting in the living room of the four-bedroom home in Altrincham, Cheshire, which she shared with Toby, Jenny seems more a survivor than a victim.

Her poignant recollections are peppered with boisterous laughter, her vivacious personality intact. She is both candid and cautious, keen to put forward her ordeal in her first newspaper interview, yet wary of being portrayed as bitter or resentful.

Jenny has most recently been on screen presenting BBC daytime property programme To Buy Or Not To Buy and, from this month, she'll be on the National Lottery draw show.

Now 42, she became a household name in the Nineties as Nicky Campbell's glamorous hostess on ITV game show Wheel Of Fortune. More recently, she has appeared on talk show Loose Women.

She is the younger of two sisters; her father Les was a builder, her mother Myra a secretary. After studying at the Italia Conti stage school in London, she won a national competition to find two new television presenters and was plucked from obscurity at the age of 17 to front BBC2's No Limits, before becoming the face of children's television shows.

She moved from her parents' home in Ilford, Essex, to Manchester to be near the BBC studios. 'It was an exhilarating time but work was my life. The only people I met were guests on my shows,' she says.

Her 20s were spent dating a string of celebrities, including Take That's Jason Orange for three years, and Bros singer Matt Goss.

She had been single for two years when she met Toby, now 48, in a Chinese restaurant in 1997. 'He was

**When Jenny Powell's marriage broke down, she 'cried until there were no tears left'. But now the Wheel Of Fortune star is loving life as a single mother – and is even dating again**



**DASHING:** But Jenny discovered Toby was unfaithful during her pregnancy

dashingly handsome,' she says. 'I asked if the takeaway he was ordering was for one and asked for his number. I think he admired my confidence.'

Toby was also successful, running

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# while I was pregnant, but the father of my children



HOWARD WALKER / REX FEATURES

his family's flooring company, a business that would make him a millionaire. After a year, the couple sold their flats and bought the home Jenny lives in now.

There is a snooker room, a pool, tennis court and spacious garden. It suggests success and prosperity, a haven for a charmed lifestyle.

In 2000, Jenny fell pregnant with

Connie. 'We felt ready and were delighted,' she says. Weeks into her pregnancy, Toby proposed while they were staying at their holiday home on France's Cote d'Azur.

They married in October 2003, in an open-air nightclub on the shore of Lake Garda in Italy.

'Connie was dressed in a fairy dress with crystal wings. I ended the evening dancing barefoot in my

wedding dress on the bar's grand piano. It was magical.'

Jenny says the early years of their marriage were marked by spontaneity and fun. 'Before Connie went to school, we would drive round Europe together, or fly to Barbados at two hours' notice,' she says.

'Toby was energetic and full of life. He was a brilliant dad and we never argued. I felt settled and confident in the relationship. I thought we were the perfect couple.'

They were thrilled when they found out Jenny was pregnant again, in 2008. But this time, the pregnancy wasn't as straightforward.

'I had terrible morning sickness. I was emotional and grumpy,' she says. 'I was away filming To Buy Or Not To Buy three days a week and feeling sorry for myself.'

But she believes that Toby changed as well. 'He seemed distracted and less attentive,' she says. 'I noticed it when I was halfway through my pregnancy. You know when something is wrong. But I convinced myself I had paranoia driven by pregnancy hormones.'

Yet by September, she could hold her feelings to herself no longer. 'I felt vulnerable and frustrated,' she says. 'I asked him if he was seeing anyone else. He denied it, but I didn't believe him.'

I checked his mobile phone, something I'd never done

before. But call it women's intuition, or a sixth sense, I knew something was wrong.'

While Jenny didn't find any messages from a woman on the phone, she did discover a text message from Toby to one of his friends detailing his plans to visit a mystery woman.

When confronted, Toby admitted an affair. He had met recruitment consultant Suzanne Galloway, 33, in a

local wine bar. Jenny suspects they'd been seeing each other for the duration of her pregnancy. It is the fact that he was unfaithful while she was pregnant that tortured her almost as much as the infidelity itself.

'I was hysterical,' she says. 'I went mad and screamed at him. I couldn't believe he would do this to me. His timing was awful. I thought we were beyond the age of meeting anyone else. It wasn't even a possibility.'

'Toby said sorry, but it was just a word. It didn't mean anything. He wouldn't admit he was still seeing her but I could tell he was serious about this girl.'

As the weeks passed, the pair attempted to rebuild their relationship for the sake of Connie and their unborn child. Understandably, it proved almost impossible. 'I felt vulnerable and he felt shut out,' she says. 'We were worn out and numb from the anxiety of the pregnancy and not knowing what was going to happen between us.'

While Jenny has never met Suzanne, she says she called her three times in a bid to make some sense of the situation. 'I called and asked if she realised I was pregnant,' she says. 'She denied everything. She sounded upset, but not as upset as I was.'

Of Suzanne's behaviour, she will only say: 'I can't condone anyone having an affair with a married man whose wife is pregnant.'

Pollyanna was born in November, 2008. 'Toby was by my side. He had chosen her name – as he had chosen Connie's – and was as thrilled as I was,' she says.

'It was such a bittersweet moment and I felt full of conflicting emotions. We adored our daughter but I knew our marriage was over.'

When their daughter was eight weeks old, the pressure grew too much and Jenny asked him to leave. 'I suspected he was still seeing

Suzanne, and I knew there was no way we'd be able to get past what he'd done,' she says.

She threw his clothes in bin bags and left them outside. 'I'm not confrontational and don't see the point in shouting,' she says. 'This was my way of showing my anger.'

'That evening, Connie got into bed with me and I slept for 12 hours. After all the stress and torture of the past few months, I felt a sense of relief and finality. I awoke the next morning and threw all my energies into sorting out custody arrangements and other practicalities of the separation.'

Yet, perhaps inevitably, her stoic sense of purpose didn't last. Within weeks, Jenny had crippling postnatal depression. 'I lost the energy to do anything. I saw my life spiralling down the plug hole,' she says. 'I couldn't imagine being able to laugh again. I had lost a part of my life and it felt as if someone had died.'

She recalls lying in bed with Pollyanna one morning. 'I couldn't feel my legs, or find the energy to move,' she says. 'I had such terrible anxiety that I couldn't eat. I lost a stone and looked horrific. I knew I could either be swallowed up or fight back.'

Her midwife put her on low-dose antidepressants and recommended that she take some gentle exercise. 'I would jog to the end of the field at the bottom of our road every day,' she says. 'It gave me a sense of achievement. I learned to take one day at a time.'

As she filed for divorce, she came to terms with Toby's behaviour. Similar to many other newly single mothers, she was torn between frustration towards her former husband and a desire to keep the peace for the sake of their children.

She chose the latter, displaying what some might believe to be a surprising degree of understanding.

'Pregnancy is a difficult time for any man, and my midwife told me it is quite common for men to have affairs,' she says. 'I told Connie that Daddy had a girlfriend while Mummy was pregnant, which wasn't allowed. She adores her father and I worry she feels torn between us.'

Meanwhile, Jenny was fortified watching Pollyanna's developments. 'Her first smile and first steps were magnified by what I'd gone through as she grew up,' she says. 'She provided a distraction. I love my job but the feeling motherhood has given me is unbeatable.'

She has also started dating again. 'I never expected to be single in my 40s, but times have changed and I don't think my age is a problem. I feel like I'm 25 again.'

Her divorce came through in May. 'It was a weight off my mind but I wasn't celebrating,' she says. 'I felt an awful sense of failure.'

But she has regained an admirable sense of equilibrium in her family life. Toby – still living locally with Suzanne – sees the girls at weekends and on Wednesdays. Their marital home is up for sale and Jenny intends to buy somewhere smaller locally.

She has learned to laugh again, and when she thinks of her former husband she does so without rancour.

'I wouldn't say I've forgiven him, and I don't want him back. But I'm stronger now, and fearless. I know that if I can get through this, I can get through anything.'