

# THE BABY BUS

HAVING a baby is all-consuming for most new mothers. But for some, this break from the fast track of having a career can provide precious time to think, invent and innovate, with unexpected results. **ROBINA DAM** speaks to five new mothers who found that having one baby led to the creation of another, very different, type of baby.

**JULIE PANKHURST, 35**, thought up the successful [friendsreunited.co.uk](http://friendsreunited.co.uk), the website that puts former schoolfriends in contact, when she was pregnant with her first child, Amber, now two. She and her husband, Stephen, a co-founder of the site, now have a second daughter, Sally, who is three weeks old, and live in Barnet, Hertfordshire. Julie says:

**A**FTER I fell pregnant with Amber, I started thinking about my old friends from school. Until then, like many professional women, I was focused on my career as a computer programmer.

But being pregnant changed my whole outlook on life. Stephen and I had been trying for a baby for almost eight years and had practically given up hope with our IVF treatment when it was successful.

I was over the moon, but I also became more reflective and, for the first time, I slowed down and began to think about other things in my life, especially the past.

I wondered what was happening in the lives of old friends with whom I had lost touch. At the same time Stephen, a software programmer, and his business partner, Jason, were thinking about innovative ideas for websites, so I suggested the concept behind friendsreunited.

I thought it would fit in with my decision to be a full-time mother. But I was so busy immediately after the birth of Amber that Stephen had to write the entire program. The site was launched when Amber was six months old, and I spent the evenings working on it.

At first, I really enjoyed it because it was on a small scale, but after the website was mentioned on Radio 1 and suddenly took off, it became stressful managing it on my own.

I had no idea it would become so successful. We now have 5.5 million registered users, and receive 3,000 e-mails each day. But we're still just a cottage industry comprising Stephen, Jason and me.

Having set up this project so I could spend lots of time with my little girl, it's ironic that I've got almost a full-time job. But at least I'm working from home.

Now we've gone beyond just helping friends find each other. One of the most heart-warming stories is that a son given up for adoption managed to trace his birth mother through it.

It's stories like that which make me feel the work is so worthwhile.

**ANASTASIA BAKER, 34**, is the founder of an agency that specialises in nannies who look after newborn babies during the night. The former television journalist had the idea when she had her second child, Alexander, now nearly three. Anastasia is married to BSkyB executive James Baker, 38, and the couple also have a four-year-old daughter, Amelia. They live in Fulham, West London. Anastasia says:

WHEN my first child was born, in 1998, I was a television reporter for the BBC. My career was important to me and I loved it so much that I

was more than willing to work late into the night or at weekends.

Though my priorities changed when Amelia was born, I didn't want to give up work, so the best solution seemed to be to have a live-in nanny. Tricia, who worked from 7.30am to 7pm.

With full-time help, I thought we'd manage, but I hadn't considered the nights. James and I both need nine hours' sleep to operate, but Amelia kept waking up throughout the night and, like any new parents, we were soon suffering from severe sleep deprivation.

I staggered on, trying to cope, and three months after Amelia's birth I returned to work, even though I was often woken up four times in the night.

When I discovered I was pregnant again, six months after Amelia was born, I was panic-stricken. I thought I would barely get a night's sleep again. The only solution seemed to be to employ a maternity nurse to work around the clock, but they cost around £500 to £600 per week.

So immediately after Alexander's birth, I rang more than a dozen agencies asking for a night nanny, but they all seemed to think this was a very odd request.

Then I placed advertisements for trained paediatric nurses in training hospitals, and found Shireen Standley, my first night nanny.

**W**ITHIN four months, Shireen had Alexander sleeping through the night. And — just as important — so was I. Having Shireen saved my health, my marriage and my sanity.

I had also begun to realise that I couldn't continue my career because I really wanted to be there for my children. But I still needed to work.

My search for a night nanny had made me think that if I needed one, there must be plenty of mothers who wanted one too.

I spent three or four months trawling through teaching hospitals and putting adverts in The Lady magazine. By Alexander's first birthday, in June 2000, I had 15 nannies on my books.

It cost only about £2,000, because the nannies are self-employed and are paid when they have a client.

Today, we have 90 nannies and between 80 and 90 clients, and I have launched franchises in Hampshire and Berkshire. The business, which I called Night Nannies, makes around £120,000 a year.

I work on Night Nannies in the morning, and spend the afternoons with Amelia and Alexander, so I have the best of both worlds.

I dreaded the birth of Alexander because I thought it would mean the end of my sleep and career. In fact, it is thanks to him that I have got this fantastic new 'baby' that I am so passionate about.

**JULIA MINCHIN, 36**, is a former marketing manager who developed a hip-seat, for carrying children, while pregnant with her second son, Ollie, now 18 months. Julia and her husband, Jeremy, 36, a former detective sergeant with



New lease of life: From left — Julie with Amber, two, Anastasia

and Alexander, nearly

the Special Branch, also have a three-year-old son, Tom. They live in Taunton, Somerset. Julia says:

AFTER Tom was born in July 1998, I suffered from repeated back pain until I went to see an osteopath. It turned out that the way I carried Tom on my hip was throwing my spine out of alignment, and I soon learned that I was not alone.

For the majority of mothers, back aches are the result of picking up and carrying small children all day. Yet, astonishingly, there was nothing on the market to help us.

At the time I did nothing about

the idea but when I became pregnant with my second baby, in the autumn of 1999, I began to see the potential.

As my body was creating a new baby, my mind was creating a new idea for me.

I already knew that, eventually, I wanted to set up my own business. I'd been an executive at Cobra Beer in London and had taken a career break and moved to Somerset to have Tom.

So I sat down with osteopaths, physiotherapists and designers to construct something that felt comfortable and was practical for

child and parent. It was tricky to find the time, though, and when Ollie was a tiny baby, I used to wait until he had nodded off, then raced upstairs to my 'office' (the spare bedroom) to work on it.

Now, as Ollie has grown so has my business. Our office has spread to three rooms in our converted top floor and we are selling to the likes of John Lewis and Mothercare. Last year, the turnover was £250,000. Yet I very much consider myself a full-time mother because my boys are my priority.

These early years are so precious,