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HENRY IS OUR MIRACLE BABY

Woman's Day, National



Real life

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In an Australian first, Kirsty birthed her son, thanks to her own mum's donated uterus

Kirsty Bryant gazes down at the cherub-faced baby cradled in her arms, a surge of overwhelming love coursing through her.

"Henry is perfect," she whispers softly, her heart swelling with gratitude for the miracle that brought him into her life.

Born on December 15, Henry is the embodiment of Kirsty's deepest desires and dreams. His arrival marked a milestone not just for Kirsty and her 32-year-old husband Nick but for medical science, as he is Australia's first baby born to a mother with a donated uterus.

GROUNDBREAKING

"I think it's the best thing ever that I now carry the womb that I grew in," Kirsty, 31, from Coffs Harbour, tells *Woman's Day* of the uterus donated by her mum Michelle Hayton, 55, just 11 months before she gave birth. "On the morning of the transplant surgery I said, 'Thank you so much, Mum.'"

The operation was complex and lasted a marathon 16 hours, with mother and

Michelle enjoys cuddles with newborn Henry.





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Kirsty, Nick, Violet and Henry are a very happy family.

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daughter in parallel theatres. "I don't think I'll ever be able to fully repay her, but two nights before Henry was born, Nick and I told her that we were naming our baby 'Henry Nicholas Michelle Bryant,' and she burst into tears," says Kirsty.

Kirsty's motherhood journey has been nothing short of extraordinary, not just with Henry but also with his older sister, Violet, three, whose arrival triggered a life-threatening bleed and an emergency hysterectomy.

"I was told I'd never be able to have children again," says Kirsty, admitting she's yet to unpack the trauma of that day. "There are unresolved feelings. At the time, I had a little baby to look after and was too focused on finding a way to get pregnant again."

Refusing to let her dreams be dashed by the limitations of her

body, the new mum found her way to a clinical trial and was offered the opportunity to undergo groundbreaking uterus transplant surgery.

At that point, less than 100 transplants had been performed worldwide. Then, after two rounds of IVE, an embryo became 'Henry'.

Aside from a bout of gestational diabetes at the 20-week mark, Kirsty had a no-fuss, textbook pregnancy, and she puts that down to her mum's great uterus.

"It knows exactly what to do," she laughs. "From the moment I got the womb, it felt like it was meant to be there. It is a life-maker"

When Henry made his long-awaited entrance into the world at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women - "It was the perfect C-section" - the entire medical team wept with joy, as did Michelle, who was in the operating theatre, too.

"The room was filled with joy and love," shares Michelle.

"It was a culmination of the entire journey and a testament to the enduring power of family bonds."

Holding gorgeous Henry in her arms, Kirsty knew every moment of struggle and uncertainty had been worth it.

'It was amazing, after thinking I'd never have another child'

"The euphoria, after thinking I'd never be able to have another child, was amazing," she says. "For me, it was love at first sight and I felt I could go through it all again."

Now, several months after Henry's arrival, Kirsty is grappling with a decision that is weighing heavily on her heart. The new mum needs to decide

before May about what do with the remaining embryos.

"Initially, I would have said 'yes' to a third pregnancy," she says. "But now, I'm about 50-50 and feel too hormonal to make a call. The process is very tough on your body. My husband is happy to leave it at two children, but I'm not sure."

The donated uterus also has a use-by date as the immunosuppressive drugs Kirsty needs, cannot be taken indefinitely.

"In five years, I'm up for my second hysterectomy... Not many women get to say that.

"If I could keep mum's uterus, I would," she admits.

Nestled contentedly in Mum's arms, Henry is none the wiser. One day, he'll be told of the fight for his existence. "But he'll probably roll his eyes and say, 'That's gross, mum,'" chuckles Kirsty. "I think he is going to be a cruisy, easy-going little man, just like his dad."

Words: Natalie Firthman. Pictures: Alana Landsberg/AE Media Syndication