

'Our miracle babies are a Christmas wish come true'

This Christmas, Liza Wilson, 36, from Liverpool, and her partner, Thomas, are celebrating the joy of family.

Watching my baby son, George, giggling while my two-year-old daughter, Isabella, tickles him, I feel a rush of love and pride. George is now nine months old and about to have his first Christmas. While that is a milestone for any family, my partner, Thomas, and I have more reasons to celebrate than most. Both our children were born prematurely, and they are our little miracles.

I wasn't sure if I would ever get pregnant. After three years of cervical cancer treatment in 2009, doctors didn't know if my body could cope with a baby. Thomas had had mumps as a child, and had been warned of the risk of infertility. We were both keen to have children, so we were thrilled when it happened quickly. To begin with, everything went smoothly. But at 28 weeks, my waters broke.

A challenging start

I was admitted to hospital and given injections to mature my baby's lungs. I remember sitting with Thomas as the medical team explained that our baby could have serious complications, breathing difficulties or even brain damage. There was so much to take in,

and my head was spinning. All I wanted was for our daughter to be okay. It was the most scared I've ever been.

Isabella Rose was born by emergency Caesarian at 28 weeks old. She weighed just 2lb 6oz and fitted in the palm of my hand. I was desperate to hold her but she was immediately whisked away to the neonatal ward, where she was put on a ventilator to keep her alive. Recovering over 14 hours, I kept thinking about the women in the maternity ward next door – their healthy newborn babies by their side. Meanwhile, my little girl was fighting for her life.

After seven weeks, we took Isabella home. It was a joy to feel like a normal family again, but Isabella was still on oxygen, so our relief was tinged with worry. In hospital, I'd grown used to the

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reassuring beeps of her heart rate monitor. Now I was reliant on my instincts. For the first few months of her life, I slept with my hand on her chest. I just wanted to know she was breathing.

At nine months old, Isabella was taken off her oxygen. At 15 months, she was discharged completely. Now two and a half, she has no complications, and you would never know she was premature. She's a real character – smiley, communicative and full of energy.

For a long time, I was adamant I didn't want any more children. Isabella's birth had taken its toll on me emotionally, and I was diagnosed with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Surgeons thought an infection had brought on my early labour, and assured me there was no medical

reason why it would happen again. Thomas was desperate for another child, but I simply couldn't face it.

Moving forward

Then, very gradually, something shifted. Thomas and I both have large families, and I began to think about the fun I'd had with my three sisters. I told Thomas I didn't want Isabella to grow up without a playmate, and he was ecstatic. In August 2016, I discovered I was pregnant again.

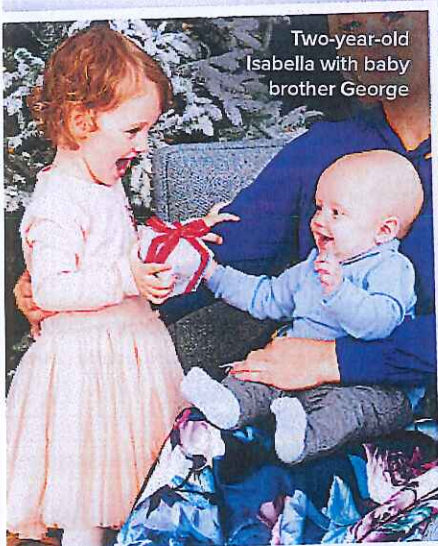
This time, I was monitored even more closely. I was told to avoid physical activity – tricky for my job as a PE teacher. By Christmas, my cervix had shrunk to a dangerous level and I was put on bed rest. Every week, I'd pack a bag and go to the hospital for a check-up. On several occasions, I was admitted, but each time told to go home and rest. Lying on the sofa on Christmas Day, I was consumed by anxiety. All the worry, fear and trauma returned.

George Lennon was born on 15 February 2017, again by emergency Caesarian. At 4lb, he was bigger than Isabella, and to begin with, he did really well. Yet at 12 hours old, he started to have breathing difficulties and was ventilated for five agonising days. I felt torn – wanting to be with George at every moment, yet experiencing huge guilt for not spending enough time with Isabella.

George came home on oxygen after four weeks. Now nine months old, he's very happy and much more robust. Isabella is constantly cuddling him, and loves being 'Mummy's big girl helper'.

Our first Christmas with George will be very special. It's amazing how far we've come. Celebrating the day with both our families and two healthy, happy children is a Christmas wish come true.

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Two-year-old Isabella with baby brother George



Dad Thomas with newborn George

Feature: Ella Dove Photography; Liz McAulay. Liza wears: Blouse, Phase Eight; Skirt, Closet London. Earrings, Dower & Hall. Shoes, Chie Mihara. Isabella wears: Dress, Mothercare. Tights and shoes, Monsoon. George wears: Top and trousers, Mothercare. Sofa, rugs and home accessories, as before

A time to celebrate



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Liza Wilson article in the December 2017 issue of Prima magazine

