

“I run to give hope to others”

After suffering the loss of four babies, Claire Duggan, 36, from Buckinghamshire, finally gave birth to a healthy little boy. She explains how running has helped her to heal

“**L**ooking into those big blue eyes, watching them gaze back at me full of love, I still can't believe Finlay's really mine. It's hard to think back to the time when the thought of cuddling my own child seemed so very far from reach. But now my beautiful boy is here and I am thankful every single day that I've got the chance to be his mum.

I'd always known I wanted to be a parent, but the road to having Finlay was incredibly rocky and painful. I first became pregnant in 2009, but over the next couple of years I lost four babies, suffering two miscarriages and two stillbirths. Words don't come close to describing the pain I felt.

After each traumatic loss, my husband, Jason, 42, held me while I sobbed and wondered, “Why is this happening to me?”.

But, despite the heartache, I didn't want to let go of my dream of a family. We vowed to keep trying and even look into surrogacy or adoption. “I love you and will support you whatever happens,” Jason promised. He gave me the strength to keep going, especially when I became pregnant again. Naturally, it was a nerve-racking time,

with doctors putting me on bed rest from 20 weeks. All the turmoil was worth it, though, when I gave birth to Finlay in April 2011, four weeks premature but weighing a healthy 7lb 7oz. “He's amazing,” I grinned at Jason. “Everything I imagined, and more.”

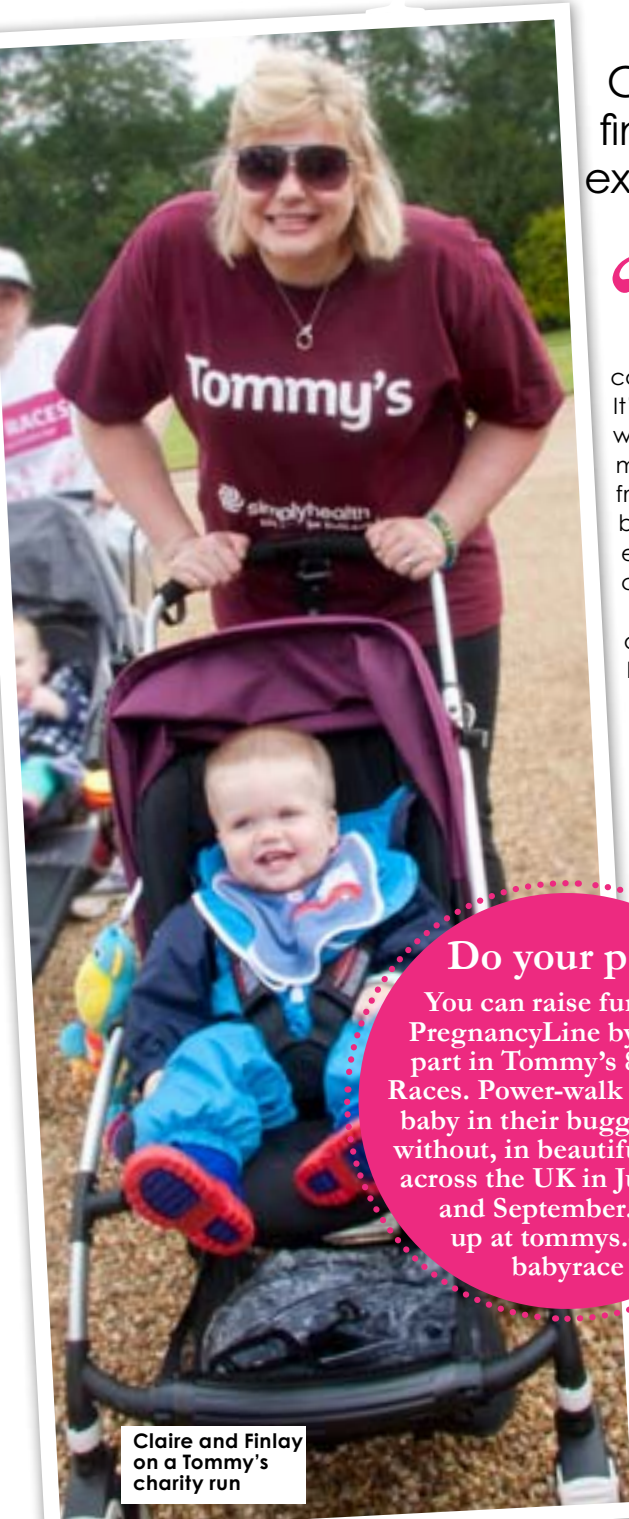
It wasn't until a couple of months later, as I held a sleeping Finlay in my arms, that the reality of all that I'd been through really hit me. Before we lost our babies, I'd always thought that stillbirths were something from Victorian times, not a tragedy that afflicted modern women. Yet, I was the proof and my experience had made me feel very lonely.

Helping others

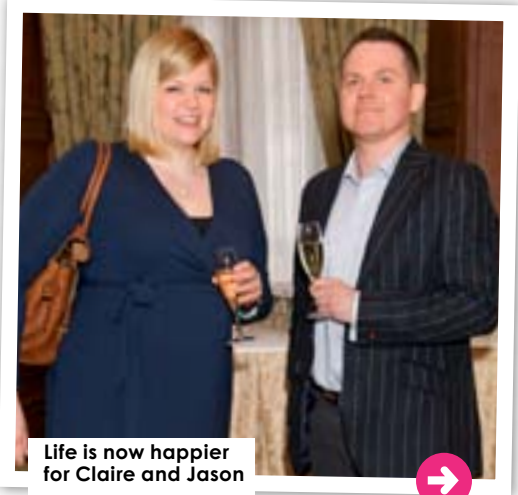
I'd come across Tommy's, a charity that gives vital support to families who have suffered with pregnancy complications or the loss of a baby, and decided I wanted to share my

Do your part!

You can raise funds for PregnancyLine by taking part in Tommy's 8k Baby Races. Power-walk with your baby in their buggy, or run without, in beautiful venues across the UK in June, July and September. Sign up at tommys.org/babyrace



Claire and Finlay on a Tommy's charity run



Life is now happier for Claire and Jason



START RUNNING in five easy steps

- 1 Don't be self-conscious. Try not to worry what others think and be proud that you're doing something so healthy.
- 2 Get the gear. Proper kit and trainers are not only important, they also boost confidence.
- 3 Take it slowly. Your body needs time to adjust.
- 4 Team up. Find a running buddy to keep you motivated.
- 5 Walk and run. You'll soon be running for longer.

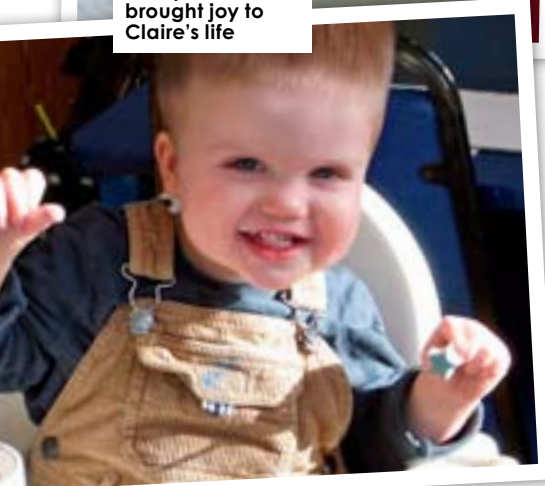
story with them. Then when I read about their annual awards – and the 'Angel' category to celebrate someone who has been a real rock through difficult times – I knew I had to nominate Jason. Pregnancy complications can put a strain on relationships, but he stuck with me through thick and thin.

A proud occasion

I couldn't believe it when I got the letter, several months later, to say he had won! I ran up to Jason, threw my arms around him and said, "You're my angel." Watching him collect his award and tell our tale so beautifully at the awards in April 2012 made me feel extremely proud. And it got me



Finlay has brought joy to Claire's life




thinking about what I could do to help. I decided to sign up for the Tommy's Baby Races – a series of 8k (five-mile) charity runs across the country that can be done pushing a buggy – to give something back to other women who have been through the same hell as me. It was also an ideal opportunity to get back into shape – I'd always taken pride in my body, but five pregnancies and steroid treatment while I was expecting Finlay had left me four stone heavier.

So with Finlay in tow, I joined a 'buggy fit' class, where you exercise in the company of other mums while pushing your pram. It felt great to be with other like-minded women, and having Finlay close by only spurred me on to work harder towards my goal.

Moving forward

In June 2012, the big day finally arrived. It was hard going, but I pushed through the pain barrier and managed to raise £239 for Tommy's. I was overwhelmed by the fact I'd finished and achieved something so worthwhile. Every step in the race had felt like it was me moving away from my past and towards the future with my family. It also inspired me to do more, and last October, I ran the Royal Parks Half Marathon in London, raising another £700.

Now I'm busy enjoying motherhood. It's really wonderful, and the fight we had for Finlay only makes me more grateful. After spending so many restless nights longing for a child to hold, I love it when he wakes up, looks at me and gives me a cuddle and says, "Can we go swimming today, Mummy?". "Of course, we can," I smile. I couldn't want for anything more. 



Claire has raised almost £1000 for charity

Just a phone call away...

Tommy's has launched a new, free PregnancyLine where qualified midwives are on hand 24/7 to provide women with practical and emotional support following a pregnancy complication or loss of a baby. Funded by an ASDA foundation grant, the midwives have been trained to give bereavement support, to advise on how best to plan for a baby following a complication, and also to advise those at risk of health problems. Call today on 0800 014 7800.

FEATURE AMANDA PAULEY