

“I’m dad and mum *to triplets*”

Ian Mucklejohn, 65, from Newbury, was the first single man in the UK to have surrogate triplets from an egg donor. He shares his story...



Ian was confident he could cope with his babies' needs



Ian and his sons, from left, Lars, Ian and Piers

“E very parent knows that mornings can be challenging at the best of times. There are battles over breakfast, stubborn faces that need washing and jumpers to put on the right way round. Once you’ve negotiated those hurdles, there’s the school run to deal with.

Imagine doing all that with just two hands – and three little boys to keep out of trouble! Walking to nursery, I’d hear Ian plead, ‘I want to hold your hand.’ With his brothers, Lars and Piers, already grasping both, I’d unsuccessfully offer a thumb before announcing, ‘Take Daddy’s leg.’ And the four of us would arrive

at the gates in what could only be described as a three-legged race!

As a single dad to triplets, every day is a bit like trying to fix a leak in the dark with a duff torch while wearing mittens – but I wouldn’t have it any other way. And while the circumstances that led to my family are unusual and, for some, controversial, I’m no different to any other lone parent.

A longing for children

It was circumstances that led me to become a dad the way I did. I’d always wanted children but being sole carer to my disabled father while

running my own successful language school meant a social life passed me by – and with it, the opportunities to meet someone special. My longing never vanished, though, and, at the age of 52, I thought to myself, ‘I don’t want to miss the boat.’ But it felt morally wrong to start a relationship with a woman just for that reason, so I decided to search for an egg donor and a surrogate.

Of course, my plan was fraught with difficulties. This type of thing wasn’t contractually enforceable in the UK, so I’d have to look to America with a view to finding an agency there. The concept of a straight man starting a family this way was unheard of, too.



Ian has loved seeing his sons' personalities grow over the years

plenty of support from friends, I decided to go solo. Having dealt with a very poorly parent, I knew I was patient and organised. The children could be

challenging but chaos was the real enemy, so once I had a routine down that I could stick to, that was it.

Of course, there have been some hiccups along the way. Potty training felt like learning to swim by jumping off the Titanic! But you find ways to cope and, as any parent knows, the stress is worth it, especially as I’ve watched the boys grow and develop their own personalities.

My children are my world and I’ve been totally honest with them about how they came into it. They might not know what having a mother is, but they do know about having a loving parent. Pulling me in for a hug, Lars teases, ‘You’re my dad and my mum, you’re dumb.’ I chuckle, but he continues, ‘I know we don’t have a mum, but it doesn’t matter because I love you so much.’ I can’t tell you how much I love them, too.” **PPP**

But my longing was so strong, I was ready to face anything, and while I was older than most dads, I reasoned I was fit and healthy for my age.

Finding a special someone

I found an agency to help and it gave me a list of possible surrogates. When I read the profile of Tina, a nurse, I knew I’d found the one. ‘Everything I’ve done in my life has been ordinary, but I want to do something that lifts me above the norm,’ she wrote. ‘I want to be special for someone.’ When she agreed to carry my baby, I was overwhelmed. The next step was choosing an egg donor. Number 211 – Melissa, who was reading for a PhD and working – stood out straight away. She came across as witty, bright, intelligent, and stunning, all qualities I wanted for my baby. Everything was set and, four months later, four of Melissa’s eggs were fertilised with my sperm and implanted in Tina in the hope one

would take. There followed an anxious wait until the IVF clinic called in to say Tina was pregnant – and carrying triplets! ‘This is unbelievable,’ I gasped. Any worries about how I’d cope with such a brood seemed secondary to this blessing. Tina kept me updated on the pregnancy by phone and, in February 2001, I got a call to say my babies had arrived prematurely but safely. Three healthy little boys!

Meeting my perfect sons

Six weeks later, I excitedly flew to the US to meet my sons for the first time and bring them home. They were perfection, with beautiful hands and tiny feet. From that moment, I felt like my life had gained a new purpose. The idea that Tina may want to keep the triplets played on my mind, but she insisted, ‘I don’t feel like a mother, I feel like a babysitter.’ The children were very much my responsibility.

But British law hadn’t caught up with the fact this kind of thing could happen, so in its eyes, all rights lay with the boys’ mother, even though I was the biological father. My lawyers also advised that the authorities would expect to see a female presence in the home, too. So I hired a maternity nurse and nannies, who helped me with the new exhausting routine of nappy changes and feeds.

After 18 months, without a single visit or word from the authorities and



Having three boys can be chaotic at times!

Read more about Ian’s amazing parenting journey in *A Dad For All Seasons: How My Sons Raised Me* (Gibson Square, £7.99). All proceeds go to ChildLine.

