

Woman donates eggs to sister, who gives birth to healthy triplets

MICHELLE Fredricks' sister has given her the greatest gift for Mother's Day — three children to call her own after years of heartbreak, miscarriages and countless tears.

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5 min read

May 13, 2017 - 11:59PM

The ultimate gift from a sister

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MICHELLE Fredricks' sister has given her the greatest gift for Mother's Day — three children to call her own.

Michelle never thought she would have one baby, let alone three.

Her dream to become a parent had become a numbers game — four years of fertility treatments, three miscarriages and countless tears.

And then came an incredibly special gift from her sister Andrea McAuliffe, 37, giving her the chance to turn back the biological clock.

To their amazement, Michelle, 42, became pregnant the first time she used two of her little sister's donated eggs. Not only did the first egg fertilise and transfer successfully, so did the second. And then, it split.

Finally, all the numbers began to add up.



Andrea McAuliffe and daughters Ginger 6, and Lulu, 3, with Michelle Fredricks and her miracle triplet daughters Stella, Sadie and Edie. Picture: David Caird

Andrea said: “Michelle lost three babies and then she gained triplets: Stella, Sadie and Edie. It was just meant to be.”

She added: “I’ve had people say that you have done such a nice thing, but that’s not why I did it.

“I did it for my sister, so she didn’t wake up on another Mother’s Day without children.”

Three years earlier, Michelle was watching Andrea baptise her second child, Lulu, who was the same age as the baby girl Michelle recently miscarried would have been.

She told her little sister she was worried that she wouldn’t be able to have a healthy baby because of the quality of her ageing eggs, and then said to Andrea: “Maybe I’ll just use some of yours?”

Andrea took it as a flippant remark and retorted: “No you won’t, I need them.”

It had taken courage and much consideration for Michelle to ask, despite their close relationship and her determination to have a baby.

“I really wanted to be a mum and I thought, ‘If my eggs won’t get me there, then I’d love to use my sisters to keep the family genetics’,” she said.



Michelle and husband Lloyd with their newborn triplets in hospital.

“I did have reservations about asking her, because if she said ‘No’, how would I feel towards her?”

“But I was prepared to go down the path of trying to find another donor if she didn’t want to do it.”

In Victoria, more than 200 women have donated eggs in a single year.

They cannot be given financial inducements and must be prepared for their identity to be known to any offspring.

Andrea knew her gift would transform her sister’s life, but it could also cause irreparable rifts.

She had no difficulty conceiving her own children, Lulu, now 3, or Ginger, 6, although she suffered through hyperemesis gravidarum, acute morning sickness, which caused vomiting so severe she was hospitalised.

While she wasn't sure if she could cope with another pregnancy, she also had not decided if her own family was complete. And there were so many "what-ifs".

"What if my ovaries get ruptured when they are retrieving the eggs and the choice of having a third baby is taken away from me?" Andrea said.



Michelle Fredricks is a mum after sister Andrea McAuliffe donated her eggs.
Picture: David Caird

"What if I do an IVF cycle and we don't get any eggs, what will I do if she asks me to do it again and again?"

"What if a baby is born and it looks identical to my girls, am I going to feel strange, like the baby is mine?"

After a year of deliberating, Andrea decided she wanted to help her sister. "I thought, she's 40, so it's now or never," she said.

In April last year, Andrea had one cycle of hormone treatment to stimulate egg production and release. She finally knew what Michelle had gone through 10 times.

"It was hideous. I was really emotional, and I never told Michelle, but even if we didn't get any eggs I couldn't go through that again," Andrea said.

Specialists at Monash IVF retrieved six tiny eggs, and three were fertilised with sperm from Michelle's husband Lloyd to create the embryos.

Within weeks of two embryos being transferred to Michelle, her blood test came back positive for pregnancy.

"At seven weeks we had our first scan and I saw the first baby," Michelle said. "Then a second one and then — oh my god! — there was a third. I couldn't believe it."

She was elated, yet so petrified of losing them that very few people knew of her pregnancy until the proof was visible.



Michelle with the premature triplets.

Michelle was right to have her reservations; carrying triplets is risky. Dr Stephen Cole, head of the multiple pregnancy clinic at the Royal Women's Hospital, says specialist care and more frequent monitoring is needed in such cases as the rates of prematurity, cerebral palsy and even death are higher.

Despite the risks and the prior ordeal, Michelle's pregnancy was straightforward.

As a birth videographer, Andrea has captured the first moments of many new lives, but this event was always going to be different.

Three days before Michelle was due to have a 34-week caesarean, ultrasounds at The Women's showed that the growth of one of the triplets had slowed.

Sadie and Stella, the identical twins created when one embryo split, shared a placenta.

Even at this age, siblings don't share fairly, and Sadie was missing out on vital nutrients prompting the surgery to be brought forward.

At home on the Sunshine Coast, Andrea was told of their imminent arrival. She flew to Melbourne, ready to record their first days of life.

As she waited patiently in the recovery room, an anaesthetist in surgery who had just discovered that she was the babies' egg donor came out to bring her in.

"I never really knew how I would feel when I saw them, I was just so happy for her," Andrea said.



Michelle Fredricks' triplets after they were born.

"The identical twins looked a lot like me when I was a baby and my girls, but they also looked like Michelle."

Ranging in size from 1.6kg to 2kg, the trio were tiny but deceptively strong for being seven weeks early.

Michelle said: “It was so surreal. When they pulled Sadie out and she cried, it was just the most amazing feeling.

“They put her on me and her head was the size of a tennis ball, she was so tiny, so perfect. After trying to get pregnant for so many years, we now had not one but three beautiful babies.

“I’m so lucky and grateful, and I wouldn’t be here without my sister.”

The triplets are now almost six months old, and Andrea and her children have already developed a strong bond with them, despite living interstate.

Little Lulu and Ginger call them their “half-sisters, half-cousins” — because they were made from mummy’s eggs.

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The Royal Women’s Hospital’s miracle mums appeal: thewomens.org.au.