

I HAD A BABY AT 48

Rene Byrd is proof that it's never too late to achieve your dreams



Rene cuddles her 'miracle baby' Crue

Finishing my glass of bubbly, I shimmied to the dance floor with a smile. 'Happy Birthday, Rene,' my friend Michelle, then 38, grinned, as we danced to the party tunes.

It was May 2016 and, marking my 40th birthday in London, I had lots to celebrate, having built up a successful corporate career as well as following my passion for soul music. As a singer songwriter, I'd performed around the world and was now financially comfortable, with a lovely home and wonderful family and friends. But, as I welcomed my newest decade, something was missing. Single for years, I'd dreamed of becoming a mum and three years earlier, at 37, had frozen my eggs – an uncomfortable, expensive procedure, but one I felt was worth it.

FINDING LOVE

I'd always hoped to meet someone one day and, incredibly, he came along, in January 2017. Chatting to Demetrious, a handsome American lawyer, in a bar in London one evening, I couldn't stop laughing as he cracked jokes. 'I want to see you again,' he smiled, and things moved quickly as we fell in love over the coming months.

Demetrious was only over in the UK temporarily and it was heartbreaking

when he returned to the US weeks later, but somehow we navigated the thousands of miles between us, FaceTiming constantly, and visiting one another when possible. Then 34, he wasn't fazed by our six-year age gap.

'I want to have a family with you,' he confessed in autumn 2017, and although quick, it felt right, so we started trying for a baby in spite of living so far apart.

Despite my 42nd birthday looming, we felt hopeful that it would happen for us but,

'SINGLE FOR YEARS, AT 37 I'D FROZEN MY EGGS'

with every passing month, those hopes were dashed. Painfully aware my fertility window was closing, by 2019, we started researching other options. I took herbal supplements, exercised regularly, cut out alcohol and ate healthy foods said to aid fertility.

But over the next few years, we faced countless obstacles, including being forced apart by the pandemic, in 2020, as Demetrious was over in the US and couldn't return to London for months.

The following year, I began suffering health issues, including fatigue, and unexplained weight gain and I was diagnosed with an underactive thyroid, requiring medication.

Also, my periods had become erratic, my moods were all over the place and I was having debilitating hot flushes.

'I've hit perimenopause,' I realised, by then 45, and a fertility check-up in November 2022 confirmed it.

'You're too old to conceive naturally,' the specialist explained. I was gutted, although there was still one glimmer of hope.

'We can use my frozen eggs,' I told Demetrious, after our appointment. We decided to embark on the IVF process at a private clinic, undergoing months



Motherhood was worth the wait for Rene

and months of tests and treatments.

While the process took longer than we'd hoped, we never lost faith. In January 2024, by now living together, we got married, in a simple ceremony and weeks later, in March, rather than jetting off on honeymoon, we underwent our first embryo transfer procedure. For the next two weeks, we were on edge. Then after

a blood test at the clinic, I went home and waited for a phone call. When it came, hours later, the doctor sounded emotional and I braced for bad news, but instead she said: 'You're pregnant.'

In tears and barely able to speak, I called Demetrious at work and he broke down too. I couldn't believe it was finally happening.

Weeks later, at an early scan, we caught the first blurry glimpse of our baby on a screen, which was magical and reassuring, but we didn't feel able to celebrate just yet.

As a 'geriatric' first-time mum, my pregnancy was high risk and we steered ourselves for problems, including a heightened chance of spina bifida and Down's syndrome. With all this weighing on us, we kept our news to ourselves, not only worried about the risk of complications, but also wary of reactions from people who thought I was too old for motherhood. Because, despite my age, I felt healthy and was more than ready to be a mum.

Thankfully, a further scan at 12 weeks revealed that our baby was growing well. While I felt dreadful during early pregnancy, battling nausea, sickness and fatigue, by around 14 weeks I felt better, my skin glowing and hair shiny.

By then, Demetrious and I were ready to tell close family and friends and while most were thrilled, others couldn't hide their shock. 'Are you sure you want to do this?' one friend gasped, suggesting that I was mad to subject myself to years of sleepless nights when I was pushing 50. 'This has been my dream for years,' I insisted.

At our 20 week scan, we discovered the sex. 'A little boy,' I murmured, eyes brimming, as Demetrious squeezed my hand.

As the weeks sped by and my bump grew, with frequent scans monitoring our baby's progress, we went shopping for essentials. Browsing in John Lewis for a cot and buggy, I was a decade or two older than other expectant mums, but felt too excited to care.

On 28 November 2024, Demetrious was beside me as our baby boy was delivered by planned caesarean section, weighing 6lb 6oz.

'My miracle baby,' I whispered, blissful, as Crue was placed in my arms.

Real life shock read

Of course, life with a newborn was a huge adjustment, just as it is for all parents. Dealing with sleepless nights and breastfeeding was a learning curve, but one that we embraced.

NO REGRETS

While I was as old as some of the grandparents I met at baby groups with Crue, I felt secure in myself and knew I'd become a mum at the right time for me. Yes, I might have had more wrinkles than other first-time mums and I felt infinitely more exhausted by the night feeds, but I didn't have any regrets.

I did face judgement though. Strangers sometimes did double takes when they saw me breastfeeding Crue, and one former friend implied I was selfish.

'When Crue is 20, you'll be almost 70,' she tutted.

'Age is just a number and Crue is surrounded by love,' I retorted.

There's no doubt I have less energy than younger first-time mums because, after all, I'm almost 50 now,

and I certainly look older too.

But there are lots of positives about being an older mum – I'm financially secure, with my own home, and I've lived such a full life already. I'm content to focus solely on Crue. Also, I'm so much more patient than I was in my 20s and 30s, which I think makes me a better, calmer mum.

Of course, it's a challenge that I'm now facing potty training and nursery school runs when many of my friends are rediscovering themselves now that their kids are teenagers and some have even flown the nest to university.

Recently, my perimenopause symptoms have returned full force and I'm struggling again with hot flushes and memory fog, which is hard when I'm already exhausted.

It's a harsh reminder that time keeps marching on and I'm not getting any younger but, cuddling Crue and singing lullabies as he gazes at me eases any worries I may feel about my age.

With my next big birthday looming, it's hard to believe that I'll have an 18-month-old toddling around at my 50th and I'll most likely celebrate with mugs of tea, not champagne. But I'm so fulfilled as an older mum, I wouldn't change a thing.

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