

Tory and I have always been close...



...just as we were when she was a baby



# A MOTHER'S PROMISE

**My daughter wanted a baby more than anything. So we made a pact**

**Susanne Gervay, 69, Sydney, NSW.**

**L**aid up in bed, my 15-year-old daughter Tory handed me a card she'd made.

*I am willing to drop out of school to be your live-in nurse, it said. Change your poo bag, do anything. I love you heaps. Always.*

Laughing and crying at the same time, I pulled her in for a hug.

"I love you, too," I told her with a smile.

I was battling breast cancer for the second time, and Tory and my son

James had been my rocks, helping to cook and clean.

Ever since she was little, Tory had been a nurturer and couldn't wait to be a mum herself.

Thankfully, I recovered and got the all clear, but when Tory was 19, she developed kidney stones.

We discovered they'd got infected and her kidney function was just 33 per cent.

"I'm afraid you have severe kidney disease," a doctor told Tory, as I sat by her side.

Tory had one question.

"Can I still be a mum?" she asked.

"It would be risky," the doctor said.

Afterwards, Tory focused on living life to the fullest. She went to uni, then got an exciting job in music and lived with friends, but she was constantly exhausted.

When her kidney function reduced further, she moved back into my duplex and helped with my business.

She didn't want a serious relationship.

"I don't want to be a burden on anyone," she told me.

"A partner would love you for all of you," I tried to reassure her, but Tory wouldn't accept it.

By the age of 30, Tory's kidneys were running on

only 25 per cent function and she had stage-4 kidney failure.

Even through migraines, vomiting, painful kidney stones and endless kidney stone removals, she put on a brave face.

Then, during one check-up, the specialist mentioned that because of her age, her egg count would be decreasing and the kidney disease would accelerate it further.

"If you want a baby, it's now or never," she said.

But it came with a grave warning.

"If you carry it yourself, there's 100 per cent chance of losing your kidney function," the doctor explained.

**Tory put on a brave face**

**Turn for more**



# Born from love

But there was more. "The baby would be born early and not thrive," she added, "and there is a chance you could die."

I was traumatised, and in the car on the way home, Tory couldn't stop the tears.

"I want to have a baby, Mum," she sobbed. "I want to try IVF, but I'm afraid of doing it alone."

"If this is what you want, I'll be there for you every step of the way. We can do it together," I promised.

As it was too risky for Tory to carry a baby, the plan was for her to have IVF to extract her eggs, then use a surrogate.

Devastatingly, over the next six years, I was there for her through eight failed IVF attempts as none of the eggs were viable.

Undeterred, we found a clinic in America, which had seen results with difficult cases before.

Tory and I shopped for sperm together, on the clinic's website, until Tory chose a handsome man with blue eyes.

Then, we found a lovely surrogate called Misty from Colorado, who had completed her own family and wanted to gift a baby to someone else.

Finally, Tory, then 36, was ready to head off

Violet Rose's first birthday meant so much to Tory



to America for her egg extraction.

The doctor figured out it hadn't worked before as her eggs were too slow growing. After injections to help, she had the procedure.

Then, the embryo was transferred to Misty.

One night, Tory called. "Mum! We're having a baby!" she cried.

Shrieking with joy, I nearly dropped the phone.

"You deserve this so much," I sobbed down the line.

Coming back to

Australia, Tory and I waited on tenterhooks.

As Misty gave us weekly updates, a beautiful friendship blossomed.

We found out Tory was expecting a girl, and in March 2022, when the pregnancy reached seven months we finally relaxed and I threw Tory a huge baby shower.

Later, Tory welled up.

"Thank you, Mum, I'm so happy we're doing this together," she said.

"Me too, I can't wait to bring our bub home," I replied.

But not long after, I began feeling dizzy and noticed I was slurring my words occasionally.

Then, chatting to my cousin, Michelle, on the phone one day, I wasn't able to speak.

"Are you still there Susanne?" she asked, concerned.

Eventually I managed to slur, "I'm fine, goodbye,"



I endured brain surgery...



...to be there when Misty (right) gave birth to my granddaughter

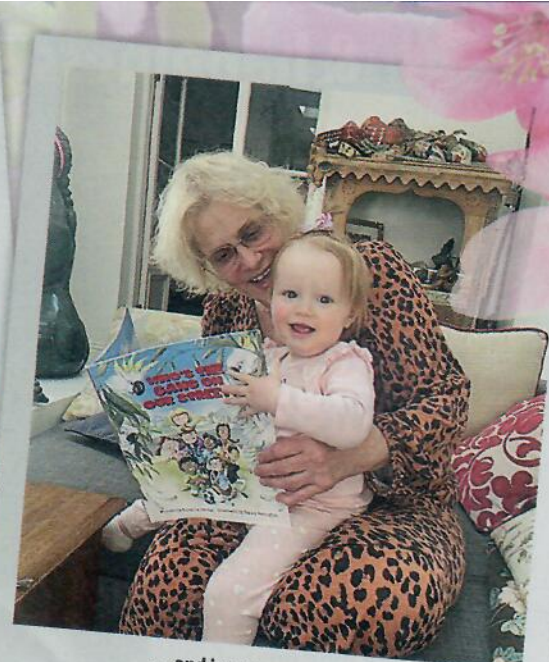




Our little Violet Rose...



...is the miracle Tory and I dreamed of...



...and is now growing into a lovely little girl

before hanging up.

Confused, I rushed to my doctor who referred me for a CAT scan.

A week later, my GP broke the news.

"You have a 6cm tumour on your brain," he said. "I'm referring you to a neurosurgeon immediately."

After what felt like a thousand scans and tests, the neurosurgeon sat me down. This time, Tory was by my side.

"Your tumour is the size of an egg on top of your brain. I never usually suggest surgery as a first option, but we need to remove it right away," he stressed.

Terrified, all I thought about was Tory's girl, due two months later. I'd made a pact with my daughter. We were supposed to raise her together.

*I have to get through this, I thought.*

The operation took four hours, and I woke up to Tory and James standing beside my bed.

"We thought we'd lost you," Tory cried. "They even called us in to say goodbye."

When I tried to reply, my words wouldn't work.

Disorientated, I listened to a doctor explain what had happened.

"When we opened the tumour, we found another tumour inside, it had penetrated your artery," the doctor said. "You had a stroke when we removed it."

Now, I was semi-paralysed, in pain, and brain damaged. I couldn't speak, eat, write or move.

A doctor held up a mirror and the right side of my face and eyes were drooping so badly that I didn't recognise myself.

Determined to keep my promise to Tory, I struggled through hours of occupational therapy, speech therapy and physio.

Slowly, I was able to take steps, feed myself and speak again.

After four days in the ICU, and four and a half weeks in the neurology ward, I was transferred to a day unit to continue physical therapy.

With my limited speech, I managed to say to Tory, "I'm going to come with you to get our baby."

Doctors advised me against flying, but I wasn't missing it for the world.

Tory was by Misty's side when she gave birth to her baby girl.

And when I saw her nestled in Tory's arms, tears flowed down my cheeks. I was so happy.

"Your dream finally came true," I sobbed.

"I couldn't have done it without you," Tory said, passing her to me.

"It's like my daughter has been born again," I cried.

Tory chose the name Violet Rose, and we spent a beautiful month with her in Colorado, with Misty showing us around the sights.

Saying goodbye, we couldn't thank her enough.

"You'll be in our lives forever," we told her.

Now, Tory, Violet Rose and I all live in the duplex together.

Tory's kidney function is just 16 per cent and she has stage 5 kidney failure, the final stage.

It means she needs to go onto dialysis. My cousin Michelle has offered to

donate her kidney, so we're waiting to find out if she's a match.

Tory gets tired, but she is a wonderful mother.

Violet Rose, 21 months, has grown into a beautiful, clever little girl, who laughs constantly.

I take her to preschool and Tory picks her up and cooks dinner.

Although we've both been through a lot, we are so lucky - I have my brain back and we have Violet Rose.

Our family slogan is 'two halves make a whole!'

Tory may have kidney disease and I had a brain tumour but together we are a whole family unit.

I've even made a picture book about the diverse families that make up Australia, called *Hi World, I'm a Miracle*.

Inside, it says, *Violet Rose was born from Tory and me with love*, and the book is dedicated to babies born through IVF.

We went through hell in the lead up to welcoming Violet Rose, but I'd do it all again in a heartbeat to see my daughter's wish of becoming a mum come true.

Your dream came true!

ASTOLD TO SOPHIE FINN