



A MOTHER'S FRIGHT

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GIVING birth to a premature baby can be a daunting and terrifying experience for any prospective mother.

But for one Nyah West mother, this became her reality with both her sons born premature in the span of less than two years.

That's why Jacqui Klabbers is heading to the Goulburn Valley next month to take part in the Walk for Prems 2018 with both sons, Seth and John.

Seth is now 21 months' old and was born 12 weeks premature, weighing 1130 grams.

And John, almost seven months old, was born 13 (weeks) too early, weighing only 742 grams.

The birth of Seth last year was no easy ride for the Nyah mother and her partner, Leigh Klabbers.

"Terrifying for Seth, all the words that they normally use, like traumatic and scarring," she explained of her experience giving birth to her first child.

"And, just horrendous in general because you don't know what you're in for.

"We had a pretty rough go with Seth because he needed to be revived when he was born."

She said he was born breathing but had stopped.

At 28 weeks, Jacqui was suffering from stomach pains, so she made a visit to Swan Hill District Health who organised for her to be flown to Melbourne to go to the Royal Women's

Hospital.

Seth was born the following day via emergency cesarean.

"It turns out I had high blood pressure, border lining on having a stroke, and preeclampsia," she said.

"I actually had doctors check the day before I had Seth and everything was perfect.

"Then in the space of a couple of hours, I wasn't okay".

After the first birth she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and post-natal depression.

She also suffered from preeclampsia during the second birth but had

never previously had blood pressure in her life.

Jacqui said Seth found it hard to cope with breathing and had come across so many health issues when one would be fixed, another would pop up the following day.

Following his birth, Seth spent more than three months in hospital (108 days), while Jacqui living in family accommodation nearby.

"It was really up and down. That was pretty in your face," she said.

But she looked on the positive side saying the experience was "enlightening".

"It opened our eyes, we never thought any of that kind of stuff existed," she said.

"You hear about babies being in hospital, but you don't think NICU (neonatal intensive care unit), the intensive side of things, is intense."

But, with John, Jacqui believed they had it "fairly easy compared to a lot of

other families".

"Because everyone has something going on," she said.

"You can never compare one child to another.

"It's not fair, we can't even compare our children to each other, because they're so different."

She said John was "born screaming" and had to be put on a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure).

During the second pregnancy, Jacqui spent five weeks at the Royal Women's before his birth on bed rest, a total of 125 days following his birth.

She said the birth of a second baby being born premature was "like a homecoming".

"Because they were born so close to each other the staff remembered me" she said.

The second time around, Jacqui had some of the same doctors, nurses and midwives around for as were for the first birth.

"They're both classed as having premature lung disease because they were both born early and they were both on oxygen for so long," she said.

And she said nowadays you wouldn't even know her children had such difficult beginnings to their precious lives.

"Seth is very lively, you wouldn't know that they've had any problems," Jacqui said.

"Now he's a huge ball of fun."

During her time in hospital, Jacqui attended mother's groups, with some of the families she made making the walk with her at Nathalia Primary

School on October 28.

"It was a good chance to meet other mothers and a lot of the mother's there were like me last year," she said.

"They were first timers and it's their first prem and they were all freaking out.

"It was like being stuck in a time warp, because all of these mothers that are saying, thinking and feeling all the same things that I was the year before, so it was a bit crazy."

Jacqui is still in contact with some of the mothers she had met who were from all over Australia.

She is also a supporter of Life's Little Treasures Foundation, who are hosting the walk.

"They supported us quite a bit," she said.

The organisation hosted events at the hospital such as Easter and Mother's Day celebrations.

Jacqui found these activities to be a moment of distraction.

"These other mothers get to know you on a level that your own friends will never know you on," she said.

"And it's something that you don't really understand until you're in it."

She said their family and friends, and the organisation, had been supportive and helpful.

And her advice to other parents of premature babies was to get as much help as you could.

"Take whatever help that you can," she said.

And her message to mother of premature is loud and clear; don't blame yourselves.

"Go easy on themselves because I found, especially with Seth, I blamed myself so much," she said.

"There was no reason why he came early, it was just a whole series of events that, I guess you could say s**t happens.

"I spent a lot of time hating on my-



self, but this time around you just have to go easy on yourself.”

The best advice she could give was “give yourself a bit of love and free time.”

“Because, you're there doing everything you can for these children, you're doing your very best.

“The worst thing you can do is shut people out.”

Unfortunately in both cases, Jacqui said she and her partner had received little financial assistance during more traumatising experiences.

ABOUT THE WALK

THE 2018 Walk for Prems will be held simultaneously at 12 locations around Australia to support the 48,000 premature or sick babies born in Australia every year.

Presented by Baby Bunting, it is the largest annual fundraiser for the Life's Little Treasures Foundation, which supports the families of babies born sick or prior to 37 weeks' gestation.



Jacqui Klabbers with her two sons, Seth (front) and John who were both born premature. **Pictures: LILLIAN ALTMAN**



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John is a happy napping baby.