

WEEKS AWAY FROM GIVING BIRTH TO HER SON...

'WE'VE GROWN A LOT CLOSER. DANIEL'S BEEN MY ROCK'

ACTRESS **CLAIRE SWEENEY** INVITES OK! TO HER BABY SHOWER, WHERE SHE REVEALS SHE HASN'T RULED OUT A REUNION WITH HER FORMER FIANCE - AND FATHER-TO-BE - DANIEL RILEY

We're at Claire Sweeney's baby shower and if it wasn't for the gifts of teddy bears and baby clothes being handed over, we could be forgiven for thinking we're at a hen party. In Liverpool's Hilton, there are chandeliers, champers is flowing and there's even a Robbie Williams tribute act getting the guests singing and whooping. This is definitely a celebration. And we're not surprised, because after two miscarriages, Claire, 43, has a lot to celebrate at eight months pregnant.

While she's had a tough year - she split from her fiancé Daniel Riley in January, just weeks before discovering she was pregnant, and her dad has been very ill - she's in an amazing place right now, looking ahead to a new chapter in her life. 'This baby has brought a lot of joy to the family,' she says. 'And it's brought a lot of joy to Daniel's family too.'

As we chat, it becomes clear that Dan is very much still part of Claire's life, with plans in place for him to be at the birth and be with Claire as they look after their new son together at Claire's Liverpool home. Last time we spoke to Claire, she was very much single, so we sit down with her to find out what has changed since then...

Your baby shower's been so much fun!

It's amazing. Before we had it, we were trying to decide on a theme and my friend showed me lots of pictures of Winnie The Pooh-themed baby showers and they were lovely, but they weren't for me.



I wanted glitz, I wanted glamour, feathers and diamanté! It really looked special, like a wedding with table settings, champagne and beautiful food.

Have you missed drinking?

No, I haven't missed the booze at all. In fact, I don't know if I ever want to drink again. You know, I've had years of enjoying alcohol, partying and doing fabulous things, and I'm quite happy not to drink again, I think.

What presents did you get?

I was spoiled - I got a lovely memory box where you put the first tooth and the first lock of hair. I got beautiful clothes. I got a little teddy bear and a couple of friends did baby boxes with everything you need in them, you know, the baby creams and cotton wool. I got loads and loads of lovely stuff.

You're moving up to Liverpool soon, aren't you?

I'm alternating between living in London and Liverpool at the moment. I'm doing pantomime in Liverpool at Christmas - I'm playing the Genie of the Ring in *Aladdin* at the Liverpool Empire. So I'll be at home for the first six months with the baby in Liverpool, which is great.

Are you going to have anyone living with you when the baby arrives?

I'm going to have my mum around a lot and Daniel will be here a lot. Daniel's mum will be here too - I'm going to have a great support system here with me.

Are you and Daniel back together?

We've been spending lots of time together and the priority really is to get the baby born and healthy and we'll see what happens after that.



MIKE DAINES/SCOPE FEATURES

Have you grown closer since you've been pregnant?

Yes, absolutely. We've grown a lot closer. He's been so supportive. He's been brilliant, he really has. So, yes, we've grown a lot closer. He's been helping me out with things, he's been wonderful.

What kind of dad do you think he'll be?

I think he'll be a brilliant dad, he'll be great. I think he'll be really hands-on. Daniel's wanted to be involved in everything. He's been an absolute rock.

Have you been to any antenatal classes together?

I've booked a lady to come to the flat to do a first aid course for babies. And I've got Daniel, my mum and his mum to come round. I've been taking the two mums and Daniel to antenatal classes too.

Who'll be your birthing partner?

I'll have my mum and Daniel there.

Is your hospital bag packed?

Not yet, but I've got everything I need. I've got my paper panties [laughs]! ▶



Above: Claire, pictured at her baby shower, is excited about becoming a mum. **Facing page top:** The star with her former fiancé Daniel. 'He's been wonderful,' the mum-to-be tells us. **Facing page bottom:** Claire with her mum, Kathy, and Daniel's mum, Tina



Above: Claire says she's loved being pregnant. **Below right:** 'I got loads and loads of lovely stuff,' says Claire



Above: Claire with her mum Kathy Sweeney, Isabelle Conroy, Irene Knight, Jayne Conroy, great auntie Kathy, JK as Robbie Williams, auntie Maureen, Dion Davies, Daniel's mum Tina Reilly and Irene Mitchell. **Below right:** 'I wanted glitz, I wanted glamour,' Claire says of her baby shower

What kind of décor do you think you'll go for in the nursery when you decorate it?

The thing is, he's going to be with me in Liverpool until February, and then in March I'm going on tour with my show *Sex And The Suburbs* and he's going to be coming with me. So we're going to be all over the place for a bit. So I don't want to decorate his bedroom until a bit later – I want him by my side for the first few months and then I'll decide what to do.

How long is the tour?

It's two months long and I'm so lucky to be able to take the baby. The producer is wonderful and he's given me a nanny to take with me. I'm very lucky. Bear in mind when a lot of women go back to work, they're nine to five, but my job is two hours on stage of an evening. I'm on stage between 7pm and 9pm and the rest of the day I'm with my baby.

Your mum's a grandmother already – is she looking forward to it again?

Oh she's thrilled. It's been a joy for the family, because my father's been very ill. He had his leg amputated, he had a quarter of a lung taken out; he's really not well.

Is he still in hospital or back home now?

No, he's back home but he's not well and my poor mum has to look after him.

How do you think you'll cope with the sleepless nights?

I'm going to take it all in my stride. It's something women have done for years and I'm not going to be the first woman to experience it. Having a baby is what I've wanted for such a long time and I'll deal with it. It's going to be gorgeous!

You've been looking gorgeous recently – have you been enjoying buying maternity clothes?

I really have. I've been lucky – I've been gifted some dresses by Seraphine and I bought some, too. They are beautiful dresses and they're really affordable. And there's a lovely little shop called The Pudding Club in Liverpool – I've

been there to get some stuff as well.

Have you struggled with the summer heat, being pregnant?

I've struggled with chafing thighs. They've been a nightmare. I've been applying talc and cream and I ended up cutting tights off above the knee,

because Spanx were too tight, so the tights stopped my legs rubbing together. So you'll see me in pictures, with my long dresses on, looking all glamorous and I've got tights with the legs cut off and loads of talc on!



Do you think you're enjoying your pregnancy more, because of the miscarriages you suffered?

I'll be honest with you, I think if my first pregnancy had been a success, I'd have enjoyed it as much as I'm enjoying it now. I wouldn't have enjoyed it less. I've been more cautious and more careful looking after myself, and I just feel blessed that this

pregnancy has developed.

Is he quite an active baby? Has he been kicking much?

Yes, he is quite an active baby. He loves music. I went to the premiere of *Jersey Boys* and he kicked all the way through, while they were signing. He loves a show tune! **OK!**

THANKS TO CO-ORDINATOR CAROLYN HUGHES – CAROLYN HUGHES PR TWITTER.COM/CAROLYNPR, 07710 715 333; MARCUS MAGEE AT THE HILTON HOTEL; LIVERPOOL ONE, FOR CHAMPAGNE AFTERNOON TEA, FOR ENQUIRIES CONTACT 0151 708 4200, WWW.HILTONLIVERPOOL.CO.UK; JULIE PERRY AT JULIE PERRY EVENTS FOR THE STYLING – WWW.JULIEPERRYEVENTS.COM, 0845 643 6007; JK AS ROBBIE WILLIAMS TWITTER.COM/JKASROBBIE; AND VIV TAYLOR-FLETCHER AND DAVID BROOKES FOR INVITATIONS – FOR BESPOKE STATIONERY CONTACT DV@DAVIDVIVIANNE.COM.

INTERVIEW BY ALISON PERRY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE THOMPSON AND LAURA SHAWCROFT

I've got my new maternity jim jams. I've got everything! I found a list online and I just went out and bought everything on the list.

How has your pregnancy been?

I've loved being pregnant so far. People say they don't enjoy pregnancy and that it's awful – I was watching a TV show the other night where women were saying if anyone says they enjoy pregnancy, they're lying, but I have! I've loved it.

You're due in October – do you think he'll arrive on time?

[Excitedly] I'm booked in for a Caesarean at the Liverpool Women's Hospital at the end of September – got my date and all sorted! I've been advised to have a Caesarean because of my age.

You've said you've already chosen the name – Gabriel – but what if the baby doesn't seem like a Gabriel when he's born?

I'm not sure now if he'll be called Gabriel. I do still like it, but I've got other names I like too. I love the name Harrison.

You told us a few months ago that you don't like to jinx things by decorating the nursery before the baby arrives – is that still the case?

Yes, that's still the case! I want him to sleep in my room for the first few months, in his Moses basket next to me. I couldn't bear the thought of him being upstairs at the beginning. I'll just want to look at him!

