

Never Forgotten

Stories of love, loss, and healing after miscarriage,
stillbirth, and neonatal death.



Mia Freedman and Rebecca Sparrow

Edited by Paula Ellery

Never Forgotten

For Georgie, Katie, Leo, Lucky,

May, and all the other little souls

who live in their parents' hearts

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Acknowledgements

A word from Rebecca Sparrow:

Are some friendships fated? I truly believe so, because that's how I feel about my friendship with Mia Freedman.

Four years ago Mia and I were strangers. But when mutual friends told Mia that my daughter Georgie had been stillborn, she reached out to me immediately, took me by the hand and has walked me through the grief I have felt over the past three years. Quite simply, I could not have survived the past three years without her.

So I'd like to thank Mia for her extraordinary friendship, compassion, and generosity of spirit and her daughter May who has helped shape Mia into the phenomenal woman she is, just as much as her three other beautiful kids.

Heartfelt gratitude from both Mia and me to our editor extraordinaire, Paula Ellery, who took on the daunting job of untangling hundreds of stories and poems and somehow managed to turn them into a book. Paula's beautiful spirit and editorial fingerprints are on every page of this book. It simply wouldn't exist without her and we felt blessed from the moment Paula volunteered to help us.

Special thanks go to Sian Horstead, who invested so much love, care and energy into this book, collating hundreds of stories and playing an integral role in getting this book off the ground.

Mia and I also want to thank the team at Netra Chetty Pty Ltd who so generously gave their time and talent and created something so very beautiful.

Love, light, and gratitude to all the women (and some men) who shared their stories for the purpose of this book and exposed their wounded, raw hearts. We are in a club—you and I—a club that no one wants to be in, but a club nonetheless. But by speaking out, by telling our stories, we remind each other that we are not alone and I think we offer hope to those who today are hearing for the first time those torturous words, "I'm sorry but there's no heartbeat".

And to Georgie and May and all the other babies who never came home, I say this: you are not forgotten. This book is our love song to you.





Timothy by Gavin Blue, Heartfelt

Paula Ellery would like to thank:

To Deb Bath, thanks for guiding, inspiring, and encouraging me, but thanks especially for all of your beautiful contributions.

To Debbie Davis, thank you for emailing me at all hours of the night, offering advice, and giving us permission to use so many of your wonderful pieces.

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And thanks to Mia, Bec, and Kim Wilkins for trusting me with this project — it's been a life changing experience.



Give SORROW words;
the *grief* that does not speak
knits up the o-er wrought *heart*
and *bids* it break.

- William Shakespeare, Macbeth



Introduction
by Mia Freedman

When I lost my unborn daughter about halfway through my second pregnancy, I retreated from the world. Even the people who loved me most and with whom I usually shared everything — my husband, my mother, my closest girlfriends — could not reach me. And I couldn't reach them.

In truth, I didn't want to.

I wanted to curl up with my arms wrapped around my empty, swollen stomach and descend into my grief. Alone. Alone with my feelings of loss and failure. Alone with my sense that my body had betrayed me and that I had betrayed my baby by not being able to keep her alive.

I was swallowed by my grief and in the darkness I was lost to everyone, just like my baby was lost to me.

Nobody around me could understand how I felt and I secretly resented them for that. There was no one in my orbit who had ever lost a baby or had a miscarriage before and this drilled my feelings of desolation and failure even deeper.

The disconnection itself made things worse. I'm usually the girl who reaches out if I'm going through a tough time and suddenly I couldn't. Nobody had a roadmap. Nobody had a clue. Especially me.

It was 1999 and the Internet hadn't yet taken hold, so I couldn't Google my despair. I couldn't seek solace through reading about other women's experiences and yet that's all I wanted to do. Desperately.

I vividly recall standing in bookshop after bookshop, searching for something about miscarriage. There were shelves of books about cancer and ADHD and depression and food allergies and how to find a man, but nothing at all about miscarriage.

I couldn't possibly have felt more isolated.

With therapy and time, I eventually processed my grief. At least I thought I did.

It wasn't until 10 years later when I met Rebecca Sparrow that I truly learned what healing looked like. We were introduced by mutual friends in the weeks after Bec gave birth to her beloved daughter, Georgie, who was stillborn in 2010.

The friends Bec and I had in common hadn't been through anything remotely similar to her loss and were desperately seeking anything that might bring her some comfort. They knew I'd been through a similar situation and wanted to know if there were any resources or books they could point her towards that might help ease her eviscerating pain.

I asked for Bec's email and I reached out to her immediately. She reached back, having read my emotional account of losing my baby in a book that I'd recently written. We talked over email for a while, and a month or two later we met in person when we were both in Byron Bay, chaperoned by one of the friends who introduced us.

We hugged and we cried and over cups of tea and pieces of cake, a deep connection was made.

That was three years ago and I cannot imagine my life without Bec in it. Our friendship was instant and while ostensibly we'd come together so I could help her navigate the aftermath of losing Georgie, she helped me process my own grief in ways I hadn't even realised I needed.

There were so many things that nobody else could understand, not even our husbands. Especially not our husbands. Wonderful men both, but grief is an individual thing and there are some aspects of it unique to the parent in whose body the child lived and died. Some things must be experienced to be understood, which is why the connection between women who have lost babies is so visceral and important.

(Note: While men often grieve in very different ways to women, their suffering is no less painful and this book is intended for them too. We have included a section with some touching stories from men, along with information that men and their partners might find helpful.)

With each other, on the phone or via email, Bec and I could be brutally honest about our feelings. There are aspects of grief that are ugly and even shameful but we were able to talk about them without judgement or fear. And the little things. Like using the names of our lost daughters — Georgie and May — in passing conversation, acknowledging they existed. Giving each other the chance to talk about them and wonder who they might have become, if only they'd lived.

Making up silly stories about what they were doing together in heaven. Venting about the insensitivity of some people and their sucker-punch platitudes like "it's

for the best” and “aren’t you lucky you have one already!” (Here’s a suggestion: don’t tell a grieving mother that she’s lucky.)

We agonised over how to answer the incredibly loaded question “how many children do you have?” asked mindlessly and without malice by strangers in the supermarket queue and other mothers at the kindy gate. And we laughed at the kind of black humour that would be shocking to anyone who hadn’t had the surreal experience of grieving someone you never got to know.

So Bec helped me get in touch with something I’d long since locked away. She helped me bring my grief out into the light and talk about it and be sad and feel normal.

It was a gift.

A year or so ago, Bec and I were contacted by the same mutual friend. Another couple she knew had been through an agonising loss of their baby. Introduced to these two women, again via email, Bec and I embarked on what we thought would be an opportunity for us to help them. But yet again, the wisdom and generosity of these women taught us both things about grief and loss that helped us too.

And so it went. Soon after, we were put in touch with yet another woman whose baby had died. And immediately after that, a good friend of mine lost his beloved son Leo the day after he was born.

Attending the memorial service for Leo, which was one of the most emotional, heartbreaking situations I’ve ever been in, I was struck by the words of the incredible grief counsellor, Deb de Wilde, who spoke at the service.

At the request of Paul and Sian, Deb talked to us about what Leo’s bereaved parents might be feeling and how, as their friends and family, we could best support them. “Their grief is like being in a very dark tunnel,” she explained to the dozens of people gathered quietly on the beach. “Paul and Sian must walk through it and nobody can rescue them or speed up their journey. All we can do is light their way through the darkness with love and friendship and understanding.”

When you’ve lost a baby, the path you must travel is yours alone. There’s no shortcut. No Bandaid. No silver lining. But by hearing from others who have walked that same path, the blackness is illuminated just a little. We’ve been there. We know how you feel. We can’t change what’s happened and we can’t bring back your baby, but we can light your way through the dark.

A note about this book:

When Bec and I decided to produce this book, we reached out to women we knew and women we didn't via Mamamia.com.au and asked for contributions. We were overwhelmed with the response.

Sorting through all of your stories was a heartbreaking task and while we and the book's amazing editor, Paula Ellery, wish we could have included every single one of them, the reality is that we received over 500 submissions and it would have been impossible to use them all. But all of your stories were incredibly touching and we thank you so much for sharing them with us.

We never intended for this book to be a comprehensive resource guide of any kind—our aim was to share as many stories as we could to show grieving parents that they are not alone. But it soon became clear (through reading all of your stories) that there was a desperate need for helpful advice, along with information on support groups and other resources. So while the book has grown from what we originally intended, the focus is still on your stories, but they are now intertwined with articles that were either written especially for us or those that we were given permission to use from other sources. We hope that you will find some light through reading all of these words.

And finally, this book was always a project of love and never intended for profit, and as such we are donating 100% of all proceeds to 'Heartfelt' and 'Sids and Kids'. Thanks for your support.

Most of the quotes used throughout this book are from the 'Lost for Words' calendar -- a collaboration of artwork by Carly Marie Dudley and Franchesca Cox. Each calendar features gorgeous photographs with quotes from bereaved parents and family members from all over the world. Please visit lostforwordscardline.com for more information.

They were not something sad that

happened to us.

They are our

babies and children

and we will speak about them *always.*

- Carly Marie Dudley

Stories

Zoe

Thank you for making a difference. I was shocked to discover, by the number of responses to your article, just how many people have been affected by the loss of a child.

I have lost two children. The first: an ectopic pregnancy in 2009, the second: an unexplained stillborn in 2010 — my beautiful boy, Lennon, born at nearly 36 weeks.

Whoever originally used the phrase ‘hell on earth’ must have lost a child, for the weeks and months that preceded my son’s death were just that.

I believe there is a great need for your book. There is a common misconception that losing a child is rare, but the endless research I have done since my son’s death points otherwise. It is such a shame, therefore, that it is not talked about. I felt very isolated in my grief, especially as I watched people avoid the subject, thinking it was the ‘right thing to do’. I found myself constantly pretending things were getting better to make friends and family feel more comfortable around me, when in fact the truth was the complete opposite. To have been able to read other peoples stories and know it does get better would have helped immensely during those dark months.

Irony, black humour, anger — so many things I had not expected — joined me on my emotional journey.

On a support website for people who have lost their child to stillbirth, a woman said, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ I think the answer is — you hang on. Because hanging on is all you can do. Both hands, white knuckles! You lurch precariously from one life scenario to another, hoping to catch your breath. A moment when your head emerges above the dark water to let you know that there is land, you’re just not there yet. And then under you go again. But you do reach land. You just walk differently on it. I am quieter, calmer than I used to be. I would like to think I’m more compassionate. I pleasure in the small things: autumn mornings, laughter, good conversation. It sounds so clichéd. But all that mattered to me before I lost my children seems so insignificant now.

My third child is now 11 weeks old and, though there was a roller coaster of emotions during my pregnancy and birth, there is not one day that goes by that I don’t stop and remind myself how lucky I am and how beautiful life is. Lennon gave me that clarity and I love him all the more for it.



Samantha Donovan

My husband and I lost our first daughter, Pippa, at 40 weeks and one day on 20 September 2006. I had been to see my doctor that day, my due date, for a regular check-up after a 'text book' pregnancy (his words, not mine!). Everything was fine: heart rate normal, size normal ... normal, normal, normal. So I went home to wait for that moment of joy and trepidation — labour.

At around midnight, I woke and felt the first stages of labour. I lay on the couch and monitored the contractions — they weren't that close, but we called my doctor mid-morning and he said it was quite normal for labour to go in phases and just to keep monitoring the contractions. The contractions did get closer together, but then later that afternoon they just stopped.

After drinking orange juice and prodding my stomach trying to get my baby to move, I started to panic and called my doctor again. He told us not to worry but head into the hospital anyway and, 'pop on the heart-rate monitor to check what's going on.' So we headed into the hospital early evening and went into the delivery suite — one that I didn't leave for the next 24 hours.

The midwife put me on the monitor and moved the pads into so many different positions on my stomach, but it was useless — there was no heart rate. I knew at that point my baby had died, but nobody wanted to confirm anything until my doctor arrived and they did a scan. My husband tried to remain positive, but I knew. It's funny because I don't think I cried at that point, perhaps it wasn't until the scan had been done and a very caring midwife finally confirmed our worst nightmare — our baby had died.

The next 20 hours are a blur. Late that night, my doctor told me I would deliver my baby the next day. Are you kidding me? I thought. I have to sleep here all night knowing my baby has died and I still have to go through labour? What cruel person does that to someone?

Early the next morning they started an induction and it took about 10 hours for our gorgeous 6lbs 6oz perfect baby girl, with bright ruby red lips and a tiny amount of light brown hair, to be delivered. Our beautiful Pippa was born sleeping, and that's exactly how she looked.

In some ways it was peaceful as there was no sound, but I would have given anything to hear the screams of a newborn baby — the ones that I had heard coming from nearby delivery suites all through the night.

Our immediate family came in to see her and hold her — they were grieving too and found a level of comfort in holding her in their arms. We spent a few hours with her and then she was taken away. I didn't see her again, but she will always remain in my heart and my thoughts.

My husband and I have since been blessed with three beautiful girls — all carefully monitored throughout my nerve-racking pregnancies. We talk about Pippa to Imogen, Eliza, and Penelope, so they know they have another sister who is 'the brightest star in heaven'. Imogen, our eldest, has even started talking about her sister, and on a recent plane trip she looked out the window as we flew above the clouds and, completely unprovoked, said, 'Hello Pippa.' It put a smile on my face, because my greatest fear is that our beautiful Pippa will be forgotten: not by my husband or myself, but by our family and friends.

The loss of my child was the darkest period of my life and I often wondered how I would ever find the strength to move forward, but somehow, with the love and support of my husband and my family, I made it through. Now I hope I can provide some level of comfort to a friend whose third child was recently stillborn at 38 weeks. Life is just cruel sometimes.



Stacey

It was just over five years ago — just nine days away from celebrating my 21st birthday and 20 days from my due date — when I received the heartbreaking news that my daughter had no heartbeat.

Being only 20 years old, I hadn't been exposed to many tragedies or deaths, let alone trying to deal with something so close to me — something that I had created and something that was so close to entering this world. So many thoughts were going through my head. Why? What have I done to deserve this? And then, How do you deliver a stillborn?

I was already scared of the fact that I had to give birth, but now to give birth and get no reward was going to be hard. I didn't know if I was strong enough to get through. I asked the midwives, 'How do people go through this: c-section, natural, drugs, no drugs?' I had no idea.

The moment I gave birth to Kloe it was silent, not a whisper, nothing. Then slightly in the background on the hospital radio played a song, Wendy Matthews' The Day You Went Away. Tears streamed down my face as they took Kloe out of the room. I looked up at the midwives and they had this look on their face, a look that read, 'You did it, you're so strong.' But deep inside their eyes you could see sadness. A little life was gone before it started, her feet will never walk this earth, and her smile will never warm our hearts. There were only memories — memories of her movements within.

Then I was handed a teddy, which had a tag that read Teddy Love Club. Although a teddy doesn't sound like much, it brought me so much warmth and comfort. Walking out of the hospital empty-handed is one of the first steps to overcome after losing your baby, and this teddy was the world to me — it was everything. I slept with it, I held it tight, and sometimes I'd even talk to it. Although it didn't fill the spot left by my baby, it filled my arms with warmth and comfort and made things just that little bit easier as I tried to cope with the loss of my baby.



Lauren

It is my birthday next week. How excited we were, two and a half years ago, to discover that our first child was due on my birthday! Instead, this year marks the second birthday that I don't share with my firstborn son, Samuel.

On June 7 2010 I went into labour, 22 weeks into a very normal pregnancy. A perfect baby boy arrived and left us at the same time — too little to survive his unexpected arrival into the world. It has been a long, slow journey out of the heartbreak, guilt, and self-blame that came with losing a child.

What a timely article Mia, and the book is a wonderful idea. Samuel will always be part of our lives and is very much on my mind as next week approaches. When our lives change so completely forever, our hearts and souls take on scars that no one can see. I sought out stories of other people's loss with a macabre hunger — I needed to know that I wasn't alone during the loneliest experience of my life.



I had a stillborn son, Thomas, on 25 March 2010. I was 24 weeks pregnant after three full cycles of IVF. I was feeling fantastic, eagerly preparing for my very active baby and very proud of my bump. But things did not go according to plan. My waters broke prematurely and the umbilical cord prolapsed, blocking the oxygen to my baby. I had to deliver my beautiful, baby Thomas, but he did not make it through the labour.

My husband and I needed to get our heads around what had happened and decide how we were going to get through the most devastating thing that has ever happened to us. Who could even imagine having a funeral for your baby, before you even got to know him? We talked and talked and decided we were not going to let this destroy us. We looked at all the positives, like the fact that I had the absolute honour of delivering Thomas and that he was born absolutely perfect in every way.

We did not blame anyone. We are now stronger together as a couple than we have ever been. Things like this can tear relationships apart, but the opposite happened to us. I am more in love with Dean than I have ever been.

But once something like this happens to you, people tell you stories of similar things that have happened to them. What came out of all these stories, for me, is that this sort of thing happens so much and you never know because people don't talk about it. Why should IVF, miscarriage, and stillbirth be so taboo? Mention Thomas's name — it hurts more when people pretend he never existed. It is okay to talk about it.

I did get through it, but I think of Thomas every single day.



Never Forgotten



Freya by Adrienne Gilligan, Heartfelt



Angela

Almost two years ago my world stopped as I stared uncomprehending at an ultrasound showing our 35-week-old baby curled up in my belly, perfectly formed, but with no heartbeat. Only a week earlier we had been at another scan, showing a kicking, wriggling little person. Now there was stillness. The doctor quietly left the room as my husband and I clung to each other and cried in a guttural, primal outpouring of grief and shock. What follows next is a blur of scans, inductions, epidurals, and finally birth. People came and went, quiet and sympathetic as I endured labour — alternating between weeping, resignation, self-blame, and a kind of blank despair.

Our baby girl was born, with a true knot tightly tangled in her cord. Her blood supply had been cut off and she would have died in just a few minutes from lack of oxygen. We raged hopelessly at nature for this cruel turn of events — our perfect, healthy baby stolen from us. We had an answer for her death, but it didn't lessen the grief.

I held her. Small, perfect, but gone.

At some point, my devastated husband went home to gently explain to our 4-year-old son, Noah, that his baby sister was not coming home, ever. Over the coming weeks, months, and years he grew to comprehend what had happened in the totally honest, accepting, and wonderful way children have. We didn't sugarcoat it — we explained exactly what had happened in ways he could understand. He saw us cry. He was allowed to talk about it to anyone, and as often as he needed. He got through it, and eventually, so did we.

Throughout the pregnancy, Noah had nicknamed the baby 'Ozzie', and the name had stuck. So, that's how she got her name — Ozzie — not the prettiest name for a baby girl, but beautiful for what it meant to Noah, and for what it will mean to him as he gets older.

Going home was gut-wrenching. There was the baby's room to pack up, so many unfilled dreams. My milk came in, adding physical pain to the mental. Family and friends rallied, giving us space but acting like a buffer between us and the rest of the world. We cried more than I thought was humanly possible.

Planning your child's funeral is something you can never be prepared for.

On a bright, gusty day, we gathered with family and friends in a local reserve overlooking water and National park. We had brought with us a big bunch of pink balloons and coloured markers. We invited everyone to write a message, draw something, or just sign a balloon. Then we let them go, symbolising that we were



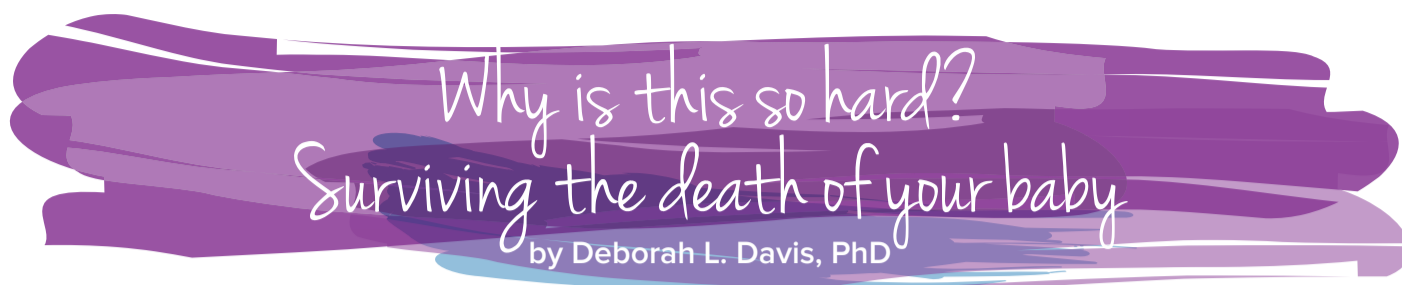
Milla by Caroline Bowen, Heartfelt

letting her go. The balloons were whisked away over the bay and disappeared into the blue sky. Each year on her birthday, our little family returns to the park to send a balloon up to Ozzie with a message of love.

The road to despair and back is a long one. The most important thing I learned was to LET myself grieve — that it is all right not to be okay. There is no time frame on grief, or no pattern it should follow. You'll be fine one day and a wreck the next.

I also had to learn to allow myself to feel good again. I'd have a good day, and then feel guilty for not being sad or for going an hour without thinking about her. But gradually I accepted that while the pain never goes away, you become better at carrying it around, and life slowly regains its colour.

Now I have a new baby. Mixed in with the rush of love was regret, more grief, and even a little guilt that he would get the life Ozzie never did. I took these thoughts, examined them, and then let them go. I resolved to love what I have and make the most of it. Grief can smother you for a time. Eventually you learn to breathe again and the air is still sweet.



Why is this so hard?
Surviving the death of your baby
by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

Your baby's death is a devastating loss. You've not only lost a child, but also a part of yourself, a part of your future, and your hopes and dreams for what might have been. You can expect to grieve deeply, whether or not your pregnancy was planned, whether it ended early or at term, whether your baby was stillborn or live born, and whether your baby lived outside your womb for one minute or one year. In fact, you may be surprised by the intensity of your grief.

Your grief may be especially complex and distressing due to two aspects inherent in a baby's death: the brevity of your baby's life, and the lack of social support.

- » When your baby dies, you don't have the benefit of spending months and years with this child. Whether you are able to recall a little person or simply a person who might have been, you were unable to become fully acquainted, making it difficult to know for whom you grieve. And your baby is gone, leaving little tangible evidence of his or her existence. This relative lack of memories and keepsakes can make your grieving more challenging, as it's harder to feel close to your little one and experience a gradual letting go. Even if your baby lived for many months, you may feel an intense emptiness as you grieve for the hopes, wishes, and fantasies you had for this child and your future together. You also must bear the shock and trauma of this unexpected, untimely turn of events. And it's not so clear how this baby fits into your life, as death robs you before you can settle into your cherished role as parent to this child. You are primed to nurture and raise this little baby, but now you are cruelly deprived and left in the lurch. The brevity of your baby's life is so unfair and senseless, a terrible violation of expectations.
- » You may experience a lack of social support because of people's general reluctance to face death or grief, often due to fear and discomfort. For doctors and nurses, discomfort often results from a lack of training or encouragement for providing quality bereavement care. In addition, people may belittle the importance of your baby, as they too had little opportunity to become acquainted with this child. They may even question the intensity of your grief. You may also feel isolated, having few shared memories or stories to swap with friends and relatives. If you're not encouraged to observe mourning rituals for your tiny baby, you don't get to gather loved ones to acknowledge and honor your baby's brief life, and they're unable to witness and share your sorrow. Any lack of support from friends, family, or health care practitioners can make you feel desperately alone with your grief.

In spite of these barriers and challenges, you can grieve and survive the death of your baby. A first step is to accept your grief and distress as normal. Second, know that you share emotional common ground with other grieving parents. You are not alone.

The Bittersweet Path to Healing

You will never forget your baby. Many people mistakenly believe that healing means you stop grieving, forget about your baby, or meekly abandon your baby to death. To the contrary, grief never completely disappears. You will always feel some sadness and wish things could have turned out differently. But over time, your grief softens. You haven't surrendered your baby; instead your relationship with your baby changes. You learn to accept your baby's death and integrate this experience into your life. Your memories of your baby are not idealised and can evoke pleasant emotions. As you remember your baby fondly, thoughts become bittersweet as your sadness merges with your happier memories, and you acquire a sense of peace.

The sense of peace and acceptance that comes with healing is a blessed change from the ravages of grief. But healing takes time. Many mothers report needing more than four years to come to terms and feel at peace. While this can seem like an eternity, it can help to remember that even as you grieve, you are healing. You are healing as you gradually adjust and come to terms with your baby's death. You are healing as you move through your feelings of sorrow, anger, regret, failure, guilt, helplessness, and despair. You are healing as you reflect on your memories of your pregnancy and your baby's time in your arms. You are healing as you appreciate your keepsakes, tell your story to anyone who'll listen, and memorialise your baby in ways that have meaning for you. You are healing as you learn to cope, regain your confidence, and integrate your baby's life and death into the big picture of your life. You are healing as you uncover the treasures to be found in the midst of adversity. You are healing even when you feel like you are regressing, as grief naturally ebbs and flows. And as you move toward healing, you take your cherished memories with you, and you continue to hold your baby close to your heart.

Surviving Grief

It's important to remember that people grieve in different ways. Not everyone will feel guilt, failure, loneliness, or deep depression. No one will feel like that all the time. Your grief may be intense or gentle, overwhelming or manageable, somewhere in between or vacillating between extremes.

It's also important to remember that the only way to move through grief is to acknowledge your experience and your feelings. However painful this may be, in

the long run, acknowledging is actually less harmful than repressing or avoiding grief. In fact, experts in bereavement agree that the quality of your grief work can determine the quality of your life. With self-compassion, mindful awareness, and learning how to cope with your emotions, you increase your chances of healing and finding peace and happiness again. Suppressing feelings only increases distress. Try as you might to quash or postpone grief, it merely waits for you, compromising your happiness until you're ready to face it and move toward healing.

Many parents benefit from practising mindfulness-based stress reduction, attending bereaved parent support groups, and individual counselling. Mindfulness involves stopping, breathing, calming, and observing your experience in the present moment with a willingness to accept what is. There are many ways to practice mindfulness, such as through meditation, yoga, art, or time in nature. Look for a mindfulness training program in your area.

Support groups and counselling offer a place where you can learn new ways of coping, and also be reassured that your grief is normal and you're not alone. If you feel stuck, overwhelmed, at the end of your rope; if your life and relationships are unravelling; if you feel nothing at all for longer than you think you should, you may benefit from any of these resources to help you move through your grief toward healing. Seeking help is a sign of strength. You deserve to feel better. You can find referrals through your doctor, local community mental health clinic, support group leaders, hospital social worker or psychologist, hospice, grief institute, online bereaved parent organisations, or other bereaved parents.

This piece was written for us by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, using updated and adapted excerpts from her book, 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby'. Deborah is a developmental psychologist who has written a number of books that support parents through various crises, including the death of a baby at any time during pregnancy or infancy. 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart' is essential reading for bereaved parents and is available online and from all good bookstores.



Blake by Kate Ellis, Heartfelt

Stories

emma12

My husband and I lost our third child, a beautiful baby boy named Beau, on 30 August 2011. Beau was born still at 30 weeks gestation. Although his birth certificate says 'unknown' for his cause of death, he was covered in Group B Strep infection, which I only found out I also had after his birth. The infection had passed from me to Beau while he was in the womb.

Words just cannot even begin to explain the pain, sorrow, despair, and blame you feel when losing a child. Yet reading other people's stories has helped me through some of the lowest of low times.

No one tells you that losing your child is only the beginning of the pain. What I didn't realise, as I walked out of the hospital empty-handed, was the craving for acknowledgement of my child that would follow. The longing for people to know that Beau existed, that we held him in our arms, that he was beautiful beyond belief, and that we are now broken inside forever.

I could not foresee that my four-year-old son was going to cry and yell at me, when I least expected it, for not bringing his baby brother home.

I could not foresee the strain it would cause on our marriage whilst two people grieved together, yet separately.

I could not foresee the devastating effect losing a grandchild would have on our parents.

I could not foresee the senseless comments people would make like, 'Well, you can always have another one,' or, 'Do you really think having another baby is a good idea?' Or, worst of all, just being ignored or put into the 'too hard basket'.

I could not foresee desperately wanting people to ask about Beau, what he looked like, how my labour and his birth was, how much he weighed ...

I could not foresee the guilt I would feel for not being able to bring my child safely into the world, and then dealing with the guilt of healing. I never realised it was possible to feel guilty for healing!

Yet with the love and support and, most importantly, acknowledgment by our family and friends, we have managed to make it through the first year since losing

Beau. I now understand that we will feel the pain of losing Beau until the day we ourselves die. But dealing with that pain becomes easier. I seek out friends and family who I know will listen to me on the days I need to be listened to. I read other people's stories on the days I need to know that I am not alone. I take each day, and the way I feel on that day, in my stride. I celebrate my son whenever his life should or would have been celebrated. And, most importantly, I talk about Beau and acknowledge his life, as short as it was, and respect that his life and death was his journey, and I am truly, truly honoured to have been a part of it.



Ana0605

My mum gave birth to my stillborn brother 20 years ago. I remember being in year two and dad collecting me from school and telling me that mum had a baby boy and that I had a brother, but he was asleep and had gone to heaven. On the way to hospital, I kept telling dad that the doctors will give him medication and he will wake up and everything will be fine. I didn't even understand what it all meant. I didn't know what death was.

We got to the hospital and all I can remember is taking a family photo with all of us. It was so confusing, because I was excited about having a little brother but I wasn't able to play the role of the big sister. I can clearly remember my parents with so much grief and heartbreak for such a long time.

My parents had my sister two years later and I made sure that she knew that she had a brother who was in heaven looking over us. It was extremely difficult seeing my parents come home without him, having to put all the baby clothes away, packing down the nursery—it was heartbreaking. We moved from our home not long after.

Thinking back now, Mum and Dad were depressed and were basically coping day to day. My prayers and thoughts go out to all the angels in heaven and their families who miss them so much.



Jodie Wilson

I lost a baby at full term (42 weeks) due to a ruptured uterus. I also suffered a hysterectomy to save my life at the time. I was 30 years old.

I went into hospital to deliver our beautiful daughter, Jessica, only to return home 10 days later from intensive care with no baby and no womb. It was 15 years ago

but it feels like it was yesterday. My heart still longs for my little girl and it will never heal completely. At every special family event, I miss her. I think about her all the time and wonder what she would have looked like. She is a part of us and that will never be gone completely.

But we are very lucky to have our beautiful son, who is now 21. Without him, I don't know if I would have coped. He kept me going on the darkest of days. He was the only reason that I got out of bed some days. I just had to keep going for him.

The grief that I felt was like a lead weight around me. I used to wake up every single night searching the bed for her. I did that for months. It almost makes me cry when I think of that now. It must have been my way of looking for her.

I used to dream that she was calling for me and that I couldn't help her. She couldn't hear me telling her that mummy was there. It was so traumatic, but somehow we got through it. I just couldn't comprehend that I should have been planning a Christening, not a funeral. Burying your child is not something that is supposed to happen.

I also felt such an overwhelming sense of shame at the time. I hid from people who knew that I was pregnant. We had neighbours knocking on the door asking what we'd had. It was such a devastating time for us. I just wanted to hide from the world. I totally withdrew into myself.

After five months I realised that I needed serious counselling and, once I admitted this, I finally was able to talk openly about what had happened to me. I stayed in therapy for two years. My counsellor used to cry with me. She was an amazing woman.

We did get through it and I can honestly say that we are much better for the experience. I truly wish we didn't have to travel the road that we did, but I am thankful for where we are now.

I still have days when I cry for Jessica. I cry for my husband and how he will never get to give his daughter away at her wedding. I cry for my son that will never know the love of a sibling, but I try to believe that things happen for a reason and that gives me peace.

I love Jessica as if she were here with me now. I will carry her with me for the rest of my life.



Jenni Rigby

In just over a month it will be the tenth anniversary of our little boy, Jack. Jack was a twin born unexpectedly at 24 weeks, after I went into premature labour. Everything had been going along well with my pregnancy until I woke feeling a little uncomfortable at 6am. By the time I spoke with my doctor and got to the hospital at 8am, I was fully dilated and it was too late to stop my labour — my little boys were on their way out!

We were told they would have about 10–15% chance of survival, something you never want to hear about your babies. Jack weighed 630 grams and obviously was very sick. We were airlifted to Townsville hospital from Cairns where they were born, and he lived for 10 days before passing away in my arms in the hospital gardens. We are grateful that we got to spend those ten days with him, although, obviously, opposed to the lifetime we were hoping for, it is not long. At least we could touch him, sing and read to him, and tell him many stories of our past and the future we dreamed for him.

Our grief is still with us every day and although at most times we feel in control of it now, it can flood back in an instant to consume you when you least expect it. Luckily Jack's twin brother, Flynn, made it through and even though he has faced many challenges with his health and development, and will continue to do so with the long-term disability he has due to his premature birth, we are eternally grateful that we have him to help us deal with such a terrible loss. Obviously, having one twin survive doesn't mean we will ever forget our lost baby, but it has given us something to hold onto and in some ways helps to heal the part of our hearts that is mourning for Jack.

We talk about Jack every day with our other children and visit him at the cemetery, and luckily we have photos of him to look at and keep his memory with us. Both my husband and myself also have a tattoo of his footprints, so that he will forever be physically a part of us. We believe Jack has truly been there to help his surviving twin brother to make it through some very difficult times, and is still helping him to make progress, despite the odds he faces.

We would be honoured to have Jack's story published in your book, especially to help those other parents who have lost one twin to see that they are not alone.

Thanking you, Jenni and Frazer Rigby, parents of Jack, Flynn, Patrick, and Tess.





Lilly by Adrienne Gilligan, Heartfelt

Hayley Wright

Alex Lee Wright-Porter was born at 22 weeks gestation at 10.13 a.m. on Sunday 10th June 2012, due to early onset of labour. He was perfect and healthy in every way, and he looked just like his Daddy. He was 30cm long and weighed 570 grams. He was my first baby and he was stillborn.

Alex was the most precious and important thing in my life. I am lost some days and other days I find my way through with the help of beautiful friends and family. From such a tragedy, I have learnt to ask for help and I have received so much from just asking. The love, support, and new friends that I have gained are such a blessing.



Kylie White

Adelaide Rose White came into the world at 2:38am on 22 June 2009. She weighed 8 pounds 11 ounces and was 58cm long. She was absolutely perfect in every way. She had a dark cap of hair, a rosebud mouth, beautiful chipmunk cheeks, and the most elegant piano playing fingers you have seen. She was so perfect, except she never took a breath.

I have always wondered about the term 'my heart broke' but that was exactly how it felt when the doctor looked at the ultrasound that night and told us that she had died. The sensation of the world stopping and this huge weight suddenly landing on my chest is something I will always carry with me. I had been hoping for hours that it was all going to be a silly mistake and that the baby was just sleeping and that was why I had not felt movement for hours. My beautiful husband, Ben, and I just held each other and wondered how we were going to get through this.

We chose to deliver her straight away as I was already in early labour and all I wanted was for this nightmare to be over so I could go home, pretend that this had never happened, and to face up to life without our baby. I will never forget the room where we gave birth to Adelaide. I can still see the clock and the dancing shoes that were in a glass box on the wall. Once I looked at the clock and for a brief second I thought maybe this was a nightmare I was having and that I would wake up, but I knew it wasn't.

I was induced at 9pm and for the next five and a half hours, Ben and I cried and talked and tried to come to grips with what had happened. The midwife talked to us about what would happen after our baby was born and funeral plans. I wondered why she was telling us all this when we haven't even given birth yet, but I realise now it was to prepare us for delivering a baby who would never live.

When she was delivered, they put her on my chest and I grasped at her beautiful warm back, and I prayed that they had made a mistake and that I would feel her breath. But as soon as I felt how floppy she was and looked at the dark red lips, I knew she was gone. The doctor showed us how tightly her umbilical cord was knotted and how nothing would have been able to get through. I still can't believe that the thing that sustained her life had also taken it away.

The midwife and doctor were both wonderful and I was so touched when they cried with us when she was born. I could see that they were both genuinely touched by Adelaide's birth. Ben has always performed the first bath for our children and it broke my heart to watch him wash her and dress her in the outfit I had bought to bring her home.

We stayed and held her until 10.30 that morning, feeling her getting colder and colder. She was so beautiful and looked so much like our other girls. I had wanted to go home as soon as she was born, but I am so glad that the midwife convinced me to stay to speak to the counsellor. Having that opportunity to speak to someone about what happens next and how to tell the children made us make the right choices for our family.

I will always look back and know that, although it was the most horrific thing to happen, Ben and I have no regrets. The most important advice we got from the counsellor was that you have to fit a lifetime of parenting into such a short time. Although we had only a very short time to make a lifetime of memories, I think we did our best to ensure that Adelaide became a treasured member of our family.

I will never forget saying goodbye and leaving Adelaide behind. As a parent, you are supposed to protect your children, so it was terrible to leave our daughter behind and know that she is going to be alone. A beautiful nurse came in and told us that she would look after her, and she held her while we left.

I felt some comfort in that we would be bringing our daughters in the next day to meet their sister. Ben also came back a third day and sat with her for hours. He told her all about her family and her special place in it. He talked about me, him, her three sisters, who we are, how much we had been looking forward to meeting her, and how loved and wanted she was. When we finally said good-bye to her at the funeral, it felt that we had done everything we could to share our lives with her.

Telling our three girls was so hard. They had been waiting so long for this baby and they ran to the door shouting, "We know the baby is here." The reactions were so different. The seven-year-old was very angry, the five-year-old cried and cried, and the two-year-old skipped around the house saying the baby died.

We took them back to meet Adelaide the next day at their request. They held and kissed her and played with her fingers. We have beautiful pictures of them holding her, their faces beaming, and they have only happy memories of meeting her that day. I still feel such guilt about having to introduce death to them so early and we still are dealing with the consequences of it. We have seen our girls battle withdrawal, loss of confidence, separation anxiety, anger, and extreme sadness. It seems that we are only now coming to the light at the end of a long dark tunnel.

I don't know how people cope when they lose their first baby — our girls meant we still had a reason to get up the next day. But it also meant that our grieving happened (and still happens) over a long period, as there wasn't much time for us to stop and think and feel. The next day we still had three little people to care for, who needed to know that, although Adelaide had died, we were going to be okay.

I have learnt so much since we lost our Adelaide. I was surprised by the amount of support we received from our friends and the school community. We received

so many meals that we did not cook for two months — although I still find it hard to eat spaghetti bolognese. Some friends have been wonderful and talk about Adelaide and don't pretend that she never existed. Ben has been incredible. He has been such a strong support to the girls and me and has picked me up and kept me going, but he also has shown me the importance of facing your grief.

My mum, who lost her first son, Sean, to stillbirth 37 years ago, has also been wonderful. It is not an experience that you would want to share with someone, but the fact that she understands what it is like to lose a child has really helped in the dark times, when it felt like no one understood what we were going through.

There have been negative experiences where I was saddened by others who didn't seem to be able to cope and so avoided us. There were also those who wanted us to support them, as they couldn't cope with her death and thus burdened us with their issues. There is also nothing worse than being told, when you are just trying to get out of bed every day and make it through, that you have grieved too long, or not long enough, or having your loss compared to that of losing a sibling, a pet, or a partner. I know I don't understand what it is like to lose those people in their lives, but I don't think they realise it is not only the loss of a child you suffer. You also lose the hopes and dreams you held for them and have the bitter feeling that this little child will never have a chance to experience life.

I still think about Adelaide constantly, but I am able to talk about her without crying and I no longer avoid people I haven't seen, just in case they ask about her. If people ask me how many children I have, I can now tell them about my four living children and also about Adelaide, who I am so proud of.

We had our fifth little girl, Amelia, in May 2010. She is so beautiful and special and continues to delight us every day. She was due to be born four days before Adelaide's anniversary, so we chose to deliver three weeks earlier. We were supported so well throughout her pregnancy, but it was an incredibly stressful time and the first few months following Amelia's birth were a time of amazing highs and terrible lows. I think I thought that once Amelia arrived the pain of losing Adelaide would go, but holding Amelia made me realise what I would never have with Adelaide — the first step, the first word, the first day at school we would never get to experience with her.

I never understood it when people said that the pain never goes away but you learn to deal with it. But I am starting to understand. It has been three years and yet sometimes it still feels so raw and hurts so much that you physically ache. But I can function, I can live, and I can be happy. I wasn't sure if any of that would be possible again. Life is never the same, but that is how it should be — it means that Adelaide was here.



Coping with guilt after your baby dies

by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

When a baby dies, most grieving parents struggle with feelings of guilt. If you are a bereaved parent, you likely know this emotion well. At times, guilt can feel like a flood that threatens to sweep you under.

Particularly if your baby died during pregnancy or shortly after birth, as a mother you may wonder how you could be so helpless to prevent your baby's death, even as you carried your little one in your womb. If the cause of death cannot be definitively determined, you may fill in the blank with your imagination and hold yourself accountable. And even knowing rationally that you were not responsible for your baby's fatal condition, it is normal to feel as though you somehow contributed to it. You may wonder how you might've behaved differently to somehow prevent this tragedy. You may entertain the possibility that the most inconsequential acts might have led to your baby's demise.

Guilt arises from the normal sense of responsibility parents feel for their children, and the belief that we have control over what happens to us and our loved ones. It is a result of the expectation that if you do all the right things, you'll bear healthy babies and your children will live long lives. It comes from the idea that your job is to protect your baby from harm, and if you don't, you are effectively an agent of harm. Some parents suspect this is payback for youthful indiscretions or "bad karma." Others harbor superstitions. One dad wondered if he had wished too hard for a son, and while this wish was granted, it came with a cruel twist. However you come to your conclusions, feeling personally responsible for your baby's death is a terrible burden to bear.

In reality, none of us have complete control over our reproductive anatomy, childbearing fortunes, or our children's destinies. If you're struggling with guilt, try considering the following:

- » Guilt is a normal part of grief.
- » Guilt is a natural result of being a responsible, devoted parent.
- » You need not believe every self-accusation that goes through your head.
- » What happened was beyond your control and never your intention.
- » You are not powerful enough to influence your baby's fate with thoughts or feelings.
- » You are not powerful enough to invite death with minor, inconsequential actions.
- » You are not powerful enough to thwart death.

- » Your feelings of responsibility will fade as you move through your grief and adjust to your baby's death.
- » Feeling guilty is not the same as being guilty.

Still, some parents can point to their actions and wonder. If your infant's prognosis was poor or uncertain, you may have made life-and-death decisions and feel especially responsible for the outcome. If you faced agonising decisions, it may help you to remember that you were in the impossible position of having to choose between terrible and horrible. Whatever your decisions, they were right for your particular circumstances and the information at hand. Most importantly, they were right for your baby, and arose out of your love for your little one and the desire to ease suffering.

Guilt can also accompany any regrets you may have about the time you spent with your little one after birth. Many parents wish they had been able to spend more time or done certain nurturing acts, but of course, when you're in the midst of crisis and trauma, it's so hard to know what will be meaningful to look back on. In fact, you did the best you could at the time, in that situation, in your emotional and physical condition, and with the amount of information and support available to you. Forgive yourself for not knowing then what you know now.

Guilt is also a way to hold onto the illusion that you have control over the uncontrollable. It's a way to try to make sense of the senseless. Guilt can feel far preferable to the realisation that we have very little control and the resulting feelings of worry and vulnerability. But in time, the torrent of grief and guilt gives way to smoother waters. You will regain confidence in your ability to control what you can and be able to cope with the uncertainties that life presents. And in time, you'll look back and realise that having survived this, you can survive anything.

This piece was written by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, and originally posted on her blog 'Laugh, Cry, Live' (www.psychologytoday.com/blog/laugh-cry-live). Deborah is the author of 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby' and has contributed several pieces to our book.

Stories

Jackie

Our stillborn son, Cody, died at 26 weeks gestation; the only clue that something was possibly wrong was I had not detected any movement for about a week. An ultrasound confirmed there was no heartbeat. Later on an autopsy was performed and it was discovered there was a breakdown of the placenta.

This was an even more complicated situation because our firstborn son, Luke, was diagnosed with childhood cancer (called neuroblastoma) at just 12 months of age, and he was undergoing treatment at the time.

I was induced, and knowing I was about to deliver a baby that was lifeless is hard to put into words. Cody was placed on my tummy, and he was wrapped in a blanket and a bonnet placed on his tiny head. This was an incredibly heartbreaking time for my husband and me, a total feeling of emptiness and sorrow. Knowing we were going home without our baby was devastating. Some fourteen years on, and my heart still breaks when I read of stories similar to ours. It still feels so raw at times and simply just not fair.

Three months after Cody died, our brave son Luke lost his battle, so we were left to mourn the losses of our two infant sons. There were some incredibly dark, awful days, and a battle with postpartum depression ensued after the birth of my third child.

We have since had our fourth child, another daughter. There has since been joy and happiness—our children now light up our lives. But it is also a time to continue to embrace and remember our two beautiful angels taken too soon, but never forgotten.



Kirsty

Two weeks ago today (2nd October) my sister went into hospital to be induced. After a great pregnancy and a healthy baby, we didn't anticipate any problems. But after a series of complications in hospital around the birth, Freddie was born in the early hours of Wednesday 3rd October and was without oxygen for 20 minutes.

They finally managed to get his heart beating, but my sister was told that her baby, at best, would be severely brain damaged with no hope of any normal functions. Freddie was blind and his brain wasn't responding at all to any motor testing.

My sister and her husband had two precious days with their son. He met our family and her close friends came to the hospital. While hoping for a miracle, we all knew deep down that his ventilator was going to have to be turned off, but in those two days my sister wanted to be a normal mum. People brought gifts, cards, and ‘new baby’ balloons. It was bittersweet and utterly devastating for us all.

In the early hours of Friday 5th October, Freddie’s ventilator was switched off. For the first time without all his tubes and the beeping of machines in the way, my sister and her husband got to cuddle their precious son who slept with them, breathing on his own for 40 minutes before he died.

It’s been a devastating couple of weeks for the whole family but particularly, of course, for my sister and her husband. We have tried to do everything we can to help, while feeling entirely helpless, through the planning of his funeral, to bringing him home so he wouldn’t have to lay with strangers around him in the chapel of rest, to making sure we could do everything we could for memories — carbon prints, tiny plaster prints of his hands and feet, photos and cuddles, and ordering a memory bear for his ashes so my sister and her husband wouldn’t have to look at a cold urn on the mantelpiece.

I’ve scoured the Internet over the last few days for any bits of information that can help me to help my sister, and I think a book like this would be an amazing idea for parents, but also their families.



Katrina Magnus

We stopped a pregnancy at 21 weeks due to our beautiful Audrey having full trisomy 13; it will remain the worst decision I’ve ever had to make. I describe it as being given the option of firing squad or lethal injection when asked how I’d like to be killed. I cried every day for three months and finally took myself off to the psychologist after I stayed in bed all day so I wouldn’t have to face the world or even think.

I found it hard to allow myself to grieve, because I was too worried about what other people would think of me if I didn’t get myself back together. But the crazy thing that the psychologist said at the start proved to be true — that grief, if you allow it in, is a healing process; if you are mindful and allow yourself to feel the grief, and not just all the other things you mistake for grief, you will emerge out the other side.

I was really frightened at one point when I thought I was doing well, but then I would have a day where I could not function. I thought I would never be able to function again, the intensity of emotion was so foreign to my control-freak nature, but it was simply something that I had no control over and it scared me so much.

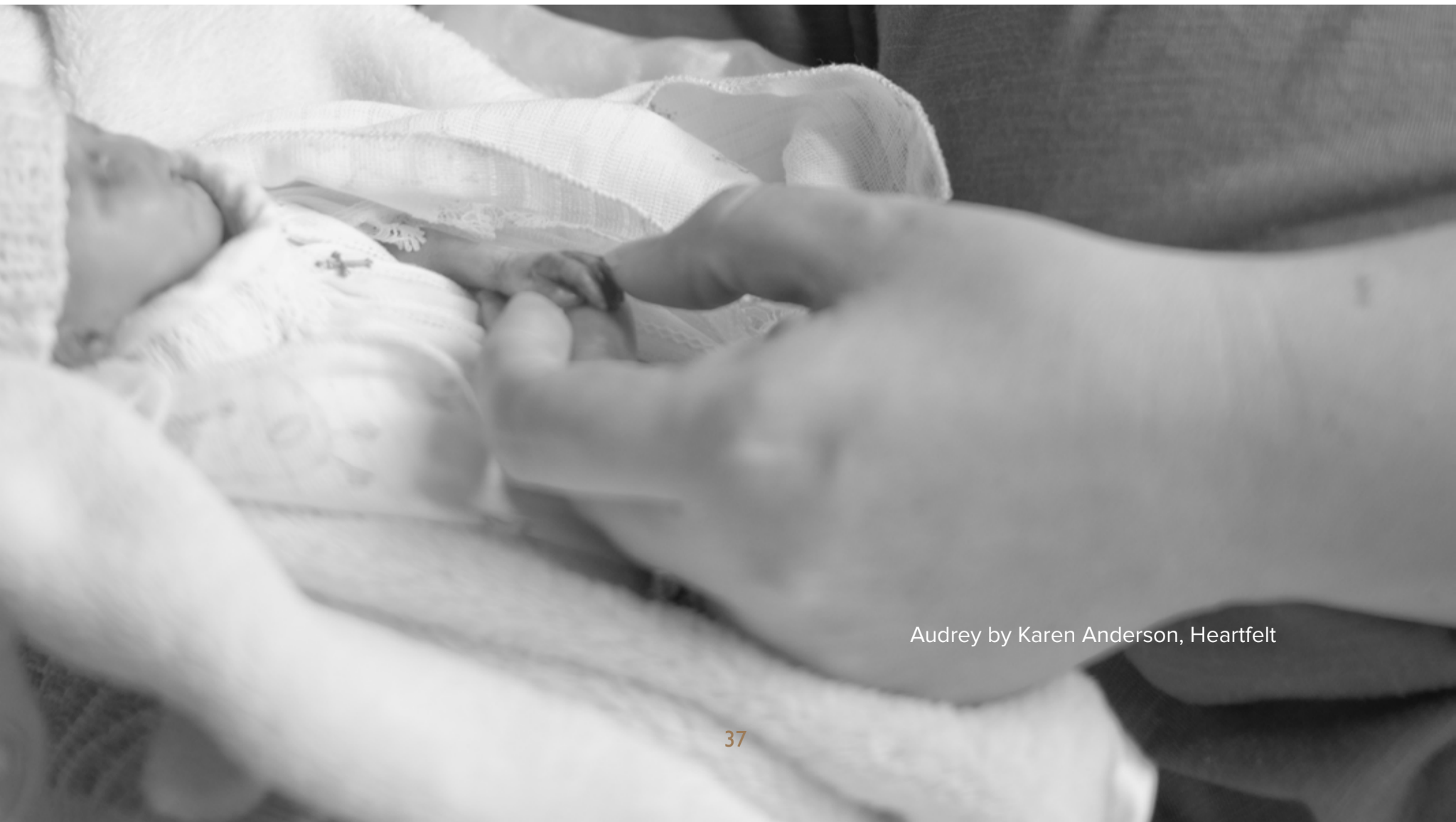
Now when it creeps in I allow it to be, rather than ignoring it. I probably still cry every second day about things that seem silly.

I have struggled over the milestones, and this month I have struggled because she was conceived a year ago and I have really reflected on how terrible the last year has been and how quickly it has passed. Often I am low and only I know why, and this month is one of those times, because I think these are things that only a mother thinks about.

I work in an area where I see a baby born nearly every day and some days I feel like I am torturing myself by staying in my job. People announcing pregnancies should know that I'm ecstatically happy for them, but that a part of me is jealous and sad and that it has nothing to do with them, I'm just not a robot that can bury my loss that deeply, so please don't think less of me if I don't seem overjoyed.

I have been so very lucky to have a wonderful husband at my side throughout this whole ordeal. We have grieved together and he still wants to know every day what he can do to help me.

I hope this book raises lots of awareness for Heartfelt. I am one of those 'lucky' people who has the pictures and I got to spend a whole day with my tiny butterfly.



Audrey by Karen Anderson, Heartfelt

Kirsten Sanders

On December 5th 2012, Clementine Sierra Sanders was born sleeping at 20 weeks. December 4th started out like such a normal day. I was waiting at the hospital for an appointment that had been scheduled for weeks, texting away and reading twitter, getting more and more frustrated at how late the clinic was running. Finally my name was called. I chatted with the OB for a few minutes about what had been going on and then she said, 'Let's just have a quick look at your belly.' I was excited that I would get a little sneak peak at our baby a few days before our scheduled 20 week scan.

The doctor was quiet for a while but I honestly thought nothing of it. I looked around at posters and tried to angle my head to see the ultrasound screen, I had figured that she would just turn it and start talking when she was finished looking. Then she said the words that stopped my heart, 'There's something wrong.'

Even then, in that split second before she went on, I repeated to myself about 100 times, 'She's not going to say my baby is dead, she's not going to say my baby is dead.' But she did. The OB said she couldn't find a heartbeat and she wasn't moving. She had me call my husband and told me what would happen next. I waited an awful hour for my husband to arrive and then we went for another more in-depth scan to confirm what they already knew. From the scan and how much amniotic fluid was there, they think Clem died a week or two before.

I was admitted into hospital and induced to give birth to my tiny baby girl. It took a full 24 hours from when I was induced until I gave birth. We were very scared to hold her but had decided beforehand that we definitely would, we knew we would regret it if we didn't. I am so grateful that I got to hold her and see that she looked like her dad, but I often feel guilty that we didn't stay with her long enough, hold her more. I think I would feel this way no matter how long we stayed. No amount of time would ever be enough with our darling little Clem.

The past two and a half months have been really hard — a roller coaster. Sometimes I function fine and other times I find it hard to get out of bed. No matter what is going on, I am always aware of this pain in my heart and chest, a lump in my throat. It has slowly gotten easier. I am not as frightened and panicky as I was in the first couple of weeks. I try to be grateful for her little life and that she existed. Having her for 20 weeks is better than her never having existed at all. She has already made us better people, and I expect that only to grow as we learn to cope more.

We got a few answers to what may have happened but still nothing conclusive. For a while we thought it may have been a syndrome but we have met with a geneticist that could not conclusively determine that, because all her chromosomes came up normal. I had also caught a CMV infection, which is a

common virus you catch from small children (I am a nanny). CMV can cross the placenta and cause stillbirth or defects. We have a meeting with an infectious disease physician to learn more about this.

Our life and friendships have changed; some people I avoid and some people I am okay with seeing. I think a lot of people avoid me. Losing a baby is a very isolating experience and there is a lot of taboo regarding the issue. I want to talk about Clem. I have had a baby and I am a mum and I want to make sure she is not forgotten. I would love to be part of your book and share our story.



It has been four and a half years since we lost our baby. In the first year it was extraordinarily hard to see how the pain would ever change. Time stood still. Calendars in our home remained unchanged. Pictures on the fridge collected dust. Everything just stopped. We went through the motions because we had another child to consider, to love, and to nurture, but late at night we would crawl into bed and my husband would hold me as I wept.

The next year saw small changes and a rather large one in that we had another child. Time started moving but it was slower for us than it was for everyone else — we could only handle so much and all of that energy went into our little family.

I nurtured my children, all three of them. I nurtured Jordan, my baby who died, through developing a new relationship with her. I moved away from my relationship with her sick body and I began associating her with the beautiful things in my life. Dragonflies became her symbol and I saw them everywhere. When I saw butterflies or rainbows I would think of her. It was hard work, but now when I think of Jordan I smile, because the imagery associated with her is so bright and so beautiful.

Life is moving faster and faster. My love for Jordan is ever present, always there, but the pain is less, in the sense that instead of a sharp stabbing ache in my heart, she has become a part of every fibre of my being. I have grown strong enough to bare it. She is in everything I do and I carry her with me as I move forward.



Monique

My first son, William, was stillborn full term, 12 years ago at the end of this month. I still miss him and think of him every day. I get anniversary grief every October, but for me this feels normal. It's normal to miss him and normal to still have times when it hurts my heart that he isn't here.

Time does help though. At the start it was like someone had ripped my heart out of my body and stabbed it continually, but I still lived. Everything hurt: it hurt to breathe, it hurt to live. My heart physically hurt every day and there were times where I felt I didn't know if I could survive his loss, it hurt so much. It was the hardest time in my life, but I got through, one day at a time, sometimes even an hour or a minute at a time.

I have, in the last year, got a tattoo in memory of William — his name, date of birth, and his hand and footprint on my arm. It feels good having a part of him always with me.

I have found talking about him helps. The pain doesn't consume me like it once did. I have his brother and sister to care for now and they know about their older brother in heaven.

My daughter draws pictures of us and includes William, and a lot of the time she will say, 'That's William, but he is alive in this picture.'

I keep William's things in a cupboard my grandma left me when she died — it's in my dining room. There is a pastel portrait of William that hangs on the wall in the dining room as well.

I see boys his age and it does still make me think, would he be that tall? What would his smile look like? What would his laugh sound like?

He will always be with me and I can only hope that his loss has helped me become a more compassionate and caring person and that he would be proud to call me Mum.

Never Forgotten



Audrey by Karen Anderson, Heartfelt



Anniversary Reactions

by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

Grieving is often compared to a roller coaster — it is an unpredictable ride with many ups and downs of varying degrees. But as you become acquainted with your grief and its triggers, you may notice patterns in your ups and downs. For example, you may find that you have particularly bad days at certain times of the year. These “anniversary reactions” are normal grief responses to the anniversaries relevant to your baby’s life and death. Even years after your baby’s death, whether you feel at peace or not, you may experience anniversary reactions one or more times a year — perhaps around your baby’s due date, birth date, death date, or during holidays. You may feel sad on your own birthday or wistfully think about how old your child would have been on the first day of every school year. Anniversary dates can be painful, but they are also a special time for reflection and commemoration.

Right after your baby dies, anniversary reactions are most frequent and sorrowful. You may feel especially blue at certain times of the day, perhaps associated with when you received bad news or first held your infant in your arms. As time passes, your grief may only spike weekly, perhaps on the day of your baby’s birth or death. Eventually, you may feel down just on a certain day of each month, and then just certain times of the year. Your grief will often run deeper, and you may feel particularly forgetful, disorganised, clumsy, or even be prone to accidental injuries, so use extra caution and take special care of yourself during these stressful times.

When you become aware of how your emotional lows are tied to certain anniversaries, it is normal to brace yourself. You may even dread anniversaries as they approach. The first anniversary of a baby’s birth or death can loom especially large. You may find it helpful to treat these days as special occasions and make plans that bring you comfort.

If you have a surviving baby or babies from a multiple pregnancy, birthdays and death days may coincide or fall close together. At that time every year, you may wrestle with mixed feelings. While you want to be happy for your surviving baby(s), your sorrow can dampen any festivities. You may feel disloyal since you’re unable to devote yourself entirely to either celebration or mourning. While this can seem impossible to resolve, you can find ways to honour all your babies. Set aside time and make plans, however private, that accommodate your feelings and recognise the special ways each child has touched your heart. Accept that this will be a bittersweet time.

Anniversary reactions can be discouraging, especially as time goes on and you feel as though you should have moved beyond this kind of grief. Even as you feel yourself reinvesting in life, you can still be surprised by a resurgence of grief. But remember, even healing will not spare you from occasional sadness. Some call this “shadow grief” — the dull background ache that stays with you. Anniversaries simply bring that ache to the foreground.

Anniversary reactions can also be unpredictable. You may not realise the significance of a date or time of year until you find yourself in the doldrums. It’s as if your body remembers, even when your mind doesn’t. But tying your grief to anniversaries can help you make sense of why you’re feeling down, and reassure you that this too shall pass. It is important to give yourself permission to have bad days whenever they appear. You are entitled to your own special pattern of grieving.

This piece was written for us by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, using updated and adapted excerpts from her book, ‘Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby’. Deborah is a developmental psychologist who has written a number of books that support parents through various crises, including the death of a baby at any time during pregnancy or infancy. ‘Empty Cradle, Broken Heart’ is essential reading for bereaved parents and is available online and from all good bookstores.

Poem



Beau

We didn't know how it all would end
Way back at the start
We didn't yet understand
How you would imprint on our hearts.

You turned up unexpectedly
Your life was meant to be
A precious, beautiful gift
But too hard for us to see.

At the beginning we took you for granted
We thought you were ours to keep
How arrogant we were
How silly we were to think.

And as our love for you began to grow
Your path was already set
The deeper we fell in love
The harder it would get.

You slipped away so quietly
Without saying goodbye
Your precious life ended
Why did you have to die?

We held your little body
The shelter for your soul
We wept for what could have been
A story never told.

Never Forgotten

The grief feels like waves crashing
Like drowning, unable to breathe
And just when you think it's all over
That wave quietly recedes.

But the emptiness you left behind
The overwhelming pain
Was not about what we had lost
But about what we have gained.

Begrudgingly, we understand that what happened
Is nothing to do with us
This is about your journey
In that we have to trust.

Thank you for the lessons taught
Like unconditional love
We know you are smiling down on us
From somewhere up above.

You touched our lives
How much you'll never know
We don't want the world to forget you
But that's the way life goes.

It all seems like a dream now
When we think back to the start
We had no idea how it would all end
And how you would imprint on our heart.

You'll always be our little boy
Our darling little man
Impossible to forget
As we move forward, hand in hand

- Emma

Never Forgotten



Lola by Gavin Blue, Heartfelt

My Lesson in Grief

By Rebecca Sparrow

It was 1980, I was eight years old and sitting on the lounge room floor leaning back onto my mum's lean tanned legs when I heard someone — I'm not sure who — say it.

“Look at her. She hardly looks like a mother whose baby has just died.”

I looked up at the TV screen.

Looking back at me was Lindy Chamberlain, with her Beatles haircut and her saucer-sized sunglasses. Her face stony, her manner matter-of-fact, as she spoke to a heaving, jostling mob of journalists about the disappearance of her newborn daughter Azaria at Uluru.

She blamed a dingo.

The entire nation blamed her.

Lindy Chamberlain, you see, didn't grieve the way we wanted her to. She was too serious. Too stoic. Heartless. Where were her tears? Where was her grief? How could she be so together? She was the mother, for god's sake.

Thirty years later and the exact same sentiments were being whispered about British backpacker Joanne Lees, whose failure to publicly emote over the disappearance of her boyfriend, Peter Falconio, led the public to mistrust her. She looks cold and distant, we murmured from our lounge room chairs. I bet she was involved.

But grief is a strange beast. And there is no one way to behave when you have experienced the type of tragedy that strangles your heart.

You can disconnect. Withdraw into your own world. And then there are the feelings nobody talks about. The bitterness, the fleeting hateful feelings. The moments that go from 'Why Me?' to 'Why not her?' Oh yes, that deep-seated wish that what had happened to you had actually happened to someone else.

To outsiders it can seem like someone is grieving the 'wrong way'.

But the truth is, unless you have experienced the loss of a loved one — especially a child — it's hard to understand that grief isn't always as tidy and polite and pretty as it is when played out on A Very Special Episode of 'Home and Away'. What I know from personal experience is that when a parent loses a child the grief is often raw. Ugly. Messy. Dark.

When my daughter Georgie was stillborn 18 months ago, I behaved in ways I never would have expected.

On a Monday night in September 2010, I held my perfectly healthy, 36 week old dead daughter in my arms and kissed her forehead and sang to her a song I had long ago made up about how very much her mummy loved her. One week later Brad and I had people to our house to watch the NRL grand final. Is that jarring? It jars me, even now. I mean, who does that? All I remember is that I wanted Brad to be with his mates for a few hours. And that when they came over, I smiled. And passed around bowls of pretzels. And sat outside with my friend Kyley and drank wine and even laughed at some jokes. And then when everyone went home, and the last plate was stacked in the dishwasher, I collapsed in the shower and became hysterical screaming for my daughter. Brad had to put me to bed.

From hospital I typed long, calm emails to my friends about my feelings about Georgie's death and yet refused to take many of their calls. Or see them in person. For the most part, I had no desire to be around people. To hear how sorry or sad they were. Instead I ate their doorstep lasagnes and spent hours making a tribute video on my laptop of a little girl who died before I ever got to see her smile. Or for her to see mine.

I made small pledges to Georgie. Became anchored by tiny rituals that connected me to her. I wouldn't hold another baby until I had another one of my own. I had to say bless you whenever Ava sneezed. I couldn't go to bed at night until I had kissed Ava's forehead and told her Georgie was watching over her.

And I spent those early days (or was it months?) on Mamamia.com.au. It became my salvation. Filled in my hours. Filled up my headspace as I tried to find ways to not think about the nightmare I was living. I read every post and left comments on stories like a normal person, like someone whose much-cherished second daughter hadn't just died.

I filled in a gratitude journal. I thought about getting a tattoo. Or shaving my head. I craved to look different so that I could wordlessly say to the world, 'I am forever altered'.

And I struggled with feelings of envy and, yes, at times resentment towards others. Friends who were pregnant. Friends who had had healthy babies at the same time Georgie died. Friends who announced their second pregnancies. The feelings never lasted long. They came and went like a shiver but they were there nonetheless. Because inside me I couldn't understand how this had happened to us. To me. To her. And now I was behind. Had to start from scratch. Like a game of Snakes and Ladders, I'd been so close to holding a second baby in my arms and suddenly found myself sliding down to the start. Back to the beginning while I watched everyone else move on with their families.

Would I ever, ever wish that someone else's baby had died rather than Georgie? No. Because having lived through the grief of a stillbirth, I can honestly say I wouldn't wish it on anyone.

But that doesn't make it easy.

On her website, Lindy writes, "She grew within my body and when she died, part of me died, and nothing will ever alter that fact."

We all sort of forgot that Lindy Chamberlain lost her baby. Her daughter. She still misses her little girl. Just the same way I miss mine.



Ethan by Kate Ellis, Heartfelt

Stories



Kat

Last year (2011) I had the joy of falling pregnant for the first time. My husband and I had barely decided to start trying when I fell pregnant and it all seemed to be serendipitous. Aside from morning sickness, which lasted all day, and some serious food aversions, all seemed to be perfect, or so we thought.

At my 19/20 week scan we were told the news that shattered us: there is no heartbeat, your baby has died, we think a few weeks ago. There were no signs or warnings, just the shock of that news and our world turned dark. The next day I gave birth to a perfect and beautiful baby girl we named Vanessa Elspeth. I have her hand and foot prints, not even the size of a ten cent piece, but perfectly formed; we have photos with her, and we have the memories of the couple of days we got to spend with her before saying goodbye.

Because she was 19 weeks and two days she wasn't classified as a stillbirth, but rather a late miscarriage — so no official certificate to acknowledge her birth. We have one from the hospital instead, acknowledging her life. After allowing ourselves a few months to grieve and my body to heal, we were told that Vanessa had died due to a large blood clot on the placenta, which meant that part of it couldn't attach to the wall of the uterus and it therefore was not enough to keep her alive.

We were given the all clear to try again and so, after five months or so of obsessing and counting my cycle, I fell pregnant again. The joy and the fear were equally intense but it wasn't to last long as I had an ectopic pregnancy and lost the baby at six weeks. To this day I still worry that I do not grieve or acknowledge this little one enough but after the pain of Vanessa, six weeks didn't seem enough time for it to fully sink in.

After this, due to the medication they gave me, we were unable to try for three months and, honestly, it was the best three months. I wasn't fussing over every cycle or obsessing about when I might fall pregnant. They also did more tests and discovered that I tested positive for Factor 5 Leiden, which means I am 14% more likely to clot than the average person. So they had a plan for the next pregnancy.

We again had time to heal and grieve and relax with one another. With a fresh perspective, we decided to try without really trying. I only allowed myself to record when I got my period, nothing else, and it worked for me because I was a lot more relaxed and it wasn't long before I fell pregnant again. I am now almost 20 weeks

and facing my 20 week scan this week and, despite knowing that this baby is alive and well, I still feel nervous. It hasn't been an easy journey emotionally with this pregnancy, for every day I remember my girl and what might have been and what I didn't experience with her.

People always ask me if this is my first pregnancy and I tell them no, I had a little girl last year who died too soon, and I wear a butterfly everyday in memory of her. Some days I don't know how I survive without her, but you just put one foot in front of the other and keep going, and eventually it does get a little easier. You are never the same again, and the grief never leaves you, but you learn how to live with it. She is, and forever will be, part of me and my story, and I will never forget holding her perfect little body in my hands.

I look forward to the day when I can tell this bubba I'm carrying now about his/her sister, Vanessa, so she can continue to live on with our family, always our beautiful butterfly!



Sheree

I lost my third child (my first son) on St Patrick's Day, 2009. He was 19 weeks and 3 days gestation — just a few days short of being officially recognised as a real person and not a miscarriage. That was what I found hardest: no one needed his name and neither a birth certificate nor a death certificate were required. According to the law, he never existed.

A few days after our loss, my husband purchased a beautiful ring for me. He said that it would be (when I was ready) a symbol and something tangible that made our son exist in the world. I wear it every day. If anyone complements me on my ring, I now tell them with pride, not sadness, about why I wear it.



Amanda

On 2nd Oct 2012, Kaylee was born at just 19 weeks gestation after a 14hour labour. She was perfect in every way except, of course, she was dead. We held her in our arms constantly for the next 12 hours, we gave her a name, we took photos, and we had her baptised. Although Kaylee never went home with us that day, never saw the sun, and never met her brother, I have a strong sense of who Kaylee was and who she would have grown into. At least this thought comforts me, but let's be honest, how could I possibly know? Yet I do. What convinces me is that I have no interest in dolphins, I am not really fond of purple, and I find the ocean a bit of a scary place, but during labour these images kept coming to me through each

wave of pain — dolphins happily jumping and surfing over ocean waves that, for some reason, just happened to be purple. Maybe it was the Pethidine or maybe, as I like to believe, it was Kaylee giving me the knowledge that I could get through this.

Kaylee was a fighter and even though my womb had failed and the outcome was inevitable, she fought with a strong heartbeat until the end. So these images and a sense of toughness will forever be associated in my mind with Kaylee. We talked to her all that night, telling her all about her family here and in heaven. I remember telling her that her sisters would watch out for her (two babies I had miscarried in earlier years).

To me, it is a fact that I had a daughter, my son had a sister, and my mum and in-laws had, for the briefest of time, a granddaughter; but to almost everyone else, Kaylee may as well have never existed. Dead before she was born, arriving just six days before the government would have officially acknowledged her fleeting presence. She will never be recorded in any official document or register.

We held our own funeral and did a presentation honouring her influence on our lives, but some did not even take the day off work to attend. I can't help thinking that if it had happened closer to full gestation it would have been easier for others to acknowledge her death, to perhaps ask how I am going now and then, and maybe, just maybe, say her name to me in a conversation. I love hearing her name — it is beautiful.

The first month was the hardest, and her due date was a very sad day, but the anniversary of her death proved a turning point for me. I have spent a year focusing on my grief and loss, but I feel ready to move on and re-engage with those around me and the garden and the house renovations that have not been touched since 2nd October. My hope now is to take her with me through life's journey in my heart and on my lips. I find joy in this amazing idea of publishing our stories, as I may still yet see her name in print if not in the book, then here on this amazing website.

I'd like to introduce to you Kaylee Kathryn Marina Joy, perfect in every way.





Grace by Adrienne Gilligan and Karen Simons, Heartfelt

Sian

I lost my baby girl, Meg, during the second trimester of my IVF pregnancy. I gave birth to her at 17 weeks gestation in 2009. I was later diagnosed with an incompetent cervix, which is such a cold and clinical term to describe such a devastating experience as losing a child. That term ‘incompetent’ also compounded my own sense of failure that my body had let us both down so terribly. I’d had one earlier miscarriage before Meg and had another after that, before my beautiful baby boy Thomas came along 17 months later.

As time goes by, you become more effective at coping. The fog of that overwhelming raw grief of the first days, weeks, months, and year gradually gives way to let some moments of joy back in to your life. But you never stop missing them, loving them, and you never forget them.

During the first 12 months after Meg died, I spent a lot of time reading and came across a poem by EE Cummings. I don’t know the reason behind why it was written, but I think it really captures the sentiment of a parent who has lost a child. The first line begins, ‘I carry your heart with me (I carry it in my heart).’



Kevin

On 14 January 2012, my wife and I gave birth to our third child. Our third son, Thomas, was born after 18 weeks 5 days — way too early to survive. Only later did we learn that the son we held in our arms, and will forever hold in our hearts and minds, is not recognised by law or medicine as a child at all, but rather as a miscarriage. As a lawyer, I have long known the law is an ass, but realising that the doctor who aided the “procedure” did not recognise our son as a life lost gave me at least a focus for the anger I felt for this injustice.

The well-meaning words of friends were at times hard to take, such as, ‘Lucky it wasn’t a girl,’ or ‘Everything happens for a reason.’ We held our two boys tight and cried for months, we questioned our faith, and thought many “if onlys”. We still do. It’s true that not a day passes. It’s also true that only time helps the pain.

I doubted I could ever go through it again, but my wife felt like she could not live without another child. I have trouble still talking about it, my wife I know wants to daily. The pressure on our marriage was greater than anything we have experienced before. We have been blessed with another child due next year, falling pregnant about the time Thomas was due to be born. This helps us know that somehow there has been a reason for our loss. There is a weird mix of joy, guilt, anxiety, and sadness with this pregnancy. We are not yet past 18 weeks 5 days, which will come in the next week and that will be tough.

We have close friends who have lost children at both earlier and later stages, including at birth. We have come to realise that there are similarities, but there is nothing good to come from comparisons.

I thank my wife daily for her strength. But for her and our boys, in my grieving I saw alcoholism and death as both viable options. It shames me to reflect on that now.

Things we did that helped us honour our son include naming a star after him, constructing a memorial garden in our yard, hanging musical chimes by our front door so we hear his song when the wind blows, getting a photo of the sunrise on the day he was born, having his name written in the sand on a west coast sunset. I know my words can’t take away any one else’s loss and my advice is unable to break through the pain, but if I could get a message through to anyone else it would simply be this: stay strong and honour your child’s memory.



Chloe Wallace

On Monday 17th September 2012, I was 19 weeks and 4 days pregnant. It was 9:30 a.m., and myself, partner, my parents, and his parents and sister, were about to find out how bub was doing and to hopefully find out if we were having a little boy or girl. The radiographer turned the screen towards me so I could see. The baby was curled up, but I didn't think anything of it. She then checked my womb, etc., and then measured bub's head. She also went to check the heartbeat, but there was no sound. She turned the screen away from me and looked and said it wasn't good news.

With my head in my hands, I cried like I had never cried before. I can remember so clearly that my mum was at my feet crying, and I knew she was hurting. That moment I can not get out of my head; it makes me tear up thinking about it.

I then had to go to a bigger hospital and had to go straight to the birthing suite. It was so overwhelming having the midwives, doctors, and social workers. I was not expecting any of this. They decided it was best to induce me and for me to deliver our baby. I was so frightened. This was our second pregnancy and our second loss this year. I had not experienced labour and was so scared, but we had all our family around.

They induced me at 3pm and by 5:45pm I was well into labour. I remember the pain so well but I tried to be strong. At 9:28pm that night, I gave birth and the midwife told us we had a boy. I did not see him after the birth, but we did name him William Wallace-Burnett.

The next day the social worker asked if we would like to see William—I needed to, he was our son. I remember being so scared and nervous. But when she brought him in, nothing else mattered. He was so precious and innocent and he was ours. When leaving the hospital with our empty arms, we were given a teddy bear that was donated to the hospital from Pregnancy Loss Australia (previously known as Teddy Love Club) it was in honour of someone else's little girl 'Anna Cassie'. I am grateful we had some photos taken and were given his blanket and beanie.

We will be holding a memorial service for William for our family and close friends. I can't understand why we lost William, but I know all we can do is take each day as it comes. Our hearts feel empty, but William makes us so much stronger and we miss him dearly. I light a candle every day for him.

Meanings of life and death

By Debra Bath

Death and taxes: apparently the two things in life we can count on to be certain (Benjamin Franklin, 1789). But the certainty of death is only that it will happen to each of us at some point. There is no certainty about the meaning it will hold for us, because each death, or life, is different.

It is painfully clear from the stories shared by grieving parents that we cannot compare one person's loss to another. Even though two individuals may experience a similar event, such as stillbirth or miscarriage, each of these losses is unique in so many ways.

If there is one important thing for others to know, perhaps this is it: the depth and breadth of a parent's grief will depend on many things, present, past, and future. The meaning of a loss cannot be dismissed or changed with words or actions. It is what it is, as experienced by the individual.

For example, trying to tell yourself that the miscarriage you've experienced at six weeks isn't such a big deal because, well, it wasn't really a baby yet, just won't work for some people. And nor should it. Because the loss and grief experienced isn't about the biological entity, it is about the meaning it has for the individual. This six week pregnancy may have been dreamed about for years and so this loss is not just a quick passing of bodily matter, but the loss of one's faith and hope in the future. It is the pain of all the past months of not being pregnant, of all the moments of thinking "maybe this time", of all the daydreams of putting on a nappy for the first time, of finally being called "Mum" or "Dad", of standing proudly clapping at the school concert, of sharing in a teenager's hopes for their own future, of being a grandparent. This 'baby' at six weeks may already have a name, and his or her life might be imagined beyond their wildest expectations.

We tend to hold the belief that grief is experienced on a curve. If a person dies very young, in-utero, or as a baby, the resulting pain and grief is minimal compared to an older child. We imagine that the impact of a child's death would grow exponentially with their age. A teenager dying would be tragic compared to a baby. And so it goes on. A young man or woman just beginning their career is somehow a greater loss than an 85-year old who is well into their twilight years. But it isn't about age, the amount of time spent on this earth. It is about the meaning that person holds for another.

My baby daughter lived for 11 days after she was born. For some reason, when people found out that she had actually lived, their sense of my pain and right to grieve increased. I still find this bemusing. Eleven days made all the difference. Apparently.

One of the frequently made mistakes by others is to minimise the meaning of the loss for the person, as they try to minimise the pain; “...don’t worry, you can have another one (baby)...” is not an uncommon platitude.

After my son died at 20 weeks in-utero, my GP said to me, “Oh, it’s such a shame he didn’t go at 9 weeks with a miscarriage...” She wanted to think that somehow this would have been a less painful experience for me. Needless to say, I never went back to see her. I felt she had insulted my son’s life, short as it was. Being ‘just’ a miscarriage would not have changed the way I felt about him. He was Finnian Charles before we knew he would not live. I had already dreamed a life for him. And I was so grateful to have met him, a tiny 220grams, but beautiful as ever. I got to birth him and bury him. This gave me great joy, as well as pain.

When anyone experiences the death of a loved one, others want to take away the pain. We don’t know what to say or do to make things easier for the one grieving. We certainly don’t want to make things worse, to open up the pain, to create tears, and so often we say and do nothing. Or worse still, we try to take away the gravity of the event, and therefore the meaning it holds for the individual. The one thing you learn with grief is that it cannot be taken away or forgotten, and allowing tears to flow does not make the pain worse. It may make others feel uncomfortable, but allowing the child to be meaningful, speaking their name, talking about them, expressing emotion, crying, does not create more pain. It actually helps.

Debra Bath, PhD, MAPS, is both a grieving mother and a psychologist. She previously worked as an academic, teaching psychology to university students for about 10 years, and now dedicates her time to her young son and runs a part-time private practice working with children and young adults. Debra has contributed several original and adapted pieces for this book.

Poem

Song I for Lillienne

The sting in my eye
The barb in my heart
The pain of knowing that
Soon we will part.

The joy of having you here in my arms
The coldness of knowing that soon
All that will remain
Of this warmth
is your name,
some photographs,
poems,
memories,
and psalms.

No comfort could ever be given
Or taken
To soften the blow to our joy that has shaken us,
Broken us,
Taken Lilli away from us
And that has stolen from her
The life that we'd sowed.

No joy can be had from sending a child so beloved
To her death
No solace taken from logic that says keeping her with us
Would be for her second best.

Never Forgotten

Too small was the joy
Too brief was the time
Of being with you, or holding you near,
Too grave was the choice no parent should make
To part with a child so dear.

Grateful and blessed
For the chance that we had
To comfort you in your pain
To ask you to trust us as we guide you to death
To hold you and nurse you through your last breath
Hoping that mystics and clerics are true
And that we shall see you again.

So as we farewell you sweet Lillienne Grace
And shepherd you from this short life –
We hope onto peace in some other place –
We will remember
Your features, your hair, the smell of your skin
The way in which death washed the pain from your face,
Your beautiful eyes, your lips and your chin,
And so many things that remain in our hearts
A bittersweet beautiful trace.

And when people ask us about
Our time with you, dear,
We will say “Stunningly beautiful
And cruelly too short,
But still we are glad you were here.”

-by Calvin Smith, October 2004



A letter to the daughter I never got to meet

by Mia Freedman

To my darling girl,

Today should have been your 12th birthday. I wonder what we would have been doing today had I ever got to meet you? Probably discussing *The Hunger Games* at length, but who knows?

I think that's one of the toughest parts of losing a baby during pregnancy or shortly afterwards.

You never know who you're grieving for. So when I think of you, there's ... a blank. A sad black hole in my heart. Nothing for my mind to latch onto for solace or comfort. I do have two memories actually. There's the way my body looked when you were nestled safely inside it. And the image of you on the ultrasound screen. Frozen. No heartbeat. Just floating. Inside my body and out of my life.

It's always a funny day, the anniversary of the day you were meant to be born. Those first few years were very raw although I had so many different significant days, it was ameliorated a bit between them in a sort of confusing spread of grief.

There was the day I found out you'd died, about halfway through my pregnancy.

Then there was the day you left my body, at the hospital.

And your 'birth' day. The day you were never born. The day I didn't get to hold you, to look into your little face and make that connection between the baby I'd felt moving inside me and the little person whose life would unfold before me. With me.

I can't get a handle on what you would have been like, what you would have looked like and that breaks my heart in a way that's really hard to explain. It's a very strange grief, grieving for someone you never knew. I have no memories of our times together, no images of your smile or your smell or all the precious details you keep locked tightly in your heart after someone has gone.

For a while there, I thought I'd reached 'closure'. What an absurd word that is. As if grief was a door that opens for a time and then shuts. The intensity may subside but so many things remain and morph into less extreme but still achingly potent

emotions. Like dust settling. It's no longer flying around in the air but it's still there, lightly coating your life.

I was so busy in the years after I lost you. Busy blaming myself for not being able to keep you alive. Busy trying to get pregnant again, to fill the space in my life and my body where you were meant to be. Busy welcoming two more children, who I love with all my heart. Busy watching all three of my children grow, while growing with them. Busy growing away from you.

Because even though that intense period of grief is one I was relieved to leave behind, it was also a way to be close to you in the only way that was left for us, as mother and daughter who never got to meet.

Shifting from that dark dark place and coming back into the light felt like a betrayal.

You know, as I've watched my dear friend Bec — your Godmother — grapple with the pain of losing her daughter Georgie 18 months ago, I've felt so calm in my relationship with you — if I can call it that. While she continues to ride the rawness of the rollercoaster, I've been able to contemplate how far I am from that place. Although I must confess to feeling a flash of envy when she's able to burst into tears and cry for her daughter. Because I haven't cried for you for a long time and sometimes I want to.

Sometimes I feel like I can't get to you. That you're locked too deeply inside me.

Bec has certainly caused a shift in me. Our friendship was built on a shared understanding of loss and some very intense, unexpectedly funny conversations about our lost daughters. There's nobody else who understands like her and we have decided you and Georgie are hanging out together somewhere, which makes us smile. Bec and I give each other little things to commemorate you both and that has helped more than I can explain to unlock my connection to you.

I've certainly come to a place of understanding about why you weren't born. A very wise woman once told me to stop blaming myself, stop making it about me because it's not. It was about you and your journey, short as it was. That's why I never got to hold you or tell you I loved you except in my head and through my tears after you'd gone.

I understand that had you been born, your younger brother and sister wouldn't have been. I may have gone on to have other children but it wouldn't have been them. That makes some small sense to me, gives me some small solace.

But I always find myself unexpectedly melancholy at this time of year. And like the goldfish I am, it rarely occurs to me that I'm missing you. Your father always has to gently remind me that it would have been your birthday and then it makes sense.

So happy birthday, little girl. I feel particularly close to you this year, particularly connected. I hope you are somewhere hanging out with Georgie, your godmother's daughter, discussing who is your favourite member of One Direction (I think it would be Harry, or maybe I'm projecting) and rolling your eyes at your embarrassing parents.

Because we're thinking of you. Today and always.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX



Clementine by Karen Simons, Heartfelt

She was *born* silent
into this world
but her little *life*
spoke volumes.

- Holly Haas

Lola by Gavin Blue, Heartfelt

Stories

Katie de Luca

After getting married in 2009, my husband and I were overwhelmed on the return from our honeymoon to discover I was pregnant. Starting a family was planned, but we never thought we would be this blessed that things would happen so quickly. Immediately we shared our good news with family and friends — being young, healthy, and happy, the thought of something going wrong never entered our minds. I definitely skipped ‘those’ sections in books.

As with any first pregnancy, I bought magazines, started choosing names, and was overwhelmed with love for my husband and baby. Feeling quite good throughout my pregnancy, we excitedly attended our first obstetrician appointment at ten and a half weeks pregnant. As the ultrasound wand glided over my belly, I knew something was wrong — there was no heartbeat, nothing to show for those two blue lines, which had started this journey six weeks earlier.

It was a shock and we handled it well, but the months afterwards were very tough. Something had been taken away — dreams, hopes, and so much love. I read that miscarriage was common and, being the strong person I was, I went back to work after two days and tried accepting our loss.

We were lucky to fall pregnant again six months later. I was relieved to know that my bad luck was over and we could concentrate on a healthy pregnancy. I suffered morning sickness and was due to see my obstetrician late in my first trimester. Unfortunately, I never made that appointment — at eight weeks pregnant I woke to a horrible feeling, and after rushing to the hospital our obstetrician broke the heartbreaking news that I had miscarried. Again. I could not bear to make the phone call to tell family and friends. It was just too hard. We were crushed, one miscarriage may be common but two was bad luck.

My obstetrician scheduled testing to rule out any medical reasons that may be causing my miscarriages. On returning to receive my results three months later, I was again pregnant. I found out I had a genetic blood disorder, Factor V Leiden and a MTHFR deficiency. This meant my blood was slightly thicker than normal, which may predispose to some pregnancy complications. However, many women live with Factor V Leiden and have perfectly normal, healthy pregnancies. I was prescribed daily injections of a blood thinner for the duration of my pregnancy. With newfound strength to overcome my extreme fear of needles, I diligently injected needles every day and was thankful to be pregnant with our baby.

In September 2010, just one year after being married, I suffered my third

miscarriage. We had not taken much time to grieve, just got on with things each time. I was working full-time, teaching at university, and working with sporting teams. We had a happily busy social and family life. With this miscarriage, my world came crashing down. The sadness that overcame me was devastating. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I was not the person I was 12 months ago and could not understand why we were being dealt such heartbreaking blows.

By the end of 2010 I was suffering chronic fatigue, as well as anxiety and overwhelming sadness. I had an incredible support team in my husband and our families, but there was a deepened sense of failure and sorrow. Our New Year's resolution for 2011 was to move to the country, re-address our priorities, and take a lot of time out, just for each other.

We took a job on the Mid-North Coast of NSW in 2011. I resigned from work and took three months to rest and recuperate. I felt happy and healthy again, and I was pregnant by the end of the third month. I saw an obstetrician who was considerate of my history, and we had our first ultrasound at six weeks. With so much apprehension, I could not get excited. But there it was, a flutter of a heartbeat. It was overwhelming for us both.

I did not feel comfortable sharing news until we were 16 weeks pregnant; this pregnancy was a precious journey for only a few people who had been our pillars of support. There was still so much trepidation. I felt that if I told someone, or chose a name, I would be jinxed and something might go wrong. After 24 weeks I started to feel comfortable, getting excited with the impending birth of our first child and overwhelmed with love for the expanding bump. I loved being pregnant, I took every day to relax and walk the beach, cook dinner and rest. In March 2012, at 38 weeks pregnant, I was induced and after a natural, four-hour labour had the greatest gift we could have hoped for—a precious, healthy baby boy.

Miscarriage is a horrible experience. It is not only the death of a baby, but the loss of hopes and dreams; it is the pain of grief and feelings of immense sadness. Whilst those around you are able to celebrate children's birthdays, you remember your due date every year, which reminds you of what would or could or should have been.

In 2009 I ran the 'City to Surf' raising funds for 'Bears of Hope', the only support network I could find for pregnancy loss. Whilst I had amazing support, this experience could be harrowing for others who don't. I found some resolve in their Sophie Bear — a reminder of strength and love in this unwanted journey. I also donated three bears to support other couples going through what we had been through.

Friends and family need to support those who are suffering. Ask how they are doing and drop around for a cup of tea. Pregnancy will be a touchy subject, but approached with sensitivity and support it shouldn't be distressing.

The experience of recurrent miscarriage taught me grief and loss, but also strength and how to reflect on life. Fourth time lucky, I was fortunate to experience the journey of motherhood. Now with a lively seven-month-old baby, being a Mum has brought unconditional love and enjoyment and fulfilled our lives. The feelings of loss and sadness for losing those babies will never go away, but life goes on and life is good again.



rex1980

On New Years Eve 2011, I found out that after six months of trying my husband and I were pregnant. Two weeks later, I started bleeding at work. I had a scan that showed everything looked okay for six weeks. I had to go back for another scan two weeks later. Those two weeks were torture. At the eight weeks scan I burst into tears when I saw a flickering heartbeat. Everything was going to be okay.

Two weeks after that I started bleeding again. I thought it best to go to the hospital, as I didn't feel right. I was rushed in for an ultrasound and I could tell by the silence, which felt like hours, that something was wrong. There was no heartbeat. It looked like our baby had passed away a week earlier.

I felt like such a failure. How could I not know? I had no pain — nothing to indicate that my little one was gone. It felt like the room was in slow motion and the silence was so loud in my head. I was numb. I thought this happened to other people. I got dressed and walked out the door while my husband waited for the results. We spent another five hours in emergency, waiting to find out what to do next.

On Valentine's Day I had to have surgery as my body was holding on and not letting go. I felt so empty and angry at my body for failing me. I felt devastated for our family that had so much excitement. But I'm glad they knew, because I have so much support.

We've just passed our due date and we spent it together having a beautiful lunch in the sunshine. We are still trying for a baby and I won't give up. Remembering is painful but forgetting is impossible. I don't know who said that, but it explains miscarriage perfectly. Who knows what is in store for me in the future? But I hope it has a happier conclusion.



Michelle Wineberg

Nobody gets it. I lost my third baby at only six weeks gestation, but from the minute we found out we were pregnant we were working out the age gap between baby and his/her big brothers, planning on a Spring Christening for a baby born in June, and wondering when we'd tell the boys about the new baby. We never got to tell them.

Once I started bleeding, there was no point telling them. I spotted on and off for a week, the internal dialogue was making me crazy, "My boobs are sore today, everything will be okay," to, "Was the baby in that gush of blood?" I ended up in the emergency room on my 31st birthday where I finally felt the emptiness that you cannot describe. I was only six weeks pregnant but my baby was a real part of us—he/she had a real future and a family waiting.

It took a long time to heal and even over five years later, and a beautiful girl added to our family, my angel is never far from my thoughts.



Clementine by Karen Simons, Heartfelt



Kylie

Over the last 11 years, I have had four miscarriages. I am a mum to four angels, but sadly, to date, I have no living children to hold in my arms and care for. My precious babies passed at seven weeks, five weeks, nine weeks, and nine weeks.

My last loss hit me the hardest, as the very day I found out there was no heartbeat, my sister-in-law (who lived with us at the time) found out she was eight weeks pregnant. She spent weeks being angry with me because I wasn't outwardly excited and happy enough for her and my brother, when inside I was ecstatic at the thought of becoming an aunty. But I was also devastated because I should have been becoming a mummy as well. The birth of my nephew was one of the happiest days of my life, but also one of the most gut-wrenchingly heartbreaking as well.

Coping with miscarriage, particularly in the early weeks, is so very difficult. Because all of mine have been early miscarriages, I have had people say, 'At least it was early before they became a real baby.' How could someone EVER say that to a woman who has just found out her baby has no heartbeat? Those babies were as real to me as any other baby, whether they be living or flying with angels.

To everyone who has experienced the devastating loss of a baby, no matter what age, my heart goes out to you. xx



Katie

In March 2011, after several attempts at IVF, we were delighted and a little terrified to learn that our single embryo had successfully implanted but had split: we were expecting identical twins in December. We started making preparations for our instant little family. I went to the obstetrician for my first visit two days before the 12-week nuchal scan and heard those soul destroying words, "I'm sorry, there are no heartbeats."

Everyone knew of our IVF journey because we'd announced the pregnancy early: 7 weeks to family and 11 weeks to friends and work. We then had to start the heartrending task of un-telling everyone. There is nothing that helps guide you or your partner through the labyrinth of black despair that follows.

Well meaning friends and family say the most cruel and insensitive things, in the vain belief they are making you feel better. The truth is that nothing and no one can take that pain away and make you feel better. You need to experience the pain to find a new definition of normal: time helps, but it doesn't heal.

As I started the journey, I began to understand that I don't want this part of myself healed, I want to wear my scars with pride to say, "Although my first babies do not live, I am still irrevocably a Mum to them. I love their living younger sister so much I feel my heart might burst, but I can't replace my lost children. I will never forget my angels. And I will love them and dream of what could have been forever."

When we tried again I wasn't emotionally ready, and the first trimester of the pregnancy I was fraught with nerves. But would I ever have been ready? We have since had our beautiful angel, our Angelina Grace in July 2012, and she has been a great healer. My rainbow baby, made all the more precious by the incredible road of pain we travelled to have her.

I'd love to contribute to your book. There are so many who have experienced the loss of a child, yet when it happens you feel so utterly alone because it's so uncomfortable for others that they can't acknowledge it or talk about it. Conversely, people who have experienced pregnancy loss or infant death bravely stepped forward to share their experience with me. It made me feel supported and not so horribly alone.



Flossy

I had a slightly different experience to a miscarriage or stillbirth. About eight years ago, I had what is called a Blighted Ovum. Basically, an egg gets fertilised but for whatever reason it does not produce a baby, but the sac still gets formed.

I didn't lose a child per se, but I was devastated nonetheless. For three months I believed I was pregnant and I was just so happy. It was almost three months to the day when I started bleeding. Long story short, I ended up at hospital where they did an ultrasound and told me there was no baby. Of course, I still had all the hormones, which didn't help when I was told the news.

What followed was quite devastating to me. Every time I had to go to the toilet, the nurses had to measure my blood loss, and when the whole lot came out in one big clump, I felt that it was literally my baby that was going to be flushed down the toilet. It was such a bizarre thing to have happen, and my partner at the time was of absolutely no help. After about a week or so of moping around and not being able to come to terms with what had happened, my partner told me to, 'Get over it, you're not the first one it's ever happened to.'

Thankfully I went on to have two beautiful girls who are now seven and five, and I wouldn't be without them. They are my gifts from God.



Lisa Gray

My second husband and I met at 39 years of age. We decided to try for a baby at 40 years of age and, after no success, we were referred to a fertility specialist. Amazingly, I fell pregnant on my first attempt at 41 years of age. We were ecstatic and with each passing week we became more and more confident.

We had an ultrasound at nine weeks, which showed the baby was developing normally. However, I do remember the technician's last words as we were leaving, 'It is early days, there is a lot of development to be done.'

On 30th September 2009, we excitedly went in for our 12-week ultrasound. Our baby was 12 weeks and four days old. The technician checked the baby's heart rate, nuchal fold, and measured the brain, which were all in the normal range. She then took two photos of the face, which made us laugh at the dominance of the nose. Unbeknown to us, our laughter would soon be replaced with tears and fear.

As she started to measure the stomach, she appeared to have a very worried look on her face. I knew then and there that something wasn't right. After what seemed like an eternity, she told us that our baby had a condition called 'omphalocele'. This is an abdominal wall defect, whereby the bowel, spleen, and other organs have not moved back into the stomach, which normally occurs between 8–10 weeks of development. We were then advised to have further testing.

The next day, October 1 2009, we returned. We were taken into a room, and the technician began to assess our baby's condition. Our baby appeared deathly still. The technician then excused herself from us. My husband said to me, 'There is not a lot of movement there.' But deep down I already knew. A more senior technician then came in and, after connecting the heart rate monitor to me, confirmed our worst fears—that our most wanted baby had, in fact, died.

On October 5 2009, I had a curette. We later found out through genetic testing that he was a boy. He was to be called Tomas. We did attempt pregnancy again, only this time with IVF, but after a failed first attempt and then a chemical pregnancy, we made the difficult decision to stop.

Even though we never got to hold Tomas in our arms, we will never forget our son and the impact that he has left on our lives.



Emma Sullivan

I, like so many others, have suffered multiple miscarriages. I could fill pages about the physical journey, however I feel that perhaps what you are asking for is the emotional journey throughout.

My first three miscarriages occurred at the beginning of us trying to start a family. The first was devastating, truly gut-wrenching, and it took a long time to move forward. However, there always remained hope that this was a one-off — a glitch on the road to parenthood.

The second miscarriage was also devastating — and the beginning of fading hope. The third miscarriage signalled a depression, an ache, a leaden heart, mourning the loss of my three babies, but also questioning whether motherhood would ever happen to me.

The exhilaration and joy of two blue lines on a pregnancy test, juxtaposed by the despair of knowing a miscarriage is occurring yet again, was a rollercoaster I was desperate to hop off.

2006 dawned in my garden and I suddenly found myself surrounded by hundreds of dragonflies. I am not usually one to get caught up in this type of thing, however I know that dragonflies supposedly signify new beginnings. Was this the sign that everything would be okay? It was the signal of hope that I needed to cling to, even if it was a fallacy. I needed something to pierce the grey clouds that were enveloping me.

February 2006, I conceived baby number four. The due date was the anniversary of my beloved grandmother's death. Was this also a sign that everything would work out, that a happy ending was headed my way after all the grief?

November 2006 we welcomed our first child into the world. I would go on to have another miscarriage in between my first and second child. After two children we planned to have no more, we felt that after all we had experienced we were more than happy with our little family.

2011 would see the arrival of our unplanned third child, conceived and carried miraculously without the early medical intervention required for our first two successful pregnancies. This wonderful miracle was born on the due date of my very first pregnancy! I believe this was the universe bookending my journey. The circle was complete.



Anneke Bhat

We lost our second child at eight weeks gestation, though we never found out until our 12-week scan. That morning, my husband and I excitedly told our two year old that he was going to be a big brother, and that we were all going to see the baby in mummy's tummy. He was so excited. When the ultrasound began I knew immediately something was wrong — the baby was too small and I knew it was gone before the technician uttered the words I will never forget, "I'm sorry, but it's bad news, your baby is gone." My husband and I held each other as we cried uncontrollably.

As the day went on, many tears were shed as we told family and friends what had happened. The next day we were booked in for a D & C, as I wanted to keep baby's remains. My midwife asked me how I felt knowing there was a baby inside me who was no longer living. I hadn't even thought about it, and I felt like a terrible mother saying it felt awful. After the D & C, I felt empty; I felt like life was never going to be the same as it was and I could never be happy again. Going back to work was hard; I am an early childhood teacher and was surrounded by babies and pregnant women.

As the weeks went on things improved, until I got the call telling me I could pick up baby's remains. I organised a cremation and fell to pieces all over again. It was another reminder my baby had died. I had recently found out I was pregnant again and all I could think about was what if this baby dies too? That day I went home and wrote a letter to the baby I will never meet but will always consider my middle child. I got out all of my unnecessary guilt and said all the things I needed to say. That night I slept better than I had slept since that horrible day, August 4th 2010, the day a little piece of my heart was gone forever.

Our daughter was born on June 3rd 2011 — she almost didn't survive her birth, and I know her little brother or sister, who didn't make it into this world, made sure that she did.

Never Forgotten



Ethan by Kate Ellis, Heartfelt



The death of a baby at any stage of pregnancy can be a very sad and distressing time. When an early pregnancy loss occurs, parents are often already busy preparing for a new life with their baby. Suddenly and unexpectedly, their plans come to an end.

There are a number of different ways a pregnancy can end. It may happen quickly and be finished within a few hours, or it may occur over several days or even weeks and may be physically traumatic. Regardless of why or when a pregnancy loss occurs, it usually comes as a shock to parents and causes a wide range of intense emotions.

Every pregnancy loss is different, and there is no right way to feel about it. Feeling sad, confused, frightened, socially isolated, overwhelmed by grief, or even a sense of relief are all common and normal. For some parents, the loss of an early pregnancy is a shocking life event from which it takes a long time to recover, whereas for others it is an event of relatively minor significance.

Many women who have experienced an early pregnancy loss feel guilty and may blame themselves. In most cases, there is nothing that the mother did to cause this event and nothing that could have been done to prevent the loss. Because there is still a lot that is unknown about many early pregnancy losses, most parents do not ever find out the cause and this can be difficult to accept.

The most common type of early pregnancy loss is a miscarriage. Many parents are surprised to learn that about one in five confirmed pregnancies end in miscarriage. While this statistic may provide little consolation, it does sometimes help couples understand that they are not alone in this experience.

Having one miscarriage does not significantly increase a woman's individual risk of having another miscarriage. Even in the case of recurrent miscarriage (three or more miscarriages in a row) there is still a good chance of successful pregnancy in the future, if there are no other medical issues involved.

Feelings and reactions

Once a baby is conceived, many parents start preparing themselves physically, psychologically, and emotionally for his or her arrival. When that process ends early and unexpectedly, many parents are shocked by the intensity of their feelings.

Parents react to miscarriages in different ways—there is no right or wrong way to feel. It is natural to experience some of the feelings and reactions associated with significant loss such as:

- » shock
- » grief
- » loneliness
- » feeling numb or 'empty'
- » sadness
- » crying
- » frustration and irritability
- » a sense of loss
- » depression
- » anger
- » denial
- » guilt and self-blame
- » confusion
- » acceptance
- » relief
- » feelings of failure
- » feeling misunderstood
- » feeling uninterested in everyday life
- » jealousy when seeing pregnant women or babies
- » difficulty concentrating
- » having dreams/nightmares
- » sleeping too much or too little
- » having an increased or decreased interest in sex
- » wanting to constantly talk about the miscarriage, or not wanting to talk about it at all
- » not wanting to be alone, or not wanting to see anyone.

It may seem that these emotions are felt all at once or parents may also feel these emotions at different times.

Women often feel confused and distressed by the sense of having no real control over their body. They may feel like they were doing their best for their baby and that their body has betrayed them.

Feelings of guilt are common — women worry that exercise, housework, employment, or sexual intercourse caused their miscarriage. Try not to blame yourself, because research indicates that these activities do not have any negative effect on the healthy development of babies.

Even parents who had mixed emotions about their pregnancy may be shocked by the strength of their feelings. Sometimes, if the pregnancy was unplanned, the mother may feel that somehow her feelings of rejection towards the baby have caused the miscarriage.

In the case of early pregnancy loss, parents may feel cheated that they have nothing to show for their pregnancy and no memories to grieve over. Perhaps news of the pregnancy had yet to be shared with others, and so not many people acknowledge the loss or offer support.

Parents who have a late loss often have trouble understanding why their son or daughter is called a ‘miscarriage’ and not a ‘stillbirth’. Whatever your feelings are — try to remember that they are natural and nothing to be afraid of.

What is most important is to find someone you can share your loss with, because it is through this sharing with one another that true healing can take place.

Grief issues

With miscarriages, mothers often ask, ‘Shouldn’t I be over this by now?’ and ‘Why do I feel so bad, when others have had babies die through much later losses?’

It is important to remember that grief is a normal healing process. There is no set timeline for grief — it will not go away overnight and is not an illness to ‘get over’.

Furthermore, grief can be just as severe in the case of early miscarriage as it is with late miscarriages (or stillbirth or newborn death). The relationship parents develop with their growing baby is individual and is not dependent on the duration of a pregnancy. Individual circumstances such as previous losses, infertility, and increasing maternal age can impact on the emotional response to the baby’s death and the time it will take to grieve.

Grief can also be a very physical emotion — parents may suffer insomnia, fatigue, tummy upsets, loss of appetite, headaches, a feeling of tightness in their chest, as well as general anxiety. Mothers can even experience aching arms and a physical craving to hold the baby.

Many parents feel isolated and lonely, because they no longer feel that their feelings are acceptable in public. People do not often understand or acknowledge the close bond that can form between parents and their expected baby. Our society often expects grief to be finished much quicker than what it takes in reality. Parents who are bereaved through miscarriage often feel as though people do not care about their baby and have no patience for their continued grief.

Do not expect too much of yourself. You have a right to recover in your own way. For some parents this will happen quickly while others may take a long time.

Reactions of others

Although miscarriage is common, the impact it has on parents is often underestimated. People often assume miscarriage is a minor event, easily replaced with another pregnancy. This can lead parents to feel that those closest to them do not understand their suffering.

Comments such as “you can always have another baby”, “it’s for the best”, or “at least you know you can get pregnant” can be hurtful to parents. While said with good intentions, comments like this fail to acknowledge the loss and trauma of miscarriage.

Sometimes other people are uncomfortable or inexperienced with loss and grief. Because they don’t know what to say or do, they say nothing. Perhaps they think it is beneficial for you to not be reminded of your miscarriage when you are trying to ‘move on’. Sometimes parents put on a ‘brave face’, which may mean others do not recognise their suffering and believe life is going on as usual.

Try to be truthful with those close to you — let them know what your baby meant to you, tell them what you need and if you want to talk about your experience. People may be surprised at the depth of your feelings. If you don’t feel strong enough to do this in person, you can write it in a letter or an email.

In some cases, particularly with close family (such as your parents or your partner’s parents) they may also be very sad and also trying to cope. Allow others to be supportive — accepting their help is an important part of the grief journey.

Making memories

Many parents have found it helpful to have something tangible on which to focus their sadness and to help accept the reality of their loss. With most early miscarriages, parents will not be able to see their baby. The suggestions below can be done at any time after your baby has died.

- » **Naming your baby:** Even though you may not know your baby's gender, naming them can be very helpful. Some parents give their baby a nickname during the pregnancy — that name can be used. Perhaps a name that can be given to a boy or a girl could be chosen. Sands can provide an 'In Memory' certificate to record your baby's name.
- » **Collecting mementos:** Some parents may choose to keep their initial positive pregnancy test, ultrasound photos, and hospital tag in a special box. Other reminders could include records of the hospital stay, sympathy cards, pressed flowers, and maybe toys or clothes that were ready for the baby.
- » **Choosing a keepsake:** Such as an ornament or jewellery.
- » **Creating something:** Such as a drawing, quilt, or album.
- » **Making a memorial:** For example, a tree, shrub, or a special seat in the garden.
- » **Writing in a journal:** Many parents find it therapeutic to record their thoughts and feelings down on paper.

This information was compiled using excerpts from the 'Early Pregnancy Loss' brochure written by Sands Australia. Sands aims to facilitate healthy grieving following the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, newborn death, or termination for medical purposes. To contact Sands or read this brochure in full, please visit www.sands.org.au.

Poem

Empty Nest

Tell me what I was doing

when your heart stopped its beat.

How could a moment of such importance not transcribe

to me, the mother, the incubus, without me aware?

Did I talk to you when you were already gone?

Blissfully unaware.

Was it you that etched that mark on my heart before you left?

It's still there... above my empty nest.

- Bernadette



I am a Time Traveller.

It was a few months after I lost my baby son, and the struggle to piece together my past, present, and future was consuming me. I heard someone describe grief as a time traveller and I realised: I had become Grief's companion.

Although it has (only) been just over a year now since our lion warrior, Leo Kallan, took his first and last breaths, I am still learning how to navigate the passing of time with Grief by my side.

Each day there is more laughter, more joy, and the glimmers of hope are brighter, but I sometimes find myself overwhelmed by the sensation of being stuck. Stuck in the past, at the hospital looking helplessly at my son, unable to touch him, to hold him, to tell him that it will be okay.

Stuck in the present, a childless mother with empty arms and a shattered sense of motherhood.

Stuck with a future almost too unbearable to contemplate.

Yet, for all the feelings of being stuck, Time continues to propel me forward, not always willingly, and sometimes without me even moving.

I did not decide to become a Time Traveller. It happened the day Leo was born.

What I had at first thought was my waters breaking, accompanied by panic that I was really about to have a baby, was soon replaced by sheer terror when I turned on the lights and saw blood.

Unreality set in.

Leo was born via emergency caesarean and, like his little heart, time lost its beat. They tell me he was revived, that he screamed with life, and they supported him with all technology had to offer.

Time followed his cue and began again.

I first saw Leo through a stranger's lens. It was from a medicated haze that I learnt that the "bonnie boy" in the picture, entwined in an intricate network of tubes and wires, was in fact my son. It was hard to believe that only a few hours earlier, he had been tucked up, safely I thought, inside me.

It was the day after Leo was born that I noticed Time was not what it had been.

An early morning phone call came from the neonatal ICU: things had turned for the worse. We should come straight away. The minutes stretched as I waited and waited for a nurse to wheel me, bed-ridden, across the hospital to our son. Eternity passed before there was a response to my bell. The urgent ache of desperately needing to be with my baby could not be relieved fast enough.

But once I was with him, I wanted Time to slow down. To stop.

*Because I could not stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me -
Emily Dickinson*

After Leo died, the kind stranger who had introduced me to my son returned. I had not known she was a gatekeeper of Time, forcing it to slow. Was it hours or years that we stroked and held him? Days passed in a surreal charade of normality, marked by tending nurses, welcome visitors warmly met, and cups of tea.

But each night Leo came to us. Under cover of darkness, Time stretched, the minutes elongated beyond their normal measure. His cool cheek pressed on my chest. His weight imprinted on my arms. The gatekeeper knew that I wasn't ready to say goodbye — when is a mother ever ready to farewell her babe? And so we shared one last night. It was never going to be long enough, but Time was obliging. It all but paused.

The next day we tucked Leo into his woollen nest. It was the last time I saw my son.

At home alone in the first weeks after Leo's death, I sought out other parents' stories of loss. I could barely contemplate Time without him, but knowing that others had somehow found the capacity and desire to do so gave me some hope that I too could survive. The time and space to do this was essential for me. I do not need those stories so intensely anymore.

I am tempted by Grief's beguiling call to the past, even as it summons me to the future.

Each month since my son died, there have been two days on which I welcome the past and surround myself with sunflowers, for they are like my Leo's mane. I do not Travel there alone; friends and family send me photos of the sunflowers they grow from the seeds we gave out at Leo's celebration by the harbour. The sea at that place is restorative, buoying me enough to face again the insistent present without my child. We draw our initials in the sand, talismans briefly fixing the past into the present and shielding us into the future. Photos of my son are

irreplaceable. I visit them, display them, arrange them; but those images will never be joined by Leo toddling, starting school, playing with the siblings that we would wish him. Hearing and speaking his name is a warming relief and I crave it; yet there is no voice to call me “Mummy” in return.

But I am no longer so completely in Grief’s thrall. I increasingly take my place as navigator: we visit my baby in the hours we could hold him and I choose to bring us to the present once more. Like all mothers, I am working it out as I go along; my challenge is to keep on doing so when my child cannot for himself, without feeling I am leaving him behind.

I re-order my past, present and future, holding Leo with one hand, and with Grief holding my other, and my Time Travelling journey continues.



Leo by Alex Vaughan, Heartfelt



I feel like I've *walked* through a
cloud of smoke
and I can't get the *smell*
out of my clothes.

He has become *embedded*
into the *fibres* of my
heart, mind, and soul.

He will FOREVER be a *part* of me.

-Crystal Stephens

Stories

Ingrid

Our little man Hayden Leonard was born on the 14th August 2012, and he left us on the 18th August, just five days later.

My waters broke at 29 weeks because of a GBS infection in my placenta. Our little man was in a breech furling position and he experienced a very traumatic and far too lengthy c-section delivery.

Everything looked positive at first and there is just too much to tell of his story — I'm not ready to write it all down, can't see past all my tears. But I wanted to share a little series of text messages that we sent out to everyone during his short life...

15.08.12 'Our gorgeous little lion was born yesterday with a mini roar at 2:40pm at 29 weeks by emergency c-section weighing 1150g ... waters broke at 5am and there was no stopping him! He had been furiously kicking me in the bladder for a few days and it turns out he had the cord wrapped tightly around his ankles ... luckily he got his way and had a dramatic early entrance. He is doing really well and so are his family, although a tiny bit stunned!'

16.08.12 'We have named our new little man Hayden Leonard. He is not having the best time at the moment so please keep us all in your thoughts and send some positive vibes our way ... he is a little fighter though, as strong as a lion, and we are trying to stay positive and hope he pulls through. Will send updates soon.'

17.08.12 'Thank you for your kind words and thoughts. Our brave little lion Hayden Leonard is not going to stay with us here on earth. We are going to say goodbye to him tomorrow and let him go peacefully. We tried so hard to bring him here safely but sometimes Mother Nature has different plans! He has taught us to appreciate each other more and brought us all closer together ... we are all staying strong and remembering how lucky we are to have each other. Please take a moment tomorrow afternoon to think of us all and we'll be in touch again soon.'

18.08.12 'We could feel the love coming from everywhere today ... Hayden 'our little lion man' passed away very peacefully this evening at 7:16pm in the safe arms of his family ... he is now the strongest shining star in our sky. Although he was only here for a short time he has changed everything for the better and will warm our hearts forever.'

The hardest part of all of this has been watching my three older children grieve for the loss of their little brother. They come out with the most beautiful, heartfelt, natural things and it just chokes us up.

When we were cradling Hayden on that last day, it was getting dark outside and my four-year-old, Angus, said to us all, as he was looking out the window, 'Oh no Mummy, it is getting dark outside and Hayden won't be able to see where he is going.' To which I said, 'No, that is why he is waiting until it is dark to go, so that the stars can show him the way.'

My four-year-old, Priya, touched Hayden's hand and said, 'His hands are so tiny Mummy but they will grow soon, won't they?'

After Hayden had passed away we were lucky enough to have the opportunity to bath him, and Priya said to me that when we bring him home, she would like to help me bath him all the time! I could not hold back my tears at this.

There is also part of a text message I would like to share that a dear friend of ours sent to me once he knew that we had to say goodbye. 'There must indeed be a better place for us than here on earth because Hayden 'the lion man' will answer a calling that is stronger than your will to keep him here. In Hayden's case, age will not weary him though your love can glow bright forever. One last loving hug can send him on his way and keep his soul warm for eternity.'

I just keep thinking that yes, a very bad thing has happened but so have many wonderful things, and will again.

Hayden was too little, too soon, but he is everywhere, all around us.

My daughter and I have created a remembrance garden for Hayden and our other angel babies where the fairies can visit. We all feel close to him there.

I would also like to say thank you so much to Heartfelt for their wonderful contribution to our life long memories of Hayden.



Kj

Three years ago, my husband and I found out we were pregnant. We went along to the nuchal scan, so excited to find out the news regarding our baby. After only what could be described as an unbearable wait, and then several specialist ultrasounds later, we found out that our son had a congenital abnormality that was incompatible with life. Most people at this stage would be offered a termination, but I had two babies on board and his twin sister was perfectly healthy.

It was incredibly hard carrying a baby for a full pregnancy, knowing that he would not survive, whilst trying to remain positive and healthy for the other baby, wishing every single minute of every day that the doctors had it wrong.

Bodhi only survived for one hour after he was born, and we spent time with our babies together. He will never be forgotten as our first son and I am now in the process of explaining to his sister that she had a little twin brother. In some ways, I try to think of myself as lucky, as our little girl turned out just perfect, but often when I see twins my heart twinges just a little at what we could have had.



Leanne

I lost my son, Jay, at 4 days old. It was a perfectly normal pregnancy and birth and there is still no explanation as to why he died. Unfortunately, Jay's death was listed as SIDS. Jay would be 15 now and he is, and will always be, in my thoughts.

I would like to share the following dedication to my son:

I think of you, my little one,
You lived such a short while,
I never dried your tiny tears,
Nor saw your baby smiles.

And even though the pain has eased,
I think about you still,
You have a place within my heart,
That no one else can fill.

Your brother and sister keep me busy through the days,
But I am still reminded of our loss in many ways,
I came across the toys and clothes I bought for you,
And I shed a tear for the baby I hardly knew.

And now there is another baby whose birth should be in May,
The fear sometimes overwhelms me,
I try to hope,
to pray.

Never Forgotten

I thought it would be easier,
Once I'd had a scan,
And saw a tiny baby move,
And wave a tiny hand.

Somehow it was a comfort,
But it also caused more pain,
I said a silent prayer of thanks,
But cried for you again.

But as each day passes,
Sometimes slowly, sometimes fast,
I try to think of holding in my arms,
A little baby at last.

And though I look forward to that day,
Excitement mixed with fear,
I never will forget you Jay,
I'll always hold you dear.

Love mummy.



Alison Baker

We lost our beautiful baby boy, Sam, two and half years ago. I was having a routine pregnancy until our 23-week check-up, where it was discovered that I was 4cm dilated with bulging membranes (as a result of incompetent cervix). I was put straight into hospital onto strict bed rest (elevated leg position), given anti-labour drugs, and was told ‘not to hold out a lot of hope’.

We met with pediatricians on a weekly basis to discuss a management plan for when our baby was born (that is, whether to resuscitate, etc.) and I was given steroids to help strengthen his little lungs.

Sam was born at 25 weeks and 2 days gestation; he lived for 3 days and passed away as a result of a bleed on the lung.

We suffered terrible grief, which put my husband’s and my relationship under a lot of pressure. We already had a son (Finn) who was 22 months when Sam was born, and he proved to be my saviour. Finn ensured I got up in the morning and ‘got on with life’. After a couple of years, support from the SANDS Group, some psychologist sessions, and support from amazing family and friends, we’re in a much better place. I still think about Sam (and talk to him) every single day, however the overwhelming grief has subsided.

We now also have a beautiful 13-month-old girl, Millie, who I’m grateful for every single day. Millie’s pregnancy was stressful — I had a stitch put in at 12 weeks and taken out at 36 weeks, we had 10 ultrasounds, and were very closely monitored by the Ob. We had a small scare at 21 weeks, so my mum moved in with us to help for the remainder of the pregnancy. We were lucky to get our ‘happy ending’ in the form of Millie, and I am now the proud mum of three.



Karen H

At 34 weeks of pregnancy (with our first child), our world was rocked by the news that there was something seriously wrong with our baby. Our doctor was concerned because on a scan his head appeared larger than it should have been, and further testing showed that our precious boy had a massive brain tumour. We were told that he wouldn't survive and there was nothing that could be done because of the severity of the tumour.

Specialists were very interested in our case because it is so rare — roughly one in a few million — and only a handful of cases had been seen in Australia, let alone Tasmania, where we are from. No one knew what was going to happen, or even if he would survive birth, which he did.

A couple of days after finding all this out, Jordan was delivered by c-section. All our family was there, and my husband and I were able to cuddle and talk to our special boy for 12 precious hours, before he slipped away in our arms. We are so grateful we had this time to share with him.

This is a particularly hard time for us, as next Sunday is his birthday and he would have been six years old. My heart still breaks for him every day and I miss him so much, but I look at our other two children and realise how far we have come, and Jordan is still very much a part of our family. Sometimes now when I think about him I don't always cry, but I smile instead because we were blessed to have him in our lives. This is the first time I have really felt able to share his story, so thank you. For the first time after reading all these messages, I don't feel quite so alone. Keep up the amazing work.



Torrey W

I lost my beautiful son, Tobi, twelve years ago last June, and I only wish that no one else had to go through such terrible pain, loss, and isolation.

I vividly remember the moment that my world spun out of control, being told that my son was dying not 24 hours after he was born. My mind screamed at the impossibility and then there was the stunning silence and numbness as I existed outside of the hustle and bustle of the normal world. I had no understanding of how much it would change me.

For so long I wondered what terrible things I had done, why couldn't it have been me who died instead? Why did this happen? The pain has never lessened — not for me, not for my husband, nor my other children — but we have learned to live with it. It's a part of us every day. I don't sweat the small stuff anymore, I don't take

for granted when one of my boys smiles a lopsided grin that's a little bit naughty, or get exasperated when my daughter wants me to listen — NOW! I'm a better person, a better mum, and a better friend.

I don't get to hug my son or tend to skinned knees. I don't get to hold him as he cries or share in his victories in the world. Instead I hold him with me everyday in the choices that I make. As a family, we celebrate his birthday and I write him a letter every year. He has always been and will always be a part of our lives, of my life.

I have cried a river of tears in my own grief and I also cry for the loss that others suffer, the profound absence where hope and possibility once existed. Beautiful babies lost to a world of possibility, wonderful mums and dads left shell-shocked and alone. I felt so alone, like a pariah and had put that down to being my experience. But no one should feel that alone. It is tough to find the right words unless you've been there. People are left speechless if they find out, and there is no understanding that the grief doesn't just suddenly disappear or lapse in designated time.

I applaud this book. As unique as each circumstance is, we are all members of this terrible, exclusive club, into which we never sought membership. It's a great thing to come together to support, understand, and perhaps even find a little catharsis. Here's to getting through another tough moment, another day, a birthday, or what should have been a milestone. Well done for just surviving.



Isaboh

Although she lost my baby brother, my mum never once underestimated the way my brothers and I felt. I was four, almost five, when my brother died. The most vivid thing I remember is mum and dad trying to explain to my brother and I what had happened but while doing so, trying to keep it together themselves.

I'm 17 now, and I go through each and every day thinking about Tobi. Losing him has played a big part in developing my perspectives on life. June rolls around every year, and at this time each year I see my family fall apart. If I could explain exactly how I feel it would be like a weight being lifted off my shoulders, but I can't. Sometimes I just sit out the back and look up into the night sky, always believing the brightest star represents my brother. Sometimes I will listen to his funeral song on repeat and cry. These have become some of my coping mechanisms. I live each day knowing that I'll see him again, and until then he gets to be the little angel on my shoulder looking over everything I do.

As a family, we deal with the pain. As a family, we comfort one another. I know that no matter how alone I feel at times, I can always come home and know that I have

a family that feels the pain I do, and a beautiful baby brother with me forever. I love you, Mum. I'm glad you've found a way to express yourself. xx



Courtney Edgar

On 3rd March 2007, I was a young 20-year-old about to embark on the most exciting journey—my now husband and I were about to welcome our first baby into the world. After a perfect pregnancy and a 20+ hour labour, I was finally 10cms dilated. The midwife was checking our baby's position when they realised that I had a cord prolapse (the cord was coming out before the head and depriving her of oxygen). I was rushed into the theatre and our baby was delivered not breathing and without a heart beat, but miraculously they were able to revive her and she was sent via NETS to the Monash Medical Centre, where she lived in NICU for 7 whole days. These will forever be the best and worst days of my life.

It was a long time before I could look at a pregnant woman or newborn baby without feeling nauseous. But after a 9-week miscarriage, I finally conceived my beautiful daughter, now three. And after another miscarriage, I gave birth to my third daughter, now 19 months. But I still think about my baby, Zahlia, every single day. Thank you for letting me share my story.



Georgina Ross

My little boy, William, was born on 1st June 2006. We had found out at our morphology scan that things did not look good, but with monitoring throughout it was confirmed that Will's kidneys and lungs were not developing.

When these results were told to us, as you can imagine, my world came tumbling down. I did not understand any of the 'gobbly goo' they were saying to me, except for the continuous words going through my head "that something is wrong", "he will not survive." I was in shock and could not comprehend anything that the doctor was telling me. All I wanted to do was run away, but I couldn't run away. I was carrying this little person inside me.

I carried William for 34 and half weeks and gave birth to the most amazing and adorable little boy I had ever seen. I do not regret any second of carrying my little fella this far, knowing that he was not going to be with us for long. The weeks that I walked around with him inside me were precious, hard, lonely, and filled with so much sadness, but joy too.

This was the first time of my life that I realised that no one else can carry you

through; you do things on your own. No one else had to give birth to a child who was not going to make it and maybe not even cry. There was a very high chance that William would be stillborn, but this amazing little creature gave us two hours. This was the best gift he could have ever given me, apart from the obvious — that he was healthy and stayed around for good. But he couldn't do that so he gave us what he could.

Walking around with a child inside you that is not going to make it is like having a ticking time bomb inside you. You constantly wonder if today is the day that he will go. I constantly got smiles and questions about when was my baby due, which I had to heartbreakingly answer. I had to plan my baby's funeral as he still kicked inside of me.

My sister-in-law was pregnant at the same time and I had to watch her get larger, decorate her baby's room, buy clothes, and (hardest of all) get positive results from her scan that said she was going to have a healthy baby girl. I was filled with sadness that I could not be happy for her; I was jealous, angry, and so very hurt because it felt like ALL the world but me got to have healthy babies. I knew that this wasn't true but nobody around me had hurt the same way that I was hurting. That is why this book is such an excellent idea. I needed to know all the 'crazy' things that I was thinking were completely normal. Ever since William's birth, I have wanted to write about it and share his story — I am quite excited to think that maybe, just maybe, this is my opportunity.



Mark

My wife and I lost our little boy 23 years ago next week, and we still miss him like crazy. After having two girls, I was so excited to finally have a boy and I think I celebrated for two days. He was due to come out of hospital in two days time, when I received a call from my wife at 6.30am on the Sunday. Travis wasn't well and I needed to come to the hospital ASAP.

Rushing in, I was totally unprepared for seeing our little boy with tubes everywhere on his little body. Born totally healthy, although a bit jaundiced and lethargic, the doctor sat us down and told us that our little boy was dying from a heart condition known as Hypoplastic Left Heart. This was so unexpected and devastating.

We called our parents in Newcastle and Taree and asked the hospital to keep him alive until they could make it down. Later that day, when they had arrived and our two little girls were brought in, we unhooked Travis from all of the tubes keeping him alive and held him with our family until he peacefully passed away in our arms. We took lots of photos, locks of hair, footprints and handprints. The photo of our six and four y/o girls holding Travis still sits on our dresser.

We left him in the hospital while we went home and grieved and started organising the funeral. While this was happening, my wife wanted to see him again before the funeral, so we organised to visit him at the funeral home. Now this isn't for everyone, but for us it was a time to grieve alone and say goodbye in private.

The funeral was beautiful but, once again, when the coffin was carried in, its tiny size caught me by surprise and I choked back the tears. We took four weeks off and went away for a holiday and we cried and laughed. We started trying again six months later, and after a number of miscarriages we finally had another little boy, who we love dearly and is so precious to us.

Time makes things easier but you never forget and there is no right or wrong way to act — there is just your way and how you feel at the time. You will get many people giving you advice and trying to help. Just say thanks but do what is right for you. When I went back to work, many times I found a quiet corner and had a cry without anyone knowing. And don't feel guilty if you laugh, as this is good for you. Do believe though that time makes it easier.



Valerie

On July 21st of this year, our sweet baby girl, Charlotte, was born after two days of labour. She was just shy of twenty-three weeks — the age when doctors would have tried to save her. She was perfect, but small — very small. We had tried so hard to stop the labour but it continued, relentlessly. Our baby girl lived for an hour, then died in my arms.

We are walking, broken, but from time to time I see the beauty in life through my toddler, through the flowers that family lovingly planted in our garden, through the meals and gifts and flowers that are still coming for us, nearly three months on. Occasionally the sun holds warmth and I sense that we are going to make it, though grief is still a daily companion.

Losing a baby is a visceral, sickening thing. It feels as though my heart is literally broken and for a while there my whole body would be wringing with pain as I relived, over and over, those two days and her life and death.

Allowing the pain to be felt and releasing it as it comes, though it is utterly exhausting, helps me. Knowing that other women have walked this path and survived, helps me. We are not alone.

One day we will be richer people for this experience and we will be thankful for the brief song that was Charlotte, here on earth for that one hour.

Her life counted for something and all the babies that have gone count for something. If we let them, they add joy and purpose to our lives and their songs will impact the earth.



Sue Reid

Brent and I lost Isaac in 1999. He lived for seven days after being diagnosed with hypoplastic left heart syndrome. We brought him home ‘to give him a life’ and share our limited days with him, extended family, and our beloved rural community.

Often women are transferred to city centres when their babies have an unexpected outcome and they feel isolated, fearful, and unsure. By having Isaac home with us, all of our community banded together in many ways — baking, finances, acknowledging us as parents. They organised a ‘dedication ceremony’ within hours of us being home so we could gather and ‘give thanks for this precious life’. We shared songs and verses, and Brent was able to explain Isaac’s condition and share his story and our precious memories.

From there I found it helpful to create a keepsake book. We now share that book with our other beautiful children. We have traditions of making a cake on Isaac’s birthday. It helps us that other people knew him and rural communities are strong when the need arises.



Parenting the Dead

by Debra Bath

Nine years and eleven days ago, my first child was born. A beautiful girl, Lillienne Grace, weighing 5 lbs 12 ounces, arrived into this world at seven o'clock on a Friday evening.

Nine years ago, at half past eight in the morning, my first child died. I felt her last breath on my face as I leaned forward, kissing her forehead, her eyelids, soaking in her physical being.

How do you squeeze a lifetime of parenting into eleven days? A lifetime of love, care, fear, and joy. The simple answer is: you don't. Instead, you begin a journey of learning how to parent the dead.

In the past nine years, I have parented Lillienne in so many ways:

- » loving her
- » singing to her
- » celebrating her — with birthday cakes and picnics, flowers on her grave, acquiring meaningful things to signify her place in our family and in my heart
- » missing her
- » dreaming of her
- » feeling her in my empty arms
- » telling her story with pride and publicly acknowledging her
- » imagining her future, wondering how my little girl would (will) grow into a woman
- » protecting her, protecting her memory.

And I continue to long for any opportunity to do these things, to grow as her mother, to find more and better ways of letting her know that she is forever a part of me, always loved, never regretted.

Unless you are the parent of a dead child, it is very difficult to see how any of this could be psychologically and socially healthy. Parents of dead children are expected to 'move on', to leave that child behind as a past event, especially if that child was very young when he or she died — even more so if he or she was not full-term.

But it doesn't take theory or science to rebut such a response. Consider this: if our parent dies, are we expected to move on? To find another parent? To leave behind our mother or father, not speak their name, share memories of them, miss them,

continue to honour and remember them? No. We take them with us in our lives. We enjoy remembering our time with them. We cherish the things that remind us of them. We keep mementos, display photographs, we talk about them without hesitation, "... I remember when my Mum ..." or "... my Dad always said..." No one would bat an eyelid at such remarks, nor would the mere mention of their name stop conversation dead in its tracks.

Our loved ones, be they a 6-week-old baby in-utero or an 80-year-old grandmother, are a part of us and our life story. And storytelling is a part of being human. When we meet someone for the first time, we ask questions of each other, we share parts of our lives. As parents, we inevitably talk about our children.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the famous psychiatrist and author on grief, talked about the role of telling your story in the healing process. She says that it is important to share your grief, the pain, and in telling the story, the pain dissipates. "Our stories contain an enormous amount of pain, sometimes too much for one person to handle" (p.65, 'On Grief and Grieving' by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross & David Kessler, 2005).

It is true, what she says, that a griever needs to tell their story, and they may feel grateful at every new opportunity to do so. Even just to use their child's name, to hear it spoken out loud, is a blessing. But healing is a life-long experience. No grieving parent ever feels 'healed' or 'over it'.

More importantly, talking about a dead child is not just about pain, it is also about joy, and endless love. Pain may lessen over time, but love for a dead child does not.

A little over one year after Lillienne died, I remember a friend saying to my husband and I that they were surprised we weren't 'over it', and that perhaps one day soon we wouldn't need to tell her story. What other parent is asked not to talk of their children, to share in conversation with other parents and friends? Yes, I absolutely needed, and wanted, to tell the story of my daughter. I was a mother, and isn't that what mothers do? Because it isn't simply a story with a beginning and an end — it is ongoing. You don't ever stop being a parent to a child: young or old, living or dead.

Debra Bath, PhD, MAPS, is both a grieving mother and a psychologist. She previously worked as an academic, teaching psychology to university students for about 10 years, and now dedicates her time to her young son and runs a part-time private practice working with children and young adults. Debra has contributed several original and adapted pieces for this book.

Poem

Our children arrive like the floating cloud
appearing in our lives from nothing save our love;
Death is the silent wind that carries the cloud from the sky;
Where cloud and wind leave no trace,
your lives leave a shredded gaping tear in our skies that lets in a flood of tears;
There is no justice; this pain just is.

So, let the tears rain;
Smear mud on our faces;
There is no god,
just life and its graces,
death and its traces.
There is no justice; this rain just is.

Arriving empty-handed, departing empty-handed – this is human;
Greeting new life open-hearted and filling new hearts with love – this too
is human;
But, coming empty-handed and going empty-hearted – this is your tragedy,
our darlings;
So empty our human hearts, into these graves, depart;
There is no justice; this tragedy just is.

Finn, our pain came like a cloud too,
Appearing when we learned of your broken heart;
When we learned that we would never fill your heart with our love;
Now let the winds of time take this pain from us;
Let them soothe us as they usher you from our sky;
Let us love you both now, only in our dreams, and in our waking hours;
There is no justice; this love just is.

By Calvin Smith, July 2005.

Losing my son: a father's story

by Jarrod Maher

On the 21st of July 2010 at 2am, George Clarence Maher was born by the way of an emergency c-section. Virginia, my wife, had to be rushed to Calvary Hospital in Wagga in the middle of the night because of sudden serious bleeding.

The next 24 hours was a real rollercoaster ride — it went from being the worst to the best and back to the worst time of my life so far.

When we arrived at Wagga hospital the first concern was for my wife's life, as she was losing blood at a rapid rate. We were advised that she would have to have an emergency caesarean and the baby would be lucky to survive, as it was only 27 weeks old. My wife was then wheeled off for emergency surgery. An hour later (felt like 20) I was sitting with my mother waiting for some news, pacing the corridors feeling like vomiting, when a trolley with a baby on it went racing past. I was not sure if it was my baby and, even if it was, I was too frightened to follow just in case he/she was not alive. The nurse came and said, 'Come and see your beautiful little baby boy, he is over a 1000 grams (apparently that is a good thing) and is doing extremely well.'

I walked in and met my son, George, for the first time. He was beautiful — little, but long with good colour. I spoke with the pediatrician and obstetrician and everything was positive. They said being born at this stage he should have a 90% chance of survival. Being a bloke that likes a punt, I was extremely confident that everything was going to be fine.

My mum and family who were around came to meet George. This was a very special time for them. Now that George was looking good I focused on Virginia again, as she was taking a long time to come out of theatre. It was probably another hour before she came out of recovery. She was very pale and was still sedated. We wheeled her in to meet George and all she could ask was if he was okay. She loved his name and thought he sounded like a strong big boy. Virginia rubbed his leg and held his hand.

After speaking with the nurses and doctors again, we decided to try and get some sleep, as George would have to be transferred to a hospital in Sydney with the facilities to look after him until he would be big enough to come home. This would be happening at some stage that day. I tried to sleep on the floor next to Virginia, without a great deal of success. At about 7am all our family started to arrive to meet George. Pa parked his truck out the front hoping George might get a glimpse; Poppy arrived and was impressed with how long he was, thought he might be a front rower! During this time everyone was trying to get onto Brendan, my brother, as he was running a camp in the Tee Wee Islands. There is no phone coverage up there, so I am still unsure how he received the message. Paul and

Chris (Virginia's brothers) came up and met George, as everyone knew we would be heading to Sydney, so they might not see us for a while. Nat, my sister, came from West Wyalong with her children. I tried to tell her not to come over as it will be okay, just to come to Sydney in a week or two. Lucky she came then.

That day the neonatal team arrived and prepared George for his first flight. This was a long process. I was walking from Virginia's room to his all day. Most of my mates had found out and called by this time. The medical staff had warned us the first 24 hours were going to be the most critical, especially with having to move him to Sydney. The time came when George was ready to go. I was concerned about Virginia and thought she should come up a day or two later when she was a little stronger. It must have been mother's intuition, but there was no way she was going to miss that flight.

I said my goodbyes to both of them as they were wheeled into the ambulance. I touched George's leg and said, 'You will be fine.' This was an extremely tough time saying goodbye. I do remember clearly my little niece, Liv, came and cuddled my leg as I watched the ambulance leave.

I then had to organise how I was going to get to Sydney and I wanted this done quickly. Lisa, my sister, said she would drive me, so I went and said goodbye to my little girl, Sadie, and then packed my bag and headed off. Once again, this was a long period, not knowing how they both had travelled. I had not had a great deal of sleep but we battled our way to RPA.

As soon as I arrived I went straight down to visit George and the doctor gave us a run down on what was happening. Once again, they said the first 24 hours are critical and because he has had to fly up here that might not help. I was still confident though. We said our goodnight to George and headed to Virginia's room in the hospital maternity ward for another bad sleep.

The next morning I had to go and see George. As I walked into the nursery I could see a lot of people standing around George. One nurse told me to stay there and the doctor would come and see me in a second. At that moment my heart broke. I knew this could not be good. The doctor came to me after about 10 minutes and said that she would like to talk to both Virginia and me together. This was the longest walk of my life. As we walked in, Virginia knew that something was not right. The doctor explained that George had had a bleed to the brain and it was not good.

We went down and were with George for the rest of the day. During this time we bathed him, said everything we could to him, cuddled him, and he was baptised for the second time. Mum flew up to Sydney and arrived just after George had passed. This was a very sad time, but also to see your mother so upset. No one should have to go through losing a child or grandchild. Throughout the day we

had family and friends come to meet George and also say goodbye, and Virginia and I will always remember their support.

That night we were moved out of the area so we could not hear babies crying all night. We were given sleeping tablets but they didn't really help. The next morning we were taken to Sydney airport by ambulance with George and flown back to Wagga. Nursing him in a box on the flight home was awful. We arrived home and had to go back to the hospital where the funeral directors would pick George up.

From there we had to organise the funeral...

We feel extremely lucky to have had George in our lives for only a short period of time and he tried his best to stay with us. My only wish is that he could have stayed a bit longer.

George was going to be in Sydney for up to 13 weeks (or at the very least the first six weeks of his life, if he survived). I know when we flew him to Sydney I was worried about where I was going to stay, what to do with work, and even paying for parking whilst there sitting beside George every day. 'Pillars of Strength' would have given me the opportunity to get out and recharge the batteries, along with providing some of the day-to-day support, which I can guarantee I would have required.

In 2011, a couple of weeks after George's first anniversary, I had the opportunity to meet with Gary Sillett who was in the process of setting up 'Pillars of Strength'. Upon meeting Gary, our stories of our little boys, Isaac and George, were nearly exactly the same, except George was born in Wagga and Isaac in Sydney. An organisation like this would have been most beneficial to me when we had George and I believe 'Pillars of Strength' will be most beneficial to other dads and families. Since that meeting I have been directly involved with 'Pillars of Strength', and have helped to establish a program to provide support to regional dads — support that I didn't have.

Pillars of Strength supports dads with sick babies, and bereaved dads who have lost babies, by providing 'time out' (through access to sporting activities and opportunities), in-hospital support, and advice on complementary services and information. Please visit www.pillarsofstrength.com.au for more information.

A luminous *light*
remains where a
beautiful soul has passed.

- Antoine Boveau

Jaylah by Adrienne Gilligan, Heartfelt

Stories

Matt

November 16th 2011, the day our baby daughter was due to be born. My wife, Rachel, was 40 weeks pregnant and Rachel's Mum was staying with us. All was ready for the arrival of our second child. Instead, Rach woke me at 2am because she was concerned that she couldn't feel the baby moving. We both thought that since this was D-day, Bub was probably just getting into position and getting ready for the final push. But regardless, we called the delivery suite and they reassured us by asking us to come in. So in we went.

Our calm soon became deep concern as the doppler machine couldn't find a heartbeat. They went and got the ultrasound machine, but it was such an inappropriately cheap piece of crap that it couldn't see anything much at all. Our obstetrician was called and by this stage my wife and I were in full-blown hysterical panic. After waiting for our doctor to arrive, and some more fiddling around with the ultrasound machine, our obstetrician turned to my wife and simply said, "I'm sorry."

I don't recall too much after that. It was a blur. We came home knowing we'd be back later that day for my wife to actually deliver the baby. We informed family and friends, we cried, we held each other, we stared off into space by ourselves. I can honestly say that I would not wish this horror on any other human being. My wife was magnificent throughout this entire ordeal and the aftermath of it all. Such strength, such grace under pressure, I will be forever in awe of her for that.

The hospital's social worker, Deb DeWilde, is the closest thing to a Saint I've ever personally met. She met us on the worst day of our lives and allowed us to come to the realisation that at the centre of all this was our baby daughter, Charlotte. A simple knot in the cord was all it took to end her life. Other than that, she was a perfectly formed and beautiful baby girl.

Fast-forward to today and Rach is again pregnant, due in January. Things have certainly 'gotten better', but Charlotte will forever be a part of our lives and her two brothers will always know of their sister, who never quite made it into the world.



Ryan Calkin

On the 23rd of July 2011 we got to meet our baby girl, who was born still. That day will always remain in my memory as a very special day. Though I may not speak of that day or our daughter as much as my wife, I still have my own way to honour my daughter. She will always be missed and my love for her will always be strong. Arielle was 36-weeks when the realisation set in that she hadn't moved in some time, which was confirmed by an ultrasound. This moment still remains quite clear, even though it was such a mix of emotions and thoughts. I think the shock is such a state that, as a male, you feel hopeless that something is out of your control.

Arielle was born one day after my wife's 31st Birthday, and four days after we got that life-changing news. In some ways we consider ourselves thankful that we had these four days to grieve and make some of the harder decisions before we met her. From the beginning we had decided that we owed it to Arielle to give her the best we could in her honour, and that is exactly what we did.

My wife was amazing and we made sure that as a family we included our children, Addison (6) and Arabella (5), who were also amazing, despite what had happened.

At just over a year and 14 months since this happened, we still talk about Arielle and we all deal with our grief in our own way. I found that I tend to mostly think about her when I have time to myself, driving and listening to music like Coldplay or Adele.

Since losing Arielle we have had a little rainbow baby Boy, Blake Riley, who was due to be born on Arielle's birthday, however we brought him into the world on the 16th of July 2012. When he is old enough we will share our story with him and tell him about the precious girl that is now a precious star.

We deal with grief and loss in our own way and time. Even though as a male I may look okay, I haven't forgotten our baby girl.

In time, choose to laugh, enjoy life, and family; by no means does this mean that you have forgotten your journey and the precious child that is here in memory.

XX In memory of Arielle Emma Calkin.



David Moffett

Today is August 26.

Tomorrow is August 27 — the birthday of Australia's greatest cricketer, and probably the world's finest sportsman ever, Sir Donald Bradman.

August 27 is also my son's birthday—August 27, 1992.

However, it is the events of August 26, 1992 that are indelibly etched in my mind. August 26, 1992 was a Wednesday. I'd been out to Al's Golf Centre and was heading back to Oatlands for my regular afternoon game of golf. When I got the call. On my mobile phone (well, in those days it was an in-car fixed phone).

The call was from a lady who worked with my wife's mother. She said, 'Jayne's at the doctor.' Jayne had an appointment at the obstetrician's office that morning. She was at 36 weeks. And then she said those words I'll never forget, 'They're having trouble finding a heartbeat.'

Much of the next twenty-two hours is still a blur. Doctor's office, home, hospital, birth, home... My wife has more memory of the details. I just remember arriving home the next morning, parking the car beside the house, and seeing our next-door neighbour over the side fence. I still remember my wife saying to her, 'Oh Joy, I've lost my baby.'

Thirty-six weeks is eight and a half months — close enough to full term.

The events of the next few days are a blur. Friends, family, time off work. I was back to work on the Tuesday in a daze. The funeral arrangements were stressful — the next months were stressful. People would ask Jayne, 'Where's your baby?' It was tough for her. Their comments, though meant to be kind, were often insensitive. But rarely did anyone ask me, 'How are you going?'

Hardly ever.

James would have turned twenty-one tomorrow — August 27.



Gary Sillett

For all the Dads who have lost children

Father's Day is a day of mixed emotions for me. A bittersweet day. Every year, I find myself engaged in a delicate balancing act.

There is the joy of the day and being a father to Callum, and the sense of loss over my other son, Isaac, not being with us and thinking of what our family could have been.

You see, when people ask me how many children I have, I always tell them that I have two wonderful boys. But people will only ever see me with one son.

My second son passed away in December 2010 after two days with us in the NICU at Royal North Shore Hospital.

In the lead up to, and on, Father's Day there is excitement in a normal household. This is a day of recognition for fathers for the work they do and the role they play and, most importantly, the joy they experience being a dad to their children.

Sadly, so many men, once excited at the prospect of being a dad (many for the first time), never get to experience a "normal" Father's Day. Some also never get to experience a normal fatherhood at all.

These men are part of a club, which swells by over 3,000 new members each year through stillbirth, neonatal, or infant loss alone.

Coping with the loss of your child at any time is both emotionally heartbreaking and physically devastating. It is a pain that endures. You never know the moment when your next "down day" will come, no matter how long ago you lost your child.

Modern society has conditioned men to conceal their emotions as a sign of strength, but a grieving father feels the loss of a child just as keenly as the mother will. Although men don't express themselves like women do, it does not mean that we grieve any less.

That's why a special occasion like Father's Day is a day of potentially tumultuous emotions for us dads, as it can exacerbate the hurt of our loss and our wistful thinking about what could have been. These feelings may not always be able to be kept in check, even though we try to be strong for our families.

To me and for the members of our club, Father's Day is both a celebration and an acknowledgement that we too are each a father to a child we adore — a child who is sadly not with us today.

While some men may prefer to let Father's Day pass without any acknowledgement, it is important to understand that a father who has lost a child of any age is still a dad, his child is still the child he loves like only a parent can. And his loss is an anguish unimaginable to the very lucky majority.

For me, commemorating Father's Day is a way to remember our lost child with love and to honour my role as his father. This day (as well as Isaac's birthday and

Mother's Day) is a very special time for me and my family. It's a time where we shut ourselves away from the rest of the world. It is my family time to be spent only with my wife and my living son where we remember Isaac and we do something special together without any interruptions.

That is what works for me, but of course every father will be different. Some men will want distance on this day, and some men will want to be around friends and family.

If you want to support a grieving dad during this time, the best gift I believe you can give him (and a mum at any time) is to acknowledge their child and recognise their loss, no matter when it occurred. It's a loss that never goes away. Affirm his role as dad.

I miss Isaac every day and treasure my precious time with him. I'm proud to be his dad. I'm proud to call Isaac my son, now and forever.

Gary Sillett is a director of Pillars of Strength. Pillars of Strength supports bereaved dads who have lost babies and dads with sick babies, by providing 'time out' (through access to sporting activities and opportunities), in-hospital support, and advice on complementary services and information. Please visit www.pillarsofstrength.com.au for more information.

Never Forgotten



Blake by Kate Ellis, Heartfelt



No recipe for grieving
by Debra Bath

One thing you learn with grief is that there is no recipe provided, no set rules to play the game. You have to find your own way through what sometimes feels like a jungle so dense that it is impossible to see ahead, or an ocean so rough and unpredictable that you never know when the next wave will hit you, or when the one that is currently tossing you around will subside enough for you to catch your breath and steel yourself for the force of the next one.

Another thing you learn is that everyone grieves differently. When parents experience the death of a child they are often advised that men and women grieve differently, and that this difference can impact negatively on their relationship. But it isn't so much about gender, about men retreating into their cave and not expressing their feelings and women being left without their partner to talk to, but rather it's about every individual finding their own way to cope. There is no right way to grieve. It is complex and dynamic and varies between individuals, and among cultures, generations, and religions.

About three months after my baby daughter died, I was chatting to a friend and I decided in the moment to be honest about how I was feeling. Being honest with someone isn't easy. We tend to get so many messages that raw feelings aren't for conversation, people are mostly trying to convince you that you don't feel the way you do, or at least that you won't feel that way for long. So I took a chance with this friend, and revealed that I was desperately sad, traumatised, with each day bringing deep pain. My friend responded, "Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. I had thought you weren't grieving — you know, you don't cry, you talk about her and what happened without tears."

At first I was angry. How dare she presume that I wasn't grieving! Did she also think I didn't love my baby? Did she think I was already 'over' it? But then I realised that everyone goes through life with preconceived ideas about what something is going to be like, including grief. We grow up with models of how people will behave in certain circumstances: what a funeral will be like, a wedding, even what behaviour to expect when dining in a restaurant. It is all learned over time, from when we are children observing everything that goes on around us. One thing we learn is that men and women are supposed to be different. Unfortunately, what we don't often learn is just how much we are the same, or how it doesn't matter whether you are male or female, but what makes you, "You" — personality, gender, age, experience, family genetics, and so on.

It's true, some men express grief in very different ways from women. Indeed, in our society we tend to learn from a very early age in life that "men don't cry". It's

no wonder then that some men are not able to easily express emotion. They don't know how to, and certainly don't feel safe in doing so. On the other hand, it is expected that women will cry, and if they don't express their grief outwardly it may be assumed that they aren't grieving.

Unfortunately, my friend didn't think about what makes me, "Me". Had she thought about what she already knew about me, she would have realised that I don't often cry. I hold back my tears, my emotion, so well that sometimes it hurts on the inside. I don't know why. It's a part of me, of how I've grown up. I've always been this way. My lack of tears does not reflect the amount of emotion I am feeling — in fact, it is more the opposite. I am a 'feeler'. I feel everything — my feelings and other's feelings — so deeply that perhaps this is why I don't cry much. If I did, I may well be crying most days.

While each person grieves differently, there is a common range of things that individuals may experience. Grief is the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual response to actual or threatened loss of a person, thing, or place to which we are emotionally attached (John Bowlby, 1969, in "Attachment and Loss"). Grief can involve a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and experiences. You may experience physical fatigue, muscle aches, chest pains or tightness, dryness or a lump in the throat, dizziness, nausea, restlessness, sleep or appetite disturbance, or sexual dysfunction. You may also experience having a "sluggish" mind, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, intrusive thoughts that don't seem to go away, confusion, or disorientation. At times you might think you are going "crazy". You may feel a sense of futility, hopelessness, or uncertainty about who you are now that your loved one is dead. You may feel nothing — nothing but numbness, hollowness, or emptiness. Or you may feel everything from sadness, loneliness, anger, betrayal, fear, guilt, despair, shame, anxiety, alienation, detachment, or simply a great overwhelming feeling.

When someone dies there are often many things that need to be done, and the initial time afterwards can be very busy; days filled with jobs, visitors, phone calls, deliveries, events such as the funeral, family get-togethers, appointments at the doctors, solicitors, and so on. Death can be a busy time. And often, you are still in shock: a process that keeps your mind and body safe from the barrage of thoughts, feelings, and experiences that make up grief.

Sometimes people mistake this period of time for a person coping well and 'getting over it'. Sometimes we, the griever, don't even realise this is happening to ourselves. Sometimes, the development of grief for each person is so different, he or she feels they are worlds apart from everyone else. Sometimes, this feeling of being out of sync with another can end a marriage, partnership, or friendship.

After our daughter died, and then our son, my husband's GP advised us to "care for one another and be careful, because the divorce rate is much higher for

couples who experience the death of a child”. And it’s true — many couples do find it extremely difficult to find connection with one another in their grief.

Everyone grieves differently. Understanding that each person’s experience and expression of grief is different can help a long way to keeping in sync, even when your grief may seem worlds apart. One person may want to talk a lot about the dead child, what happened, how they are feeling. Another person may not know how to even put a few words together to explain what it means to them. They may not even know how they are coping, other than having a scary and overwhelming mix of thoughts and feelings. Some people may not want to burden their partner with their own grief, knowing that he or she is also intensely grieving. Some may be so frightened and overwhelmed by their partner’s depth of pain that the knowledge of their suffering is too much to bear right now. Some may not want to make their partner’s pain greater by sharing their own pain. Some may not want to acknowledge their own pain because they are frightened that they themselves will simply not be able to cope. There are so many possibilities.

There is a simple lesson: everyone grieves and responds differently. Showing emotion and communicating, or not, does not reflect the degree of grief or love that the individual has for the deceased. Nor does it reflect the importance that this event has in their life.

Grieving differently is inevitable. Building a shared understanding of this experience can help to keep people feeling ‘in sync’, while travelling on very different paths.

Debra Bath, PhD, MAPS, is both a grieving mother and a psychologist. She previously worked as an academic, teaching psychology to university students for about 10 years, and now dedicates her time to her young son and runs a part-time private practice working with children and young adults.

Stories

Matt Silvester

I'm doing this for my stillborn son

“You don't know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have” – author unknown

29 September 2010 is a day we will never forget. Our lives changed forever. Our whole world was turned upside down when our son, Samuel, was stillborn at 36 weeks term. Samuel's umbilical cord got tied in a true knot and he had cut off his own oxygen supply. The pregnancy had been completely normal up to this point too, with no complications at all. Losing Samuel was devastating to our family and friends and I clearly remember thinking at the time, “If we can get through this, we can get through anything.”

Today we will be celebrating Samuel's second birthday. It's hard to know how to spend the day. We could hide indoors feeling sorry for ourselves or we could go out and face the world. Should we have birthday cake to celebrate? We couldn't bring ourselves to buy a cake for his first birthday. Last year we celebrated Samuel's birthday by releasing balloons from a bridge over a lake at a local park. We went to a party shop and all chose balloons to release.

Our eldest son Oliver (8) chose a balloon with soccer balls all over it “because I would have taught Samuel how to play soccer.” Thomas (6) chose a bright orange balloon with stars “because Samuel is up in heaven near the stars.” My wife, Alison, and I both chose balloons with butterflies on them. We had released balloons at Samuel's funeral so it seemed a fitting way to celebrate and butterflies have come to symbolise Samuel. I am sure we will do the same again this year.

I often wonder what Samuel would look like now. He was the spitting image of Oliver when he was born. He had my “big” big toe! Would he have light hair and blue eyes like Oliver, or dark hair and hazel eyes like Thomas? What would he be doing? No doubt terrorising his older brothers, I would imagine. Samuel is very much part of our family and we often talk about him. The boys bring his name up unexpectedly, which always makes me happy. Every time any of us see a butterfly we say “hi” to Samuel. I am determined that we will never forget Samuel, although I know there is no way that we ever will.

Since we lost Samuel I have been determined to do anything I can to help others who have experienced a similar loss. I ran the Sydney marathon in September last year in memory of Samuel and to raise money and awareness for The Stillbirth

Foundation Australia. I cannot describe how much it saddens me that on average six families every day in Australia have a stillborn child and their lives have been indelibly changed. I found that training for and running the marathon was good for me as part of my own grieving process. It gave me something positive to focus on and newfound purpose. I was doing this for Samuel.

To be honest, the day of the marathon is a bit of a blur for me. It was an unseasonably warm spring day with temperatures reaching 31C during the run. The heat and the emotion of running for Samuel really got to me and from 27km to the end (42.2km) I was doing more walking than running. With Samuel on my mind, I was determined to make it to the end. I still laugh when I think back to just after I had crossed the finishing line. Thomas came running up to me, scolding me, by saying, “Dad that was so boring. You took so long!” I was completely overwhelmed to have raised \$7,672 in sponsorship for The Stillbirth Foundation, which was beyond my wildest dreams. I did promise Alison that I would never run a marathon again.

Early this year on my daily bus ride home from work I noticed that entries were open for the New York Marathon on 4 November 2012—coincidentally just two days after our 10 year wedding anniversary.

I half-heartedly read the information on the New York marathon website about the lottery draw for international entrants. The website stated that the percentage of successful applicants accepted for my category would be between 8–12%, depending on the total number of applicants. I thought “what the heck” and decided to give it a go anyway and entered the international lottery draw.

Alison and I actually met in New York in 1996 when we were both part of an international exchange program — Alison is from Orange, NSW, and I am originally from Kent in England. For the past few years we had said that it would be great to spend our tenth anniversary in New York. With Alison due to give birth to our fourth child in March, we had discounted going this year. I am delighted to say that in March our beautiful daughter, Lucy, was born.

I had pretty much forgotten about my New York marathon entry until, to my complete surprise, I received an email in late April saying, “Congratulations! This is the beginning of your New York City Marathon journey.” I was in! Wow! As a friend said to me at the time, “Maybe fate is playing its part. After all you guys have been through, the arrival of Lucy and with the marathon coinciding with your 10 year wedding anniversary. You just HAVE to go to New York!”

After a lot of discussions we have decided to take our children too. Oliver and Tom were so incredibly strong for us that there was no way we could go without them. Lucy will be only eight months old, so it is a shame that she won't remember the trip.

So after promising to never run another marathon I will be running in New York, again in memory of our son Samuel. This year I am also running for bereaved dads and for a recently formed charity called Pillars of Strength.

I consider myself fortunate that I have always been someone that can openly talk about things, and I find that talking helps. But I know this doesn't come easy for a lot of dads who tend to keep their feelings to themselves. Pillars of Strength provides a peer support group with other bereaved dads who have experienced a very similar tragic loss. No matter how great your family and friends are, it is hard for anyone to truly understand that feeling of utter loss, devastation, and pain that you feel when you lose a child, which is why organisations like Pillars of Strength are so important.

Update one year on:

Well we all went to New York for the 2012 marathon and had the family holiday of our lives, with memories that will last us all a lifetime—especially Oliver and Thomas. Unfortunately, the day after we arrived, New York was hit by the remnants of Hurricane Sandy, which caused considerable flooding, loss of power and, sadly, loss of life. Rightly, considering the state parts of New York were in, the marathon was cancelled. I still couldn't help feeling the most disappointed I have ever felt in my life that I wouldn't get to run for Samuel and for my sponsors. As we heard the news of the cancellation Alison turned to me and said, "It's ok — I give you permission to come back next year."

At that stage I had raised just under \$5,000 for Pillars of Strength and I thought that I had to run a marathon somewhere. I checked a few websites and the next marathon in NSW was in Orange — Alison's hometown! So in February 2013, I ran the inaugural Orange marathon as one of just 80 entrants. The crowds were somewhat smaller in Orange than they would have been in New York, but at least I had numerous friends cheering their support around the course. Oliver and Thomas ran the last kilometre with me and we crossed the finish line holding hands. In the end I had raised \$5,154 for Pillars of Strength.

We recently celebrated Samuel's third birthday. We were up in Bathurst for a family wedding and released balloons at the top of Mount Panorama. The releasing of balloons has become the way we celebrate Samuel's birthday. When the time came to release the balloons, Lucy (now 18 months) wouldn't let go of hers and then carried it around everywhere with her for the next few days! We thought this was precious. I have found that each birthday has been a bit more bearable than the last, although I still kind of want to just survive the day in one piece. I don't think we will ever have a cake. Every year, I am touched by the number of friends who remember what the day is and send us messages to say that they are thinking of us.

Alison was true to her word and I am heading back to New York in November 2013. I have already decided that this will be my final marathon, and this time I know I actually mean it! Again, I will be fundraising for Pillars of Strength. Unfortunately, I will be going on my own this year, but my brother and his wife will be joining me from the UK for the weekend and I am still lucky to have a number of close friends who live in and around New York to cheer me on.

I think that running three marathons in memory of Samuel has been a fitting tribute. Over the past three years I have found that training for marathons has helped me immensely with my grieving process for Samuel. I don't think I could have survived as well as I have without having something to focus on. In the future, instead of running marathons and raising funds for charities, I plan to give my time to the charities instead. Hopefully my small contribution will, in some way, make the lives of others who experience a similar loss slightly more bearable. I still live by the quote I read not long after Samuel was stillborn: "You don't know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have." But in saying that, don't be afraid to cry. Don't bottle up your emotions. Talk. You will find it helps.



Ben Howard

Hamish's Story.

Hamish Aubrey Howard was born full term on the 22nd of December 2004. After a long labour, he was born by emergency caesarean at 12.30pm.

We were all so happy when we held our healthy baby boy; he had lots of visitors, from grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and his big brother Fergus. All seemed to be going fine with him until Christmas Eve. I headed off to the pub for a few drinks with some mates to “wet his head”, when I received a call from the hospital to come straight away because he had become gravely ill and they were unsure what was wrong with him.

When I arrived at the hospital he was in the special care nursery with a team of doctors and nurses around him. The paediatrician came to speak to us and said that it looked like it was a heart complication but they were unsure of the complexity of it, and it would be touch and go for him until the NETS team arrived from Sydney. We had Hamish baptised as, at this stage, we were unsure of the outcome for him.

The Doctors and nurses worked on him and had to resuscitate him once while we waited for the team to arrive, which they did at about 11.00pm. On Christmas morning, Katie, Hamish, and I were all airlifted to Sydney airport at 2.00am, where two ambulances were waiting — one for Hamish and I; and one for Katie. Since Katie was still a patient at Calvary, she needed to be admitted to Westmead hospital while Hamish and I went to Westmead Children's hospital Grace ward, which is their neonatal intensive care ward.

We met with the cardiologist at 10.30am on Christmas morning, which really makes you appreciate what wonderful staff are at our hospitals 24/7, 365 days a year. When we met with the cardiologist he explained to us that Hamish had transposition of the greater arteries (TGA) and a hole in his heart (VSD). So at this stage he needed to have a minor operation to put another hole in his heart to help with the mixing of the blood. This all went well and I was able to hold him by that afternoon.

On Boxing day, Katie was able to start feeding him, which was great. We met with the surgeon who advised us to wait for him to get a little stronger before he had his open heart surgery. He explained in great detail how the operation would work and that it would take between four to six hours. He was booked to have this operation on 12th January, and this was the start of a massive rollercoaster ride for all of us.

We took Hamish up to surgery at 8.00am. We gave him a kiss and the staff took him away. We went to do a little bit of shopping to distract us from the long wait. We got back to the hospital at about 12.00pm and had some lunch. Then our pager went. We were all very anxious to hear the result.

When we got up to intensive care the surgeon spoke to us and said everything had gone well and that there was some small leakage, but so far so good. We went in to see him, which was pretty hard as he was quite swollen from the operation and had tubes coming out of him everywhere. His heart had started to race and the doctors were really concerned about this. He then went into cardiac arrest and they had to resuscitate him while we were there. His heart stopped beating for 15 mins, but they managed to revive him and felt positive that he had good oxygen flow at all times.

Hamish had several things against him that day. He went back into surgery at 4.00am the next morning to be put on a heart lung machine as his little heart was struggling, and this would give it a break and help him recover a little. As anyone could imagine, this was very hard for all of us to cope with, especially seeing him so helpless. Hamish would go on to have another five operations after this. Every time they thought that had fixed the problem, something else would go wrong.

Hamish never opened his eyes again to see us after his first operation. He endured a lot in his 28 days of life, especially in those days after his major surgery. His final day with us, he again endured another operation, which was to close his chest. All was okay for the first few hours, but then everything went downhill from there. He went into cardiac arrest again. The nurses and doctors worked on him for close to 30 minutes, when our surgeon came to us to say that he could make the decision or we could, but he thought it was time to stop. We all agreed that it would be best for Hamish to stop the resuscitation, and Hamish passed away on the 18th January 2005 at 7.45pm.

We were able to spend time with him and cuddle him. Fergus, our then 20-month-old, came in as well—he may never remember this, but we will never forget it.

Hamish still had all the tubes and wires in him from the surgery, and his body had to have an autopsy done on it.

I think all you can feel is numb when you lose your child. We slowly walked back to our room after leaving him for the last time. I think we were all too shocked to really talk. We flew back to Wagga the next day. I just wanted to be as far away from the hospital and all of the memories as I could. Hamish's body would follow us in a few days.

When we got back to Wagga it was good to be back, but something was missing and will be for the rest of our lives. Hamish was buried on Monday the 24th of January. We were so lucky to have wonderful family and friends who supported us through this part of our lives. It is a journey that will never be forgotten. We still

talk about Hamish everyday. We have since had two girls, Sofia and Eliza. They are very much aware of their brother who is in heaven, and most nights we look for his special star.



Ben Sladic

Being a father.

I don't take anything for granted anymore; I thought it would all follow the plan — how wrong I was.

I learnt to adjust my focus when Alexander came along; things that once took more from me had to settle for less. This is as it should be; I was a dad, and I had a son to look after, to care for, to guide, to love, and to cherish.

The feelings grew stronger, the anticipation and excitement with the news of another pregnancy. How quickly things can change. A routine visit; all is not as it should be.

The next few weeks feel like months. Routine is thrown out the window. I had a 19 month old son to look after and a '20+ week' old son battling increasingly grim odds.

There is no chance of 'viability'. Declan arrives too early. I am numb. Amidst our shock and despair we follow the midwife's advice, and we take photos, we bathe and dress our son. I adopt my 'role' and somehow we get through the next few weeks. I return to the routine of work, seeking shelter from the reality of what has occurred.

Many months pass, we find out we are expecting another baby. My feelings are different this time; I have the same anticipation and excitement, but also the uneasiness of knowing what can go wrong.

Surely not again. The look on the obstetrician's face gives away more than he realises. We are back in the hospital, the same soaps and smells from the year before. My daughter, Ella, is born at 24.5 weeks. With enormous strength and courage she lives for five long weeks in the NICU.

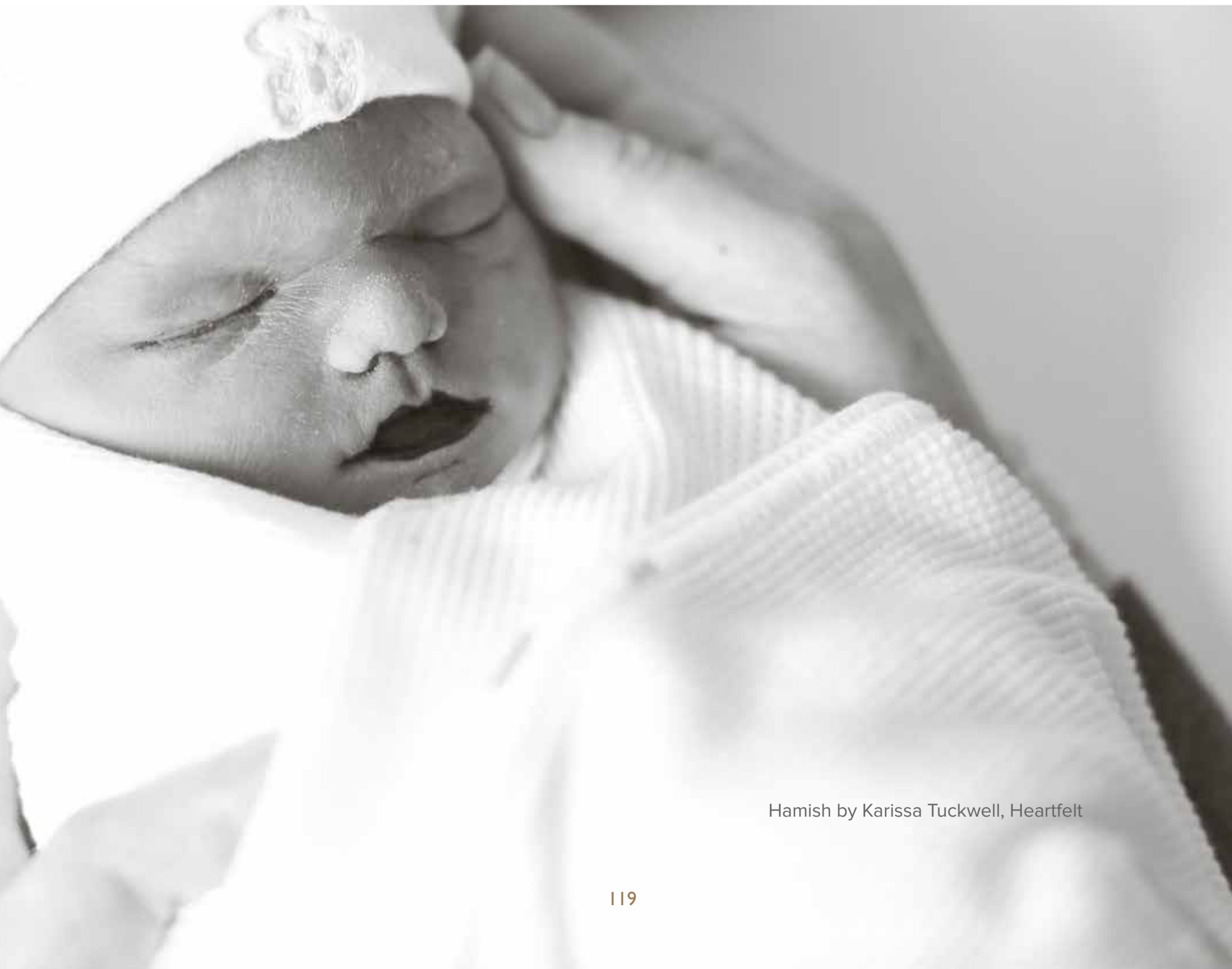
Everything is put on hold. A strong connection is formed. She senses my presence, strongly grips my little finger and etches her piercingly beautiful gaze in my mind forever. I don't hasten back to the routine this time. We spend precious time together as a family. We talk and agree the ways we want to remember all of our children. We discuss how important it is to help others feel comfortable to remember and talk openly about our children with us.

We are also offered hope. After the loss of Declan and Ella, we are given more specific medical advice. We confront our fears. We travel to Melbourne for surgery to prevent a reoccurrence of what had previously happened.

We soon find out that Kylie is pregnant. We anxiously pass through the second trimester this time. A date is chosen and with almost 'German precision' we welcome our beautiful big smiling baby boy, Isaac, into the world.

I now have a six-year-old and an almost two-year-old son to look after, to care for, and to guide. I will always have four precious children to love and to cherish.

Each of my children provides me with amazing memories, insights, and strength that I hope to draw from to always lead a fulfilling and positive life.



Dan MacDonald

Father's Day.

Tearing off the wrapping paper to a pair of woollen socks or a six-pack of underwear will mean a lot to me on Sunday. It's the first Father's Day I get to enjoy as a dad, and I will revel in every minute of it. I'll tell anyone who listens about the moment my son's head first entered the world and how his eyes instantly locked onto mine. I'll be milestone man for a day — proud to remember his first smile and to boast about him being the biggest boy at mother's group.

Last October my wife and I conceived for a third time. Relying on a three-stick policy of pregnancy confirmation, to say the affirmative result pleased us would be an understatement. We were buoyed by the news, and we felt especially fortunate that my wife could get pregnant.

Although we had endured two miscarriages, the positive tests lent us some permission to be excited, but I felt an overwhelming urge to keep my happiness in check.

Before the first miscarriage, my wife and I had been trying to have a baby for six months. Our doctor shared with us all the dos and don'ts of getting pregnant. We cut the don'ts from our diet and did the dos like our lives depended on them. Our diligence proved our dedication to the cause, and showed each other we were committed.

Learning we had succeeded the first time, I was on a high for days. I celebrated by buying parenting and names books. We told our families and friends. Biologically, I had fathered a foetus. But, significantly, in mind and emotion, I was a parent, a dad; our child was going to grow up fortunate — well educated and part of a loving family.

A fortnight later, the joy turned sour. Scans revealed that at eight weeks, our baby had died. It happens to one in five pregnancies, our obstetrician told us. I was angry for getting ahead of myself. We contributed to that alarming statistic again in August.

Our third time we vowed not to talk names and I balked at plotting our baby's future. We would initially limit the people we told to those we could rely upon for support.

As the pregnancy developed the more hopeful I got — I wanted a healthy baby but my hope was negative. I didn't want anything bad to happen. At the halfway point, when my wife began feeling the baby's kicks, her optimism soared. 'This is the

one,' she would say to reassure me, but also because it's what she believed. I tried desperately to mirror her confidence. But I found it difficult.

I was convinced the 'third-time-lucky' theory wouldn't apply to us. I urged myself not to be pessimistic. Doubting my baby's ability made me feel guilty and embarrassed.

Thousands of Australian dads grapple with pregnancy loss. Every year, there are about 2000 stillbirths and 850 newborn deaths in Australia. In the majority of these cases, the causes are never known — there are 10 times more unexplained stillbirths than there are cot deaths. Often bereaved parents spend the rest of their lives wondering what went wrong.

They should be celebrating Father's Day too, but for many it is a day of mixed emotions. I know this year is different for me, and I can feel blessed to have a healthy baby to share it with. I will also wonder what might have been.

So there is more to my Father's Day than a gift I can wear. As well as celebrating the life I can enjoy with my son, I'll remember the miscarriages my wife and I endured on our way and reflect on the emotional exhaustion of nine anxious months.

But I'll consider myself fortunate, for there are thousands of Australian fathers who never got to take their babies home. So, to all dads: Happy Father's Day.



Dan MacDonald is employed by Sands, an organisation that provides peer support to parents whose babies have died. Visit www.sands.org.au for more information.

Adam Awty

The 11th of July 2009 — a date that marked the end of the joy and innocence of pregnancy for my wife and I. This was the day that six words, “I am sorry, your baby has died,” forever changed us and defined our future.

Our scheduled visit to the sonographer for the 20 week scan was supposed to be the day we found out if our impending arrival could wear our son’s hand-me-downs or if pink would be the new blue. But instead, it turned out to be one of the most defining and saddest days of our lives, when the joy turned to tears, fear, and anger when no heartbeat could be found.

Stunned and in shock, we drove home to finish the cleaning for our first open house, while we waited to talk to the obstetrician. Naively, I thought we would just have to wait for a miscarriage to occur, but no — our baby needed to be delivered in hospital by inducement.

We then spent the next 24 hours in the delivery ward waiting for the inevitable. That was one of the cruelest things I think could happen to anyone, to have to watch your wife endure the pain of labour, knowing that it was all for nothing, knowing that we would go home without our baby.

It’s been over four years since we delivered our middle daughter on the 12th of July. For most people a delivery means a healthy baby — for us, this time, it meant the beginning of one of the toughest journeys for, unlike most babies, Matilda was delivered without joy or the sound of a baby’s first cry — she had died in utero and was delivered a few days short of 20 weeks gestation.

Even today, some days it is all a blur — like it was all a dream, yet other times it feels like it was yesterday. 12th July 2009 will stay with me for as long as I take breath. In life, you expect to lose your grandparents and your parents, but never your children. I never got to know my daughter because she never got a chance to live, but that doesn’t matter, she is still my daughter nonetheless.

That day and the days that followed are etched in my memory and can never be forgotten. But therein lies one of the difficult journeys that you are thrust into. I have grieved for the loss of my daughter, but I have learned to live for today and what I can control. As a man, you are expected (or sometimes you put the expectation on yourself) to be strong, to shoulder the load for everyone else, to try and fix the unfixable. As a man, you may not cry regularly for what you have lost, you may not speak your child’s name often, but you do remember and feel the emptiness from time to time. As my wife regularly reminds me when we look in the back seat of the car, there is an empty space in the middle where Matilda should be but for some weird twist of fate.

While it does get easier, it is never gone. I can still see my wife's pain for a loss we cannot explain nor understand why. In the early days, weeks, and months I wanted to fix it but I couldn't and I still can't, and that is hard for a man who, for some primal reason, needs and wants to protect his family from pain. I have learnt that losing a baby is a taboo subject for many because they don't know what to say or how to react; so when people would ask if you only have one child you say yes because it is easier, when in reality all you really want to say is, 'No, I have two but one's dead.' Bit of a conversation stopper really!

I have also learnt that men and women grieve differently and are impacted in different ways from the loss of a child — my wife wanted to talk and I didn't. I love my wife, but I know I struggled to give her what she needed at times and this is hard, but grief is a very personal and individual thing and we all get through it differently.

It's funny that after the appropriate grieving period had passed it was like everything was ok again, but it's wasn't — our demons were still there, and they impacted us as we tried to have another child while grieving for the loss of Matilida. I know a lot of people are not comfortable with grief (me included) or talking about such unpleasant issues as the loss of a child. But we are determined not to forget her.

Each year we continue to acknowledge Matilda as a family, with a cake and spending the day together. After all, our daughter lived in my wife's womb, and I was there when she was delivered. She is my living children's sister, our parent's granddaughter, and our sibling's niece. She was just taken before they got to meet her. If she was born and took a breath would that make her more real? For us, no!

The irony is that my son, who never met his sister, is most at ease to talk about her. He has two sisters, just one died in mum's tummy and is in heaven now with his grandfather (who he has also never met). He is quite happy to tell anyone, even the girl at the checkout, about his sister in heaven.

While the time has passed and we now have a beautiful sister to Matilda, my memories are still strong. I still remember the day I had to talk to a funeral director to have Matilda cremated; I remember the support of the great midwife, Barb; I remember calling my parents and blubbering like a baby because I didn't know what to do (who would?); I remember the sadness and emptiness in my wife's eyes; I remember being scared that it would happen again; I remember the little package wrapped in a blanket that I was too scared to hold; but most of all, I remember my daughter!



Anonymous father's story

How do you tell someone that you are having a down day? Although you may exude strength on the outside, you feel helpless, weak and alone, and don't know how to ask for help.

This is what I felt, and on occasions still do (as I am sure many other dads do), after losing my child.

It is not in a man's nature to ask for help when he is feeling down or alone. We have been brought up to believe that men must be stoic and strong in the face of all adversity, even when all we want is someone to ask how we are.

Who would have thought that in today's modern society that it is still a challenge for people to recognise a dad's loss and ask how he is, or if he's okay? (Although things seem to be slowly changing, with organisations like Pillars of Strength being around.) A dad's loss, at whatever stage, is a burden that he will try and deal with in his own way, because society has programmed us to do so.

We had many of our family and friends ask us what can they do to help, but in the state of losing your child you sometimes want people to do something for you without asking, like dropping off a cooked meal. Although we knew people's hearts were in the right place, we wanted action and support, not pity, as it is sometimes hard enough to function let alone take care of yourself in the early days after your loss.

In saying this, we were also probably to blame. Trying to ask for help was and still is the hardest thing for me to do, and to this day I still probably haven't asked for help as much as I should have, even when I have desperately needed it. I did try and ask for help early but it seemed a bit hard. I tried counselling and found it wasn't for me. I found that I couldn't handle being enclosed within four walls with someone asking me to tell them how I feel. I also tried a combined counselling session with my wife, but I couldn't handle the times when she was telling the counsellors how good she was feeling, when only an hour earlier she was crying in my arms and having a difficult time dealing with losing our child.

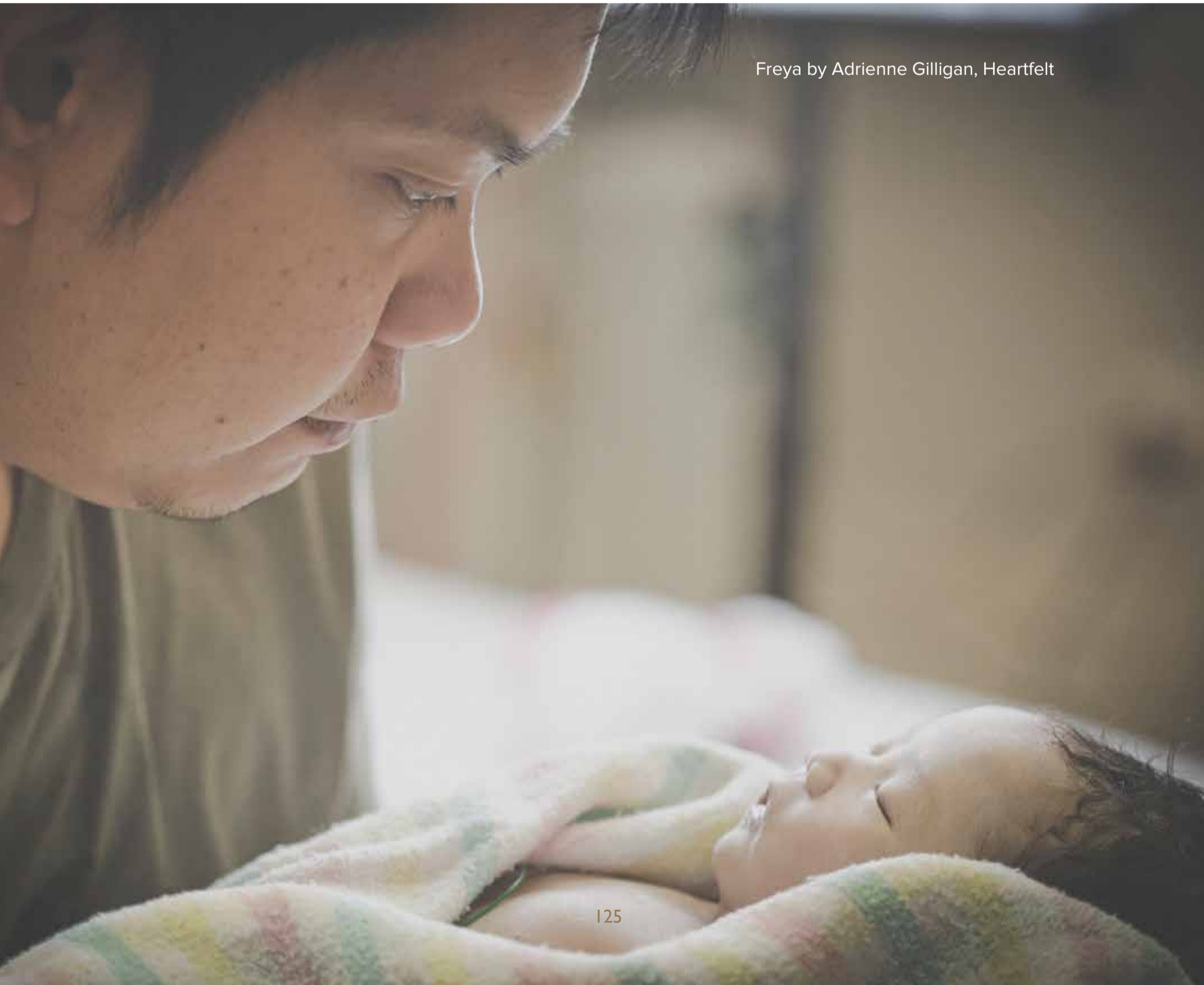
I also tried to find support groups for dads but was told that they did not exist (but I could always attend one for bereaved mums with my wife, although I would probably be the only dad in the room).

Then I found Pillars of Strength. Through this I have met some other dads at one of their events, who have been through a similar situation to me, and I was given tickets to a game so I could take a couple of mates who I hadn't caught up with in a while. It may not sound like much, but it was something that recognised me as a dad and that I had needs and that I had lost my child too.

That is sometimes how my rollercoaster life feels since losing my son just after he was born. Family and friends didn't realise (and still don't realise) the hurt and the loss that we endure due to the masks that we wear every day. Don't get me wrong, I have many more good days than bad and I am grateful for my family and the life that we lead, but it is hard for us sometimes to feel part of society when no one acknowledges that you have a child (even though they are no longer here).

Recognition is all I want, yet I will never ask. I want people to acknowledge that I am a dad (although my child is no longer with us). It is support that I seek, not pity from family and friends, by recognising that although we wear a mask, we hurt every day, even though you may not see it.

Like many people say, until you walk in someone else's shoes, you don't really know what is going on.



Freya by Adrienne Gilligan, Heartfelt

You and your partner—and grief

by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

A parent's expression of grief is affected by the interplay of many factors. Since early childhood, both men and women have learned about expressing grief by what they've been told, what they've observed, and what's been expected of them. These social influences have shaped each parent according to gender and personal predisposition toward certain emotions, temperament, and ways of being. You can benefit from being aware of how social expectations affect you, your grief, your relationship with your partner, and your access to support. In addition, it can help to be aware of common dynamics between partners, so you can accommodate your differences, ease communication, and foster acceptance.

Social expectations

In many cultures, women are allowed to be emotional, while men are supposed to be always in control, brave, rational, independent, and productive. From a very early age, many boys are taught to be ashamed of expressing need, crying openly, being weak or afraid, and having affection for other males. "Real men" aren't supposed to weep or lean on others.

Many men also find it difficult to verbalise their thoughts and feelings, perhaps partly due to culture, but also due to the natural, biological differences between male and female brains. Many fathers describe not being able to find the words, their grief simply being a nonverbal hurt and they feel it's hopeless to try to talk about it.

In any culture that values male stoicism, and because men tend not to verbalise feelings, bereaved fathers typically exhibit a narrow range of emotions, seek and accept little support, and don't cry and talk about their babies. A father's grief may appear to be more mild and brief, but this perception is partly due to men's grief being less visible or audible. So when grief isn't apparent or when the mourning period seems short, this does not necessarily indicate the true intensity of the father's feelings. He may be profoundly bereft, even as he appears subdued, whether due to conforming to social expectations or his own temperament and preferences for privacy.

Unfortunately, as a result, fathers can feel especially isolated. When people align themselves with social expectations and note the father's reluctance to share feelings, they understandably focus on the mother as if the father is unaffected. But when friends and relatives enquire only about his partner, the father naturally feels neglected. He may cringe when others compliment his ability to "hold up," because inside he feels so torn down. He may feel thwarted when he's expected to return to work without any drop in productivity. He may not have male friends who can listen to him talk about his feelings and experiences.

In short, cultural pressures and natural nonverbal tendencies discourage men from seeking social support, which is considered helpful for moving through grief. When you add the message to men that they aren't supposed to grieve, bereaved fathers often feel inhibited and misunderstood. If you're a dad, feeling isolated at a time when you need support only adds to your distress. Or perhaps you feel that grief is a private matter and are content to keep it to yourself. What's important is that you discern your own emotional needs and speak up about them if you wish.

For men and women alike, the quality of grieving is related to the quality of living. So it behooves us as a society to fully include fathers in bereavement care, and to offer individualised social support, acknowledgement, validation, and affirmation to mothers and fathers.

Typical differences between mothers and fathers

If you are in a relationship, you will share this journey with your partner. At times you may feel in sync with each other, but many times you may feel far apart, each of you caught up in your own unique experience and emotions. Navigating this experience together can test your communication and relationship skills as never before.

Besides different social expectations, fathers and mothers often have different coping styles. Men typically jump into action, as if working out their feelings through applying themselves at their jobs, diving into hobbies or sports, solving problems, and tackling projects, such as creating, fixing, and building stuff. This is known as the “instrumental” style of grief.

In contrast, the mother typically has a more “intuitive” style, which focuses on processing thoughts and feelings by talking and writing and generally experiencing her emotions. She may express her grief by crying and ruminating and sharing with others. It can be a challenge for couples to understand and accept each other's coping styles. The father may worry that the mother thinks and talks too much about the baby and her grief, while she worries that he's avoiding grief and instead working and playing too hard.

The father and mother also tend to have different outlooks. It is normal for a father to focus more on the mother than on the baby, while the mother can't help but dwell on the baby as she had a direct, physical connection. A father, having already lost his baby, doesn't want to lose his partner as well, so he may focus on the mother's physical and emotional health, while the mother stays focused on the baby.

Another common dynamic in couples is that the father feels compelled to keep it together and “fix it,” while the mother feels compelled to fall apart. This disconnect

can be upsetting for both, as the father worries about the mother's mental health, and the mother feels like he doesn't care about their baby.

Another disconnect that many couples experience is grieving on different timetables. It is typical for the father to delay his grief while he tends to the heartbroken mother and the tasks that need doing. Again, the mother may see him busily handling everything, and wonder if he even cares that their baby died. Then months down the line as the mother begins to recover and take on more responsibility, he can afford to come undone. And then she worries because he's not himself, inattentive, too overwhelmed, or falling apart.

If you observe differences between you and your partner, remember that there is no single way to grieve. There's your way — and your partner's way. Know that it's normal to take turns plunging to the depths of your grief. It's also normal to experience different needs regarding sexual intimacy. Accepting your differences can help you empathise and support each other as you each find your way. Understanding that you're both normal can help you worry less that your partner will crash and burn or that your differences are a sign of irremediable distance. Be aware of your emotional needs, know that they are valid, and fend off any feelings of distress due to isolation by seeking support from a variety of people, as well as each other. Communicating openly, without judgment or rancor, can help both of you feel more united, even as you grieve separately.

This piece was written for us by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, using updated and adapted excerpts from her book, 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby'. Deborah is a developmental psychologist who has written a number of books that support parents through various crises, including the death of a baby at any time during pregnancy or infancy. 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart' is essential reading for bereaved parents and is available online and from all good bookstores.

Poem

Loving You

Loving you, dear Finn,
Holding you
in the fantasy of my arms,
Missing you
in the ache of my heart,
Wondering
about you.

Loving you, dear Finn,
Visiting you
in the cold, wet earth,
Mourning you
in dawn of each day,
Dreaming
about you.

Loving you, dear Finn,
Seeing you
in the eyes of your brother,
Honouring you
with the words that I speak,
Forever being
with you.

In memory of Finnian Charles Smith

~ born and died, 17 July 2005 ~



Memories of Madeline
by Lyndal Curtis

As a journalist, I'm used to asking the questions. When I'm asked questions it's usually part of a live cross when I have given some thought to what I'll be asked.

But when I'm off air, there's always one question I don't answer easily. I pause and consider my answer, and sometimes I lie.

"How many children do you have?"

For most people, it's an easy question to answer, there's no hesitation, and a smile darts across the face as people remember the life they have outside work.

For the past nine years, since my second daughter was born, I've struggled with it.

It wasn't the easiest pregnancy, but the difficulties were niggling, annoying, nothing to cause concern, just some lost sleep and frustration.

But on February 19 2001, when I was 38 weeks pregnant, I felt my daughter give an almighty kick as I rested in bed. I thought no more of it. I turned over and went back to sleep.

The next morning, February 20, when I woke up I realised I hadn't felt her move all night. Not even a little bit. I told my husband and watched the panic I was beginning to feel being reflected on his face.

He got our daughter dressed and we headed to hospital.

My mind was racing and the next thing I remember was sitting in a large room in the maternity ward as a midwife strapped a fetal heart monitor around my waist and tried to find a heartbeat.

Nothing.

She moved it again, and again.

And still nothing.

My mother arrived and it took one look at her to know she had taken one look at my face and knew what was coming.

She took my daughter and we promised we'd call.

Then I was in a wheelchair being taken down to have an ultrasound.

I saw my baby on the monitor, but there was no heartbeat.

I remember wanting to walk back to the ward, and the nurse wanting me in the wheelchair. I don't know how I got back.

What I remember next are snippets, little bits of time that stretched over hours.

We were in a room in the maternity ward. My brother visited. A priest, a family friend, came. My doctor came. Nurses came and went. Each face registered part of the shock I was feeling.

And everyone struggled with the words. Trying to find the right way to say the unthinkable.

As the night fell, my husband and I rested on beds moved together in the ward meant for two mothers, with room for their newborns.

My labour was induced, and at 5.25 on the morning of February 21 2001, my Madeline was born.

There was a knot in the umbilical cord that was supposed to keep her alive. As she grew and moved, doing tumble turns in my stomach, she put a knot in the cord. And as she prepared to make her way into the world, the knot tightened and cut off the life I was supposed to supply her with.

And she died.

She was a beautiful baby, looked like her sister, with a shock of black hair. We held her and took photos, building quickly a small stock of memories to hold onto because there were no years ahead to do that slowly.

And eventually, a few hours later, we left her at the hospital and went home.

It was the hardest thing I have ever done. I left my newborn baby all alone, knowing I would never hold her again. I had a piece of cardboard with her footprint on it and a lock of her hair. And the quilted blanket she was wrapped in at the hospital.

Back to the car with the baby capsule inside. Back to a house where the newborn clothes I'd washed a couple of days before hung on a drying rack.

Hanging there was a new outfit I'd bought for her. She was buried in it, along with a singlet I wanted her to wear because she was so small and I didn't want her to be cold. I was her mother and that's what mothers worry about.

From the day we came home and for months later, time in our house stood still. I watched the world outside moving at a normal pace, but I was not part of it.

For a while I blamed myself. I should have kept her alive. That was my job. There was something I should have, could have done. But it was just an accident, a terrible, awful accident.

Things were very black, but life has a way of picking you up and moving you forward. At Madeline's funeral, my eldest daughter — then two-and-a-half — wandered round the small circle of family pulling faces at us to try to cheer us up.

Cards and letters and flowers flooded into our house, from work colleagues, friends and politicians. Not one of them had a hackneyed message. Each was original and heartfelt. Each person struggled to find the words because there are no easy words to cover the pain and loss. I treasure each of them today.

At the time I couldn't talk to people. My husband and mother dealt with the phone calls. But just knowing that people were thinking about us helped more than I can say. Along with my daughter, husband, and family, the people who took the time to let us know they were with us helped tether me to life at a time when I often felt the pain was unbearable.

Helpful too was the advice a midwife gave when she came to check on me a couple of days after I left hospital. She told me that, "Whatever you feel is OK."

Everyone grieves in their own way. I expected the tears and the pain, although the strength of it and the deep place where it came from surprised me. I didn't expect the days when I felt kind of OK, when there were some moments where I didn't cry. It was good to know that feeling all right was OK too.

And eventually there comes a day when there are more smiles than tears, and when it's time for your world to start moving in sync with everyone else's. And that's OK too.

People have told me I was brave to carry on, but that's not true. Once you've made the decision to go on breathing in and breathing out, life just happens to you. Groceries need to be bought, dinner needs to be cooked, my eldest needed her parents. And after a while it's normal again.

I am permanently changed by Madeline's death. My emotions run much closer to the surface and I cry much more easily than I ever did before. There are news stories I cannot listen to, television programs I cannot watch because they are about children lost or dying. Every disaster sends my thoughts immediately to the

mothers who've lost children and for a moment I'm paralysed with the pain they must be feeling.

I know now I am stronger than I ever thought I could be, partly because the worst thing I could imagine happening to me has happened and I'm still here.

I understand when people say, after a tragedy, that they didn't think it could happen to them. I struggle to believe I'm the person who lost a daughter. That wasn't who I thought I'd be, and yet that's who I am.

I think about Madeline every day. I talk about her when I'm asked. We celebrate her birthdays with a cake and a present we give to a charity to pass on to a girl of the same age. We leave balloons by her graveside on her birthday and a tree at Christmas. She'd still be a little girl and would be unimpressed by flowers. They are for another day.

We build memories in a different way. I keep track of what year she would have been in at school, but I deliberately don't think about what she would have been like if she'd lived. For me, imagining her alive would only illustrate what I've lost and I worry if I did that, I'd start crying and might never stop.

Talk about closure annoys me immensely. People should, if they want, seek answers about why someone they loved has died and if there's someone to blame. But even after the answers have come and the blame, if there is blame, been placed, the memory of the person who's been lost doesn't go. The pain of losing them and the joy they brought remain. They are one of the threads in your life that continue on. Nothing ends or closes.

Should someone you know go through the same thing I did, be there for them. For a while they may not want to talk to you, or see you. But let them know you're there. And when they're ready, let them talk about what happened. It's sad, painfully sad, but talking is a way of helping keep the memory of their baby alive.

The memory of Madeline is always with me.

So, when I'm asked how many children I have, after I've looked to see if you're pregnant and paused to think about whether I want to have the conversation, more often than not I'll answer.

I have four children. Two girls who are 11 and seven, a boy who is five, and my second daughter, Madeline, who would have been nine.

This is what I wrote two days after Madeline died, and what I read out at her funeral:

These are the things I had hoped for Madeline:

I thought for a long time she was going to be a boy, but deep down I had hoped she'd be a girl we could call Madeline.

I hoped I'd looked after her well while she was growing inside me and that all the things I hadn't done quite right wouldn't have affected her and made her underweight or caused a problem — and she was perfect; our beautiful little girl.

Apart from that I had simple hopes for her.

I hoped she'd fall asleep on my shoulder when I was cuddling her.

I hoped she and her daddy would fall asleep together on the couch and that I could sneak in with a camera and take a photo of them.

I hoped she and Jessie would love each other and be close and that they'd enjoy playing together ... and she'd have fun when Jessie showed her all her toys and all the things she can do.

I hoped she'd sleep well and eat well ... and that she and I and Jessie would do a lot of things in my year off — that we go for walks, and go to lunch a lot, and do all the things I meant to do while Jessie was a baby but never got around to.

The things I hope for Madeline now:

I hope she knows how much we love her and how much we will always love her.

I hope wherever she is that she doesn't think she caused us pain because we're not sad because she came into our life, only because she was in it for such a short time — because we couldn't bring our beautiful girl home and because we had to say goodbye before we'd had a chance to say hello.

I hope she's with her grandparents who also can't be with us now — I hope she's giving them cuddles and falling asleep in their arms and that she's giving them some of the joy Jessie gives her Nana.

At the moment I'm in the middle of a big black void... but there are three bright lights in that void. One is Madeline — a reminder always of what could have been and so very nearly was... our other favourite girl who will be an important part of our family forever. The other two are Phil and Jessie — showing me there is a life to get on with, and a future for us all.

And each time we get a hug from someone, each time someone phones or sends flowers or a card, each time someone tells us they love us, or we can laugh at something or Jessie smiles or sings or just is, there's another light in the darkness...

And in time it won't be so black anymore because we have a lot of love around us and a lot of good reasons to go on... while there will always be patches of darkness, it will mostly be lit by happiness and love.

Madeline will always be our beautiful girl... while she trod only lightly on this earth, she will always be deep in our hearts.

This article was originally published on The Drum (ABC Online) on 19 Feb 2010, and was used here with kind permission from the author.



I will not let the *world*

view me with pity and think,

“Look at what her *daughter* has done to her.”

May they instead watch me in awe and *think*,

“Look at the *woman* her daughter

has helped her *become*.”

Stories

Lynette Taylor

The ache in my heart is still as strong as it was in November 1976. I went for a routine check-up a few days before my baby was due, and my doctor said my baby was a little small, so I did a urine test. I received a phone call that afternoon to go to hospital for an X-ray. The next morning the results were devastating.

To be told that your baby will die at birth was shattering. I couldn't understand that the baby inside me, which was moving and kicking, was going to die. I even thought of leaving the hospital so as not to give birth, but knew that could never be. The doctor explained the bone structure on the forehead had not grown, so therefore my baby was brain dead and I was keeping it alive.

That night was the last night I spent with my baby kicking and moving inside me. The next morning I was put on a drip to induce labour. My husband and I were waiting for the inevitable. We were asked if we wanted to see our baby, but I was sedated and wasn't thinking straight and said no. They said that they could arrange the burial as well. Having a two-year-old boy at home on one wage, my husband and I thought this would be okay. I still regret that decision.

My baby girl, whom we named Nicole, was born and whisked away, and I was put in the maternity ward.

The next few days were a blur as I was on sedatives, and there was no support for us in those days. A sister was very sympathetic and I was told to go home and try again — I will never forget those words.

We went home to try and move on. My husband packed away all the baby things to try to make it better, but we cried all that night. Our son was asking where the baby was. Family and friends tried but it was hard for them as well, because they didn't know how to help. We just didn't talk about it.

You ask yourself if there is a reason for why it happened. You ask yourself if it was anything you did. Every month for six months I cried as I tried to fall pregnant again. Then finally, the test was positive. Elation then FEAR crept in every day for nine months, regardless of being told all was fine.

My baby boy was born healthy in 1978 and I finally had a baby girl in 1981. To this day I wish there were support groups, councillors, people to take photos, and to be able to hold my baby just one time. When people ask us how many children we have we always say three, but we have had four, because the heartache of carrying her for nine months and giving birth will always be our precious memories forever.



Lea

Next month, it will be 27 years since my first baby was born and died. That's more than a quarter of a century and yet, when I read your article, all the pain and hurt that I felt at that time came flooding back.

Although the pain of having a baby die diminishes with time, it never goes away. It is not just the death of a baby — it is the death of dreams, hopes, and promise. I remember thinking, as I returned home from hospital, that my life was meant to be changed irrevocably, however, to all outward appearances, it was the same as before. Only I had changed and it was impossible for most people to recognise that. It was as if my son never existed. I have struggled with this ever since.

When I was pregnant with my second son, the inevitable question was asked, 'Is this your first?' I used to weigh up the relationship I had with the person asking the question and decide if it was worth going into details about my first son dying or simply smile and say, 'Yes'. I now have two healthy adult children and throughout their lives I've had the same response to the question, 'How many children to you have?' My mind goes through the process — is this person important enough to carry on a conversation about the death of my baby or do I say 'two' and move on? Whenever I answer 'two', I say a silent apology to my firstborn.

I think the strongest feeling I had after the hurt and grief of having my baby die was guilt. Did I do something wrong? Should I have eaten differently? Did that night out before I knew I was pregnant do some damage? I beat myself up for quite some time, and I still wonder if I could have changed the outcome but I have learned to accept that it is what it is.

I hate the platitude that good things come from bad, however I do believe that I am a better parent to my other children. The gift of parenting is precious and should never be taken for granted.



Sue Kane

Our first child, Jack, was born sleeping at 35 weeks. Jack was born with his thumb in his mouth. Somehow this has given me some comfort for the past 22 years. I will wonder about Jack for the rest of my life: his first day of school; what he would have been like as a toddler, a teenager, and a grown man now. Yes, our world changed forever and my arms ached for such a very long time. I learnt to be brave.

The slow dawning of what was happening as the doctors kept trying to find our baby's heartbeat, to the news you have to deliver your baby naturally. Listening to women screaming as they delivered healthy live babies, whilst delivering my own silent baby. The sadness of having my milk come in with no baby to nourish. Being told by the hospital chaplain they would not christen my baby as he was stillborn. My husband carrying our Son in a tiny white coffin at the cemetery whilst I sat leaking milk meant for our little boy. Seeing pregnant women everywhere I went and shaking uncontrollably at the sight of a baby. The house filled with flowers, which took me years to like again as they reminded me of losing our Son. I knew the only way to feel whole again was to keep on going, keep on trying to have a family, and to never give up.

Beautiful Jenna was born just over a year later. I had placenta praevia and had to be hospitalised on best rest for a month, during which time I willed this baby to hang on. Jenna was born six weeks premature and filled our hearts with happiness. So much joy, I had found my centre. Three years later, we decided to try for another baby. One ectopic pregnancy, one miscarriage, followed by two years of IVF, I fell pregnant on our fifth cycle. I held my breath. When our doctor booked me in for a C-section for 21 August 2000 I softly cried and said no. The date was 10 years to the day baby Jack was stillborn. I remember the doctor telling me I would be able to talk about Jack one day without crying. He was right. It takes a long time, but he was right. Our third child, our second son, Shaun, was born early but healthy almost six weeks premature. I could breathe again. At last I felt complete. We are so incredibly lucky and thankful for our children.

My message is to keep going with your plans to have a family — naturally, adoption, fostering — anyway you can. You will feel happiness again.



Wendy

30 years ago I also lost my firstborn son at 25 weeks. We didn't get any support or guidance at all. I was just told, 'Get over it, you are young and you will have more.'

My labour was induced and I delivered my son, but I wasn't allowed to see him. The pain was horrible, but made even worse because I was in the maternity ward with other happy mothers and babies crying. The pain is never forgotten nor is my son.

I read these stories and it is uplifting to know that mothers and fathers today are treated so much better. Thank you all you brave ladies for sharing your stories, they help me immensely. I went on to have three other healthy sons but our first son, even though he was taken away unsighted, is never forgotten.



Michelle Porter

On 2nd May 1986, I endured a twelve-hour delivery and gave birth to a beautiful baby, but who was genetically deformed and physically disfigured. I was 19 weeks into my pregnancy.

But I was determined to keep trying for another baby, despite the overwhelming sadness I felt and the horrific aftermath this experience placed on my marriage.

On 2nd December 1986 (yes, a few months later) it happened again. Another delivery, 18 weeks this time, another beautiful baby I wouldn't be bringing home. Another genetic disorder — a different one this time. No chaplain, no counselling, no friends who could face talking about it. No communication from an already distant husband.

People tell you they know how you feel. They don't.

People tell you that you need to have another baby and then you'll be fine. You aren't.

People tell you it's God's will. It isn't.

People tell you that you need to move on. You can't.

People tell you time will heal. Yes, it does, but that doesn't help at the time.

For me there was so much that impacted my experience: the lack of professional support, a non-supportive husband, friends who weren't around, cruel nursing staff, the lack of a chaplain to pray for me. But somewhere within me there was a fighting spirit.

I fell pregnant again the following year and gave birth to my beautiful Holly. Every May and December I feel sad, and then realise it is the anniversary of the loss of my precious boys. They are with me always and, for me, time has healed. But I had to make very difficult choices for myself. I chose to channel my grief. I knew I had to get out of bed every day for my own good. I had to go back to my group of friends, even though they hadn't supported me. I had to fall pregnant again. I had to work things through with my husband. The marriage bit took years, but two years ago (yes, 23 years later!) we were able to talk about it, and I discovered that he simply didn't understand me — at all. He wanted to, but couldn't. He assumed so much, as did I. I thought he didn't care about me, he thought I was overreacting. The healing from this understanding has been profound. If only there was someone available to facilitate this at the time.

If all this sounds familiar to you, know that the ONLY way through it is inside yourself. The days when you want to drown, allow yourself a ritual—light a candle, pray, grieve, cry, write a journal, draw, whatever you need to do, but then move forward. Just tiny steps. Every day. It may be that you just ring someone you know who's sick, to ask how they are. You might smile at someone who looks sad. Just tiny steps. And do something nice for yourself everyday. You might listen to your favourite song, or stand in the garden and smell a flower. Know that your baby is with you. You will always be a mother. Tiny steps. If you can't do it one day, don't beat yourself up about it — tomorrow is a new day. Start again. Tiny steps.

If you feel like you are going down the track of destructive behaviour, call someone, anyone. Email a forum. Go for a walk. Go to the beach. Tiny steps forward. Every day.

Twenty-five years on, I have studied chaplaincy, determined to prevent my experience happening to someone else. Of course that can never be, but as women we need to communicate to heal. I am also a photographer, and until now I didn't realise why I love to take photos of newborn babies. I didn't know about Heartfelt, but will definitely volunteer.





Kym

I was in the middle of a busy morning doing housework when I stopped to flick through the paper and stumbled across your article, Mia. That was two hours ago. You have brought my day to an abrupt halt as I read thought the personal stories of loss and my own memories from 20 years ago come flooding back.

My husband and I lost our second child, a baby girl, Renee Erica, at 32 weeks. She died in utero from a heart defect and I was told to go home and come back the next day to deliver her naturally. I felt like a freak carrying a dead baby inside me. The labour the next day was very emotional for both ourselves and the attending hospital staff. Once Renee was delivered, we were given the opportunity to hold her and take all the time we needed with her. Some of our family wanted to share the experience and others did not.

The hardest part was leaving Renee at the hospital and going home without her, and then being reminded again and again as my milk came in. The funeral was arranged and our wonderful family and friends rallied to support us, even though they too struggled to find the right words to express their heartfelt sympathy in the shock of our loss. In hindsight, I think the key to getting through the grief process is surrounding yourself with positive people and not to be afraid to speak up when you and your partner need emotional support.

So often the man in a relationship is expected to be the strong one when he himself is going through just as much emotional pain/grief as the woman. Thank goodness for the internet where anyone going through a similar experience can now find a multitude of sites and get the assistance required immediately. God bless all the beautiful babies in heaven.



Kay Tomlins

Nearly 50 years ago, I gave birth to a stillborn baby girl — an identical twin. I was told I was lucky to have one healthy baby and to pretend that the other child never existed. Well intentioned, but oh so very wrong! I wasn't even allowed to see her, let alone hold her and grieve. In recent years we have obtained her death certificate, found out where she is buried, and had a naming ceremony for her, which has brought some peace to me and my family. Justine Elizabeth did come into this world as a tiny, if imperfect, human being, and this fact has finally been recognised and celebrated.



Helen Wilson

I still remember those words, “I’m sorry, no heartbeat” at 33 weeks. The Shock, the disbelief, the heartache, the anger towards a lack of information and not knowing where to turn.

I still remember being proud at the birth, and still hoping the radiologist had got it wrong a week before. I was sure I could still feel little flutters, but didn’t want to ask what it could be.

I still wish I’d held my son and that the nursing staff had left us alone for a while.

I still wish I had a photo of our firstborn.

I still wish he was here today to be part of our family and to be a big brother for his two sisters, Skye and Jade.

I’m so thankful I did get to see him. I uttered a quiet ‘oh’ as he was beautiful, I was frightened of how dying in my womb may affect my baby.

I’m thankful that I went to the funeral, even though a well-meaning person suggested I not.

I’m so thankful for my husband who shared the grief and my need to be listened to.

I’m thankful for SIDA (NSW), Mal McKissock, and a friend that ‘snuck’ me into SIDS workshop groups, before SANDS was around. (This path unlocked many sad and good memories and allowed meaningful sharing with other wonderful mums.)

I’m thankful for a SIDS mum that said, “In one way I’m luckier than you, I got to see my baby’s eyes open and smile and joy — if ever so short. I’m so aware that you did not have this chance.” Thankyou xoJ

I’m so thankful that, while my light was dimmed, with time and everyday living the light does come back. Maybe this is why I appreciate sunny days and why bright yellow daffodils have a special meaning to me.

I’m thankful for my husband sourcing daffodils in July for every anniversary of Shaun’s birth.

29+ years on, I still remember his face, with a tear and a gentle smile.



Lyn Whiteway

43 years ago, I gave birth to a stillborn child. I was 40 weeks pregnant and I knew the baby was dead a week before the birth, but I couldn't make anyone believe me. Even when I was in labour, the nurses kept saying they could hear the heartbeat. When the baby was born it was whisked away without me seeing it, and although I asked for the sex of the baby I just got told it was better not to know — that way it would be easier to forget about the birth. My obstetrician came in the next morning and said, "I hear you had a bit of bad luck last night. Stop crying, you can have another baby." My obstetrician was a woman.

We had to pay to have the baby buried and were told it would be in hallowed ground in an unmarked grave. We were not allowed to know where the baby was buried. When I came home from the hospital empty-handed and broken-hearted, I had no counselling, no way to resolve the grief.

I used to go down to the shopping centre and hide from the other women I had gone to antenatal classes with. I was bereft, but no one would let me speak about the birth or my baby. It was as though he had never been born. This baby haunted me until a few years ago, when I had some counselling and during the sessions my grief over my stillborn child welled up. My counsellor told me to get in touch with SANDS, they gave me the details of their London branch, and things snowballed from there.

I gave my sister, who lives in London, my power of attorney and as I knew the date of birth (it is engraved on my heart) and the hospital where it took place, with a bit of digging they came up with the name of the churchyard where my baby was buried.

My sister drove to Sussex and a miracle happened. An old verger was there, and when Jane asked if there was any way she could find the exact spot she was told that he was a verger 43 years ago and the vicar there at the time would not bury the babies in an unmarked grave, because one day their mothers would come looking for them. He would hold a little private service for each stillborn child and then bury them at the foot of another grave. He then instructed the verger to keep a record of each baby and exactly where they were buried. He pinpointed the spot for my sister.

Another joy was that when Jane contacted the hospital they asked if we had ever had a Stillborn Certificate. When they were told "NO" they immediately organised one to be sent to us here in Australia, and we learned for the first time that our much-loved child was a boy. I can't describe the emotion of that moment. It was love, joy, sorrow, and so much more. The knowledge that we could now name our son was incomparable. I wrote a poem in honour of Sam. I would like to share it with you.

A Song for Sam

You are a song, sung softly through the years
You are a rainbow shining with my tears
You are a dream I dreamed that never quite came true
A blending of two hearts that longed for you
Your heartbeat echoed mine from deep within
I felt your movements, soft, beneath my skin
I held you in my heart, a warm embrace
But never in my arms and face to face
I knew the very moment that you died
A part of me died with you, deep inside
How could I say goodbye, I never knew
The essence of the person that was you
I've longed for you so often through the years
I never saw your face, or dried your tears
I never saw you learn to walk and run
We never knew you would have been our son
You never knew how much we would have cared
Or felt your Daddy's arms when you were scared
But now, at last, we can give you your name
Dignify your death and ease the pain
We can see the garden where you sleep
Think of you as Sam, and softly weep
For all the memories that might have been
For a son so loved but never seen
You are a song, heard softly through the years
You are a rainbow shining with our tears.

We did manage to scrape up the money for a last trip back to England to say goodbye to my Mum, who died shortly after we returned home, catch up with the family, and also to visit the beautiful church in Sussex Downs where our child is laid to rest. We put some flowers where he was laid and we were able to finally say goodbye properly. I would have loved to put a brass plate with his poem on the grave, but unfortunately they were just too expensive. We are pensioners now and have to be so careful. But in my heart, I can see my little boy's grave and now can put him to sleep. Every time I hear or read about another mother having a stillborn child, I cry. Time never diminishes the pain. I have a 42-year-old son who is the light of my life, but I will never forget my firstborn.

It's never too late: advice for parents whose baby died

many years ago

by Sands Australia

Some time ago, your baby died during pregnancy, labour, or shortly after birth. However long ago this happened, we are very sorry that you experienced this traumatic event.

Like many other bereaved parents in the past, you may have been told to go home, forget your baby and have another one as quickly as possible. It is most likely that your loss and grief were never acknowledged.

Many parents with the same experience have suffered unresolved grief relating to an event like this. They were saddened by the fact that they did not know where their baby was buried and that they had no tangible reminders of their baby's existence.

Despite being told to, these parents could never forget their baby who died and many felt as though they could not lay their memories to rest.

Hospital attitudes in the past — 'out of sight, out of mind'

Up until the 1980s–1990s, hospital staff believed that if parents were allowed to see their baby who had died and establish a connection, their grief would be more intense. As a result, most parents were not allowed to see or hold their baby who had died.

In a state of shock, some parents were initially relieved that they did not have to come face-to-face with their heartbreaking reality. Others wanted to see their baby, but were too scared to challenge the process — this was not a time when people questioned authority. If parents did ask to see their baby, most requests were denied.

In a majority of cases, information was withheld from parents and they were sent home without any record of their baby's existence. They were not provided an opportunity to arrange a funeral or offered support to help them with their grief. The hospital usually organised the burial in an unmarked communal grave and to this day many parents still do not know where their baby is buried.

Although these hospital practises were done with the best intentions, it is now understood that they often caused emotional damage to bereaved parents.

Community attitudes in the past

When parents arrived home, they found that attitudes in their own community were similar to those they experienced in the hospital. They were again discouraged from talking about their baby and expressing their natural instincts to grieve. Many parents became extremely confused by their painful and strong emotions. Because there was no one to reassure them that these feelings were normal, some became so distressed that they thought they were 'going mad'. This often had detrimental emotional effects in the future.

New attitudes and awareness

It may be some small consolation for these parents to know that hospital staff are now aware of the need to have parents' loss and grief acknowledged. Because of the lobbying and advocacy work of Sands, the Australian hospital system underwent comprehensive policy changes in the 1980s and 1990s. These changes transformed the way bereaved parents were cared for at the time of their baby's death.

Hospital procedures now acknowledge that parents are connected and committed to their children long before birth — forming strong bonds through pregnancy or perhaps even before conception. Doctors and midwives now encourage parents to spend time with their baby and document physical proof of their existence, such as taking handprints and footprints. These physical keepsakes can help parents grieve and remember their baby. Parents are also given the option to plan their baby's funeral and burial or cremation — actions which can help them to express love for their baby.

Beginning your journey of discovery

Even though many years have passed, it is never too late to acknowledge the existence of your baby, create mementos, and say goodbye. If you have not done so already, choose a name for your baby. This is the first step to acknowledgement. Also be aware that your family and friends may consider it strange that you are suddenly thinking and talking about your baby who died, but remember that it is completely normal to want to acknowledge the death of a loved one.

Ways to locate information about your baby

For parents, finding the burial place of their baby is often the main goal. Many thought their baby's birth was not officially documented and that there would be no burial record. However, many of these births were recorded. Parents who have

located these records have found them to be a huge source of comfort, as they provide physical proof that their baby existed. In some cases, these records have also helped parents to trace where their baby is buried. You can try to access more information about your baby from the following contact points:

- » The hospital: Contact the hospital your baby was born at and ask them about the possibility of accessing your baby's medical records. Because babies weren't always given their own records, you might also like to try to access your own (in some instances the baby's paperwork has been stored with the mother's record). Generally speaking, you will need to make a written application. The hospital will inform you of their process.

If you had your baby at a hospital that has since closed, call the health department in your state or territory. They may know which facility took over the records.

Also be aware that medical records may have been lost or destroyed in the time since your baby was born, or that records may not contain burial details. In this case, it may be possible to find out which cemetery the hospital was using for communal burials at that particular time. Again, if the hospital no longer exists, try your state government department.

- » Cemeteries or funeral directors: For some parents, the only remaining evidence of their baby was found by searching cemetery records. Sands state offices may have some information on the cemeteries that major hospitals used during different time periods.

Funeral directors located near the hospital where you gave birth may also be able to help, because they may have buried other deceased babies from that hospital.

For many bereaved parents, finding their baby's burial site has been a sad experience, as they were distressed by the location or type of grave they found. Some parents were upset that they could not move their baby to a private grave. While each cemetery has different rules, it may be possible to arrange a personal plaque for your baby.

- » Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages: You may want to contact the registry in the state or territory your baby was born in, to seek advice and to clarify how you may be able to request a search for any possible registration for your baby. It may be that the birth was registered and if that is the case the Registry will have specific policies relating to accessing those records, some of which may also provide burial details.

Unfortunately not all parents (especially those whose babies died very long ago) can find where their baby is buried. If this is the case for you, please contact your nearest Sands state branch, as we may be able to help.

Ways to remember your baby

Although you will always remember your baby, below are some suggestions for those who may wish to create more memories.

- » Obtain certificates: In some cases parents who have tracked their baby's documentation have been successful in dealing with the Registry to have their baby's birth registered. Once the birth is registered they were then able to get a birth certificate issued. If you wish to pursue that option you must contact the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the state your baby was born, as there are very strict requirements that must be met before any registration, particularly very old ones, can be completed. If your baby was baptised, the hospital chaplain or religious representative may be able to provide a Certificate of Baptism. Sands also has an 'In Memory' certificate available.
- » Establish an annual ritual: Some parents visit a special place, bake a cake, or release a balloon to celebrate their baby's birth or death. You may like to attend an organised remembrance service for babies that have died, such as those held by Sands.
- » Hold a memorial service: This could be at a cemetery, a place of worship (perhaps there is one in the hospital where your baby was born), your home, or any other special place.
- » Create an album of mementos: This could include medical appointments and records, certificates, photos of the gravesite, or a copy of the page in the cemetery register with your baby's burial details.
- » Make a personal tribute. For example:
 - plant a special tree in your garden
 - have a sketch or portrait done to represent your baby
 - place a memorial notice in the paper on the anniversary of your baby's death
 - donate money or a gift in your baby's memory
 - write a letter or poem to your baby.
 - where to go for more help

Never Forgotten

Even though your baby died a long time ago, it is never too late to ask for help. Sands has parent supporters who were also bereaved many years ago and who have gone on to locate their baby's burial place.

You might also like to talk to a trusted friend or relative, or a minister of your own faith (if you have one). If you would like a mental health clinician to support you, Sands can provide information of professionals practising in your area.

This information has been adapted from the 'It's Never Too Late' booklet, produced by Sands Australia. Sands aims to facilitate healthy grieving following the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, newborn death, or termination for medical purposes. To contact Sands, or read this brochure in full, please visit www.sands.org.au.

Poem

You came into our lives
Put a sparkle in our eyes
Made the future more enticing
Built our dreams and kept them near.

But it seems you were not meant to be
Your little soul rests peacefully
Whilst your body shies away
From winter's chill that waits outside.

Perhaps you weren't quite ready
For a world so full and heady
Or perhaps you knew of souls
More fitting for the role.

Whatever your good reasons
I've no doubt they're for the best
But may we ask a favour?
One last parting kind request.

Please tell the soul who's waiting
That a life sits for the taking
That two souls fit for its making
Cannot wait for that first smile.

And though we may have never met
Our deepest love and due respect
We'll think of you along the way
And hope to cross your path one day.

by Anika

Never Forgotten



Clementine by Karen Simons, Heartfelt

Giving birth to a stillborn son

by Rhonda Mason

The day my little boy died was a beautiful Saturday. It was early spring and the weather was warm and balmy, with sunlight bathing our cosy apartment. I was already a week overdue and my doctor planned to induce me on Monday. I was excited and impatient, but not worried.

Then, that night, I began to suspect something was wrong. The baby had always been very active, but I hadn't felt him move for hours. Even though part of me couldn't believe anything could go wrong so late in the pregnancy, dread started creeping in. By the time I summoned the courage to tell my husband, Rick, I was trembling with fear.

We drove to the hospital in silence, imagining the worst, but desperately hoping to be told otherwise. When the midwife couldn't find a heartbeat, I knew. Raw pain seeped into my entire being. The doctor on call hooked me up to an ultrasound machine and said, "There's his heart, but it's not beating. I'm so sorry." With those words, grief descended.

Rick called his parents first. Then he called mine. Mum and Dad thought we were calling with 'the good news' they'd been waiting for. Through my hysterical sobbing, I could hear Rick trying to explain to my unsuspecting father. He didn't understand, so I grabbed the phone. "No, he's died. The baby has died!"

The rest of the night is a blur. My parents arrived to find me out of control, sobbing. The doctors decided I'd be induced the next day.

We couldn't sleep. I was too scared about giving birth. Rick and I clung to each other as we cried, and my stomach twisted and churned with anguish. I remember not feeling the baby move that night; I remember the stillness and the emptiness.

The next morning, I was on autopilot. I just did everything Rick told me. He dressed and fed me. He packed my bags and took me to the hospital. He was my rock. They gave me the oxytocin drip, I laboured hard for three hours and then I was ready to push. At 1.55pm, I gave birth to our son, Cameron Angus Mason. He was 4.5kg with jet-black hair. He was beautiful.

For the entire labour, I'd been dreading the moment when they'd place Cameron in my arms. I didn't want to see him dead. Yet the moment I held him, my heart swelled with the love I already had for him. This was my little boy. My tears fell all over his precious face. He looked as if he was sleeping, but he never opened his eyes or made a noise. He was completely still. I finally understood why they call it 'stillbirth'.

We only had eight hours with our son and we took turns cradling him. I kissed his cheeks, his nose, and his forehead. I stroked his perfect hands and fingers. I breathed in the smell of his skin. I was storing everything up for the years ahead. At 9pm, we decided it was time to say goodbye. I wrapped Cameron up for the last time and Rick placed him gently in the crib. We left a little teddy with him.

I leant down and kissed him one last time. Unable to support myself, I held on to Rick as the midwife wheeled Cameron out of the room. After nine months together, he was gone, and the doctors weren't able to explain why.

Five days later, we held a memorial service. I was grateful for friends and family who took time to be there but, in the weeks that followed, I grew increasingly bitter and resentful at the way people responded to our grief. Even though, according to the Stillbirth Foundation Australia, one in 140 babies born in this country is stillborn, most people didn't know how to respond.

Coping with people's well-intentioned but awkward responses only sharpened my grief. I resented people telling me to "be strong" or "let go" — some even suggested we shouldn't have so many photos of Cameron in our home or post them on Facebook. There were trite remarks about how he wouldn't want me to be so sad. Or that he was better off not having to suffer in this life.

I have no doubt I'll see Cameron in heaven one day — that's what allows me to cope with his death. Still, it hurt when people reminded us of this, as if it would lessen our sorrow.

But the worst response of all was being told we were young and we'd have more children.

Was Cameron replaceable because he died in-utero? And what if we didn't — or couldn't — have more children? The implication was that he was 'just a baby', and we never knew him anyway.

It infuriated me that others thought they knew better than us how we should grieve. Unless you've come home from hospital empty-handed after nine months of pregnancy to face an empty nursery, or organised a funeral days after giving birth, you can't know how we felt.

All I wanted was for people to mourn with us, to tell us they were deeply sorry for our loss, to reassure us they'd never forget that Cameron was our firstborn child. Then there was the silence from those who couldn't deal with our tragedy and kept their distance. Even today, the wound from that silence cuts me deeply.

There were, thank goodness, friends and family members who were able to care for me. They read my blog as I poured out my sadness and held me when I broke down. They never put a time limit on my grief or tried to 'make things better'.

They listened as I talked about how much I longed for my son — they were brave enough to face the darkness with us.

When we fell pregnant six months later, people assumed that everything was suddenly OK and we'd get over what had happened. People told me to “enjoy the new pregnancy”, not realising I spent every hour of every day fearing that the second baby would die, too.

Thankfully, we welcomed Angus safely into our arms, 13 months after we lost Cameron. I was taken aback by the number of people I hadn't heard from since his death, who came out of the woodwork to congratulate us.

We've since had another boy, Peter, and, as our sons grow up, I wonder what Cameron would be like today, what our family life would look like with all three boys.

Three years on from Cameron's death, I've come to accept there will always be people who won't be able to talk about him. They see us 'happy' and don't want to remind us of our loss. But it's the silence that hurts.

No one ever moves on from losing a child — that's a myth. I've spoken to parents who lost a baby 40 years ago, and they yearn for that child every day. Even though they're not there, your child remains a part of you and your family forever. And that's the way it should be.

This article was originally published in the Daily Telegraph, December 12 2010, and was published here with kind permission from the author. Rhonda writes about her experience at www.lifewithoutcameron.com, and about the funnier side of parenting at www.pinkronnie.com.

I *feel* him with me.

I see him in my other *children*
and he is still *part* of our family.

He *taught* me to live with
all love and no *regrets*.

How can I ever *thank* him enough?

- Amanda Gaffney-Ray

Stories

Carly Marie Dudley

Saying Goodbye.

We held my son's Memorial Service the Thursday after he was born sleeping. I woke up and had a cool shower. I put on a pretty white summer dress that I had bought whilst I was pregnant with Christian. I wrapped my wrists in turquoise beads and I placed purple orchids in my hair. I don't remember much of the drive in to the hospital, in fact I don't remember any of it or how we even got there.

I remember walking into the chapel with a racing heart. We had arrived there early. I walked into the chapel and saw a tiny little box with a blue butterfly on it. I knew that Christian's ashes were inside. At that point it hit me that I was attending a funeral for one of my own children. It was too much for me and I had to get out. I wasn't going to be able to sit in there and wait for it to start. So I went downstairs with my Mum to give some 'Thank You' cards out to a couple of the midwives.

When I came back up, most of the family was there and I went in and sat down. I remember looking over at my Mum, Dad, and brother. Mum was rubbing Dad's knee. He was just staring out the window. His face was full of anger and his eyes held so much sadness. I don't think he could believe that this had happened, and the thought of his face still breaks my heart. The last thing I wanted him to be was angry.

The service was truly gorgeous. My husband, Sam, was amazing and read out a letter that he had written to Christian earlier that week. I was too consumed by grief to speak and so I asked the Chaplin to read out my words, as I was unable to be brave that day. We played some beautiful music including the song by U2 that Sam had sung to Christian when he was born. The Chaplin read a passage from 'The Prophet' titled Joy and Sorrow. It was beyond fitting.

During the week Sam and I had bought a piece of jewellery to give to each other in Christian's memory at the funeral. We exchanged the gifts. Sam gave me a gorgeous gold ring with a stone that reflects all the colors of the rainbow. I gave Sam a crucifix with Christian's name and date of birth on the back of it. As the funeral came to an end, the Chaplin gave me Christian's ashes and I walked out of the hospital with my son.

That afternoon Sam's parents held a wake for Christian in their beautiful garden — it is a magical, enchanting place. I know Christian would have loved playing there

just as his sister did. All the family came. Sam and I gave out frames to everyone with Christian's hand and foot prints in them. We are so blessed to have such a loving family. Everyone's support was nothing short of a miracle to us.

The following 18 months were difficult. We had to learn how to live again. I lost interest in life. I lost interest in most things. Scarlett was my only reason to get out of bed each day. I owe that little girl my life. She will never know just how much of a gift she is to me.

After 18 months I dreamed of Christian for the first time. I was walking along a beautiful beach. Up ahead of me were three young children, their skin glowed in the warm sunlight. There were two boys and a girl. They were too young to be by themselves, especially by the sea, and I worried for them so decided I would go and see where their parents were. As I got closer to them I could see that they were drawing in the sand with pieces of driftwood. They spotted me and before I could do anything they skipped off up into the sand dunes. I could hear them laughing as they disappeared from my sight. Their giggles echoed out to sea. As I got to the point where they had been drawing, I saw that they had written their names in the sand. The names read Noah, Christian, and Bella. It was only then that I realised that I had dreamed of him and for the first time since his fatal diagnosis, I felt my blood begin to pump around my weary body again. My soul had returned and my light that had almost burned out had been reignited. He was okay. He was more than okay. He was living a full and amazing life on Heaven's Beach and he was with his friends who had also left their families too soon. He found me. He revived me. He inspired me.

Christian's visit sparked an idea in my heart and mind. The next day I went to the beach and wrote Christian's name in the sand and so, on August 19th 2008, Christian's Beach was born and our lives were changed again forever. Since that day, back in the Winter of 2008, over 17,000 children's names have been written in the sand at sunset on Christian's Beach.

This experience has brought Sam and I closer together and at times further apart. It has been hard on us as a married couple. We grieve so differently but from the beginning we have allowed each other to grieve however we have needed to. We stand strong together with LOVE in our hearts. We did not want to become a statistic.

Since Christian was born, I have learned incredibly intense, beautiful, and heartbreaking lessons that could only be taught to me through the loss of a child. I often wonder why this had to happen. What was the reason for this? Why did he have to die? I will never know but I will do my best to make sure that he is never forgotten. We will never be able to measure the value of the gifts that Christian has brought into our lives. His life and death has opened our eyes to so many beautiful and amazing friendships. His spirit is felt by so many.

I thank God every day for all four of my children. I am not angry now, but thankful that my son has given me this beautiful life that I live today. I know that the place that Christian is in is so incredibly amazing. I will miss him every day for the rest of my life. I thank my angels for helping me to rise above my sadness. I thank God for sending Christian into my life, even if it was only for the shortest stay. I miss him, I love him, and I will mother him always, because he is my son. And he matters.

Carly Marie's 'Seashore of Remembrance' is one of the most beautiful ways to memorialise a child that we have seen. Please visit Carly's website (carlymarieprojectheal.com) for more information on this and all of the other projects that she is involved with.



Ivy

We lost our baby girl, Natalya, on the 31st October 2011. I still cannot believe that it's been almost a year without her. I was pregnant at the same time as a lot of my friends, and every time I see their babies already crawling I can't help but think that that should have been my baby. Dealing with the anger was the hardest part for my husband, our marriage, and me. One day we would be so close and the next we would have one of our very regular screaming matches.

My counsellor suggested that I start training to release some of the energy in the training instead of my husband, so I started training for the SMH half marathon, which I ran in memory of my daughter. I also organised a fundraising ball for which Mia herself was a special guest speaker. I will be forever grateful for her generosity and I will never forget her speech, which helped me realise that I was not alone in my grief.

There are so many of us out there, yet losing a child is the loneliest path that we have no choice but take. I sincerely hope that this book will not only help parents going through their grief, but also it will raise awareness and educate others in the way that they can support parents like us.



Sue

My beautiful son, Thomas, was stillborn on 13th May 2009 at 34 weeks. There was no reason for his death. I found out that there was no heartbeat at a regular check-up. I remember how cruel I thought my obstetrician was to suggest that I should deliver the baby naturally. I was numb when they told me and remember going into autopilot — all I wanted to do was go home and spend time with my two year old daughter.

There were no tears to start with, just a belief that I had somehow killed my son. I remember everything so clearly. A sleepless night with a complete disbelief that my baby had died, the baby who, only days before, had been kicking me. I remember the devastation when we arrived at the hospital, the same hospital where I had delivered my daughter two years before. The staff were amazing, I will never be able to thank them enough for their support and understanding.

Although this was a time of sadness I remember the elation of being able to deliver my son naturally. I remember the joy of seeing him, holding him, and kissing him. I also remember the fear of what he would look like and thinking that he would be cold and stiff, but he was warm and he was my beautiful little boy who was at peace.

The real loss hit me the next morning when we met with the funeral directors and they took him away. The loss will be with me forever. Not a day goes by when I don't remember him and think how our lives would be richer with him here.

Every year we celebrate the anniversary of his birth by coming together as a family. We have a special dinner and then we each write a message on a balloon and send the balloons to him to play with. It is always a difficult time of year, especially as it is a day or two after Mother's Day.

As others have said, you never forget. I carried Thomas for 34 weeks. I had hopes and dreams for him, he was going to complete our family, but unfortunately he was taken too soon. I have looked for answers everywhere and have only recently realised that I just need to accept it happened. Thomas will always have a place in our family. I proudly talk about him, my daughter talks about him and whenever she sees a star in the sky she says that Baby Thomas is watching us. Talking openly is the best thing I have done and I would love to share my story with you.

One of the positives that came out of the loss of Thomas is that I will never turn away when someone suffers a loss. I will never pretend it hasn't happened and if that can help someone get through a period of loss and grief then I am thankful.



Dianna

I gave birth to very pre-term twin boys on October 6 2005. At 24 weeks and 5 days, they were not expected to survive and we were given a very grim outlook of the possibilities (disability, death, etc.). The boys were born weighing only one pound ten and a half ounces and one pound ten ounces respectively. The hospital staff were fantastic and the boys were given the best care possible.

Two weeks in, we were told to "relax" as they don't usually lose them after this much time. On day 25, Harrison (the eldest twin) perforated his bowel and, despite

the doctors' best efforts, died of infection. The doctors kept him alive with CPR until my husband could come from work to hold his hand and say goodbye. We were a mess... planning a funeral for one son whilst having to keep going back to see the other son (Cooper).

The hospital staff were great and very supportive, but the thought of taking Cooper home after months was too frightening to contemplate. My husband and I talked a lot, cried a lot, and found our way through the most awful time of our lives. Seven years on and Cooper is a healthy, average, yet exceptional, little boy.

Every year, around this time, my husband, who doesn't talk much about Harrison, likes to go out and buy (or make) something for a special part of the garden that he calls Harrison's Garden. This is his way of dealing with the grief. Grief never goes away but becomes easier to talk about and deal with. I often still find myself asking why and replaying different scenarios in my head about what might have happened if...

We have had another baby since and Evan, a full term and robust little man who gives us a lot of joy. We are thankful for what we have and will always remember the son we couldn't bring home.



Russ

My wife and I have had four miscarriages without a success (yet!!). As part of the healing, we are taking the step to plant four roses at home in memory of everything we have been through. A reminder of the 'jelly beans' we didn't get to meet or know.



Gillian

I gave birth to the most beautiful baby girl on 11 July 2011 ... perfect in every way, yet not breathing. Layla Emerald was stillborn at 40 weeks + 5 days gestation. We've only just discovered, almost 15 months on from her birth, that I had an amniotic fluid infection. Apparently, a significant proportion of stillbirths may be attributed to infection — it's an area of research that the Stillbirth Foundation is currently supporting. Of course, answers such as the one we've been given don't make our loss any easier to deal with — but it helps (for future pregnancy) to have something other than "unexplained" on the paperwork.

One of the most important things to me, in facing and dealing with my grief over the loss of Layla, has been for her to be acknowledged; for her name to be spoken; for her to be remembered as a real little person who was here on this earth. With this in mind, and to fulfil one of our dreams for Layla of travelling far and wide, Layla's daddy and I created 'Layla's Travel Stones' as a means of ensuring our precious baby girl was able to explore the world and, equally, that this world experienced our Layla. The stones (small river pebbles engraved with Layla's name and date of birth) were given to our family and friends with a request from us that they place them in a beautiful or memorable location next time they travelled.

Layla's website (<http://www.laylastavelstones.com>) tracks the final location of her stones and brings us much joy in the thought that so many have made the effort and that Layla is indeed spreading her wings.



Hamish by Karissa Tuckwell, Heartfelt

Grieving and Remembering

by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

As you grieve, remembering your baby can help you cope. Although thinking about your baby can trigger feelings of grief, dwelling on your memories is a way for you to slowly adjust to your baby's absence. Memories allow you to reminisce about your pregnancy, your baby's special qualities, and happier times. Memories make it possible for you to say goodbye to your baby at a gradual pace.

In the past, parents were encouraged to forget their dead babies. Because there was so little to remember, it was assumed to be an easy task. However, it is not so easy, because to forget is to abandon a cherished child, to give up a part of yourself, and to walk away from your dreams and your envisioned future. And it was traumatic and undermining for parents to be told that their grief was unfounded. Nowadays, because of increased awareness, research, education, and advocacy, modern bereavement care supports and encourages parents to remember, nurture, and affirm their babies. This kind of support enables parents to more easily grieve, cope, integrate this baby into their lives, and adjust to a different future.

Memorialising your baby

Many parents find it helpful to have their baby memorialised in a tangible way. There are many ways to publicly acknowledge your baby's existence:

- » Have your baby's name written in the shore at sunset or have it engraved in stone or brass and mounted somewhere meaningful.
- » Write a poem or a story about your baby and have it published in a newsletter, magazine, or newspaper — or your own blog.
- » On anniversary dates or Christmas, make a donation in your baby's name to a charity or research foundation.
- » During the Christmas season, some philanthropic organisations give out names of needy children. Buy something for a child that is the age your child would have been.
- » Donate some helium balloons to a children's hospital or the intensive care unit where your baby stayed.
- » Donate a tree or other plant to a botanic garden in your baby's memory.
- » Name a star in your baby's honour (www.starregistry.com.au).
- » Send a birth and death announcement to family and friends. Particularly if your baby died early in pregnancy, such an announcement enables you to

acknowledge your baby and gives you an opportunity for naming and sharing your grief. Such an announcement might read, “It is with great sorrow that we inform you of the passing of our child, _____. We know that you understand the importance of this child in our life and will share in our grief.”

Over time, you may think of other meaningful, public ways to honour the memory of your baby. It’s never too late to make this kind of gesture.

There are also many private ways to memorialise your baby. You may find it comforting to plant a tree or a flowering shrub in your garden or keep a houseplant as a living memorial to your baby. During the Christmas season — or any time of year — you may want to display an ornament or burn a candle in memory of your baby. You could invest in a piece of jewellery or another object of value that symbolises your baby. You can wear a locket containing a wisp of your baby’s hair.

You may want to make your own memorials, enlisting your own creativity. There are many skills parents draw on, including patchwork, quilting, needlework, knitting, sewing, doll making, drawing, painting, silk screening, journalling, scrapbooking, engraving, sculpting, woodworking, glass blowing, gardening, flower arranging, or creating a piece of stained glass, pottery, furniture, poetry, or music. Hang keepsakes on a wall or display them under glass, or frame anything that reminds you of your baby. Design a card with your baby’s name and date of birth and death. Include a poem or footprints/handprints, and have it professionally printed and framed. You can also make a container to hold mementos of your baby.

You may find that the creativity involved in such projects gives you a sense of accomplishment and worth — that you are still capable of making beauty after your baby’s death.

This piece was written for us by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, using updated and adapted excerpts from her book, ‘Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby’. Deborah is a developmental psychologist who has written a number of books that support parents through various crises, including the death of a baby at any time during pregnancy or infancy. ‘Empty Cradle, Broken Heart’ is essential reading for bereaved parents and is available online and from all good bookstores.

Poem

Empty Arms

Not everyone was happy, when they were first to hear of you
But already I adored you, over-joyed to bring you through
They all worried for my welfare, they all did but fear the worst
But risk it all to have you, just so happy — I could burst!

I collected all you'd need, from the moment you'd arrive
Bunny rugs and bottles, learned to place you on your side!
Collected wee and blood tests till my mind could stand no more
But every drop they captured, well worth the one I did adore!

A baby boy — too pretty! Some would surely say,
A life cut short in-utero, cut short by twenty days!
A routine scan discovered, our time together's final end
Your heart no longer beating, how could I ever mend?

Why did the world keep turning, when my boy had gone away?
Not to know him for one minute, not to see him grow and play
I went through pains and hours, while you came into this world
I stroked your tiny head and watched for fingers to uncurl.

Wishing for a miracle, I tried to WILL you back,
I talked to you and kissed you til the nurses took you back
You were perfect in your body, a little smaller than you should
Do anything to keep you, keep you with us, yes I would!

Never Forgotten

But then the longest walk of all from hospital to car,
With empty arms I'd leave there, a young heart battle scarred,
In following days I'd name you, Anthony, Tony for short!
And then a service/funeral and a brass plaque need be bought.

This seems a million years ago, when I was twenty-one!
My saddest time I'll ever have — to lose my only son.

by Priss Pringle



I have to remember that
time is not taking me farther
from you,
but it is bringing me closer
to seeing you again.
That, to you, we only
will have been parted for an
insignificant moment.

- Andrea Butter

Further reading,
helpful information,
and resource lists.

A note to friends and family

by Deborah L. Davis, PhD

Whether you are a friend, an acquaintance, or a close or distant relative, you can offer invaluable support to bereaved parents. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

Face your own feelings about death

Feelings of disappointment, failure, fear, sadness, and anger over the death of a baby are quite natural. By acknowledging your own feelings, you will be better able to approach parents openly and supportively. They appreciate those who share their sorrow and dismay, and are comforted to know others grieve with them.

Educate yourself about grief

If you understand the significant and lasting effect of a baby's death on a family, you will be in a better position to offer support. Being aware of the experiences, behaviors, and emotions that accompany grieving will enable you to listen without judgment or worry, and to reassure parents that their reactions are normal. You will also feel more comfortable around the grieving parents.

Affirm the baby

Personalise the parents' relationship to their child by referring to "the baby" and using the given name. Avoid using terms such as "fetus," or "the miscarriage," or "the stillbirth." Recognise gender by saying "him" or "her" rather than "it". Refrain from statements that devalue the baby who died, such as, "You're still young, you can have another." The parents loved this baby. Don't try to persuade them to forget and move on — parents need to remember and dwell on their baby. By talking about the baby directly and sensitively, you can help parents acknowledge their bereavement and express their grief. For those experiencing parenthood for the first time, however briefly, affirm that they will always be this child's mother or father.

Validate the parents' grief

While the urge to ease parents' sorrow is natural, remember, there is nothing you can say or do that will "fix it" or take away their pain. Since the baby is constantly on their minds, avoiding the subject only makes them feel more isolated and invalidated. Refrain from statements that belittle their grief such as, "It's really for the best." And don't point out the treasures you can find in their adversity. They

can only find silver linings for themselves at their own pace, and even then, these will not banish their grief. Instead of offering solutions or platitudes, simply tell them how sorry you are and that you are thinking of them. Knowing that you care and understand is immensely comforting.

Be a willing listener

Parents benefit from telling their story over and over. Even if you know the details, you might ask, “Would it help to tell me about your baby?” This is an invitation parents usually welcome. By listening with empathy and acceptance, you give the parents a chance to air thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or pressure to “feel better by now”. If the parent starts to cry, this is OK. These are the healthy tears of grief, and you have given the gift of an opportunity for expression.

Continue to offer support as time passes

While the first year or so is most difficult, many parents feel abandoned or pressured to feel better after just a few weeks or months. Not wanting to burden you with their troubles, they may hesitate to discuss the baby or their feelings. If you pose general questions such as “how are you doing?” parents easily assume you only want to exchange pleasantries. Emotionally vulnerable, they may find it hard to seek out your support, choosing to withdraw instead.

To broach the subject directly, you can let them know you are thinking of them and the baby. They will appreciate your initiative. You can demonstrate a willingness to listen by continuing to ask specific questions about their situation. Parents usually are eager to discuss matters such as: “What was the most difficult part about your baby’s death?” or “What are some of your favorite memories?” or “What are some helpful and/or not so helpful things people have said to you?” Ask to see photographs or other mementos. Express your remembrance on the anniversary of the baby’s due date, birth, or death, or on special holidays, even as the years go by. By inviting parents to share their grief, you will be providing genuine personal support.

This piece was written for us by Deborah L. Davis, PhD, using updated and adapted excerpts from her book, 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby'. Deborah is a developmental psychologist who has written a number of books that support parents through various crises, including the death of a baby at any time during pregnancy or infancy. 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart' is essential reading for bereaved parents and is available online and from all good bookstores.

Helping children grieve

by Martine Oglethorpe

Grieving is a very personal experience and many of us will find that we deal with grief in very different ways. This, of course, is the same for children. If a family has suffered the loss of a family member, friend, or even a beloved pet, it is important that parents allow their children to grieve in their individual ways. Some will be overt in their grief, whilst others may appear as if nothing has changed. What is most important for any person who is grieving is to have that grief acknowledged, and for them to be provided with a safe environment to deal with their emotions in a way that best meets their needs.

In the past, children were often shielded from being involved in a family's grieving process and this, I believe, must only have left them feeling fearful, confused, and isolated. Children, instead, should be allowed to see your grief and display their own, to hear your cries and cry their own tears. They must also be witness to your ability to continue to function and take part in daily activities, so that they too can know that it is okay for them to return to their games and play. They need to see that whilst you are devastated by an event, you still have the ability to pick yourself up. They need to see that there is no stop/start to grieving: there will be times when you are down, there will be times when you are okay, and these emotions will continue to fluctuate for some time.

When my daughter died I was at first concerned about the effect on my seven year old, as he would often ask me to lie with him at night. His questions and attempts to try and make sense of the seemingly unexplainable would often leave us both crying ourselves to sleep. Was I putting too much of my own pain on to his tiny little shoulders? Should I have tried to shield him more from the enormity of this whole experience? On reflection, I began to realise that this was something that he needed to do as well. I am now confident in the knowledge that he only took on what he could handle. It was also important for us to be able to get up the next morning and talk about normal stuff, have a laugh, go about our daily tasks, and thus remind ourselves that despite finding ourselves in a place of desperate sadness, we also knew that those times wouldn't last forever. They will return, and we will find ourselves there again, but they will also be shelved, hidden somewhere far enough away to enable us to go on and enjoy our everyday living.

So when your children are mourning the loss of someone or something, remember that acknowledging that loss is the key for them, and be guided by them as to how much they are able to take on. Age, development, and personality all play a large part in how children respond to grief. Some may mourn fiercely and loudly and be ruled by these emotions of grief. Others may take much longer to process the emotions and you may find they come out later, at often unexpected times and in unexpected ways. Provide open communication and a safe environment, so that in

whatever timeframe they have and whatever process they endure, they will know that there will always be an opportunity for them to be heard and for their grief to be acknowledged.

Martine Oglethorpe is a mother to five boys and a baby girl who passed away at 5 months old. She is a family and youth counsellor sharing her personal and professional experience on her blog themodernparent.net



Freya by Adrienne Gilligan, Heartfelt



While it is always sad when someone dies, the death of a baby brings a special kind of sadness. It seems to go against the natural order of life and feels particularly cruel because it comes just as a new life was expected.

Grandchildren are supposed to be one of the most cherished joys of growing older. They are special little people to spoil with love and affection and also the newest members of the family's next generation.

Grandparents-to-be often await the arrival of a baby with a similar sense of anticipation as the parents.

When a grandchild dies, many grandparents feel strong and unexpected emotions. It is often said that bereaved grandparents suffer a 'double sorrow'. They witness the immense suffering of their own child as they also mourn the death of their grandchild.

For grandparents, there was once a time when it was their responsibility to protect their son or daughter from harm. Although your child has most likely been an independent adult for many years, the desire to protect them from pain is a natural instinct. You may feel that watching your child suffer is the most difficult part of this tragic event, because you know there is nothing you can do to 'fix' things. However, know that the special kind of love and support you can offer can be invaluable to your child's emotional recovery.

Lost hopes and dreams

For many parents, their hopes and dreams are lost when their baby dies. This is the same for grandparents. You may have looked forward to cuddling your grandchild, teaching him or her new things, or bonding together on outings.

Feelings and reactions

As grandparents of a baby who has died, it is normal to experience a range of intense emotions — this is part of the process.

Grandparents sometimes question whether their feelings are justified, because they hardly got to know, and perhaps didn't even see, their grandchild. It is important to remember that feelings based on emotional connections can be just as strong as those based on physical ones.

Some emotions you may experience include shock, denial, confusion, disappointment, and jealousy, as well as:

Anger: This may be directed towards yourself, God, your partner, health professionals, the other side of the family, or even the baby who died.

Guilt: Some grandparents feel guilty that their grandchild died while they continued living.

Sadness: This experience may bring back memories of other deaths from the past.

Frustration: Grandparents may feel more aware of their own mortality than other family members, and may feel as though their chances to experience grandchildren are running out.

Give yourself time to work through these feelings, and be aware that they may also affect you physically. Exhaustion is common, as are disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.

Ways to help yourself

While you provide support to others, remember that you too have experienced a loss and must also take care of yourself.

Many grandparents who have partners count on them for support and this may be sufficient.

Occasionally though, this dependence can cause strain, as couples may expect to grieve together in the same way. Remember that all individuals experience grief differently — and that men and women often have different ways of coping.

Women may want to express their emotions by talking and crying, whereas men may not be as inclined to communicate their sorrow in these ways. Try to be accepting of each other's differences.

Where to go for more help

Many grandparents have found it helpful to get support from their partner (if they have one), as well as friends or members of their local community. You may also like to speak with a GP or a religious/spiritual practitioner.

If you would like a mental health clinician to support you during this time, Sands can provide details of professionals practising in your area. Sands also has trained parent supporters who have had a grandchild die, and you may wish to speak with them.

Other helpful suggestions

Avoiding conflict:

Because your child is experiencing stress and emotional turmoil, they may likely be very sensitive to other people's words and actions.

Sometimes grandparents have the urge to 'parent' their child and offer opinions such as "You worked too hard", "You weren't eating right" or "You left it too late." It is not uncommon for parents to blame themselves when their child dies, so reconsider any comments that have the potential to cause added guilt. Don't let a careless moment cause a rift. Offer reassurance instead of judgement and know that it is okay to say, "I just don't know what to say."

Let parents make their own decisions:

Remember that parents and children often have different values and beliefs. You and your child may not always agree on how to approach matters relating to the baby's death. Try not to pressure your child into any particular course of action — allow them to do what seems right for them at this time. Being receptive and supportive of their needs can make the world of difference.

This information has been adapted using excerpts from the 'Grandparents' booklet produced by Sands Australia. Sands aims to facilitate healthy grieving following the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, newborn death, or termination for medical purposes. To contact Sands, or read this brochure in full, please visit www.sands.org.au.

Creativity and Grief

by Debra Bath

Who'd have thought that there could be any similarity between creativity and grief? This may seem like a long shot, a creative mash-up gone wrong, but somehow it makes sense to me.

Last week we attended the Sunday service at the church located at our son's school. My husband regularly plays the drums in the church band and it was one of his playing days. I didn't know it in advance, but it also happened to be the special Year 3 service, where the students actively participated in the service with singing, talk, and drama. About 40 little 8-year-olds and their families flooded the chapel. The girls were wearing their favourite dresses and looking very much like, well, little girls. Bright eyes, smiling and nervous faces, hair bows and shiny shoes creating a wave of glitter as they rushed by.

At one point all the students were on stage and I could see the full array of little girls. I wondered to myself, "What would Lillienne look like now? Would she be like that girl, tiny and shy, or like that other one, seemingly proud and confident? Would she love to wear sparkling sandals and a flowing dress? Or would she rather something else?" Lillienne, my dead daughter, would be the same age, in the same class, as these girls.

As we began to sing a hymn, I couldn't hold back my tears any longer. They rolled down my cheeks and I covered my face with my hands. "No, not now!" I thought. So I gathered myself together in the moment and steeled myself for the rest of the service. I lip-sync'd the rest of the hymn. I was unable to get any words out, especially anything to do with love, longing, suffering, or goodness. Unfortunately pretty predictable themes of most religious songs.

As the service ended, I avoided the gaze of anyone, knowing that if someone were to say, 'Hello, how are you?' I would burst into tears. And that would not be good timing. After eight years of experience, I've learned that it is unlikely for people to handle another person's tears very well. Even less well when they discover that not one, but two, of my babies have died. What does one say to that? Usually not much, followed by an uncomfortable silence, and muddled segue to some other topic of conversation or a need to leave. I truly feel for anyone who has unknowingly walked into this with me. Of course they don't know what to say. Why would they? Grief is one thing that all humans experience, but it is one thing that we rarely talk about or learn to be comfortable with.

So my grief, when it comes, is not often timely. In the middle of a church service, or driving in the car. Not good timing. Tears and driving are a particularly unsafe combination. Like sneezing repeatedly. Both could potentially lead to a crash.

Tears and being in public are just plain uncomfortable and inconvenient, for everyone. So I've learned to 'suck it up'. Suck up the tears back to where they came from, suck up the pain and cover it with my invisible armour so it cannot be seen. And hope that it returns at a more opportune time. When I'm alone and have the time to be with it.

Because I do hope it returns. At least, most of the time. It is through my grief — the pain, the memories, the longing — that I am able to connect with my daughter and my son. Love and pain are inextricably entwined in grief. Especially grief that follows the death of a child.

But the inspiration, or trigger, for my grief is not something I can contain or control. Just as is the inspiration for creativity, it seems. And here's the link. Finally! I hear you say. Famous creative individuals have often talked about the process of inspiration being something you can't always control, that it often happens out of the blue. For example, Leonard Cohen the musician and songwriter has said:

"I can work, I can go to my desk and work every day for a year and nothing happens...Whereas, sometimes just a waitress handing me a sandwich can ... touch me very, very deeply and suddenly everything will open up — the heart will open up. It's very mysterious how the heart opens up."

And Elizabeth Gilbert (author of *Eat, Pray, Love*) recounts how Tom Waits once described driving down the freeway in LA when all of a sudden he hears a little fragment of melody, coming to him in that often elusive way, when there is no way to capture the inspiration as it comes. In this story, Tom apparently looks up to the sky and says, "Excuse me, can you not see that I'm driving? Do I look like I can write down a song right now? If you really want to exist, come back at a more opportune moment when I can take care of you."

So I wonder what the underlying similarity is for this triggering experience in grief and creativity? Perhaps it is that both involve our emotional memories and processes in the brain. Perhaps that is why creative approaches are often used in therapy, such as writing, art, and drama. But here's another thought. What happens to creativity if you ignore it? With grief, it inevitably comes back to you, and often in waves much stronger than those you've tried to repress. Or it finds other ways of seeping through you, such as with illness, depression, anxiety, or an inability to be free to feel anything.

But what of creativity? Would it matter if you repressed those inspiring moments, those urges? Abraham Maslow (early proponent of Humanistic psychology) suggests that humans have an innate need for growth and self-actualisation, "the full realisation of one's potential". Perhaps for some individuals, creativity is part of their potential and therefore not to fulfill their creativity would be not to fulfill their potential. According to a humanistic view, feeling stifled in one's personal growth

leads to mental ill-health. So, like repressing grief, perhaps ignoring the need for creativity would also have a negative impact on one's wellbeing.

Later that day, after coming home from church and entertaining family for the afternoon, I was still feeling the heaviness of my held-back tears. But I felt like the moment had passed, and I thought, "What good would it do me now?" as I climbed into bed. What was the point of sharing this with my husband, when there was nothing he could do? But as I turned to say goodnight, I couldn't get the words out before I began to cry. Through gut-wrenching tears I told him about seeing all the little girls at church. I don't know how long I cried for. But I haven't cried like that for years. I cried so hard it hurt my ribs, my eyes, my head, my heart. I cried for all the times I couldn't cry. For all the times I held in my tears, too embarrassed, exhausted, or guilty to shed them. For all the times I wanted to show the world my pain but didn't. For all the times Lillienne's or Finn's spirit had come to me at an inopportune moment, and I had wanted so desperately to be with them but couldn't. Afterwards I felt a little lighter. Relieved to have allowed the inspiration to come and be processed.

A friend of mine, a writer, academic, musician (and just all round very creative person!) recently wrote of her experience of creativity. She talked about how she engages in her own creative processes, allowing herself to take moments of inspiration, and that her wellbeing, both personal and professional, is so much better when she does. It was reading her reflections that inspired me to write this. So there you have it. Creativity and grief, perhaps a perfect combination.

Debra Bath, PhD, MAPS, is both a grieving mother and a psychologist. She previously worked as an academic, teaching psychology to university students for about 10 years, and now dedicates her time to her young son and runs a part-time private practice working with children and young adults. This piece was originally posted on Deb's blog at alifetoponder.blogspot.com.au.



*Australian support and information services
for bereaved parents and families*

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

www.grief.org.au

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is a not-for-profit organisation established to provide a range of education, counselling, research, and clinical services for those working in and affected by experiences of grief and bereavement.

Bears of Hope

www.bearsofhope.org.au

Bears of Hope is an Australian registered not-for-profit organisation managed solely by a dedicated team of bereaved parents. Bears of Hope provides leading support and exceptional care for families who experience the loss of their baby.

Heartfelt: giving the gift of photographic memories

www.heartfelt.org.au

Heartfelt is a volunteer organisation of professional photographers from all over Australia dedicated to giving the gift of photographic memories to families that have experienced stillbirths, premature births, or have children with serious and terminal illnesses.

PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association Inc.)

www.panda.org.au

PANDA's National Perinatal Depression Helpline, funded by the Australian and Victorian Governments, provides vital support, information, referral, and counselling to thousands of Australian parents and their families.

Pilari (Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Research & Information)

www.pilari.org

Pilari offers information, support, and healing for everyone affected by pregnancy and infant loss.

Pillars of Strength

www.pillarsofstrength.com.au

Pillars of Strength provides 'time out' and support to bereaved Dads and to Dads while their child is sick in hospital.

Pregnancy Loss Australia

www.teddyloveclub.org.au

Pregnancy Loss Australia (formerly known as Teddy Love Club) is a national support program for bereaved families who suffer the loss of their baby or babies from miscarriage, stillbirth, termination for foetal abnormality, and neonatal loss through an early support program and professional support services.

Sands Australia (miscarriage, stillbirth, and newborn death support)

www.sands.org.au

Sands aims to facilitate healthy grieving following the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, newborn death, or termination for medical purposes, by providing quality support and information to parents and their families.

Sids and Kids

www.sidsandkids.org

Sids and Kids Australia is a high profile and well-respected national not-for-profit organisation with a highly successful history in health promotion, bereavement support, advocacy, and research.

Stillbirth Foundation

www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au

The Stillbirth Foundation Australia works to reduce the incidence of stillbirth in Australia by funding and encouraging research into stillbirth, and increasing public awareness about stillbirth.

The Shed Online

www.theshedonline.org.au

The Shed Online is an online social community for men that includes men's online forums, general support and resources, and information about locally based men's support groups.

Yasmina's Gift of Hope

www.ygoh.org.au

Yasmina's Gift of Hope provides awareness, support, understanding, and a Gift of Hope for families who experience miscarriage, premature birth, neonatal loss, stillbirth, infant loss, or diagnosis of a congenital abnormality during pregnancy or after birth.

Please note: This list is not comprehensive but we have done our best to include the leading organisations in Australia. These websites listed will include a range of additional links to other resources and state/local services.

Communities, blogs, and other services

A Life to Ponder

alifetoponder.blogspot.com.au

Debra Bath is both a grieving mother and a psychologist who has written several pieces for our book. On her blog, Deb ponders life, death, and the little things in between.

Carly Marie's Project Heal

carlymarieprojectheal.com

Visit this website for information on Carly's gorgeous 'Seashore of Remembrance', artwork, photography, and other community projects.

Exhale Literary Magazine

exhaleliterarymagazine.stillstandingmag.com

Breathing through creativity.

Laugh, Cry, Live

www.psychologytoday.com/blog/laugh-cry-live

Deborah L. Davis, PhD, author of 'Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby' has written several pieces for our book. On her blog, she ponders the emotional side of life, beginning to end.

Mums Like Me

www.mumslikeme.org

Mums Like Me is a not-for-profit organisation that donates handmade Memory Boxes to hospitals for newly bereaved parents. These boxes are made by other bereaved parents at support group meetings.

Still Life 365

stilllife365.blogspot.com.au

Still Life 365 is a unique art project for, about, and by mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death.

Still Standing Magazine

stillstandingmag.com

Surviving child loss and infertility.

Please note: There are hundreds of blogs for and by bereaved parents, many of which were posted as links in our comments section. Unfortunately, because there were so many, we were not able to visit each one individually. For that reason, we have only included the blogs of those professionals who wrote pieces especially for our book. Likewise, our list of support services is not comprehensive, but we have done our best to include the leading organisations.



Recommended reading list

Coping with Grief

Mal McKissock and Dianne McKissock, 2001 (Australia)

ABC Books

This excellent book outlines the grieving process and provides practical suggestions for reducing further suffering and bereavement.

Our Babies Have Died

Sands Victoria 2008 (Australia)

This is a collection of 37 stories written by bereaved parents in the hope that they will help others going through the grief of losing a child. These stories are at times heartbreaking, brave, and sensitive.

Pregnancy Loss: Surviving Miscarriage and Stillbirth

Zoe Taylor, 2010 (Australia)

A book of courage, hope, and survival for people touched by all aspects of pregnancy loss, whether late or early.

An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination: A Memoir

Elizabeth McCracken, 2010 (US)

“This is the happiest story in the world with the saddest ending,” Elizabeth McCracken writes in her hauntingly beautiful and often blunt memoir about the stillbirth of her firstborn son.

Layla’s Story: A Memoir of Sex, Love, Loss, and Longing

Vanessa Gorman, 2005 (Australia)

An extraordinary account of the life of a 30-something both before and after the death of her firstborn daughter, Layla.

They Were Still Born: Personal Stories about Stillbirth

Edited by Janel Atlas, 2010 (US)

Atlas has written extensively about her daughter's stillbirth and this book is a compilation of courageous accounts of stillbirth written by some brilliant writers.

Still At Birth

Caroline Sugden, 2011 (Australia)

A story about the deep loss, grief, and survival after stillbirth, including a legal battle over her obstetric care.

Life Touches Life: A Mother's Story of Stillbirth and Healing

Lorraine Ash, 2004 (US)

A mother's memoir about the stillbirth of her first and only child.

A Mother's Tears

Nicole Wyborn, 2011 (Australia)

Midwife Nicole loses two babies to miscarriage, then experiences a stillbirth as well.

Not Compatible With Life: A Diary of Keeping Daniel

Kylie Sheffield, 2008 (Australia)

A mother's journey after learning her baby had a condition in utero that was not compatible with life.

A Kiss From An Angel

Stacey and Gavin O'Brien, 2005 (Australia)

A glimpse into the pain of a mother and father after the death of their firstborn son.

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby

Deborah L. Davis, Ph.D, 1996 (US)

Offers reassurance to parents who suffer from anger, guilt, and despair after the death of their baby.

Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Death

Sherokee Ilse, 2008 (US)

A revised edition of this useful supplement, reinforcing and expanding on some of the issues presented in this book. Written by a parent.

When a Baby Dies: The Experience of Late Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Neonatal Death

Nancy Kohner and Alix Henley, 2001 (UK)

Produced in co-operation with Sands UK, this book presents the experience of perinatal loss from parents' perspectives. It includes a 60-page appendix on medical explanations.

Someone Came Before You

Pat Schwiebert, 2009 (US)

A gentle book with illustrations explaining the death of a baby to siblings.

Beginnings and Endings With Lifetimes in Between

Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen, 2005 (Australia)

A beautifully illustrated book to help explain life and death to children.

Wishes For Us, Wishes For You

Julie Pearce, 2010 (Australia)

A picture storybook for children about love, loss and grief.

This list was provided by Sands Australia from its soon-to-be published book, 'Life, Loss, Hope: Surviving the death of your baby' (2013). Please visit sands.org.au for more information.

I didn't bury my son,

I planted him...

And he grows...

- April Burnhill

Max and Nicholas by Gavin Blue, Heartfelt