



Edward

Edward Burridge
18 October 2002

Susan and Rick are New Zealand/English expatriates who have lived in Singapore for eight years. They were delighted to conceive their third child, Edward, and the whole family was looking forward to his arrival. But at 30 weeks of pregnancy little Edward's heart suddenly stopped beating for no apparent reason. His parents have had to learn to cope with this illogical and terrible loss, and regret the lack of hospital support and understanding in their moment of grief.

Written by Susan Burridge, Edward's mother

On 17th October 2002, I arrived at the hospital for my antenatal appointment, which I had arranged four weeks previously when I was last there. As usual, the nurse took my blood pressure and weight gain, which were both fine and had been throughout this pregnancy.

The Doctor ushered me into his consulting room. I was familiar with him, as he had delivered my two other children (Lucy and Holly). It was always exciting to see him and we had a brief chat. After acknowledging that I had had a good weight gain, he felt my tummy and said the baby was in the breech position. Not a problem as I was 30 weeks and there was plenty of time for the baby to move.

He then did a routine scan. That was where everything started to go wrong. He asked me in a worried tone when the baby had last moved. I was beginning to feel threads

of coldness creep over me. I knew that the baby had moved the night before and remembered watching my tummy move while I was lying in bed. I had been amused at all the activity inside me. I hadn't felt movement that morning but wasn't monitoring it nor at all concerned as it was still only 9.30 am and I had been busy running around trying to get to my appointment on time. The Doctor then held my hand and told me he couldn't find a heartbeat and that he thought our baby had died.

My mouth turned dry and all I could think of was NO, no, no. I kept asking if he was sure and he said how sorry he was. Then I just kept repeating, "OK, OK" in this unusual voice, trying to comprehend what was happening. My body felt completely numb as though somebody had hit me really hard. Somehow I managed to telephone my husband at work. He was devastated and came to the hospital immediately. I was put in another consulting room to wait for him to arrive. The nurse stayed with me and we waited. The feeling was pure disbelief, shock and unbearable sadness. When Rick arrived, we fell apart and cried.

We were sent down to the radiologist so they could confirm there was no heartbeat on a more detailed scanner. It was desperate seeing all the people waiting for their 20-week scans with big smiles on their expectant faces. We had tear-stained faces and were in total shock.

Only a few weeks earlier, we had been there like them. Everything felt surreal like it was a dreadful nightmare. We kept hoping there had been a terrible mistake and the radiologist would find a heartbeat. The radiologist confirmed our nightmare that in fact our baby had died. We then were sent back up to our doctor's room. There, he told us that I needed to deliver the baby. Either by allowing it to come naturally, which could take up to four weeks or by inducement—which he recommended. We chose the latter option. It somehow felt wrong having our baby inside me if it wasn't alive. At that point I asked what sex our baby was. We were keeping it as a surprise, but I suddenly needed to know. The doctor told us it was a boy. At that point, we both broke down as reality kicked in. He would be the son we had dreamed about.

I was admitted to hospital that afternoon and given vaginal pessaries to induce labour. By 7.00 am the next morning nothing much was happening and we were getting desperate for this part of the nightmare to be over. They gave me an epidural and oxytocin, which brought on the labour quickly.

Our son Edward was born on 18th October 2002. He was beautifully perfect and it was so desperately sad that we couldn't have him alive. I remember thinking how quiet the delivery room was. No baby crying—just this dreadful silence. We both held him, kissed him, said a prayer and our goodbyes. He will always be our third child and our beautiful son, Edward.

No photos were taken of our little boy. I really feel the hospital failed us in respect of support immediately after his birth and helping us provide memories, which we could keep. I would never want anyone to feel that their baby somehow wasn't important

enough. It is obviously such a distressing and confusing time for parents and they need to be guided by the hospital staff. Taking photos, a lock of hair and footprints should be mandatory. A birth and death certificate, no matter what the baby's gestation. Suggestions and guidance for a burial or cremation would have been helpful. We had to ask for these, unsure if was even okay to do so. We were made to feel like Edward was somehow not a "real" person and so "did it matter?" I feel so cross about that now.

We were also made to feel like there was no time and everything had to be done quickly. He was whisked away once we had said our initial goodbye, so soon. What if we had wanted to see him again? He was actually cremated that day! It was all very unnecessary and this definitely made it more difficult and traumatic for us. Fortunately, a very great friend raced down to the crematorium (just in time) to take his footprints. They are all we have of our beautiful little boy. I am so incredibly grateful to her for doing that for our family and us. I look at them every day and really don't know what I would do if I did not have them.

Seven long weeks after Edward's birth and death we went away on a family holiday. It was wonderful to escape for a while, although I am very glad that we spent some time facing reality and dealing with people before we went. It was reassuring to know while we were away we had already "faced the world", so this wasn't looming over us when we returned.

The holiday enabled us to have some special time together and also gave Rick a chance to talk to me about how he felt. Men are hopeless at talking to each other about these things. I think it really helped him, although he has never found it as easy to talk about Edward as I do, so the grieving process is different.

Life went on—but sometimes when I was doing something very ordinary, like driving to the shops, it would suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks. I would feel all dry in the mouth with the wind completely knocked out of me. I found it difficult to believe any of this had really happened to our family.

Gradually we began to feel that life was getting back to "normal". When we lost Edward I thought I would never smile again, and then two months on we realised that we were smiling, going out with friends, socialising and trying to heal. I came to realise that doing these things wasn't belittling Edward or what happened in any way; it is just what had to be done for us to heal. Time helped us and I am sure it will continue to do so but I don't think we will ever actually get over Edward's death—you just learn to live with losing a baby.

We talked about trying to have another baby too. This is something we desperately wanted and I found it frustrating and difficult having to wait the suggested three months by the doctors until we could start trying again. It seemed that everywhere I looked, there were pregnant women or newborn babies around me.

When I did fall pregnant we were both delighted, and felt exceptionally lucky to have been given another chance somehow. But I felt very upset when people suggested

farewell, my child

that this baby would replace Edward—I can never replace him, nor would I want to. He was and is our third child and we will always love and miss him terribly. The new baby growing inside me gave us hope. Although I was completely terrified that we would lose this baby too, I felt fortunate to have been given another chance.

I found the pregnancy VERY stressful. Everyone seems to feel that “lightning never strikes twice”—but by being pregnant again, I risked being struck again. I had to change my obstetrician too, as I couldn’t bear to keep going into that same room which I was in for all of Edward’s check-ups. It was too hard to be reminded during every visit of that awful day when I found out he had died. I also needed a doctor to completely understand that although everything might look fine medically, I wasn’t fine. I needed all the support and encouragement I could get. I found that doctor and he made me think we might just get through this with a live little baby at the end. I will always be grateful to him for his professionalism. No matter how silly my questions or feelings were, he took them very seriously and I felt I was in good hands.

On 15th October 2003, our second son and fourth child, Thomas, was born alive and very well. We were delighted, relieved and exhausted!

Three days later was the first anniversary of Edward’s birth and death. Complicated emotions swung from joy and elation at Tom’s birth to incredible sadness and despair at Edward’s death. We managed to leave Tom, Lucy and Holly with somebody for an hour on Edward’s anniversary while Rick and I spent time alone thinking and talking of him. I was pleased we did that. It was a good, important thing for us to do.

I constantly wonder if Tom is anything like his brother Edward. Not so much in looks but in personality. I feel that having another boy has given me an insight into what Edward would have been like. I also feel that Tom will miss out on having a live brother. One he could play with and that saddens me too. For him and Edward.

Rest in peace my little angel boy.

