



Lily

Lily Belle Bilton
16 August 2004

Petrina and Tim are English expatriates who have been living in Singapore for four years. They had been trying to start a family for a long time and were overjoyed to hear that they had conceived twin daughters. Everything went well until a final scan at 38¹/₂ weeks could only find one heartbeat. Petrina writes of the mixed joy and sorrow she and Tim have lived through, experiencing one daughter's birth and the other's death at the same time.

Written by Petrina Mousley, Lily's mother

At lunchtime on Monday 16th August 2004 I passed by my husband's office to collect him on the way to what we had been told would be our final scan. I had reached 38¹/₂ weeks, full-term for carrying twins, still with no signs of going into spontaneous labour and our obstetrician had said he would do a last check before setting the date for a C-section on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Francis, the office doorman, waved us off having told my husband that the 16th was an auspicious day. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation and all should have been well with the world. In the taxi I remember saying that I just wanted to see Lily move on screen. She was lying across Isis and I found it difficult to sense her kicks had panicked me on a number of occasions. My husband reassured me that just as all the other scans had shown, both babies would be fine, dancing, kicking and interacting with each other.

As I lay on the scan table we chatted with our obstetrician as we always did. But

something about today was different. A general foreboding crept over the room which I put down to nervous anticipation. I was focusing on the obstetrician's face and could tell he was no longer fully engaging in polite chit chat. He was distracted and concentrating on the screen. I also knew, which my husband did not, that having located Isis' heartbeat, he was taking an inordinately long time to locate Lily's.

Something in his face confirmed my fear and my journey had begun. Having shifted positions several times to help him with the ultrasound as I knew she was in an awkward position, I told him he was really scaring me. I was desperate for reassurance but none came. He told me kindly that he had to find her heartbeat to reassure himself. It was at this point that my husband realised we were no longer dealing with an ordinary scan. The obstetrician advised us that we needed to get the twins out as soon as possible, that there was still a chance Lily could be ok but that we could take no risks. I staggered from the scan table, my legs buckled in shock and I felt sick to the stomach on a cocktail of dread, horror and disbelief. My husband and I were shown into a small side waiting room, to wait for a wheelchair to take me straight to theatre, and we collapsed into tears desperately trying to cling on to the hope that our darling Lily was ok. Within an hour I was in surgery.

Six months on in our journey, it is still too distressing to engage directly with the pain of our loss. It has been so confusing experiencing the highs of becoming first time parents when we are feeling such enormous grief. We have decided to let the following two excerpts tell the rest of our story. The first is from an email we sent to our closest friends on our return from hospital. The second is from a letter we wrote to our daughter.

“We are still reeling at the chain of events that led to the arrival of our two beautiful daughters: Isis Amelie Bilton (3.24 kg) and Lily Belle Bilton (2.5 kg).

In brief, having had fetal heart monitoring for both girls on Tuesday 10th August and Thursday 12th August, we were advised that both babies were doing very well with strong active heartbeats. On Tuesday we had agreed with the doctor that Thursday's appointment would be a final check before making the decision to take them out on Friday or Saturday, had I not gone into labour in the meantime. However on Thursday the doctor said that as the babies and I were doing so well we should wait over the weekend to give me a last chance to go into labour spontaneously. If we still hadn't had any signs by Monday, he said we would then make the decision to deliver them on Tuesday or Wednesday. It was at Monday's appointment however, lying on the scan table, when the fear kicked in. He was taking a long time to find Lily's heartbeat, two minutes rolled into five to ten minutes and still he couldn't find it. Shell-shocked we were rushed straight into surgery for a C-section under epidural. Tim was with me throughout—I couldn't bear for him to be alone with the news if indeed we had lost her,

and the doctor felt it would be better for me not to have to go to sleep not knowing and wake up still not knowing. Through all of this, that was the best decision we could have made. We both heard Isis cry the instant she was delivered and knowing she was safe, our focus went to Lily who was delivered two minutes later, stillborn. She looked so peaceful and so beautiful. Very like Isis with subtle differences. I had a big cuddle with Isis and then Tim went with her to the nursery to settle her in whilst I was stitched up. He then had some private time with Lily until the three of us were reunited, before Isis joined us. Our time with Lily was so precious. Holding her, talking to her—trying to understand why she had come so far only to leave us and her sister to cope with her loss.

So far there is no conclusive medical explanation, she was perfect, a good weight, a good size (the same length etc as her sister) and at 38 weeks gestation, full term for twins—the autopsy may or may not provide us with some clues but we will not receive the results for quite some time. Whatever happened was very sudden, as there were no signs of distress, which is a small comfort.

A friend got in touch with a child bereavement support group in Singapore and the following day two wonderful women came into visit us. They entered the room with open arms even though we had never met them before in our lives and we both agree we don't know how we would have got through the first few days without their support. It was like having family here.

We took photos with Lily and Isis, and thankfully we thought to take a lock of hair and hand and foot prints but we never got to dress her in the outfit we had chosen and the staff, although some were very sympathetic, still seemed very anxious to take Lily out of our room and off to the mortuary when we just needed her to be with us. We held a private blessing for her on Tuesday in the hospital to say our goodbyes and on Thursday her daddy went with her to the crematorium where she was surrounded by flowers from her immediate family. We will bring her home for a private ceremony at the church where we were married later in the year so she can rest in a place we love.”

Darling Lily Belle

We feel so blessed to have shared the nine months of your life. Your kicks and wriggles, your hiccups, your thumbsucking. We had such fun watching you grow inside me, scan after scan watching you play, move and develop. In spite of the sadness, it was a treasured moment to see you in the flesh on the day you and your sister were born. You were so beautiful you made our hearts stop. Our time together was so precious.

In my heart I feel as your mummy I should have done more, something, anything to keep you safe from harm. Please forgive me. I wanted so much to be your mummy. When I held you in my arms and saw your face it was the hardest thing I have ever done, to kiss you goodbye. We had so much love to give you and we will carry it with us always until in years to come we finally get to wrap our arms around you and breathe you in and share it with you once again.

We cannot express in words the sadness we both felt when the doctor delivered you and confirmed our worst fear. That the routine scan we had had that morning where he was unable to find your heartbeat had been right. You had already gone. Lily we are both so sorry that we didn't know you were struggling for your life. We are so sorry if there was anything we did or didn't do that would have made a difference. All we can ask for is your forgiveness. If only we could have our time all again, we would have delivered you earlier and then maybe you would be here with us and your gorgeous sister now. If only.

We held you tight in our arms amazed by your beauty; soft and warm milky skin, red lips and such a peaceful expression. It feels appropriate to say that you looked heavenly—like a small piece of heaven cradled in our arms, what an honour to hold you and spend two days with you. We wrapped you and felt the weight and warmth of you as we held you close. We studied your face, took a lock of your silky brown hair, your tiny fingers wrapped around one of ours and, if we closed our eyes for just a moment, the pain went away as your body rose and fell with our own breath as if you were sleeping and about to stir. How we longed for you to stir and yet they say never to wake a sleeping baby and you did look so so peaceful.

A mix of your mummy and daddy. We created you together out of love. And, in spite of the pain we will carry with us always, we are blessed to carry with us the memory of you. Those pregnant months; mummy stretched beyond recognition but still waddling so proudly, overjoyed by the expectation of having a family. How daddy had always longed to have twins—and what a treasured moment when we saw you and your sister for the first

time on screen at our scan and the news sunk in that his wish had come true. How blessed we felt.

We held a blessing for you and said prayer after prayer, clutching each other. Our tears wet your head and cheeks. You looked so much like your sister—two peas in a pod. We carefully chose your first outfit and, along with flowers from us and all your loving relatives, daddy took his first car trip with you—singing to you at the top of his voice so you wouldn't feel lonely.

The things that we would have shared with you: How painful to accept that we will not see your first smile or your first tooth. From two cots to one, our twin pram sits back in the shop window we first saw it in before the exciting day we brought it home and daddy spent hours “reading the manual” while mummy decided just to fiddle with every lever to make it work.

No words can describe the pain, the heartache, the devastation, the numbness, the loss that we feel. We have cried so many tears and still they keep coming. Part of our family has been ripped away—our own flesh and blood, our pride and joy, our future, our present—relief only comes when we shut out the reality of having you snatched away from us and yet denial leaves us sick to the stomach. It is all wrong. You are not here and we miss you, we miss you with a gnawing pain that won't go away.

Lily you were so wanted, so wished for, so anticipated, so loved. We would have had so much fun together. It is so hard but we are trying to understand why our time with you was so brief—and we are so grateful that we had the nine months we had to cherish you. That your sister is safe we are so thankful. What joy she brings us day after day. Thank you for keeping her company, inside mummy, and for helping her to stay safe on her journey into this world. It must have been hard to be parted. We will do our best to give her a happy, safe and loving home. And when she is older we will tell her all about you. There will be a lifetime of things to talk about when we see you again, but until then, sleep well our darling Lily Belle. Know, always, that we have loved you with all our hearts and we will go on loving you always.

Good night darling and god bless

All our love, your mummy and daddy