

“Beautiful Poppy never took a breath”

For REBECCA ARMISTEAD and her husband, GLEN, losing baby POPPY remains the hardest experience of their lives



MUST read

“Pregnant with Poppy”

The whole family was overjoyed when I fell pregnant with Poppy. We couldn't have imagined how things would turn out.

but made the trip into the hospital every other day for tests and checks.

I was one day shy of 35 weeks when I had my last scan. The results were not good. Poppy's heart was barely beating. All of a sudden the room filled with people and within an hour I was in theatre ready for a caesarean. At this stage we knew Poppy was going to be very sick when she was born, but my doctors remained positive, giving us the best-case scenario. My instincts, though, told me that best-case was not what they were expecting.

After Poppy was delivered we had a very quick look at her before they took her away to try and revive her. What struck me most about this time was there was absolutely no noise. No baby crying, no talking, just silence. They worked and worked on her, but gradually the activity subsided and I knew Poppy had not survived. The paediatrician came over and told us they hadn't been able to help our little girl. At that moment everything in me seemed to shatter and die. I couldn't believe after all the hard work to get her we wouldn't be allowed to keep our little girl.

SUPPORT AND SOLACE

We spent a lot of time with Poppy after her birth. The doctors were happy for us to have her for as long as we liked, but warned her condition would deteriorate. It's frightening to hold your baby when she is not alive, but we wanted to remember how she looked and to have the experiences we thought we were

going to have. We cuddled and dressed her and read her stories. We were so lucky to be able to do this. Some hospitals don't offer anything. I can't believe parents

would be sent home with empty arms and no help to get through it. It was, quite honestly, the most devastating experience of my life. It's shocking to think that some women are just expected to manage.

We had a counsellor spend most of the first day with us. She was a huge support and put us in contact with people who could help us organise

Poppy's funeral. She gave us a lovely box, which holds everything we will ever have of Poppy's. Her blanket and first outfit,

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“Precious memories”

Our counsellor gave us this box to hold all the items we have of Poppy's, including her handprints and a lock of her hair.

her teddy, her handprints and footprints, and a lock of her hair are all in there. Later, we added her hospital bracelet and birth certificate.

We also had a group called Heartfelt visit. Heartfelt are an amazing charity, with volunteers who donate their time to come and take photos of critically ill or stillborn babies. The photos that were taken are the most treasured things we have of Poppy.

That day our parents brought Xavier in. He couldn't understand why everyone was crying and why Poppy wasn't still in my tummy. We told him Poppy's heart was too broken to work and she had died and gone to heaven.

LEAVING WITHOUT POPPY

I left the hospital on the day Poppy was to be transferred to another hospital for her postmortem. I waited until they had taken her away so I didn't feel like I was abandoning her. To this moment, leaving the hospital without Poppy was the hardest thing I have ever had to do.

Coming home to the house we had prepared for her, to her bright pink nursery, was just as unbearable. We had a lot of counselling when we got home and were referred to SIDS and Kids. I'd thought the organisation was just for babies who had died from SIDS, but they provide help for people who have

lost children up to eight years of age.

Almost 200 people attended Poppy's funeral. I did Poppy's obituary, outlining her short life and what she meant to us, and Glen sang *Blackbird* by The Beatles.



“Our angel”

Glen and I dressed Poppy, held her and read to her. We wanted to have those moments with her to remember.

We planted a beautiful crepe myrtle tree in Poppy's memory and released 100 pink balloons.

WE'LL NEVER FORGET

When you get busy with life, work and a child, it's very easy to just go through the daily grind and not think about how things are really going for you emotionally, but Glen and I have made sure to reconnect and support one another. I guess the one blessing from this is that we are closer now than we have ever been. We are the only two people who really get what each other is

going through and we want to take care of each other. Having Xavier has been a huge part of us getting through the days, too.

I'm terrified I might forget something about Poppy. Glen and I were the only

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ones that met and knew her and if we forget, then Poppy is forgotten. I am slowly learning I have to trust in the fact that I won't forget and by moving on I am not forgetting her, I am just moving forward.

We want to have another baby. I do fear people will think we want to replace Poppy, but that isn't the case. We could never replace Poppy. But we've always wanted to complete our little family with a sibling for Xavier and that is still our plan. Unfortunately babies are difficult for us so we need to start trying, which is hard to fathom when we're still processing so much grief. I guess all we can do is try and hope for the best.

I will never get over Poppy's death. I know the pain will never go away. However, I'm learning to accept that it will always be there and trying to build my world post-Poppy into something I can deal with every day. ▶



“Always in our hearts”

Even though we are moving forward, we will never forget Poppy. I always wear her name, along with Xavier's, around my neck.

As told to Linda Barnier Pictures Reader's own Picture with Poppy Gavin Blue from Heartfelt