

# Joy of cherishing a baby after so much heartache

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**E**VERY baby is special, but when Louise Leah looked into the eyes of her daughter, Chloe, for the first time, the emotions were overwhelming. Chloe is the baby Louise and husband Michael feared they would never have the joy of holding.

Louise’s first two pregnancies ended in the tragedy of stillbirth. Ella was 21 weeks when she died in utero and brother James was born more than 24 hours after Louise was induced.

“We had no idea what to expect and had been prepared for the worst so we were amazed to see that she was so beautiful and, although so tiny, was fully developed,” Louise says. “Her features were so fine and delicate. She was beautiful and looked so peaceful.”

“Ella stayed in our room until we were ready to say goodbye later that night. It was such a surreal thing; how do you say goodbye to your baby, knowing that you’ll never see her again in this lifetime?”

A range of tests failed to discover why Ella had died.

“I went through such a range of emotions each day,” Louise says. “I had moments where I would cry my heart out and be angry, asking ‘Why me?’ – I just wanted my baby back. Then moments later, I was at peace with her passing and had happy memories of our beautiful girl.”

Louise and Michael, 30, were warned by their doctor that people would react differently to Ella’s birth and death and that some

knew straight away that something was wrong.”

A second ultrasound confirmed her worst fears – there was no foetal heartbeat.

“Our precious baby was gone,” says Louise.

She and Michael then learnt that Louise would need to labour and deliver their baby. Ella Louise was born more than 24 hours after Louise was induced.

“The hardest thing for me was that I had a beautiful daughter and I couldn’t show her off to the world,” Louise says. “I couldn’t sign her name on cards. I was limited to who I could show photos to. I wanted people to understand that I was a mum.”

“Just because we couldn’t see her didn’t make me any less of a mum.”

**F**IVE months after losing Ella, Louise was pregnant again.

“I was very positive the entire pregnancy,” she says. “Not once did I think it could happen again. I had heard of women who had two stillbirths but I didn’t think it would happen to me. We were told the baby was very healthy and everything looked good.”

The Central Coast couple were a little nervous about setting up the nursery they had dreamed of but by 36 weeks it was all ready and Louise’s hospital bag was packed.

“We passed all the danger periods and our baby was fully developed. Our baby was coming at any time

**Mother-of-two Zoe Taylor discovered the need and found the inspiration to write a book about pregnancy loss as she stumbled her way through her own grief over four miscarriages.**



**DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER ZOE TAYLOR**

would not know what to say and therefore say nothing.

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“We passed all the danger periods and our baby was fully developed. Our baby was coming at any time

now,” she recalls. But concerned about a lack of movement from her usually very active baby, Louise went into hospital for a check at 38 weeks.

Following an ultrasound, she was faced with the horrible reality that once again there was no heartbeat.

“This could not be happening again. It couldn’t. But it was and it did. We had lost our baby,” she says. “The reality sank in immediately. We knew what lay ahead.

“Our beautiful baby boy, James, was born sleeping.

“I will never forget my husband’s reaction as he realised he had a son. It broke my heart.

“James was absolutely perfect. He looked so peaceful.

“He was only six pounds eight, but his face was round and chubby. The hardest thing was that he still looked alive, like he was only sleeping. We kept waiting for him to wake up and start crying.

“Again we were left with empty arms and broken hearts.”

Once again, Louise and Michael were planning their baby’s funeral

and close to 90 friends and family helped the couple say goodbye to their second child.

There was an explanation this time, however.

It appeared the cord had become wrapped around James’s foot, cutting off his oxygen supply.

Amazingly, Louise did not give up hope on her dream of being blessed with a child she could watch grow up.

“I have to believe that there can be positive things come from tragedy: our growing love for each other, new-found friends, feeling the amazing love and support of so many family and friends that I didn’t know we meant so much to and a greater appreciation for the miracle of life and the meaning of patience,” she says.

**L**IKE most women who experience stillbirth and miscarriage, Louise’s patience was rewarded – baby Chloe was born in September last year.

Despite striving to remain positive and relaxed throughout the pregnancy, Louise admits that she could not really believe she was going to meet her baby until feeling the baby kick on the morning of a planned caesarean at 38 weeks.

And while Chloe is a delight to her parents and extended family, she is not a replacement for her brother and sister.

“Being Chloe’s mum is everything I dreamed it would be,” says Louise.

“But I still get emotional at times when I think of everything we’ve been through and just let myself cry.

“I have reached that light at the end of the tunnel – a place I had started to wonder existed. I find myself in awe of this beautiful baby girl. Her smile lights up my world and fills me with pride and joy.”

But while it was worth the long struggle, the pain will always be there.

“It will always be there, but not always sad. It was worth all the pain, all the tears and it was worth the long struggle,” she says.

Chloe is proof that you can find love and joy again after loss. Life does go on.

“The pain heals and we don’t ever move on, but we move forward and bring them (Ella and James) with us,” Louise says.

“I am a mother of three. I am no longer scared to tell people about Ella and James for fear of making them sad.

“They are a part of me. Chloe will know about her brother and sister from as early as she can understand, as Michael and I talk about them every day and always will.”

**□ Pregnancy Loss: surviving miscarriage and stillbirth is published by HarperCollins Australia. Available in bookshops from February. RRP \$27.99. A proportion of the sales will be donated to the Stillbirth Foundation Australia, to help fund vital research.**



**DREAM COME TRUE:** Louise Leah with Chloe, now four months. “Her smile lights up my world,” says Louise.