

Don and I were married in March 1960. After a year we decided to try for a baby and I soon became pregnant. We were excited and nervous at the same time. Except for feeling tired, I was well with no sickness. But around twelve weeks I began to feel unwell. It was on a Sunday after lunch when I realised something was wrong. An ambulance came and took me to the maternity hospital. I was told to undress and lie on a bed, which I did, and then I experienced a little discomfort as if I needed to go to the toilet. I looked on the sheet and there was what looked like a small lump of flesh. I apologised to the doctor for the mess. He said that is what they had been waiting for. I had miscarried and that little lump of flesh was my baby. I needed a small operation and was told miscarriage happens to a lot of women during their first pregnancy. The doctor advised us to wait three months and then try again.

Six months later I was pregnant again. For the first three months I had morning sickness. I was working in a typing pool and every morning when the tea trolley came round, off I went, down a flight of stairs to the ladies' room. I did not have to tell my colleagues I was pregnant, I could tell they knew by the look on their faces when I came back.

The pregnancy went well, and one week before the due date I was admitted to hospital and labour was induced. Our baby boy was soon delivered, weighing 6 pounds 4 ounces, and he was perfect. I was so excited, I could not wait to show him off to Don when he came to visit the next day. Husbands were not admitted during labour in the 1960s.

After the joys of childbirth I became very ill with an over-active thyroid gland, but my mum helped me a lot. After two years I was able to come off the medication, and Don and I decided to try for another baby.

Three months into the pregnancy, the doctors discovered I had a large ovarian cyst. The surgeon waited until I was a few weeks into my second trimester before operating, to prevent miscarriage. My pregnancy continued but was very uncomfortable because of the large scar down my abdomen.

The baby's movements felt different to when I had carried my son. Two weeks before my due date I had an x-ray to determine the baby's position. While waiting for the results I went into labour and was admitted to hospital. The x-rays were sent for and I was taken into the delivery theatre. I knew something was wrong because as well as the usual staff, the consultant was also there. I asked why, but was told I would be all right. As I started to deliver my baby, a mask was put over my face. I tried to pull it off, but someone grabbed my hands and then I could remember no more.

Don was with me when I came round. Initially I was told I had given birth to a baby girl who was stillborn, later I learned that she had lived for about an hour. We named her Gina. She had spina bifida and encephalitis. The nurse said she was just like a butterfly – beautiful, with a short life – and she told me to go home and forget about her, and just enjoy my little boy. I had nothing to remember Gina by: no photograph, no hand or footprint, no description telling me what colour her hair was. I could not just go home and forget about my daughter, I never could.

What was I going to tell my little boy? I was in such a daze, it all happened so quickly. Well, I told him that there was not a baby after all. This must have puzzled him as he had felt her kicking in my womb. But my dad told me to tell my son the truth, so I did. I told him the baby had been born poorly and the doctor could not make her better, so she had died and gone to Heaven.

As for me, I just wanted to shut myself in a room and grieve, but I had my little boy to think about. My mum gave me a trunk and I carefully packed all the things I had prepared for the baby, and it was put in the loft. It was something I wanted to do on my own, and that is what I did.

Several other family members gave birth that year. I felt no jealousy, I was happy for them that their babies were all right.

There were things I never thought about at the time. Don told me several weeks later that he had to register Gina's birth and death, and that she was

buried in a communal grave with other babies. He did not say much about how he felt, but he must have been grieving as well.

My thyroid illness returned and I was so ill that I had to have surgery to remove most of the gland. I also underwent radiation treatment to prevent the problem recurring. Because of this the doctors could not say whether I would be able to get pregnant again.

Praise God my prayers were answered. Five years after I had Gina, I fell pregnant again. I was not afraid and felt at peace about this baby. My second daughter was born four weeks early and was absolutely gorgeous with a head of black hair. My family doctor said I could not have had a prettier baby if I had tried! My son Gary was nine years old when Mandy was born, and he enjoyed playing with her and teasing her.

In 2008 I found my daughter Gina's grave and was able to leave a bunch of roses. The following spring I planted some bluebells on the site. I also had a plaque made with her name engraved on it which is next to Don's grave memorial. FORGET HER? NEVER!



I believe life begins at conception, otherwise the embryo would not grow into a baby. Only living things grow.

Janet

This is Janet's story and expresses her personal opinions.