

## *Introduction*

Well done! I am impressed with you already. I never bother to read introductions. You could say that I am the hasty type. Well usually that is. On this occasion though, there was nothing hasty about me writing this recollection of our beautiful daughters Marnie Maes short six-week life with us. I struggled with the idea for quite a while I can tell you!. I didn't think I could handle it. By handle it, I mean I didn't think I could go through every single memory of Marnie in life and in death with a fine toothcomb. In many ways it would have been far easier for me to block it all out and never mention it again. It has been the most painful experience of my life and I am sure that nothing will touch that in the future. Did I really want to relive that over and over again?. A few things made me sit down and start writing however. One reason being I never ever wanted to forget. I never wanted to forget any of the funny little things she would do nor any one of her cute little facial expressions. As strange as it sounds, I didn't want to forget her in death either. I wanted to remember my visits to her in the chapel of rest and the day of her funeral. I was so scared that over time my memories of her would fade. I didn't want to forget. By writing Little Wings, every little detail will always be there and with me, as she will.

When Marnie died on 5 November 2004 at 6 week of age to SIDS or cot death, I truly felt that I would never get through this period of what can only be described as utter hell. I desperately wanted to feel that we were not alone in our pain. Of course we had amazing support from our family and friends but I really wanted to connect with other parents who had gone through the same situation. How had they coped? Was there any form of light at the end of a very long and darkened tunnel? Would time heal like all of the health professionals kept telling me was absolutely the case?. I assumed that there MUST be a book somewhere written by a parent who had lost a baby, I wanted to know that my constant rollercoaster of emotions were "normal"? And that I wasn't going completely mad in the over analyzing of Marnie's last moments until I felt like a mad woman. I felt further more lost when I realized that there was no such book. After writing about my own

experiences, I can certainly see why. It is incredibly painful and difficult to relive everything over and over again. However, it was not all doom and gloom!. Writing about Marnie has helped me to come to terms with losing her, maybe in the tiniest way, but never the less. I have also written this book for you. Parents like us who suffer and continue to suffer. I would have done almost anything to come across an informal book like this when we lost Marnie. Every book that I picked up was filled with medical textbook terminology that you could barely read, never mind understand. There is nothing textbook about Marnie's book. What you see is what you get. There are no holds barred. It will make you smile, laugh and probably shed a tear or two. I expect you will feel like you have known me for years after reading my story!. I am so glad that for whatever the reason, you are taking the time to read Marnie's story. I hope that it helps you in some small way and I hope that it gives you, most of all, hope for your own futures.

### *About Us*

Young, Happy go lucky, sociable people who live near the sea!. That just about summed Spencer and I up. We both worked hard and played even harder during our relationship of about seven months, particularly as Christmas 2003 was looming. It's just getting into the festive swing of things we would say in an attempt to convince ourselves!. Not that we needed an excuse really. By day I worked in a busy law firm and Spencer had all of the stresses and strains of running his own business. A glass of wine at the end of the day was much sought after!. Our first Christmas came and went in a haze of Christmas parties and work events. It came as no surprise when I was feeling a little worse for wear in January. All of the Christmas festivities had obviously taken their toll and I was convinced it was a classic case of burn out!. Something was niggling me though. I had put myself through the diet from hell and had exhausted myself on the cross trainer every night in a fight to get rid of that excess Christmas bulge and yes I wasn't losing a single pound. My period was late too. And would you believe it the thought of a glass of wine made me feel sick!. The alarm bells started ringing. Very loudly!. Nothing could have prepared me for when I saw

two little blue lines on that home pregnancy test though. Shock! Amazement!, even a little horrified!. I can't tell you how many times Spencer and I read and re-read those instructions, just to make sure. Was the test working properly?. A mass purchase from Asda confirmed all (the woman at the pharmacy gave me a very strange bewildered look!) and that's when it really hit home. I was to become a mum!. My adventures as a carefree socialite for the time being, were over!!. Spencer and I hadn't planned the baby but we were so happy. We had just bought our new house with a nice garden and as a couple we were very happy together. This sealed the deal so to speak!. We felt so lucky!.

I had quite a normal pregnancy. I had the usual sickness, tiredness and carpal tunnel but all of my scans showed a healthy growing baby with no problems at all. Everything was normal apart from the fact that little one was breech so I was to be booked in for a caesarean section. We had found out at our 20 weeks scan that the baby was a little girl. We decided to name her Marnie Mae. I couldn't believe my luck. A girl!. Could life get any better?!. We got to work on the nursery – obviously everything was varying shades of pink!. We bought the pram, the sterilizer kit, the car seat and so many clothes, all neatly folded away in the nursery chest of drawers (all pink naturally!) and so many toys!. We were just so excited. I could not wait to meet Marnie. Here is a very good hint. Don't ever conceive in December. It means that you are at your largest and heaviest in August. The hottest month of the year!. By this point, I was really ready to have the baby!. We were now ready for her Marnie's arrival and I was finally given my date for my caesarean – 21 September 2004!. I was just so happy and excited, I thought I might burst!.

September 21<sup>st</sup> 2004 finally arrived!. It is no way an understatement to say I was terrified on that day. I too was unbelievably excited. Nine months of feeling pretty rough in all honesty, were soon to be at an end. I could not wait to meet her. I wondered if she would look like how I had imagined and pondered so, so many times. And here we were. I walked into theatre and wondered if my jelly like legs would hold me

up. The delivery took much longer than I thought. There was a lot of commotion and I realized that Marnie had been born but there was no sound of her crying for a while. Just as I was about to panic, I heard her cry. I hadn't even seen her, and I burst into tears. Relief maybe. The doctors brought her over to me and WOW she was huge! a gorgeous little girl with great big eyes and a very loud cry!. They announced that she topped the scales at 8lb 12oz!. I was expecting a slight 7lb baby as I am only 5'3. I blamed Daddy myself.

Marnie Mae Pope was beautiful. A real little chubby cherub with beautiful blue eyes. I really was blown away. I couldn't believe that she was mine and oh my god! I was a mum!. You would have laughed if you saw me holding her in those first few days. I was so clumsy with her. I told you I wasn't a natural!. She just seemed so fragile. I didn't quite realize how long it would take to get her dressed. I wouldn't snap her little arms or legs off would I ?!. And honestly, how was I supposed to change her nappy, without getting weed on when she wriggled around so much?!. I used to dread it when my visitors would leave me alone at the hospital with Marnie. Not only because I knew I was not going to get any sleep (isn't sleep deprivation a form of torture in some countries?!) but I just felt that I couldn't cope on my own!. Those multitude of baby books didn't really give you the full picture! . My baby blues soon disappeared when Spencer took us both home and we introduced Marnie to her gorgeous milkshake pink nursery. I think she was rather impressed. We felt like a real family. As the days passed, Marnie and I got to know each other and the absolute terror that I felt when Marnie was born melted into a real sense of joy and a huge sense of pride. I had never felt so happy. I would never have believed it.

It became apparent that Marnie Mae was in no shape or form a textbook baby. She never stopped eating and never slept!. Instead, she liked to watch TV (we know all of the words to The Bear in the big blue house show). She liked to look at anything pretty like fairy lights and generally, she has to be involved in anything and everything. Nanny Jill called her "little Miss Nosy". She wasn't wrong there. People would

comment on how unusually bright Marnie was and how advanced she seemed for a baby so small. She would hear my voice and turn her head to face me and she would watch the television with such concentration, it was scary!. Of course I beamed with pride. Not only was our daughter beautiful but she was very bright too. I felt truly honoured and yes I admit it, I felt rather smug too!.

Everybody told me that babies don't really do much until they are around three months old and that really, until that point, they haven't got a personality as such. Marnie seemed to smash that theory into pieces!. She made us laugh so much. Let me illustrate: Marnie had to be the hungriest baby in the world. Ever. She constantly shoved her little hands in her mouth and gummed them excitedly. I didn't have to guess what she wanted. Even when we kissed her she thought it was food and would try to eat at our faces!. She was a little animal (takes after Daddy obviously!). Marnie knew what she liked. She would sit in her bouncy chair watching cartoons, with her big blue eyes lit up, smiling and talking to herself. Marnie also knew what she didn't like!. Namely the dreaded crib!. One night we saw her little legs hanging out of the crib and then watched as her arms tried to hoist her up and out!. She was trying to escape into Mummy's bed no doubt!. I don't think she liked toy chickens much either. She used to punch her yellow chicken, watch it fall over and smile to herself. I don't quite know what the chick did to deserve that!.

Spencer always used to laugh at Marnie in her pink, frilly princess dresses I used to dress her in (it had to be done!). She wasn't the daintiest of little girls, she was a bit of a bruiser really, but she looked gorgeous in whatever she wore (and you knew it young lady). Marnie loved her cuddles and affection. If she wasn't permanently attached to somebody, we definitely knew about it. She never used to like it when I had to put her down. She used to cling on to my necklace in an attempt to stay latched on (good thinking - I told you she was clever). Not only did she love lots of cuddles, she loved being pampered. Well she is a girl!. She loved the baby massages that I gave her and having her magic cream rubbed into those gorgeous chubby cheeks of hers. She

was a bit spoilt really. Marnie was so welcomed into our families. She was adored by everyone and was always centre of attention at our Sunday lunches. We felt like a proper family. We had to laugh when Marnie went to her first Halloween party, and when dressed as a little pumpkin with her spooky ghost slippers on her feet!. She was just adorable beyond words.

On Thursday 4 November 2004 we both had a lovely day together. We slept in and listened to my new Dido album until Marnie decided it was time to get up - she was bossy like that. She then had a bubble bath in her sink in her bedroom (I still wasn't that confident with her, slippery little sausage!) which she loved as she always did. Marnie was growing at such a fast pace that Daddy had given us some money to get some more clothes. We came back with numerous outfits, all pink naturally. I had felt very proud when out shopping. So many people stopped to compliment me on my lovely new baby. I was so proud. On the way home I saw that the shop windows had started being decorated for Christmas. I was so excited. What a fantastic Christmas we would have this year as a real family. We then went and spent the afternoon with my mum who was Marnie's biggest fan!. Needless to say Marnie was spoilt all day long.

We went home to see Daddy and I commented to him that I had never felt so happy and that I felt that as a family, we were so incredibly lucky. Life was now perfect. I was 24, we had a lovely new home for our lovely new daughter and the future just looked so bright for us three. I decided to get a head start that night as I was so exhausted. I kissed Marnie good night and admired her beautiful little face, still not quite believing that she was mine. That was to be the last time I saw my gorgeous little girl alive. Spencer told me that nothing was out of the ordinary that night. Marnie took 3oz of her late feed and then proceeded to wee all over him as he changed her nappy. She then settled down and very quickly, went to sleep around midnight.

I woke up at just before 3am with a start, expecting Moos to be stirring for her next feed. I looked at her and the first thing I noticed was that

she has a small amount of blood coming from her nose. I looked at her more closely - it was dark - maybe my eyes were playing tricks on me - I realized her lips and around her eyes were blue. She wasn't breathing. I can only describe the events after finding Marnie like that, was absolute chaos. Utter panic and screams upon screams.

In that second I knew. I knew that Marnie was dead. I remember screaming her name over and over and attempting to bring her back. I remember blowing into her tiny mouth and rubbing her chest. I remember looking at her and just knowing that it was too late. But I carried on until Spencer's mum took over as I watched helplessly. I can't describe that utter fear I felt. It was a pain I had never felt before. The next thing I knew the paramedics were in my bedroom. As he rushed Marnie out of the house into the ambulance I saw her little limbs hanging loosely, my little sturdy girl was now so floppy. So lifeless. This can't be happening. This can't be happening. By now they were several police arriving outside my house. I went outside but the paramedic guys closed the door to the ambulance. I couldn't go in. So I stood there. Barefoot on that bitterly cold November night waiting. I looked up at the sky. I have never prayed so hard in my life. I stood there bargaining with God – please let her live. Take me but not her. I remember the moment when the paramedic came out of the ambulance. I remember his tear-stained face and I knew. He tried to tell me that Marnie had gone yet all I could hear was horrendous screams. I then realized that those screams were coming from me, hysterical and retching in the middle of the street.

I was literally picked up and taken into the house. I could not breathe. This was my worst nightmare. This can't be happening. I looked up. Why were there so many police in my house?. Did they think we had hurt Marnie? done something wrong? had we?. I saw the police officer crying. This can't be happening. The worst thing was when my Mum and Dad arrived. Spencer had rang them in panic when we found Marnie. I didn't want to have to tell my mum and dad. Seeing their grief and pain made me feel utterly responsible. Did they think it was my fault?. I couldn't do this. My mum asked "where is she?" and all I could

say was "she is gone". My mum ran outside to the ambulance where she told me Marnie was laying under a little white blanket on the ambulance bed. Mum said she looked so tiny. I was asked if I wanted to see Marnie and I couldn't. I just couldn't.

The Coroners officer then arrived. He told us that they had to take Marnie. I felt powerless. I felt shocked. I wanted to scream - leave my baby alone, leave her with me. But nothing came out. Nothing. The guilt and upset I felt was unbearable. What if Marnie thought that I had left her? she needed her mum. We gave the Coroners officer Marnies favourite little cuddly toys, which he said he would keep with her. It sounds stupid, but that brought me some comfort. She likes those toys. The next kick in the teeth was being told that Marnie would have to have a post mortem. I try and block that thought from my mind because it is far too painful. I am the type of person that cried when Marnie had her heel prick test. I told you I was a wimp. It was unbelievably surreal when they took Marnie. I remembered my words to Spencer the night before "lucky", "happy". That was all gone. In the space of a few hours. Her pink pram was still in the hallway. Her bottles all ready for her feeds throughout the night were sitting untouched and the house was full of her clothes, toys and baby necessities. I picked up her pink baby blanket and sobbed. I could still smell her new baby purity and the not so fragrant odour of baby sick. I never thought I would like that smell. How things change. The days that followed Marnies death were one big blur. I couldn't tell you one day from the other. Spencer and I were still on a knife-edge which didn't help. We were awaiting to hear the post mortem results. We both agreed that we would not be able to deal with it, if in some way it had been our fault. I thought I would go mad. I analyzed Marnies last moments to pieces, over and over and over. Finally the Coroner did come back to us with an initial finding of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. This didn't really help us. All that confirmed that was Marnie had died naturally. That we hadn't hurt her, but we needed to know more. It now meant though that Marnies funeral could go ahead. Funeral. God, it hadn't even crossed my mind. How very stupid of me. I am ashamed to say that I was in a fit state to plan the bulk of Marnies funeral. My parents did the bulk of it and I am so



thankful for that. It was bad enough having to organize such basic things. I was asked to organize an outfit for Marnie to wear. The day before she died, we went on our girly shopping trip and ironically I got her a lovely pink tracksuit with "Angel" written on the front. I remember buying that and thinking how pretty she would look in it. Now this would be the last outfit Marnie would ever wear. I was so angry. But I had to deal with it so I decided on her angel tracksuit, her I love my Daddy vest and her mouse slippers. She was to have her soft pink princess blanket too. As daft as it sounds, I wanted to her to be warm and cosy. Daft probably isn't the word, insane maybe is more appropriate?. I took some of her toys to the funeral home to be placed in her coffin. I also gave her my gold necklace that she so often used to swing off in an attempt to stay on my front, a silver cross to keep her safe and a photograph of Mummy, Daddy and Marnie and a letter asking her never to forget us. I remember going to the jewellers to buy Marnies silver cross, and the shop assistant stood there smiling asking if it was for a christening. We just nodded. I wish it was. I kept thinking. I wish it was. I was asked whether I wanted to go and see Marnie at the funeral home. I really was in a terrible turmoil. I had never seen somebody who had died before seeing Marnie that night and I admit it, I was so scared. I was scared that seeing Marnie days after death would be even worse than the images I held of finding her that night. But as her mum I felt that I needed to get a grip and do what was right for Marnie. So I went. I had the most wonderful funeral Director who held my hand as I walked into the chapel of rest. I don't think I ever held someone's hand so tight in my life. And there she was in a little Moses basket, in her pink outfit, with her little dummy in and all of her toys surrounding her. She didn't look terrible as I had thought, but she didn't look like Marnie either. She looked like a little porcelain doll. She didn't even look real to me. Her beautiful big eyes had sunken and her fabulously chubby cheeks had shrunk. I touched her little chest and in such a stark contrast it felt so hard, unlike her little soft chubby belly as been. I sat by her side and re-arranged her toys around her and tucked her in. The soft toys were freezing cold and the harsh harsh reality hit that Marnie didn't stay in that cosy little room all the time but that she had

been in some type of fridge before my arrival. Of course I understand why this is necessary but the pain and sadness in that hitting home could have destroyed me in that moment. I just wanted to wrap her up nice and warm in her little blanket and to take her home. For her to wake up and this whole nightmare to be over. It wasn't ever going to be over though.

I went daily to see Marnie for the next three days. She was still my little moos and I was fully aware that I was on borrowed time. Very soon I would not be able to pop in to see her anymore. I sat beside her and spoke to her. I pleaded with her to wake up and I told her how much I loved her. I also told her that I was desperately sorry. I felt like I had let her down. I was her mum and I was supposed to make everything better. I had let her down. I had failed. On the third day the lady at the funeral home gently advised me that Marnie was "starting to go" and that it would be better if I didn't return again. It hadn't even crossed my mind that babies do not get embalmed. But then why would it?. This couldn't be happening. Not to me. Not to Marnie. On my last visit, I sat and stared at Marnie for hours. I didn't ever want to forget her. Would I?. Would I forget what she looked like?. It couldn't happen. I realized that it was probably time to go home when I would stare at her so much my mind started playing tricks on me. I could have sworn that I saw her sucking on her dummy, or her little chest rising in a split second. It sounds ridiculous but I had to check by placing my hand near her mouth to see if I could feel her breath. Logically, it was ridiculous. I was going mad.

The day of Marnie's funeral came around very quickly. I didn't want that day to come because this really would be the end. I didn't want to say goodbye. It had only just been hello. And now it was goodbye and this was wrong. Very wrong. I was also scared about how I would react when I saw her little coffin. I knew it was coming but to actually see it. I didn't know how I would cope. There was still a huge sense of disbelief. I knew it was happening. I knew she was gone but none of this was really registering. When the hearse arrived outside our house I immediately thought, well where is Marnie?. There were so many

flowers and her coffin so was so so tiny, that I couldn't initially see her. When I did, the pain hit. I thought I would be violently sick. We arrived at the church and Spencer carried Marnie in, in his arms . Marnie had a very Christian funeral. It gave us some comfort. We sang all things bright and beautiful, because that's exactly what she was. We also played Clocks by Coldplay which just felt relevant "Lights go out and I cant be saved, tides that I tried to swim against, have brought me down upon my knees, oh I beg and beg and plead". I sat in that church with a huge photo of my gorgeous, smiling little Marnie up on the table, and on that very same table was my daughter in a tiny white coffin. This was not right. I still could not believe that this was happening. It couldn't be. I tried to concentrate on her lovely photo and not the thought of Marnie, lifeless in that box in front of me. Block it out Chantal. Block it out. Burying Marnie was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. I stood at the grave and I couldn't even cry. There was nothing left. I wondered if people thought it was strange that I wasn't standing there crying and wailing. Was it?. I felt numb. Seeing her tiny little coffin being lowered into the ground, all I could think was, I really hope it doesn't rain today. I wouldn't want her to get cold and wet. After the burial, I turned around and realized the extent of the size of Marnies funeral. There was a sea of black. Over 250 people attended Marnie's funeral, and she had over fifty floral tributes. That's one popular little girl.

I found it hard to leave the churchyard that day. It was a bitter November day and I just kept thinking that I hoped she was cosy in her slippers and that I hope she knew that I didn't want to leave her. We spent the rest of the day with our friends and family, drinking far too much. I remember looking out of the pub window that evening. It was dark and it had started to rain. I felt like my heart had been ripped out. I hoped she didn't feel scared or alone. Spencer and I went away to Lanzarote for a week after Marnie's funeral. Our families had thought it best. As we boarded the plane with excited holidaymakers, I wondered what on earth I was playing at. We have just lost our daughter and we were going on holiday?. I felt guilty. I felt guilty every time I smiled or had not thought about Marnie for the past thirty seconds. As luck would

have it (not really) our hotel was jammed packed full of babies and toddlers. There were everywhere, with their proud, happy, smiling parents. Families. We weren't a family anymore. Was I still a mum?. I hated it. I was angry, I was bitter and twisted and I wondered how I would ever be happy again. I spent most of that week away sat by the pool crying. Spencer didn't want to talk about it. I think men and women differ so much in their approaches to grief. I wanted to talk all day about it. To get some sense of it but instead we just ended up arguing again and again because he couldn't deal with it. I am told that this is very typical with guys.

You know that sinking feeling when you arrive home after a week or twos holiday? well surprisingly we didn't have this on our return. Quite the opposite really. I felt that going away was useful but it was a case of you can run but you can't hide. I could have spent the week on the moon, and it wouldn't have helped me escape the pain. I was quite glad to get home and back to our familiar surroundings. I went into Marnie's nursery when we got home. That smell hit me as I walked in. Her smell. It was still there. The pain rose its ugly head a fraction higher. Everything was the same in there. I felt closer to Marnie in her nursery. Spencer however could not go in there for weeks. I found a pile of dirty washing. Her little baby grows covered in her sickly smells in the laundry bin . I couldn't face putting them through the washing machine. I wondered how long her smell would stay. I would spend a lot of time in Marnies room. Keeping her clothes tidy. Rearranging her toys. Talking to her as if she was still there. And then I would look at her empty cot and realized there was no baby that needed her toys or clothes rearranging anymore.

All of her "new baby" cards were still hanging up in her bedroom. All the messages of congratulations. I would often look at them and wonder how this had happened. How on earth we had got to this stage. I didn't want to take those cards down. It was like I would be accepting it. They stayed up for a long time. I would sit in Marnies room and look through Marnies memory book that mum had organized for the funeral. There were so many lovely individual memories from various family

and friends. Several messages of how cute Marnie looked on Halloween in her little pumpkin costume. That was just 5 days before she had died. The most painful thing about sitting her Marnie's room was when I was looking at the video footage we had of her from birth. That was almost impossible. To see your little one chattering and wriggling about in such a perfect way, broke my heart. She looked so contented having cuddles with Mummy and I looked just so happy. I then started watching and re watching to see if there were any signs that something was wrong. Again and again. I couldn't find or see anything. But I continued to punish myself. I felt that I deserved the pain.

Spencer and I spoke about trying again for another baby very soon after losing Marnie. We found it so difficult to go from being a family back to being a couple. Life just seemed very shallow and empty and lonely. I felt guilty for thinking about another baby. I didn't want Marnie to think that she was being replaced or that my feelings for her had changed. I remembered my words to her at the funeral home "you will always be mummy's special girl". But I also knew that for my own sanity, we needed to try again. I found out I was pregnant in January 2005. Yes that soon. I wondered if we had done the right thing, I worried what people may think that I was pregnant so soon and I was terrified at the what ifs. What if this happens again?. I will keep you posted....

The last time we spoke I had just found out that I was pregnant with Ruby. Do you remember the guilt I felt?. The hope I felt? and of course the utter fear. Would it happen again?. Ruby's pregnancy was a huge blur of continuous scans, Consultants appointments and regular emergency treks to the maternity Unit to "check" she still had a heartbeat. I think Poole Maternity got a bit fed up with me in the end!. I cant tell you how many times I was convinced Ruby was dead during my pregnancy. I had even accepted it before walking through the hospital doors on many occasions. I think it's is very fair to say that throughout the course of my pregnancy with Ruby, I held back. In a big way. I cared. Of course I cared but there was that little bit of

self-preservation that I kept back. I had to. Because the same question kept cropping up time and time again in my mind - WOULD it happen again?. The twenty week scan was a bittersweet occasion. The Consultant told me that I was carrying another girl. As crazy as it sounds, I was so pleased it wasn't a boy. She would be just another Marnie wouldn't she?. She would make it all better, that I was sure of.

Of course we told everyone our "happy" news. People were over the moon when they realized I was pregnant again. It was "for the best" and it would ultimately mean a happy ever after, so why did I feel so utterly guilty?. Why didn't I feel particularly happy about it all?. I kept thinking that I had only buried Marnie months before, and here I was, waddling down the high street. I wondered what people must have thought. The guilt really was overwhelming. It consumed everything. I often would visit Marnie's grave to tell her that she would always be Mummy's special girl and that I wasn't trying to replace her or to forget her. The big question though was I trying to convince her or myself?.

During the latter stages of my pregnancy, Mum and I "braved" the nursery. It was hard. I suppose the realization kicked in when we had to sort out Marnie's things to "make way" for another baby. It wasn't a nice feeling. I was adamant that the new baby wouldn't wear anything of Marnie's. Marnie's things were so precious. I hadn't even washed a few of the last outfits Marnie had worn (I still have everything, neatly folded in pretty pink boxes). As I folded the new baby clothes and put them into what was Marnie's chest of drawers, the realization definitely hit. The guilt swallowed me up. In that second I wouldn't how I would cope with another baby. I really couldn't do this all again. What had I done?. I felt so bloody stupid and so irresponsible. However, it was all a bit too late in the day to be feeling like that. The months had flown by and before I knew it I was in front of my Consultant who was booking me in for an elective caesarean section on 5 September 2005. She was coming if I liked it or not.

My due dates with Marnie and Ruby couldn't have been any different. With Marnie's there was a buzz of excitement. The anticipation. The wondering of whom Marnie would look like. It was a good time. With

Ruby I was feeling a mixture of dread - I was convinced that she would be born still born. There would be no heartbeat. My feelings were, let's just get this over with, and a state of numbness. I was in that bubble again. There was no excitement this time.

As I was wheeled into theatre, the first thing I noticed was the huge increase in doctors and nurses. Theatre was packed. My first thoughts were - See? They know the baby is going to be born dead too. Let's get this over....

As the epidural went in (and funnily enough this time around I didn't feel any pain, but then maybe I had stop feeling full stop) I lay back and started counting the cracks in the ceiling. For no reason at all. Then I started counting the doctors and nurses in the room. For no reason at all. And, in seconds, there was a baby's cry and then my doctor held up a very chubby, black haired baby. She was crying, she was breathing and Oh that was MY baby. I looked at her and I am ashamed to say I felt nothing. They handed her to me and I told them that "I would hold her later". She could have been anyone's baby they had just shown me. Anyone's. Spencer took Ruby off to get cleaned up and dressed. As I lay there getting sewn back up, I started counting the cracks in the ceiling again. They really should get this theatre re-painted. It looked ever such a mess.

After the doctors had finished with me, I was wheeled on to the ward where I saw Spencer feeding Ruby her first bottle. I looked at her closely. MY GOODNESS. She had jet black hair and reddish skin and she looked NOTHING like Marnie. Nothing. This isn't what I had expected. And then after all of those months it hit me. She wasn't Marnie. She never was going to be. She was Ruby and Marnie really wasn't coming back. What had I done?

I hadn't accepted Marnie's death and here I was with a brand new baby. What had I done?.

Over the next day or two numerous family and friends came to see me in hospital. They were all so happy for us and that our horror story had finally ended and we were now a happy little family. I smiled in all the

right places, nodding in agreement, but all the time I stayed in that bubble and felt nothing. I felt like I had failed. Yet again.

Do you remember in the subsequent chapter when I told you about the CONI scheme? (Care of the next Infant? a scheme developed by FSID in the UK to help parents who have lost, with their new babies). Well thank goodness for them. Before Ruby was born they gave us an apnoea monitor. You attach the little probe on to the baby's stomach with a small piece of surgical tape and basically, if the baby stops breathing, the alarm sounds. From the day she was born Ruby was on the alarm. I would lay in my hospital bed listening to the click-click-click of the monitor which meant that she was still breathing. I would hold my breath if one of the "clicks" was a bit slow in coming around. That clicking could have driven me insane. But at the same token it was vital for my own sanity.

Having said that I don't think my sanity was that intact. I got up in the middle of the night during my hospital stay and I went to see if Ruby was okay in the nursery. The nurses had changed her baby grow and put her in a purple baby grow- that wasn't hers (but looked the spitting image of one that Marnie had worn). Maybe it was the lack of sleep or the drugs, but for a split second I thought it was Marnie in that cot. I did wonder if I was going mad.

Before long, it was time to leave the hospital and to go home. I really didn't want to leave. The hospital was my haven. My safety net with all of those Doctors around and drugs and monitors. If anything went wrong here I could just press the buzzer. What would I do if something went wrong at home?. I was terrified.

So, we took Ruby home. We took her into the same milkshake pink nursery that we had taken Marnie into on her arrival home, not even a year before. It didn't feel real. I felt like a fraud. We had a baby. We had lost a baby. And here I was standing in the same nursery with another baby girl in the space of a year. Ruby's first night at home was pretty traumatic. I felt like I would have a heart attack. I was so so terrified. Typically the CONI alarm went off through the night and after leaping



out of bed for the third time, I wondered if this was a sign of things to come. Was it a false alarm or was she stopping breathing?. I also wondered how my caesarean section stitches hadn't burst open with all the leaping. Poor Rubes. Every time the alarm went off, I would shake her awake and she would awake with a fright, crying her eyes out. And then sat perched over her cot all night watching her. All night whilst shaking like a nervous wreck. I would sit there awake, night after night, wondering why on earth I had put myself through this again. I was so tired. I had the baby blues, I was so sore and yet the overwhelming fear that Ruby would die, beat all of that combined, hands down.

I was also obsessing about any potential signs of illness. I googled everything. And even though Ruby's breathing monitor was ticking away nicely, sometimes I would look into her cot and I would see the same blue tinged face that Marnie had on the night we found her, so again I would have to wake Rubes with a start until she cried loudly and started throwing her little arms and legs about. I would breathe a sigh of relief.

It sounds strange but despite doing everything for Ruby and watching her like a hawk, I could not at that point, have told you that I had bonded with her. I hadn't. It was all very mechanical. It was all about the fear of another baby dying. But I think at that point, that was as far as it went.

Until one day.

It was just an ordinary day really. She looked up at me whilst I was changing her nappy and she looked at me, and with a little windy smile. She broke me. I loved her like I couldn't believe. She was now 3 weeks old. And that was the start. Nothing has changed since that day. I am so grateful for that.

The love flowed and the bond had been made. I started to enjoy Ruby, but of course, those increased feelings of love, ultimately increase those of fear. In all honesty I suppose the first two years of Ruby's life, I was on a knife edge. I had done so much research into cot death and I had learnt that it can happen up to two years of age. Consequently,

Ruby remained on her monitor until just after her second birthday. Those bloody false alarms came and went through those two years, and there is no denying it, that every one of those alarms could have given me a heart attack. As Ruby progressed and reached her little milestones, I would still wonder about Marnie. It felt so unfair that she had missed out on so much. You only realize how much when you see another child developing and growing into a little toddler. Its amazing how much they change and how much they can do. Her first tooth. Her first steps, her first words, her favourite things: food, TV programs, friends etc. I suppose silently, I wished away those two years. I wanted to get Ruby through that baby stage. Quickly. I can't say in all honesty that I believed that Ruby would stay however. I still had prepared myself a little bit in case it should happen.

I loved seeing all of Ruby's milestones, and celebrating all of her birthdays and Christmas times, but the whole time I still thought about Marnie and felt terrible that she had missed out on so much in life that was visible through Ruby growing and changing. I suppose that old word – guilt – cropped up a few times during those times too. Funny that. After two years I started to relax a little, Ruby came off her monitor – now this bit wasn't so easy. That beep beep beeping had been a regular fixture of my life for such a long time and it meant that I KNEW she was breathing. I can't tell you how often I checked Ruby in her cot each night when that monitor had come off!. I still had the same feeling of dread and fear as I walked into the darkness of her bedroom each night, half holding my breath, expecting the worst. People have said in the past, that how could I still feel like that, after all, by this stage Marnie was two years old, a toddler. Well let me tell you now, Rubes is eight this year and I still check her religiously at night. I can't see how that will ever go away. It's even worse when she is ill. I think the Paediatrics unit at Poole Hospital know us by first name. Or maybe I am more than likely known as "that crazy mother"! But on the flip side of this, Ruby brings me so much joy in my life. I live for her. She is my happiness and I would do anything for her. Anything. I am so pleased that I have Ruby. Life would be a pretty dark and different place without her. I describe Ruby as my Best friend. It is made that a little girl of not

even eight can be described as that, but she really is. She loves "chick nights" when we eat popcorn, watch movies and paint our toe nails. She loves going out for dinner at Aruba and talking to the Parrot! She loves the beach, her holidays and she loved visiting the "real" Father Christmas at Lapland last Christmas. She is just so precious,

So I think that is about the size of it. A story of utter hell that did have a happy ending (although I would have never ever have believed that). I still find it hard to believe that it will be nine years ago in November that Marnie died. Sometimes it feels like yesterday. A lady I know who had recently suffered a miscarriage asked me how I coped the other day. She was in such a dark place and was so low. I saw myself. She asked me if it gets easier in time, did I still get paranoid? Did it still hurt?. I suppose the answer to all those questions is yes. It does get easier. That raw pain that you never thought existed has faded away – but not entirely. It resurfaces its ugly head particularly at Christmas time or on Marnie's birthday. I am grateful that over time the pain has become bearable. And I think that's about as good as it will get, "bearable". The guilt? Well there is a small part of that that will always remain. I was Marnie's mum and I felt like I had failed her. But in 2010, 6 years after Marnie died, I finally sought Counselling. Its never too late so they say!. I am so honoured to have met the most remarkable Dr Hubbard, who in her ingenious fashion convinced me, told me that Marnie dying was simply not my fault. Now maybe this lady has a way with words or has magic powers or something, but in time, I accepted it. I finally got to the stage where I didn't think it was my fault, and do you know what, I walked out of her office smiling, and feeling like a huge weight had been lifted from me. A weight that had consumed me for nine years. A weight that was stopping me from living and a weight that meant I wasn't giving my all to Ruby, because I felt guilty. It was a great feeling. Not that it exactly started off like that. It was hellish going through every single detail of Marnie's death. I had blocked that night out from my mind over and over again. I would only have to briefly touch on the memory and I would immediately shove that memory back into the dark place it had been placed in. It was hard. And I almost felt that I was there that night once more. But like I said, afterwards, I felt so much

better. Honestly, I would recommend Counselling to anyone who has gone through this horrendous loss. I feel that I can move on with my life and be a much better Mum to Ruby. We have so much fun together and I didn't want to be consumed with guilt every time that happened. I was sick of living the bittersweet life.

So how are things now?. Things are going well. I can look at photos of Marnie now and smile and remember her little noises that she used to make and her little smile, without the gut wrenching feeling of pain. I think of Marnie and I hope she's okay. I hope she realizes that I haven't forgotten her and I hope she is happy – wherever she may be. There is no doubt in my mind that losing Marnie has changed my life forever. The person I was before Marnie died, isn't the same "me". I suppose there is a constant brick wall around me, that very few can break down. I can't say I relish the fact that I am like that but I think it is nature's way. I have a very strong bond with Ruby, as I mentioned, I would describe her as my best friend and there is no one in the world I would rather spend time with. Without going into too much detail, my relationship with the girls dad failed as do so many relationships after losing a much loved child, ultimately the differences in the way that we grieved, ultimately ended our relationship, sadly this is not uncommon after the death of a baby.

Ruby, of course knows all about her big sister. In fact, the day we bought Ruby home from the hospital we took her to Marnie's place. Ruby has been brought up with it. I still have photos of Marnie all around my house and we celebrate her birthday by sending her balloons and imagining her eating chocolate cake with her angel friends!. We decorate a mini Christmas tree for her at Christmas time and leave her eggs at Easter. I didn't want Ruby to be kept in the dark over Marnie's death and even, her existence, so I have always spoken about Marnie as a member of her family. Which she is . Ruby often asks why Marnie died and how unfair she feels that it is, because she would like somebody to play with. It breaks my heart, but I try to answer in a way that isn't too difficult for a seven year old to understand. I'm thirty three and I don't understand it so how could she?. People often

ask me if I want more children and most are horrified when I say absolutely not. I don't think I could go through it all again. I think sometimes that if I hadn't got pregnant with Ruby so quickly after losing Marnie (about 8 weeks), I would have been too frightened to go for another. The fear is still there and now life is the best that it has been. Of course, I still check Ruby is breathing several times on a nightly basis. There is still that tiny bit of fear as I walk into her dark bedroom on a night and await to see her chest rise and fall and then that huge sigh of relief. I wonder when that fear might disappear, but I am realistic, and I don't think it will go away just yet. You really cant go through finding a child in the middle of the night, in the way I did, without it scarring you forever.

I hope that reading Marnie's story has helped you in some small way. Surround yourself with people that know and love you and know that in time, the pain will fade. I know you don't believe me -I said the very same thing.

Just trust me on this one...