

OUR LIVES: Happy un-birthday

Just because our little boy was gone, it didn't mean we couldn't celebrate his special day. By Heidi Eldridge, 31

The midwife placed a monitor on my rounded tummy and I settled back so she could listen to my baby's heartbeat.

I was 36 weeks pregnant with my first child.

My partner Steve and I had been trying for a baby for two years. We had put the finishing touches to the nursery and now we couldn't wait to meet our little one.

I was imagining our first cuddle when I was aware that the midwife had been quiet for a while.

At last she said: 'When did you last feel your baby kick?'

'I'm not sure,' I replied.

She said: 'I think it would be best if you went for a scan.'

I called Steve and set off from the health centre to hospital. On the way, I tried not to panic and told myself: *'Everything will be all right.'*

I met Steve and we went into the sonographer's room together. I lay on the bed and she passed the scanner over my tummy. As she stared at the screen I could tell from her face that something was wrong.

Then she said: 'I'm so sorry, he's gone.'

'No!' I cried.

I was induced that evening and soon after, I gave birth to a baby boy weighing 5lb 4oz.

We called him Aidan James.

The midwife wrapped him up and placed him in my arms, and I gazed down at his perfect face. He looked as if he'd just fallen asleep.

It was impossible to believe he



Me pregnant with Aidan



Releasing the balloons

'Goodbye, my angel'

would never take a first breath or open his eyes.

Later that night Steve took me home. Without a word, we went upstairs and quietly shut the door to the empty nursery.

We held Aidan's funeral on what would have been his due date. Steve carried the coffin. It was the size of a shoebox.

In the weeks that followed, my family and friends did their best to comfort me. But everywhere I went I saw mums with babies and all I could think was: *'That should be me.'*

The hospital could find no reason for Aidan's death. His heart had simply stopped beating.

Time passed and soon it was almost a year since Aidan's birth. I wanted to mark the day but a birthday party seemed wrong.

Then one day I was listening to the radio and the presenter was talking about a new film version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Suddenly a song popped into my

head...

A very merry un-birthday to me... To who?... To me... Oh you! A very merry un-birthday to you.

It was the song the Mad Hatter and March Hare sang in the original *Alice in Wonderland* film, and I had an idea.

I turned to Steve and said: 'Why don't we throw an un-birthday party for Aidan?'

He replied: 'That's a great idea.'

I got busy. I sent out invites for an *Alice in Wonderland*-themed party. The date was 15 May, Aidan's first birthday.

Planning the day made me realise that it was all right to celebrate Aidan's birth and that, even though he had died, he was still part of our family.

Little by little, I began to let go of my grief.

The day before the party, I turned to Steve and said: 'There's something we need to do.'

I led him upstairs and

together we opened the door to the nursery for the first time since Aidan had died.

Then we took his ashes and scattered them in a beautiful wooded spot near our home in Meadway Drive, Weybridge, Surrey.

Next day more than 70 friends and family arrived at my mum Sharon's house nearby. Everyone was dressed as a character from *Alice in Wonderland*.

We had bouncy castles in the garden, ball pits, plastic pink flamingos, croquet and lots of cups of tea. Although



Tobiah and me at Aidan's bench

the sorrow of losing Aidan was never far away, the day was filled with fun and laughter.

Towards the end of the day I told everyone: 'Thank you for all your support. We'll never forget Aidan but we are now ready to say goodbye.'

We then released 36 red balloons into the sky — one for each week Aidan was with us. We all watched silently as they drifted away.

Then I had another announcement to make. I was 18 weeks pregnant.

In time, I gave birth to our son Tobiah. I still think about Aidan every day but Tobiah has given our lives meaning again.

We have dedicated a bench in Windsor Great Park to Aidan's memory. When Tobiah is old enough we'll take him there and tell him about the big brother he never got to meet.

● Visit Heidi's website about pregnancy education for expectant mums and midwives at mamaacademy.com or go to her Facebook page, facebook.com/MAMAAcademy

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Steve, me and Tobiah