

Amy's story

After trying for a baby for three years, on 20 December 1995, I found out that I was pregnant. It made a wonderful Christmas present.

I made sure that I did everything possible to aid the baby in its growth, I started taking folic acid tablets and gave away the cigarettes. I was on cloud nine! I was cautious at first telling people of my pregnancy until I had reached the 12 week mark.

At 14 weeks my husband and I heard its heart beat. It was so strong. Hearing it made my pregnancy more believable.

At 19 weeks we set off for an ultrasound after having a large breakfast as instructed. It was so exciting, finally to see our baby, and have a photo to show people. My husband and I watched the screen in awe as the baby moved about. After a few minutes the lady conducting the ultrasound went to get the doctor. We weren't alarmed by this, as my husband, while waiting, had read a pamphlet which stated that it was common practice for a doctor to also do an examination.

After the doctor had conducted his own examination, he notified us that there was a problem with the baby. He was vague on what the actual problem was, but organised an appointment with my Gynaecologist that afternoon to discuss the results.

My Gynaecologist explained that the baby appeared to have 'Chiari Syndrome' (water on the brain, caused by a spina bifida) and organised an appointment to see a specialist in a couple of days to confirm it. We discussed what this then meant, whether there was something we could do. He advised us that to detect Chiari Syndrome so early was not good. That usually a baby like this would have aborted. Although he advised that we had a 'choice', he then proceeded to tell us that if I was to go ahead with the pregnancy, I wouldn't be able to have a natural birth as the baby's head would be too big, and that was if the baby survived till full-term. He then advised us that even if I had a caesarean the baby would be brain damaged and probably wouldn't live long. What a choice. Life-long dream versus quality of life for all concerned.

My husband and I were devastated. How do you cope with such news? How could this baby (our first), which I had just started to feel move about, have something wrong with it. The three days we had to wait till we saw the specialist became a blur of tears.

On Tuesday, 2 April 1996, the specialist confirmed the findings and advised that the best thing to do was to terminate the pregnancy. Arrangements were made for me to go into hospital to be induced at 8.00am the following day.

At 10.20am on Thursday, 4 April 1996, I gave birth to a baby girl. She was only 24cm in length, but complete in every way.

The hospital staff were fantastic, they gave us a lot of support. They organised for photographs and hand and footprints to be taken for us to keep.

We decided to name her Amy and have her buried in the Rose Garden at Gungahlin Cemetery.

She was buried in a little knitted dress, wrapped in a crocheted blanket and placed in a little wooden box, which I had carefully painted with her name and placed stencils on. I later created a keepsake - an album of events including photographs, footprints, the birth notice we placed in the newspaper and cards and best wishes of friends and family - which is really nice to look back on, acknowledge, and to one day show my second daughter.

Written in memory of Amy by Helen Newham.