

IT'S HARD SEEING MY GIRL GROW UP WITHOUT HER MUM



Chris wishes wife Joe was here to see beautiful Emily

Tuesday September 27, 2011

By Kate Hilpern

CHRIS and Joanne Bingley wanted nothing more than a baby. So after some fertility problems and two miscarriages they couldn't believe their luck when their healthy baby daughter Emily was born 18 months ago. Yet within just 10 weeks Joanne, who was known as Joe, had taken her own life.

Now single father Chris is devoting his working life to improving services for women with postnatal depression.

"It still hasn't sunk in properly because we had everything going for us," says Chris, 43, who lives in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire.

"There's this hard physical pain that feels like a broken heart. There are still many times when I cry myself to sleep."

Chris and Joe had been together 10 years when Emily was born.

"I was a management consultant and Joe was a nurse. It was a job that fitted perfectly with her personality, loving and caring, capable and gregarious.

"She was one of those people who seemed to move everyone she met. Something that became apparent at her funeral where there was standing room only," Chris says.

They were both child-focused even before they had Emily. He adds: "We knew Joe would have difficulty getting pregnant because she'd had various health problems but after our three-month African honeymoon in 2005 we decided to try." When nothing happened they sought fertility treatment.

"We were both quite large and we were told that our BMI measurement was too big for us to qualify. Joe started looking at stomach stapling treatment and we also looked into adoption but then out of the blue and to our excitement Joe became pregnant in 2007."

Tragically the 12-week scan showed that Joe had miscarried.

"I think that's when Joe started suffering. She was really forlorn and lethargic and not herself at all. But she had some counselling and after a few months she seemed to be back to her normal happy self."

When Emily was conceived during a holiday in Dubai the following year and their 12-week scan showed she was healthy they were elated.

"Joe couldn't stop crying with joy and she had a normal pregnancy. The birth was hard but we came home tired yet cheerful. We adored Emily and were doting parents."

Then Joe, who was 39, had some problems with breast feeding and ended up in hospital twice. As soon as she switched to bottle feeding Emily was fine but Chris thinks this is when Joe started falling apart mentally.

“Outwardly she appeared happy and relieved albeit tired but after she’d died I discovered she was making huge numbers of calls to helplines.

“Looking back I think she had completely lost confidence in herself as a mother but she masked it even from me,” Chris says.

Within weeks it had become obvious and she told Chris she was going to the GP.

“He prescribed antidepressants for postnatal depression. I tried to help out as much as I possibly could but a week later she was clearly going downhill badly so we went back to the GP together.

“She sat in the surgery and talked not just about suicide but the methods she had considered. The GP realised this was not a cry for help and called in the mental health team. Ten days later she was dead. She’d jumped in front of a train,” says Chris.

“I felt the mental health team had failed her so when the hospital trust did an internal review and concluded that they did nothing wrong I requested the strategic health authority carry out an independent investigation.

“This concluded with 21 recommendations for change that are being implemented across Yorkshire. It’s so frustrating because if Joe had got the right treatment or I had been given the right information to help her more myself I think she’d be alive.

“There will be an inquest into her death next month which will no doubt tell us more.”

Today Emily is a happy 18-month-old.

“Although it’s wonderful to see her grow it’s hard too. I want Joe to share these moments. Emily even looks like Joe with her sparkling blue eyes, big smile and blonde hair.”

Chris has another priority: to ensure the same fate doesn’t befall other families.

“I’ve set up a foundation in Joe’s name. I felt there needed to be something nationally that pulls all the existing charities together and works towards improving services for women. There are guidelines but all too often they aren’t followed. I wanted to offer quick and easy access to information for women and their families.”

Elaine Hanzak-Gott, a postnatal depression expert from the [advice service \(www.greatvine.com\)](http://www.greatvine.com) receives increasing numbers of calls from women who are suffering.

“There’s an expectation of how fantastic everything is going to be particularly if it has taken time to get pregnant. Often the reality is very different,” she says.

It is estimated 10-15 per cent of all live births lead to postnatal depression.

Diane Nehme of the Association for Postnatal Illness (www.apni.org) says the condition is far more recognised and accepted by the medical profession. But she adds:

“The bad news is counselling and therapies are lacking within the NHS.

“Whilst drug treatments can be incredibly effective they can take many months for recovery to be made and that’s where these back-up services are needed.”

Her advice is to write a diary at the end of each day with a scoring system. Give one for a good day, two for a manageable day and three for a bad one. “It allows you and your doctor to have an accurate picture.”

Chris hopes treatment options will improve radically in the future. “Joe had depression in her family which puts Emily at risk herself. By the time she’s old enough to have children I want to know that if she ever suffers from it she can expect to get the help she needs.”

For information on the Joanne Bingley Memorial Foundation visit
www.joebingleymemorialfoundation.org.uk