

Hidden Loss

Although the baby never cried out, suckled at its mother's breast, or slept in the newly decorated nursery, the child was a part of the parents as much as any child born into a family. Coping with the tragedy of the loss of an infant in pregnancy is not easy and many mothers say that people do not understand how traumatic this type of loss can be for them.

Jennifer J. has lost two infants this way – the first was following her son's second birthday. The family had been looking forward to another baby in the house and when she realized that something was wrong, she reassured herself that it must be a minor problem. When it became clear that she would miscarry, Jennifer's loss was profound. She said that she was astonished how differently she was treated in hospital when she suffered the miscarriage as opposed to her delivery a few years earlier. She found that the Doctor on call was indifferent, treated this loss as something which was mundane and nothing to worry about, told her that she could try some painkillers if things worsened, but said after all she should realize that it was only a miscarriage. She said that those words "only a miscarriage" stuck with her and she wondered how a trained medical professional communicated this type of loss in such a way.

Today with two healthy children, Jennifer is grateful that she managed to survive those pregnancies with success. Her two miscarriages though are still a part of her life's fabric and she remembers the dates when the pregnancies ended and she lost her two babies. She says that this often surprises people who feel that she is being overly sentimental or even bordering on melancholia. She replies that these were important dates in her life and they must be remembered because they mark a part of her own history. The babies were a part of her, if only for a brief period in her life. Because there was no official ending, - a funeral, a service, a custom or ritual surrounding the miscarriages, she has chosen to remember in her own special way with flowers on the anniversaries of the dates.

Jennifer says that her overwhelming feeling when she miscarried was one of guilt – had she done too much and put a strain on herself and therefore was responsible for the miscarriage? Had she not been careful enough in everything she ate or drank? Only in time, she joined a support group and was able to talk about the emotions and doubts that nipped and careened through her heart and head, she found she was able to deal with them more completely.

She hopes that people will think about the things they say when they are told of such a loss and she suggests that because a child was not full term and was not born, this is not a reason to ignore the emotions that have accompanied the loss. She recommends that people be careful in asking about their pregnancies in case there has been a loss.

Sometimes, giving advice can be helpful, but Jennifer says that hearing that this was “for the best” did not sit well with her and she found that an arm around the shoulder or a moment to think about the infant was far more beneficial.

Being able to talk to other parents who have lost a baby in pregnancy is often therapeutic and can help bring things into perspective. The sharing of sentiments, recalling the comments, experiences, and situations can also be important. That sense of isolation and frustration, when shared, can be dealt with and can help in the healing. Through Bereaved Families of Ontario anyone who has suffered such a loss may find a sense of peace and understanding.

~ From “Time to Remember” by Barbara Klich