

Its Never Too Late to Grieve

For many years, parents were not allowed to grieve after the death of a baby and there was little understanding of the need to grieve. Often parents did not see their babies - they were not allowed to hold or cuddle them. They were discouraged from arranging a funeral and were told to forget their loss as quickly as possible and have another. Guilt, relating to something they did or did not do, plays a large part in many people's experience of loss.

It is simply unimaginable what these parents coped with and how they managed to survive. It must have been extremely difficult for them. Many parents say 'we did what we were told to do'

"Churching", "Limbo" and many other customs and beliefs of the time added considerably to people's anguish and hurt. Fathers were totally excluded and employers were noticeably tough on staff. One dad says when his daughter died over 40 years ago that he was told by the state body that he worked for - "we do not consider it a significant bereavement to warrant a day off work". Can you imagine this?

Times were definitely tougher and when you listen to some of the parents stories there experiences were inhumane.

If you are a parent whose baby died a long time ago and now feel able to talk about your experience, how different it all was back then and maybe being able to trace information about your baby or register your baby it is not too late to do that. ISANDS can help you to do that.

[Long Ago Bereaved Parents - Leaflet](#)

Finding Out About Your Baby

To find out more information about your baby, contact the hospital where your baby was born. They should be able to tell you what sex your baby was (if you don't already know), if there was a reason for your baby's death, and where he/she is buried. You may find it is difficult to trace your baby's records or nursing homes may have closed down or medical practitioners may have died leaving no records. However, it is worth checking as most nursing homes passed on their records to a local hospital when they closed. Many hospitals now invite parents to talk over their past experience and the Social Worker will help to organise this.

If you are unsure of where your baby is buried, contact the hospital where your baby was born. Many babies were buried in "Holy Angels" communal plots. Many of the bigger cemeteries e.g. Holy Angels in Glasnevin, have accurate records of all babies buried there. Once you have the date of birth/death they can give you the exact location where your baby is buried. If the hospital where the birth took place is no longer in existence your local ISANDS contact may be able to tell you where the records are now.

Memories

It may not be possible to trace your baby's grave, but you could inscribe the baby's name on your own family headstone, or just place flowers where you think your baby might be buried. You may not have been allowed spend time with your baby when he or she was born, however it is still possible for you to make some memories of your baby e.g. sew a special patch with the baby's name and date of birth and frame it, plant a tree or a shrub in memory of your baby, write down all you remember of that time or perhaps write a poem or a letter to your baby. ISANDS have unique booklets for parents and siblings to create a record of the baby that died called 'A

Season to Remember'. You can see it if you click on [ISANDS Memories Collection](#) or phone for a catalogue. It may take just one single action, one idea mentioned above, to relieve a lot of pent up pain and sorrow.

ISANDS holds special Remembrance Services for babies that have died around the time of birth. We also organise Parents' Support Nights which are for the long-ago bereaved as well as for the recently bereaved.

Many hospitals now give Remembrance Certificates for babies who died in the past.

ISANDS has a Book of Remembrance in which you can have your baby's name inscribed. Don't worry if you didn't give your baby a name before now. Very often babies were either given a name by the hospital such as Mary or Joseph, or were known only by their surname. You can give your baby a name when he/she is being inscribed in the Book of Remembrance and this may help you a lot.

Remember it is never too late to grieve.

Certificates

If your baby lived, even for a few minutes, it should be possible for you to get a birth and death certificate if you haven't already got them. If your baby was stillborn you would not have received a certificate. However, since the Stillbirth Registration Act 1994, you can get a stillbirth certificate for your baby once you have the relevant details. The Act applies only in relation to a child weighing 11b 1.6Ozs (500grms) or more, or having a gestational age of 24 weeks or more, who shows no sign of life at birth. ISANDS are very willing to assist you with this, if you want to give us a call. The hospital should be able to give you all the information you need in order to register the baby's birth or death.

When contacting them you will need to provide them with the following information:-

- **Baby's surname**
- **Date of delivery or date of death if your baby lived for a short time (if you are unsure of exact dates, explain this to them)**
- **Your present address and phone number**
- **The address you were living at the time of your baby's birth**
- **Mother's full name - including maiden name**
- **Mother's date of birth.**

You can register the baby in any Registration Office. If you did not give the baby a name, there is an opportunity for you to do this now.

If you would like to speak to somebody who was bereaved long ago you can phone ISANDS phone number, or write to us, and we will put you in touch with a contact in your area.

Two Mothers Remember Their Experience

"There was no counselling available 25 years ago, when my daughter was stillborn. For three days afterwards I cried a lot. One of the attending staff told me that if I did not pull myself together I would end up in their psychiatric unit, and it would be very hard to get out."

Denise

"Pierce Matthew actually lived for six days. They did explain to my husband that his condition was serious and they didn't expect him to live and I was not to see my baby. I remember from the beginning wanting desperately to see him and hold him. I wanted to know the colour of his hair etc. I loved him from the time I carried him. They should have let me say hello and goodbye properly. Nineteen years later I went back to the hospital and with the help of a kind nurse I saw Pierce Matthew's chart. I took some photos of it. The day I went to get Pierce Matthew's birth and death certificate you would think I had won the lotto, it was wonderful holding these two certificates after all those years. I put all these mementos into a scrapbook on what would have been his nineteenth birthday. Not much perhaps, but each tiny memento means the world to me for the son I pray to in heaven".

Jean

My mind does not mourn yesterday, it mourns today.
The images that pass before my eyes
do not recall the infant son.
But see you running through the house
a teenage son in search of food and gym shoes
and maybe me.
I do not mourn you for what you were
but for what you cannot be. **By ~A Mother' {SANDS, Vic. Australia}**