

# My Birth Story by Liz T

I didn't plan to have any more children, especially at the age of 40! I already had 3 children (singletons) who I adored, from my 1<sup>st</sup> marriage, ages ranging from 15 to 20 years. When I discovered I was pregnant, it was enough of a shock, but my anxiety increased when the 12-week scan showed up not one but two foetuses! I had 'missed out' on conceiving twins previously so it hadn't occurred to me that I could be having twins although my mother was a twin. Dave, my partner, was over-the-moon! I honestly wasn't as enthusiastic; I was very frightened, but Dave, it seemed, was going to be supportive enough for both of us and I got used to the idea, as we were very happy together. I was a blubbing wreck and extremely concerned about the viability of producing healthy babies as I was considered a "Geriatric Mum" (medical terminology.) Nevertheless, I opted not to have the amniocentesis test (needle through tummy button which can identify certain abnormalities), as there's a chance of miscarrying and losing one or both twins. I got to the point where I decided to 'go with the flow' and leave it all to fate, the due date was 5<sup>th</sup> May 1998 and I liked the idea of May, - practical with summer on its way and the added bonus of spreading the financial cost, as we had several winter and spring birthdays close together.

Dave and I didn't have long to wait for our 'big day' to arrive. I'm told I am impatient, and may have wondered if I'd be able to wait even up to 35 weeks, but would never have wished the twins to arrive as early and precariously they did. It wasn't going to be the full-term route for us! I'd had a relatively easy pregnancy, no extreme sickness, textbook really up until week 29. It was Thurs 11<sup>th</sup> February 1998: I was going for a regular pre-natal check-up at Poole Hospital. Evidently my blood pressure was high and there were proteins in my urine. I was not alarmed particularly; I felt fine, my wrists and ankles were a little swollen but I considered that as part and parcel of being pregnant. I was asked to stay in overnight, which I did and the next day the 'vital signs' had not improved; the doctors wanted to monitor me and requested that I stay in overnight again. I didn't know much about the condition: pre-eclampsia or toxæmia, I was told I had this condition that could occur in women expecting twins. I had vague recollections of reading about it in a pregnancy textbook years before and it was probably the only thing I hadn't been anxious about. On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February, the signs had not improved even with complete bed-rest and the registrar at St Mary's informed me of the risks, it was serious, the twins and I could die if I started fitting. It was agreed I should have an emergency caesarean that evening. My best friend was visiting at the time and we both cried. I was given steroid injections to strengthen the twins' lungs, as they are not formed properly at 29 weeks. The heart monitor seemed to pick up quite strong beats, which was reassuring, but I was beside myself with fear. I tried to persuade health professionals to let me wait another day as I worried the twins would not survive arriving 3 months premature, but eventually I accepted that the caesarian was the only option. One of the nurses rang Dave on his mobile, but she couldn't say very much, other than he was urgently needed at St Mary's Maternity Hospital by 6pm that evening. Dave was working in Portsmouth at the time and he sped along the motorway (quite dangerously apparently) in the company car with his colleague, to get to Poole Hospital. He was just in time to be briefed and gowned- up in order to be present at the births. (There was no time to take his colleague, Greg, home and I was told he waited outside, smoking and drinking gallons of coffee; people thought he was an expectant father!)

Back in the theatre I was given a spinal block which I believe is a one-off local anaesthetic in the spine, unlike an epidural which can be topped up. A screen was placed over my tummy. Dave sat beside me and held my hand, not saying much - he's a man of few words anyhow, so he was

practically dummy-like! Later he told me he was on autopilot and very worried. I felt strangely calm and resigned; they had commenced the caesarean - I could feel 'fumbling' - it really was okay, no pain. I learned after that there were 7 health professionals for each twin around the operating table on-hand for the deliveries. Liam at 6.35pm was the first of the boys to be plucked out weighing in at 2lbs 12ozs, attended rapidly by his team of 7, he gave out a sizeable cry and it was noted. Marcus followed his brother at 6.42pm and had difficulty taking his first breath but with the assistance of the medical team he gave a cry, small but significant; his team of 7 obstetric professionals rallied urgently around him, he weighed in at 2lbs 10ozs. To this day I have nothing but praise, admiration and unending gratitude for those who helped to bring, albeit shakily, my beautiful boys into the world. I was duly stitched up, given a polaroid photo of each twin, named twin 1 and twin 2, to help me 'bond' I think and to remind me that I had produced something, before being wheeled to the recovery room. I apparently was quite swollen all over, I don't recall being like this but Dave and friends tell me that's how I looked when they visited. I do remember being asked to drink lots and lots of water/juice. Constantly throughout the night I had something called magnesium sulphate administered intravenously. I don't know why this was, but it must have worked! I was very distressed - I remember pleading for no more injections - it got to the point where the nurses and doctors attending could not find any more veins - I'd become a pincushion.

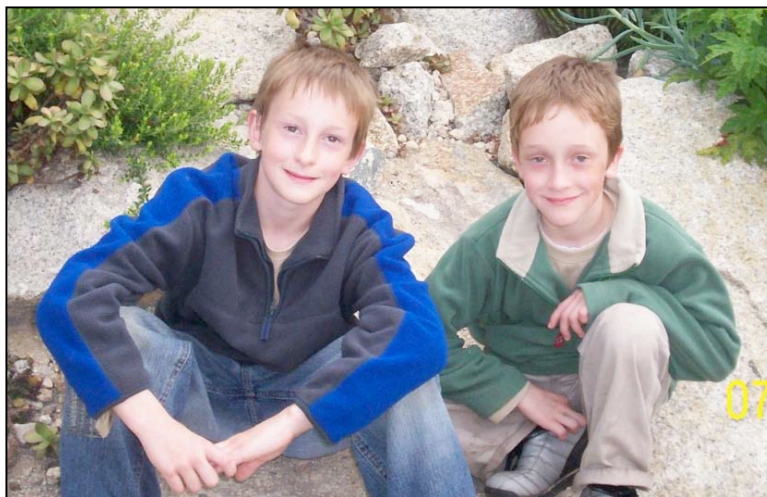
The 3<sup>rd</sup> day after the birth I was improving slowly and was moved to a room of my own. Unfortunately, it was placed just outside the nursery I would hear babies crying, especially at night and although I felt very sad at not being able to attend to my twins, I was as content as I could be in the knowledge Liam and Marcus were in good hands in the Special Care Baby Unit and they'd survived for almost a week. It got slightly better for us all over the next few days - friends and family visited and we all thought it was great to have the boys born on Valentine's Day. We used humour as a release and nick-named them Phil and Grant (East Enders) and Bill and Ben, (those who are old enough will understand!) I have one son born on Fireworks Night, Nov 5<sup>th</sup> and Dave's is on 25<sup>th</sup> December, so it all made sense really. There were ongoing worries, Marcus's oxygen levels were not good, his breathing was erratic; he needed constant monitoring and blood tests but after 2 weeks he was eventually moved to the less urgent side of the unit with his brother Liam. Seeing the twins in incubators, seeing wires attached to them, hearing the bleeps of the various monitoring equipment was scary and alarming, but I soon got used to it.



My blood pressure wouldn't go down and I wasn't allowed to leave hospital until the 10<sup>th</sup> day, albeit with beta-blocker tablets which eventually, after 8 weeks did the trick. After 6 weeks Liam and Marcus were moved to the nursery within SCBU, which was a good sign - they were surviving. Dave and I had learned to tube feed our little men. Dave, seemingly unruffled by the medical procedures they had to go through and I, trance-like going through the motions. I think I had cut-off a little after they were born as I thought they would not survive, I didn't dare to 'love' them too

much. We visited them twice a day, from our home in Moordown, Bournemouth. I got used to expressing breast milk via the breast pump, and freezing it ready to take into hospital for the twins, it was the only positive helpful thing I felt I could do for them. I felt very bovine-like and Dave would call me Daisy! My daughter, Becky, was 15 at the time and the whole experience had been distressing for her also. The twins were on the move again - the last 3 weeks of the twins' hospital stay was at Acrewood, the children's ward, Poole Hospital. More concerns however; following more tests, we had been told Marcus might need a heart operation and could possibly leave hospital with an oxygen bottle. His oxygen stats would need to improve greatly by the time we reached the proposed discharge date, 29<sup>th</sup> April. Liam was doing really well and could have been discharged from hospital early April but Dave wouldn't hear of taking home one twin without the other. I was opposed to his view as I was desperate to have a baby home, but now see it was the right decision.

Marcus's oxygen levels had improved enough for him to be discharged on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, although we were to have several oxygen tests when he was at home. Hooray! It was wonderful, exciting, but daunting also to be taking our boys home - It's all I had wanted to do for 12 weeks. When they were a year old we had a fantastic party to say thanks over the year to our family and friends for their love and support. We're



not out of the woods yet - Marcus has a couple of conditions that will affect him all his life - but that's another story. Liam and Marcus are now 10 years old, doing what 10-year-old boys do, ensuring that we go to bed tired and draining the bank balance! It's been traumatic and draining, and it's now a fantastic adventure, - we wouldn't have it any other way.

## **Premature Birth – Twins and Triplets in Special Care (SCBU or NICU)**

“In the UK, we have around a 7% premature birth rate with over 40 per cent of all twins and multiples needing some special care - largely because twins are born earlier than single babies and are usually small. Special Care Baby Units (SCBU) aim to provide the care that babies would have had in the womb, supplementing this with help with breathing, feeding and warmth. Babies usually need special care if they weigh under 1.7kg, are less than 32 weeks or have any medical problems.”

To read the rest of this article, go to <http://www.twinsuk.co.uk/twinstips.php> TwinsUK have an excellent list of printable fact sheets and this is the intro to one of them.

Our club also gives out packs to mums who have early babies and visits them in special care. We have a mum in the club with two sets of twins herself, who works part time in the NICU in Poole. She has a particular interest in supporting families with multiples. We also support Bliss the Premature Baby Charity and their local Bournemouth branch. If you need advice, call Anna on 07791 300563.