

pregnant again if he were here. It was an intense roller-coaster – happy, sad, happy, sad and back to happy again.

I realised the ‘what ifs’ wouldn’t serve me well, so I tried to stay positive while also honouring my feelings. First and foremost, I was extremely lucky to be having another baby. Many women who lose babies can’t carry another child or they spend years trying to have another one.

People thought I’d be worried about losing the baby, but I believed Xavier was looking after him or her. Besides, I had to ensure I was sending all my positive vibes to help our child grow and arrive safely.

The thought of it being a boy so soon after we’d lost Xavier needed consideration.

There are squirmers who don’t know what to say, and those who’ve lost a baby or know someone who has. I can usually put people at ease by sharing information, talking about Xavier’s legacy and letting them know I’m OK. Often they thank me for sharing, because so many people don’t talk about it.

The weekend before I gave birth, we went to the first birthday party of our niece, who’s the same age as Xavier would have been. Chris and I were both unprepared for how sad we’d feel; Xavier should have been opening presents with his cousin.

When Eliza was born last May, people expected me to be really happy. Of course, I loved her and felt so lucky she was here, but bringing her home was challenging.

Xavier Bear is available to support families who experience the loss of their baby while in Intensive Care, Special Care Nursery or Paediatric Intensive Care Units. For more information or support groups, visit www.bearsofhope.org.au.



“MY GRIEF CAME BACK TWICE AS HARD; I REALISED ALL THE THINGS I’D MISSED OUT ON WITH XAVIER”



(from left) Debb and Chris with Xavier, who was born premature and died after 29 hours; baby Eliza next to her brother’s namesake, Xavier Bear; the couple with Eliza.

Although we truly hoped to be blessed with another son, Chris, in particular, was concerned we’d compare him to Xavier. Having a daughter meant a different energy and approach to some aspects of parenting. We wanted to feel connected to the baby and prepare as much as we could, so at one of our scans, we asked our obstetrician to write ‘Xavier’s sister’ or ‘Xavier’s brother’ on a piece of paper. We opened it on Christmas morning and were shocked, but excited, when we read ‘Xavier’s sister’ – I’d always seen myself as a boy’s mum.

Another issue to deal with is when people ask if you’re expecting your first child. Every woman who’s lost a baby has a different view, but I never deny Xavier, even to strangers. I say, “This is my second child; I have a son, Xavier, who’s in heaven.” People usually fall into two categories with their response:

On top of the usual new-mum difficulties, my grief came back twice as hard; I realised all the things I’d missed out on with Xavier.

One day, while I was feeding Eliza, I noticed a mark on her hand. I tried to rub it off, but her vein structure has an ‘X’ shape. I believe it’s Xavier’s way of letting me know he’s had a hand in delivering her to us.

We’ve discussed how we’ll talk about Xavier with Eliza and any future children. He may not be in this world, but he’s part of our family. We’ll tell them they have a brother in heaven who’s their special guardian angel.

I believe Xavier is around Eliza. The other day, she was lying on her tummy and all of a sudden she stopped, rested her cheek on the bed and started laughing as her eyes darted around the room. I know it’s him. I say to her, “I know your brother’s here. Tell him Mummy loves him and misses him so much.”

I’ll always ache for Xavier. Part of my family will be missing forever. Despite our loss, we’re proud we’re able to help other people like us through Bears of Hope and the introduction of Xavier Bear, his legacy. The teddies are given to parents who’ve experienced neonatal loss, so they don’t leave the hospital empty-handed.

Of course, the most beautiful gift we’ve been blessed with is our Eliza. Nearly nine months on, I still have times when I pick her up and say, “I can’t believe you’re here.” Not a day goes by when I don’t feel blessed to have her. She provides us with endless joy and has helped mend our broken hearts.

Hearing her say “Dada” for the first time was amazing, and watching Chris with his daughter makes my heart sing with pride and happiness. I’m a very lucky woman. ■

AS TOLD TO KATHERINE CHATFIELD

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