

My Miscarriage

Pre-Pregnancy

My husband and I were married on 10th February 2012 after nearly eight years together. The driver behind our timing to get married was always when we were ready to settle down and start a family. We both wanted things to happen in that order and were quite happy to hold off until we were truly ready for the commitment of marriage and children.

Once we were married we were still living in London, as we had been for about two years, so the next step was for us to move back to Scotland – where we'd met and where I grew up, although he was originally from East Africa and settled in Scotland several years before I met him. So, the plan to move home to Scotland meant finding jobs and relocating and that was our next focus before thinking about getting pregnant.

About eight months after we were married I secured a job in Glasgow with the same company I'd been working with for over eight years and my husband very quickly found work in Clydebank. Initially, we moved in with my Dad as we both had tenants in our Glasgow properties and it made sense to save a bit of money when we had people covering our mortgages. A few months quickly turned into many months as we got settled into our new jobs and back into family and social lives back home and we were enjoying spending the time with my Dad; probably a little too much!

When we got to the summer of 2013 (around nine months after moving home) we started to discuss next steps. I was 34 and my husband was coming 37 and we both knew that time might well be running out and that the risks of pregnancy were increasing exponentially with every passing day. I was still holding off for us to be settled into our own house...ideally the rural family home I had pictured in my future...and also being promoted again before we proceeded with our family. However, my husband and many of our friends and family felt that there was no "ideal" time to do it and there could forever be reasons that it wasn't quite perfect but I still wasn't convinced.

I had been on a fitness kick for quite some time to ensure I was fit and healthy and to reduce my weight as best I could (as this carries its own risks in pregnancy) but I wasn't quite there yet. I also made pre-conceptual appointments with my local practise nurse to ensure everything was in order, which it was, and I got lots of advice and information to ensure a healthy and happy pregnancy and, of course, baby.

I was also concerned that, as the main income earner, it could be difficult to afford to take much maternity leave as I only get three months full pay from my employer and thereafter, my salary would drop by 70% supplemented only by statutory maternity pay. In addition, as the head of a team in my company I was worried that that there could be adverse implications for my career of taking a significant amount of time out of work. Did having a baby mean to others that I wasn't committed and ambitious in my job? That couldn't be further from the truth but I was still deeply worried about that and how I would be able to juggle being a great parent with being career driven...quite a quandary for the modern woman! I was so concerned about the financials that I called my HR department to ask what my financial position would be if, on my current salary, I decided to get pregnant as the written policy was incredibly complicated but they refused to work through a hypothetical scenario that would help me to plan things properly. They needed a form from my doctor confirming my pregnancy before they could discuss the numbers with me...not much help once I was actually pregnant. There was me trying to plan ahead and be responsible and yet everyone was telling me I was over-thinking it!

I just didn't know how to get comfortable enough with all of that to allow me to relax and enjoy the experience of trying for a baby...a totally new and exciting chapter in our lives. I felt a great deal of responsibility about moving ahead with this decision most especially as I had spent my whole late teenage and adult life desperately trying NOT to get pregnant by mistake as I always knew I didn't want to have a child that I wasn't 100% prepared for. I felt like a naughty schoolgirl even discussing it with the nurse. I had to continually remind myself that I was now a 34 year old woman and that it was perfectly normal for me to be having this sort of discussion!

I met one of my closest friends for lunch one day, determined to tell her we were planning to get pregnant and get her support for my careful planning. She had recently had her first baby and was one of those people who just seemed to have taken the whole experience of pregnancy and parenthood entirely in her stride and I was sure she must have planned it to perfection. But rather than agree that I was being very sensible and responsible, she agreed with my husband that I really was stressing too much about everything. I should just accept that we were in a reasonable financial situation, we were committed to being the best parents we could be and we'd figure it all out in the nine months between getting pregnant and having the baby. There was no immediate need to panic and there was a limit to the amount of planning I could do anyway. Let's face it...I might not get pregnant for many months or even years...I certainly couldn't plan what time of year I would be having the baby so that I could be on maternity leave in the summer! I realised then that I was getting myself wound up about a host of things that were impossible for me to control.

Time to Try

Eventually I managed to start relaxing about everything and, as much as possible, I felt things were in order enough for me to come off the pill in August 2013 to allow my body time to adjust (as I'd been on it since I was 16 years old) and to start properly ovulating, which we expected to take a number of months...and it did. That didn't stop me feeling certain I must be pregnant the first time we had "unprotected" sex! Having spent my whole life to that point doing everything I could to prevent a pregnancy, I was certain that it would only take one time to get pregnant. If only I'd known then that there was really only a short window each month in which there was a reasonable chance I could get pregnant...I could have been a bit more relaxed!

Due to our finances being tied up in property in Glasgow (in negative equity) and our familiarity with renting in London, where prices were much higher than anything we were likely to pay in Glasgow, I felt it best for us to rent a suitable family home in the Glasgow area and we could continue to rent out our flats, neither of which were really big enough or suitable for raising a family, but after lots of long discussions we agreed that it made far better financial sense to move back into my two bedroom flat initially and put any extra cash towards the mortgage so that we were building equity with which to buy our ideal family home. Very wise and sensible...but not my "ideal" picture! Nonetheless, the decision was ultimately made for us as my tenants handed in their notice to move out at the end of November 2013.

It was October before I had my first period which indicated everything was working on its own again so we officially started trying for a baby in November 2013 and by this point I was getting excited about the prospect of being pregnant and becoming a mummy, and we were getting our living arrangements sorted out so I was finally comfortable with the idea.

Christmas came and went fairly uneventfully but my period which was due at the end of December didn't arrive and so I did a home pregnancy test, much to my husband's despair, but it came back negative. He was of the view that there was no need to worry about taking tests and constantly checking and worrying about things. I would know when I was pregnant and would soon begin to show. However, I wanted to know the exact date that it happened so I could plan everything ahead to perfection. I kept rigorous notes of my ovulation dates and when we made love so that I could be sure.

New Year came and went too and then I had my birthday to look forward to in mid-January. We made a trip to London as our friend was visiting from Tanzania so we spent my birthday weekend there. I was certain by this point that I was pregnant but the negative test had thrown me as it was supposed to be able to detect pregnancy as little as one week after my period was due. I also started to get very sore breasts and was running to the toilet. So, I couldn't help myself when I packed another pregnancy test as we were preparing for the trip.

We were staying with friends and when I got the chance to have the house to myself for a couple of hours I decided to do the pregnancy test. I was so certain it would be positive so I was feeling so excited and I'm sure if it had been a negative result I simply wouldn't have believed it but it was, indeed positive. The phrase "Pregnant 1-2 weeks" was the most exciting and terrifying I have ever read! I immediately tried to call my husband to see when he'd be back but he was going to be about an hour so I'd just have to wait. I wanted to show him rather than tell him.

Pregnancy Success

I was feeling incredibly pensive just sitting there with that loaded phrase imprinted on my brain. What kind of mum was I going to be? What would life look like in nine months' or a few years' time? I started thinking about nurseries, schools, houses, maternity leave, my career, who I wanted to tell, and so many other things I can't even remember now. I just didn't know what to do with myself and this information that I couldn't yet share with anyone.

After what seemed like an eternity, my husband finally returned home. In quite a serious voice I said I needed to talk to him upstairs and he trudged up like a naughty schoolboy heading towards a telling-off by the headmistress. I'm sure he was wondering what he'd done wrong now. I showed him the test and, after he fumbled about for his glasses, he finally registered what that phrase actually meant and he looked at me with such shock but such joy that it nearly made me burst with excitement. It was one of the most intimate and joyful moments of our lives and we allowed ourselves a few minutes to revel in it.

Eventually I asked him if he would tell his family but he was very nervous about mentioning anything until after the 3 month window. However, I didn't think I could keep it a secret from my closest family and friends. I was so excited and I wanted them to share in that rather than us waiting until it was old news for us. It was my mum's birthday the following day and mine the day after, and I couldn't think of a better birthday present. I immediately called mum to tell her the news and she was really surprised. We'd been throwing her off the scent for a while and so it came a bit out of the blue, but she was absolutely delighted. I then called dad straight after and he was equally delighted. Everyone was overjoyed...not least

because we were all picturing a first for our family...the arrival of a little milk chocolate baby who would be a beautiful combination of both my husband and I.

After that I couldn't help but text my closest friends to share the excellent news with them and as we were staying with friends we shared with them too. It was a weekend of extreme pleasure and joy and everyone was so happy for us. I had decided, however, that I wouldn't tell my work until I absolutely had to – either when I was starting to show or if I was very sick and needed time off. I just didn't want to be passed over for any potential opportunities at work as a result of me being pregnant and likely to go off on maternity leave for a lengthy period of time.

Being sick was also a real concern as my mum suffered hyperemesis with all three children and was even hospitalised for about a month when she was pregnant with me as she literally couldn't keep anything down so I was hoping that I would be able to dodge that one...trying to function properly in a very busy and stressful job whilst feeling nauseous filled me with dread.

We got through the weekend with us being the centre of attention the whole time. Everyone was so overjoyed at our news and it was great. When I got back home I arranged an appointment with my GP. I don't know what I was expecting but it was definitely more than I got from him. I told him I had just found out I was pregnant and the test said I was only a couple of weeks along, but he worked out my dates and insisted that I was actually seven weeks pregnant as they date it from the first date of your last period – before you're even pregnant! Given I had so meticulously noted my dates I was quite put out by this news and felt like I'd just lost a month of my baby's development somehow. He also advised that he would refer me to the midwife and that it would take a few weeks to get an appointment. So, not only did he not do a "proper" pregnancy test to check that I really was pregnant but he also wasn't about to start getting involved. He just bumped me off to another department to deal with me when they had time. I was definitely thinking I would have had to do a formal test and maybe get some blood tests or something, but no, I just had to wait the endless time until my midwifery appointment came through in the post about three weeks later.

In the absence of any immediate midwifery support I decided that I would turn to the internet for information instead. The internet was an excellent source of information and I was even able to see the weekly development of my baby which fascinated me...but did that mean that I should be looking at seven weeks or at three weeks? I was confused but finally worked out that if I was taking the date I conceived then I would calculate a thirty six week pregnancy and going by the NHS dating system it would be a forty week pregnancy so I was finally able to make peace with this too.

It felt like a lifetime waiting for that appointment to come through from the midwife and when it finally did I was "technically" ten weeks pregnant. The leaflet that came through with the appointment said that ideally I should have certain blood tests before week ten so I was really frustrated by the fact that not only had I missed those blood tests but, with the appointments I'd been given, I wouldn't have my twelve week scan until the end of week thirteen. That didn't feel right. I tried calling to bring the appointment forward but the midwife at my doctor's surgery wasn't available until the scheduled appointment and apparently I couldn't have the scan until after that appointment. I didn't want to push the date further back so I stuck with it and looked forward to us being able to see our baby on the screen in a few weeks' time.

Overall the experience of being pregnant was relatively kind to me. I didn't for a moment feel sick although I did have a substantially increased appetite and would suddenly have very strong urges to eat. It seemed my body wasn't at all happy at being the slightest bit hungry. I was getting nervous, though, that I was going to put on too much weight but my mind was in turmoil about the fact that I couldn't diet. It really was an odd sensation to know that I was going to get bigger and that it would be okay. I had spent such a lot of my life trying to diet and lose weight and had done very well pre-pregnancy to get fitter and healthier and lose nearly two stone from my heaviest.

From about ten weeks I started to feel incredibly bloated and it was becoming difficult to hide. I couldn't work out whether I was actually starting to show (oh no...was it twins?!) or if it was just bloating because I was eating so much. I also had been feeling quite rosey for a few weeks, not because of the pregnancy necessarily but I took a pretty heavy cold, followed by a chest infection for which I needed antibiotics, followed by another cold, and then I was desperately trying to fight off the flu that my husband had succumbed to. He was even sleeping in the spare room to try to protect me and the baby from getting it. I was drinking copious amounts of homemade honey, lemon and fresh ginger tea and taking lots of vitamin C to try to boost my immune system and it seemed to be working.

At twelve weeks I was getting really excited about my scan, just over a week and a half to wait until everything was confirmed and I could see my healthy baby growing inside me. Until that point I was realistic about the fact that, essentially, all I had inside was a complex bunch of cells and it was not yet able to sustain life. But it was unavoidable to picture the future, what would he or she look like, what names would we like, and so on, and as we got to twelve weeks I was so sure everything was going to be perfect.

Warning Signs

On the Wednesday evening of my twelfth week I went to the toilet and there was something I can only describe as a mucus plug along with a small dark blood clot. My heart skipped a beat and I was really concerned. I hadn't had any spotting or anything untoward throughout my pregnancy and so this was really unusual. However, I had a quick look online and my mind was put at rest that it was quite normal to have some spotting, so I just put it to the back of my mind. But it was still there working away on me and as I was reading my book in bed that night I had my hand on my abdomen and found myself saying "come on wee one...hang on in there...it's going to be okay". This was the first time I had allowed myself to emotionally connect to what was actually going on inside rather than just the future picture.

The next morning there was some more blood and when I wiped myself the tissue was pinkish but not really bleeding as such so, again, I put it to the back of my mind and went off to work. Throughout the day things were the same and by evening I was finding it difficult to focus on anything else. I still didn't tell my husband. I just didn't want to worry him unnecessarily. I decided that if I was still bleeding the next day (Friday) I would call my GP. When I went to the toilet in the morning it was like I had my period – enough blood to turn the water red and I knew this was too much. I kept quiet and headed off to work but immediately found a quiet space to call my GP when I got to work at 8am. They weren't open yet and I got put through to NHS 24. The call handler took the details and said someone would call me back within a couple of hours, so I went back to work. I had a meeting across town in the morning and just as I was about to go in at 10am I received a call from the NHS 24 nurse and we went through all the details. She advised me that I should make an emergency appointment with my GP who could refer me for a scan. As I hung up the phone I was called into my meeting and I just put it to the back of my mind for the next hour and a half but as soon as I came out of the meeting I called my GP who told me to go straight there, so I re-routed my taxi.

The GP simply called the early pregnancy unit at my local hospital and left a message for them to get back to me direct so I had to walk out of his office without any clear understanding of what was happening or when I could be examined to find out the answer. I had no choice but to head back to work and wait as I had an important meeting at which I was supporting one of our Board members. However, in the taxi on the way back to work my mind was in absolute turmoil. I had really important stuff to take care of at work but, at the same time, I wanted to know that my baby and I were both okay. I just couldn't imagine sitting in a meeting for three hours that afternoon when all I would be doing was waiting for a call to go for a scan. I didn't know how I would be able to excuse myself discreetly from that. I hadn't even told my work I was pregnant yet as I'd been waiting, at least, for my scan. I decided that regardless of when the midwife was going to call I was just going to head straight to the hospital and wait until they could see me rather than sitting at work worrying about everything. It felt like positive action to take.

When I got to work it was only fifteen minutes before my meeting was due to commence and I asked my boss if I could have a word. He was clearly in the middle of something and very busy but I insisted it was urgent. So there I was panicking that there was something wrong with my baby having to tell my boss that I was pregnant and that I had been bleeding for a couple of days and was having to rush away to have an emergency scan. My heart was thumping out of my chest as this really wasn't the way I had wanted to break the news but, with two kids of his own, he was very understanding and told me he'd take care of everything...I should just go. As I came back to my desk, one of my team was there looking very concerned for me and I mumbled something about explaining later but he really did look concerned and we're a close team so I asked him to walk me out and I told him what was going on. His own wife was actually about a week further along than me with their second child and so he was completely sympathetic and understanding. I told him just to tell the rest of my team as it would be very difficult to explain what all the drama was about and I really didn't want anyone having to lie for me. Apart from anything, I was pretty sure I was just being paranoid and that when I came out of the hospital I would have really exciting news to tell everyone.

Emergency Scan

I quickly left the office and was walking down the road without even knowing if I was going for the bus or taking a taxi and feeling totally and utterly desolate. I couldn't decide whether to call my husband or not but I knew he would find it difficult to get away from work so I thought I would just wait until I knew what was going on. I finally managed to hail a cab and asked to be taken to the maternity unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The taxi driver asked if it was for me or if I was visiting a friend and I reluctantly told him it was for me but he obviously assumed it was just a routine check and proceeded to tell me what an amazing experience pregnancy and parenting was from his perspective as he had four daughters of whom he was incredibly proud. I couldn't help but feel desperately sad in the pit of my stomach but at the same time it was so lovely to hear this man enthusing about his very clever daughters and it was a very welcome distraction. When he dropped me off he wished me all the best for the future and a little glimmer of hope returned.

I explained to the receptionist that although I didn't yet have an appointment I had the referral papers from my GP and he had left a message on their answering machine two hours before. They advised that they could see me in an hour and a half

so I headed off to the hospital canteen for some lunch as I hadn't eaten a thing all day and I was feeling a little weary. The time passed quickly enough and I went back in for my scheduled appointment. The midwife, Maureen, was just lovely and totally put me at ease. So, I climbed up on the bed and she prepared me for my scan which started with the external abdominal ultrasound.

After a while of looking around with the scanner her voice went very quiet and she put her hand on my arm as she told me that she wasn't seeing a twelve week pregnancy in the scan picture and she couldn't find a heartbeat. My heart seemed to sink through the bed and land with a thud on the floor. Basically my baby had stopped developing at around eight weeks and things hadn't progressed since then. Maureen wanted to double check things by doing the more detailed internal vaginal ultrasound using a sort of wand device. This was not painful at all and frankly even if it was I could have handled any amount of physical pain if it meant that she could find out it was all a mistake and my baby was actually okay. But it wasn't to be. Unfortunately this just confirmed that my baby had no heartbeat, was only 1.8cm long and there was no blood flow from my body to the baby.

Maureen went on to explain that this was very common (around one in three pregnancies) and that I had three options to handle the miscarriage. I mentioned to Maureen that, with those statistics, she must be having this conversation every day and she said she had it several times every day. This really shocked me. I had never considered just how common this was and was sure it was something that wouldn't happen to me. All of my careful pregnancy planning should have meant it all went perfectly and this was so totally unexpected. All of this was completely surreal. I hadn't even told my husband I was there having the scan and now I was going to have to tell him that our baby was dead. He wasn't there to listen to everything the midwife was saying and I was immediately worried that he would think I had done something wrong.

I tried my best to listen as Maureen talked through my options. Firstly, I could leave things to happen naturally ("Missed Miscarriage") but this may take two or three weeks; secondly, I could book myself into hospital for a couple of days and take some drugs and pessaries to help expedite the process in a controlled environment ("Medical Evacuation of Uterus"); or thirdly, I could have a procedure under either local anaesthetic ("Manual Vacuum Aspiration") or by general anaesthetic ("Evacuation of Retained Products of Conception") to remove the "pregnancy tissue".

I barely listened as Maureen continued to explain everything. All that was running through my mind was that I had been carrying my dead baby around inside me for four weeks thinking it was perfectly healthy and normal, all the while telling more and more people I was pregnant and feeling quite smug about it all. I felt like an idiot for not listening to my husband when he wanted to wait until after the first scan. I also started to think about the horror of telling all those people that I was, in fact, no longer pregnant. The weight of the responsibility upon me was immense and I didn't have a clue what to do.

As Maureen continued to explain I began to realise a new horror that not only my baby was dead inside me but that I would have to somehow get it out of my body. I started to realise what the three options really meant. I would essentially have to bleed everything out of me and would have some large blood clots but this could take two or three weeks to happen; I could take some drugs to make this happen faster whilst being in hospital; or I would have to have it surgically removed. None of these options appealed to me one bit. I had just seen a full screen image of the outline of my baby and the thought of having to see that come out of me was horrific. Maureen helped me to realise that my baby was actually very tiny and would be surrounded by a small sac and fluid which would come out naturally along with the other "pregnancy tissue". The reality of what that meant hadn't fully hit me and Maureen didn't go into detail but I thought with the sac being so small I could probably cope with that. The third option was more appealing than the first two because I wouldn't need to see anything coming out of me and it would expedite the process so I could get back to work but it didn't feel right to make a decision about anything until after I'd spoken with my husband.

The procedure could only be done on Mondays or Fridays at that hospital and if I didn't decide to go ahead the coming Monday whilst I was there that day I wouldn't be able to have it done as I wouldn't have been given the necessary medication and had the required blood tests. So, it would be at least Thursday before I could have it done meaning that, since I had already started bleeding, it might happen naturally before then. I agreed with Maureen that I would think about it over the weekend and discuss it with my husband and I would call her on Monday. As I walked out of the ward I felt the emotion start to well up inside me and was about to start crying but I caught myself when I saw the queue of women outside waiting to go through for their scans and I hoped with all my heart they would have a happier experience than my own.

The Calm After the Storm

I stood completely numb at the bus stop and then the dread of having to tell people really kicked in. My work would be wondering what was going on, my husband didn't even know that I had spent my entire afternoon at the hospital, my mum and dad and everyone else I had so openly told all my exciting news and I was now going to have to whip the rug out from under all their feet. There I was going to the hospital sure that it was all going to be fine and that I could surprise my husband with the great news that the scan had confirmed everything was on track, but instead his reluctance to tell anyone

that I was pregnant until after the scan was correct. He was getting frustrated with me telling so many people so soon and he was right...I should have waited. I felt extremely foolish and embarrassed.

When I got home I had to speak to my husband as a priority. I called him but didn't get through and so texted him to call me as soon as he could. I waited for a while but in the meantime I decided to call my mum who immediately cried at the heart-breaking news. I nearly started to cry – it's very difficult not to cry when my mum does – but I managed to pull it together and told her that I would be very practical about it all. At the end of the day it was just a bunch of cells and wasn't a fully functioning baby yet so I was sure it would all be okay. I was almost managing to believe it myself and that gave me some comfort. The same conversation followed with my dad and he was equally devastated for us, but my spin on things seemed to reassure him too. He was feeling terribly guilty for talking the week before about going shopping for a crib and other baby things, but he wasn't to know.

Finally, my husband called me from work and I had to break the news to him. He was so shocked and seemed to be struggling to process the information. I guess I was expecting him to drop everything and run to my side but instead he just said he had to get back to work and I was furious with him for that. I really needed him to ask me how I was coping and to come and give me a big cuddle but instead I felt like I was getting in the way of his working day. After I got off the phone I realised that I had been dealing with the information for several hours at this point and it was completely new information to him...information that he just couldn't comprehend having been told while he was huddling quietly away from his desk on the phone, with his boss within earshot. He's a very private person and wouldn't want anyone to find out about this so he had to keep it together, especially when he was in the very busy month-end period at work. A short while later he texted me to apologise for not handling the information well. He was indeed shocked and didn't really know how to react or what to say. I was absolutely devastated that I had broken the news to him this way rather than just wait until he got home from work.

I then had a desperate urge to just tell everyone quickly, like ripping off a plaster, get it over and done with quickly, cry for a bit and then move on. So, I spent the rest of the afternoon sitting in a silent house on my sofa texting or e-mailing everyone I had told I was pregnant, including my work who had just found out that day, the sad news. It was heart-wrenching to have to tell people and it made me so desperately sad that I had to make their day memorable for the wrong reasons and I felt terribly guilty at being the bearer of that sad news. However, the response I got from everyone was overwhelming - complete and utter sorrow and understanding that I could never have anticipated. They were so worried about me and were incredibly supportive which felt really great that day and was exactly what I needed. It helped that people reacted in a way that meant it was okay for me to feel as devastated as I did. It also surprised me how many people mentioned that they had either been through it themselves or knew someone close to them who had been through it. I had no idea just how common this really was. You read the statistics but you just always think it won't happen to you, and unless someone close to you shares their experience I don't think you have any idea what it really feels like.

Once the hive of activity had quietened down I just sat alone very quietly on my sofa feeling completely numb and I remember not being sure whether this was what I was supposed to feel or if I should really be crying my eyes out. I also realised very quickly that I was getting ill. I had been fighting off my husband's flu for the past week and the shock of the day's news just obliterated any remaining immune system I had and let my body succumb to the virus. I started feeling very achy all over and sneezing and very sorry for myself.

When my husband finally made it home we just hugged each other and I talked him through the events of the day. It was a very practical discussion and we were just totally in shock. We didn't really know how we felt or should feel. Practically we both knew that there was never really a living baby in there but at the same time we had such a horrendous sense of loss...of the baby we'd pictured in the future, of nine months of pregnancy, of becoming parents, and life thereafter. It was utterly devastating and I felt like I had a huge hole in me. To add to that torrent of emotion I also found it very difficult to cope with having my dead baby inside me and I was terrified about what I might find every time I went to the toilet and that got worse with every passing day as the bleeding became heavier and I began to have very strong cramps.

We spent the weekend with me being too ill to do very much, although I had promised my mum I would meet her for lunch the next day so I dragged myself out to meet her. I really didn't eat very much and struggled through for about an hour but I had to head home and lie down as I was feeling very feverish and weak. Once I was home I just got into my jammies and lay on the sofa. We just stayed together at home talking to each other and trying to make sense of the news. My husband was incredibly worried about me and was absolutely fantastic looking after me and staying close at hand. In many ways it was a really nice weekend. Just the two of us, very intimate, as we dealt with this news that shook our whole world.

On Monday I was beginning to feel that the worst of the flu was over and was actually feeling grateful for having felt so unwell as it allowed me to focus on that rather than everything else, and that helped me to feel a bit stronger about things. Since I was bleeding to the level of a normal period, I felt as though I could cope with carrying on naturally for the time being

with the understanding that if it went on too long I would be able to have the medical intervention at any time. I had pretty bad diarrhoea, a combination of flu and hormones most probably, so that made it quite difficult to see what was coming out of me and I felt that was probably a good thing.

The cramps were coming and going on Monday evening and I took some painkillers as these were more intense than my normal period cramps. On Tuesday morning when I went to the toilet there was a sizeable clot, or rather more like a large piece of lining tissue, which was about the length of my index finger and as wide as two fingers. To me this was pretty big as it was more than I'd ever seen during a normal period. By Tuesday night the pain woke me up in the middle of the night and I had to take painkillers to help relieve the pain. Through the night it was at times excruciating to the point that I was rolling about in bed trying to get away from it. It was like the most extreme sickening type of pain from my abdomen just above my pubic bone to deep into my body. Every wave of pain was an even more painful reminder of what was actually happening to me...I was expelling my dead baby from my body.

On Wednesday, though, things seemed to settle down and the blood had almost stopped and this continued on Thursday. I started to believe that perhaps I'd missed something when I'd gone to the toilet and just maybe that was it over. I wanted nothing more than for it to be over. Every single time I went to the toilet or felt a cramp I was reminded of what was still happening to me and it cut very deeply. I felt I just couldn't begin to cope emotionally until everything was out of me.

A Dose of Reality

I spoke to my dad on Thursday evening and he was asking what was going on. I told him I thought it was reaching the end and he mentioned that he'd been talking with my sister-in-law (a second year GP consultancy trainee) who had told him that it may be worth encouraging me take the option to have things medically removed. She had explained that there was still a lot more "stuff" to come out, like the placenta (albeit not full size), the umbilical cord, all the lining tissue, the foetus and sac and all the associated fluid and blood. She was fairly sure that I would know when it had happened and by the sounds of things it certainly hadn't yet.

Whilst that really wasn't what I wanted to hear, it was a really good wakeup call as I'd almost managed to convince myself that it had all happened and I'd managed to completely miss it. It did, however, completely horrify me. It all meant that I still had my dead baby inside me and that made me sad and hollow in a way that is impossible to properly explain. It was such a strange feeling of having to sit on the edge of my life waiting for this horror movie to play out completely out of my control. I knew that until everything was out of my body that I couldn't start to heal either physically or emotionally and I was utterly mentally exhausted. I couldn't bear the thought of it taking another two or three weeks for things to progress on their own. I certainly didn't want to be out of my house when "it" happened and I really didn't want to see pieces of pregnancy tissue, potentially the size of my own hand, falling out of my body.

That evening I went online to see if I could read about other people's experience of miscarriage, but as with the midwife, all the information on the main medical websites (like the NHS and Bupa) just talked about cramps, bleeding and large unspecified clots. I finally came across the Miscarriage Association website which had some good information but still nothing specific enough to help me really prepare for exactly what I was likely to see if I continued on this natural process. However, I did notice a link to "Laura Talks" where one brave person wrote about her own recent experience of miscarriage and it gave me the detail I was looking for. A frank, open and slightly terrifying account of what the journey was like for her. It was an incredible read and it helped me to make my decision about how I wanted to progress. I discussed this with my husband and we agreed that the next day I would call Maureen, my midwife, to make arrangements to have the surgical option carried out the following week.

On Friday morning my friend (with whom I had discussed my pre-pregnancy concerns) and her one year old daughter came through from Edinburgh to visit me and keep me company for a couple of hours. Before she arrived I had called the early pregnancy unit to let Maureen know what we had decided, but as usual I had to leave a message on the answering machine for someone to get back to me. So, I had a coffee with my friend and we talked through where things were with me and my body and we were interrupted after about an hour by Maureen returning my call. I explained my latest thinking to her and she asked me to pop along on the hospital to have another scan and see exactly what stage things were at before we made the necessary arrangements. So, the three of us headed to the hospital and I was grateful to have someone with me this time.

I had to go through for the scan myself as they wouldn't let the wee one in with me but I had managed once before on my own so I felt okay. Maureen was able to confirm from the scan that things had not progressed at all and I was certain then that I was making the right decision to have things removed. She went off to make the arrangements to have the procedure done under general anaesthetic as I just didn't want to be aware of what was going on. I just wanted to wake up and it would be all over. However, there was no availability for another two weeks and by that time things would probably have happened naturally so the second best option was to have it done in that unit by local anaesthetic rather than needing a

theatre team to conduct the operation. That meant I could have it done on the Monday and I just had to make it through the weekend. I was just hoping and praying that everything would stay put long enough to see me through the weekend.

Maureen arranged for someone to take some blood and then she came back in to explain what was required. She gave me lots of pills that I was to take on Monday morning at different times, first two tablets to put under my tongue at 8am that needed to dissolve for at least ten minutes before I could swallow them which soften the cervix and speed things along, then at 10am I was to take four antibiotics for infection cover, and two paracetamol and two double strength ibuprofen tablets for the pain. Everything was written on the boxes and I headed off feeling really glad that I had an end point to this whole ordeal. My friend dropped me back home and I just rested and contemplated the following week.

The Beginning of the End

Over the weekend I felt I needed to stay close to home. One of my best friends and her partner were coming over and we were planning to go for some dinner round the corner but when I found they were fully booked I decided just to throw something together so we could have a night in. It was great to have them here and feel like I was normal for a while and it was such a great distraction from everything. We had a few glasses of wine, my first in around 3 months, and we just chatted the night away over dinner and drinks. They spent the night and we had a lazy morning, a walk in the sun, followed by brunch nearby. I almost managed to forget.

The rest of the weekend was spent not exerting myself too much in hope of not stimulating anything before my procedure on the Monday. I was also a bit apprehensive about the procedure and did a bit of reading around the subject. I was getting most nervous about taking the first pills in the morning as they can quickly make you feel very shivery and feverish and can make the bleeding much heavier. On Sunday night I had a terrible dream about taking those tablets and everything coming out before I made it to the hospital and I woke up feeling very out of sorts. I was also feeling so apprehensive that it was going to be such a serious and sombre event given the reality that our baby was going to be sucked unceremoniously from my body and discarded. I knew that it probably had never lived but I couldn't stop thinking about it in this way.

I decided to take the 8am pills whilst still in bed so that I could rest for an hour and then get up and have a shower and some breakfast before the next round of pills at 10am, but within ten minutes I started to feel very crampy in my lower abdomen which was getting worse and worse by the minute to the level it had been at its worst the previous week and then I started feeling very shaky and had a terrible uneasy feeling. I knew I needed to have a shower and felt that if I didn't go quickly I wouldn't be able to go at all, so I struggled out of bed as quietly as I could as I didn't want to wake my husband and start him worrying about me. I actually couldn't cope with his worry on top of my own so it was easier just to struggle quietly on myself.

I was shivering so much I could barely stay on my feet so I had to use the wall for support. I was finding it difficult to breathe properly and had palpitations, and I started making a really strange sound that I couldn't really control due to the shivering. The thought of taking my clothes off in a cold bathroom was almost enough to make me not bother. I did manage to get in the shower and whilst propping myself up with one hand I very weakly had a quick body and hair wash but it was the bare minimum. I had already started to bleed quite heavily and it was running down my legs in the shower. I got out and dried off then went to the toilet to pass as much of the blood out as I could and a large clot was dangling out of my body. I was terrified to look but I couldn't help myself so I caught it on a tissue and examined it closely. Thankfully it was just some lining tissue and I breathed a deep sigh of relief. I then put on my hooded bathrobe and fluffy slippers and lay on the sofa trying to get my breath and heart rate back to normal. I just closed my eyes and snuggled up trying to rest and not panic about what I was going through. I must have been dozing when my husband came through looking very concerned at seeing me curled up on the sofa. However, as I came to life I realised that I was feeling much better and, whilst I had quite bad cramps, my breathing was back to normal and I wasn't shivering. The uneasy feeling had left me and I felt able to eat some porridge and drink some tea in preparation for my next lot of pills at 10am. Once I'd eaten I got myself dressed and ready to go but by this point I was running a bit late and feeling very stressed.

We left twenty minutes before my appointment time and, although the hospital was just half a mile from home, we still needed to get parked and navigate through the maze of the car park and hospital to get to the right place. I asked my husband to drop me off at the door and we had about ten minutes to spare when he went off to find the car park. I waited for him outside as he didn't know where he was going and if he'd gotten lost he wouldn't have been able to call me as there was no signal in the hospital. It felt like forever standing there waiting for him with quite bad cramps coming and going and I could feel the blood running out of me into my sanitary towel. I was getting very stressed out and really didn't want to be late. I was wishing I had just gone with him to the car park to show him where to go and how to get back to the main entrance but I just didn't feel up to the walk. With about one minute to go before my appointment time he finally came into view and we made it into the hospital. I was feeling very on edge but managed to bite my tongue and just move on rather than start an argument. We had bigger things to worry about that day.

We had to sit in a very small, hot waiting room which was square with no windows and the door was closed on us. There were only two chairs in it and a little table with tissues on it and I knew that the room was for people who had received the same bad news as me and I felt very claustrophobic in there. I wished there was some nice music playing or some magazines or even a TV in the background just to create some distraction. I was so conscious of how I was feeling...nervous, sad, a bit sore, glad it was going to be over soon...but I had no real idea how my husband was doing because I had been a bit wrapped up in myself that morning. I asked him and he was really worried about me and what was about to come but was accepting of the news we'd received the week before and was ready to move on once he knew I was going to be okay. It really helped me to keep talking about it and just keep our feelings out in the open. I needed to know that he was okay too and it helped me to not worry about him so much. At the same time, worrying about him helped me not to worry about myself – a bit of a double-edged sword.

Finally, we were called through by a nurse to the treatment room which was quite small with a large window ahead (thankfully with one-way glass), it had a WC through a door to the right, and next to that door a little wash hand basin and a mirror, and then in front of the window was a visitor's chair, then a bed with stirrups and an ultrasound scanning machine by the door. The doctor came in and introduced herself and briefly talked about what was going to happen but I didn't catch her name and didn't really pay much attention to what she was saying but she did tell me that she and the nurse were going to talk some nonsense in order to help distract me and keep the mood light and this helped to break the ice and relax me a bit. She then asked me to go through to the WC and take off my bottom half clothing, and she gave me a sheet to wrap around me. I then came back through to lie on the bed. My husband was in the visitor's chair at my head to my left and I'm sure he was glad to have the window to look out of as he, like me, really didn't want to see what was going to come out of me.

The process started with an internal ultrasound scan to see where everything was sitting inside my body. Again, this really wasn't painful but, given the cramps I'd been having, it was a little uncomfortable this time but nothing too concerning. It seemed that the morning's pills had worked quickly and the sac with the foetus was sitting on my cervix ready to come out. So, the nurse put the heart rate monitor onto my right index finger so they could monitor me and the doctor talked me through what she was doing as she went along.

First she positioned herself on her stool at my feet and then raised the bed until I couldn't see her over the sheet that was covering my lower half, but I was acutely aware that my "bits" were at her eye level. She then inserted a lubricated plastic speculum, just like a smear test, and extended it to a comfortable level which was actually better than any smear I'd had. She then had to administer a lot of local anaesthetic into my cervix as she would need to pass through this to reach my uterus. I tried not to look at the syringe and needle and just stared out of the window. I felt an initial scratch and a little stinging from the first injection but it was manageable and I just kept reminding myself to breathe.

The doctor started asking me questions about what I did and the like as she continued to administer a series of injections of anaesthetic into my cervix. Suddenly I felt a strong pain to the front of what must have been my cervix and pretty serious stinging and I couldn't help but jump. The doctor apologised and said that particular area was a bit more sensitive but she carried on and I just took very long and hard breaths to work through the pain whilst crushing my husband's hand. The doctor kept asking me questions but I just didn't want to keep my head in the room and instead just looked out the window and she quickly realised this and started directing her questions to my husband who was sitting quietly tense and horrified. I vaguely remember them talking about Africa and her growing up in Kenya, and perhaps going there on holiday this summer with her family as her daughter really wanted to go but I really wasn't concentrating on anything in particular. The view from the window was of the main entrance to the hospital and the M8 motorway in the background and I just watched the world go by as normal whilst inside this room was the end of the existence of my baby.

After about ten minutes the local anaesthetic had been fully administered and I was physically feeling okay. Emotionally I was a mess but the distraction of the friendly discussion everyone in the room really helped me not to focus on the weight of the sinister process I was enduring. A few minutes later and the doctor and nurse were preparing the instruments for the main part of the procedure. She took a swab and put it inside me to clear some of the blood but I got such a fright that I jumped as I could feel what she was doing and it felt like being rubbed with sandpaper. She reassured me that I was supposed to feel that and the only bit that was totally numb was my cervix. Next she explained that she was going to start the procedure and that many women don't feel anything much and others get quite crampy at the height of the procedure. My heart was thumping but I just focussed my eyes and mind out of the window and kept a firm hold of my husband's hand.

I have no idea exactly what the doctor was doing next or what instruments she was using as I couldn't see anything but I know how it felt. It was like someone putting their arm inside me with a wallpaper scraper and roughly running it round the inside of my abdomen and although I could feel nothing in my cervix I could feel everything else and it was painful. This was nothing like the natural cramps I'd been having. It was the physical feeling of someone rustling around in my abdomen and it was impossible to relax and breathe through it. It just had to be endured. Lots of deep breathing with strange noises coming

out of my mouth for about three or four minutes that felt like hours to me and the doctor stopped for a moment to advise me that we were now coming to the climax of the procedure. I took a deep breath and the pain level notched up significantly and it was just excruciating. I was moaning and squeezing my husband's hand so hard it was nearly hurting me, let alone him, but I managed to keep still. It felt like she was scraping everything in my abdomen out of my body and if she hadn't stopped when she did I didn't think I could have coped any longer. That part was only a minute or so but it was very painful indeed. Other than the pain I didn't hear anything or see anything that I didn't want to. I didn't feel any blood or material coming out of my body and they very quickly cleaned everything up. The doctor advised that she needed to insert a rectal antibiotic pessary to give me further infection cover and before I knew it she had popped it inside. It felt cold and strange for a few minutes but that soon passed and I forgot about it.

I was breathing pretty heavily and suddenly felt incredibly hot so they whipped off my jumper and gave me a damp cloth to wipe myself down with. The pain quickly turned to much more manageable bad cramps and I just lay there feeling a bit dazed and relieved that the worst was over. They quickly cleaned me up and made me comfortable on the bed before getting me some water and asking me to rest for ten minutes or so. I just lay there trying to put the experience of a few minutes ago to the back of my mind and focusing on how I was physically feeling. I was talking my husband through what it felt like for me and just trying to get everything back to normal.

I wasn't sure if, after the ten minutes, I was going to be heading home or if they needed me to hang around as this hadn't been explained to me. So, after about five minutes of chatting and sipping water I said to my husband that I was going to just get up and dressed. He very quickly told me that I was to lie down for the ten minutes, as instructed by the doctor, and there was no way he was letting me do anything but that, so I did as I was told. After a while the doctor came back in and sat down to chat. I apologised for not catching her name (Dr Kumar) and asked her about her time in Kenya. We chatted for a while and then she asked how I was feeling. I said that everything had settled down and I felt okay. She asked if I wanted to sit in the waiting room we had started in but I really didn't want to be in that horrible little hot room again. I asked if she needed the room I was in and she said no and I could wait where I was as I needed to stay in the hospital for around an hour after the procedure to ensure I was well and not excessively bleeding. So we agreed I would stay sitting up on the bed for a while. It was nice to be able to see life carrying on outside and was a nice distraction.

I then texted my mum and dad and closest friends to let them know it was over and I was okay, and was occupied for a while with texts back and forward and just chatting with my husband and drinking water. In summary I felt very relieved that it was over and I felt like it was the line in the sand I was looking for to move forward from. It hadn't been the sombre and sinister experience that I had expected it to be and, despite it being far more painful than I had anticipated, that pain was short-lived and I survived relatively unscathed.

After about half an hour I decided to go to the toilet and get dressed but as I made it to the WC I suddenly felt something pouring out of my body and looked down to see fresh red blood flowing down my legs and forming in a pool on the floor and splashing my feet. I got quite a fright and grabbed some tissue to help catch the rest. I waddled to the toilet and went as normal, and whilst going the rectal pessary decided to make a bid for freedom and plopped unceremoniously into the toilet along with a white froth which was the dissolved but as yet unabsorbed antibiotic. I cleaned myself up, put on a fresh sanitary towel so I could monitor my blood flow and got myself dressed. I then cleaned up the blood and advised the doctor that someone would need to clean the floor for infection control purposes as they probably wouldn't have been able to tell that I had bled all over it. The doctor didn't seem too worried about the blood loss and said it was common for the blood to pool when lying down and then flood out a bit when standing up but said if I was soiling a sanitary towel within an hour once I was back home then I should go back in. Before I knew it the hour had passed and I was free to go home. My husband went off to get the car and I just sat quietly in the room not really thinking about much waiting for him. When I saw the car pull up I headed down, accompanied by the auxiliary to make sure I got there safely, and we headed home.

Time to Heal

By this time it was about 1.30pm and I had started to feel quite hungry but neither of us felt like preparing anything so we went to the little Italian deli around the corner from our home for a spot of lunch. We just sat peacefully chatting through the morning's events and were pleasantly distracted by a gorgeous little girl dining with her grandparents at the next table. At that point I no longer felt the distress of having my dead baby inside me and felt glad that I had my body back. After lunch we took the one minute stroll back home but I was feeling quite light headed and so lay down on the sofa with a blanket and we put on a movie to entertain ourselves for a couple of hours. As the anaesthetic and painkillers wore off I started to feel quite crampy again and was bleeding a bit but nothing too bad – more than a normal period with slightly fresher red blood – so I just kept resting and taking more painkillers as prescribed and they helped me to keep the discomfort to a minimum.

The remainder of that week passed relatively uneventfully and I was just bleeding like a normal period and trying to rest but I found it very difficult to be alone in the house as I was just moping around feeling desperately sorry for myself. I was also feeling very guilty about the time I had taken off work (this was week two) and I was trying to keep on top of my e-mails but I

was also feeling overwhelmed by everything and decided that I would just need to let it go and pass everything over to my colleagues to handle. Everyone kept telling me I had to focus on me but I just wanted to focus on everything but that! I'm not one for sitting down and moping but given the opportunity that is all I'll do and I found myself sitting in front of the TV for hours on end without moving but all the while wishing that I had the motivation to get up and go for a walk or to clean the house or cook something...anything productive...but I just struggled to shift myself and it was dragging my spirits down. I found any excuse to get out of the house to visit my mum, dad and friends so that I had something to do.

Moving On

Although the procedure had removed everything and I had expected that to be the line in the sand I was looking for to begin moving on emotionally, I unexpectedly still felt that same feeling as a result of the bleeding and the small cramps I was experiencing. Everything was a reminder that the remains of my pregnancy were still exiting my body. I wanted to get on with my life again but felt that while I was still bleeding it just wasn't going to happen. At the end of that week I went to see my doctor to arrange a line for work as I had already been off for two weeks and although I felt that I needed a little more time I fully expected him to tell me it was about time I was getting back to work. However, without question he immediately signed me off for a further two weeks and told me to take my time to recover both physically and emotionally.

I had very mixed feelings about being off work for such a long time. I wanted to show my commitment to getting on with my job and getting back to being there for my team but at the same time felt very overwhelmed at the prospect of taking on all that responsibility on my shoulders again. I was also worried about having too much time to feel sorry for myself and equally worried that I hadn't actually stopped and cried about everything. I had felt very sad and desolate at times but I hadn't actually cried for my loss and this was very unlike me. I can usually cry very easily. Finally, all these mixed emotions allowed me to see that I definitely wasn't ready to get properly back to my life just yet. It was very easy for me to tell my friends that I was doing fine (I was) but there was a lot more going on that I needed to give myself time to deal with.

So, to help me to think through everything I was feeling and start to deal with that emotion I decided to take Laura's lead (who so bravely wrote about her own experience) and write down what it was like from my perspective. When I was searching for more details about miscarriage to help me make the right decisions for myself based on fact, it really helped me to read an honest account of Laura's experience and I wanted to read more but it wasn't available so I felt that if writing about my own experience helped even one person, in the way that Laura's story helped me, then it would be so worthwhile.

Sitting down at the computer to write felt very therapeutic at first and I reminisced about where our pregnancy journey began but as I got into the detail I had to stop for a while. It was all a bit too raw and vivid and I realised I had been avoiding thinking about it. I kept trying to write some more and as I progressed I was becoming more and more insular and getting back to moping on the sofa in my jammies and just mindlessly watching TV all day without even paying attention to what I was watching, the noise helped me to avoid having to deal with everything.

Today, though, I decided I was going to use the time sitting in my jammies to do something productive, I took a deep breath and wrote solidly for eight hours to bring my story up to date.

Where am I now?

It's now three and a half weeks since I got the news and two weeks since my procedure. I feel physically well and stopped bleeding seven days after my procedure, but I have a bit of an emotionally journey to go through before I'm fully back to me. I still get pangs of sadness when I see a full pregnant tummy or see the pregnancy test adverts on TV. My brain knows that I'll have all that again, but my heart is not ready to completely move on yet. One of my team at work is expecting a baby and his wife is around the same stage as I would have been and I'm worried about how I will deal with that. I also have a clear picture imprinted on my brain of standing at my desk at work with the winter sun streaming through the blinds, everyone getting on with their work as normal whilst all of this was unfolding for me and I was preparing to leave for my emergency scan. Every couple of nights I struggle to get to sleep just thinking about everything I've been through...reliving everything with great sadness and raw emotion.

Yesterday I felt overwhelmingly sad and despondent all day. I met my mum and dad, along with my young niece and nephew, for lunch and afterwards made a last minute appointment with my hairdresser followed by some clothes shopping – all in a bid to cheer myself up. As I walked through the town heading home afterwards I felt like a fraud. People were just getting on with their lives but whilst I was trying to do the same with my new hair and clothes that wasn't what was really going on underneath. I had such a dark shadow over me and I felt terrible. But when I got home and my husband asked how I was and how my day was I just said everything was fine as usual. I couldn't find the words to articulate what was wrong because I just couldn't quite put my finger on something specific.

We went off to bed as normal and the feeling followed me, intensifying as I lay in bed in the dark, and before I knew it tears were welling up inside and I started to cry. I didn't want to wake my husband and I wanted to be by myself so I went through to the sofa. I put the light on and realised that even that small thing changed my state of mind and was a distraction, so I turned it off and lay in the dark with my mind racing through the last three weeks and our now altered future, and I just sobbed. I couldn't put my finger on exactly what I was crying about...I just needed to cry and I did, on and off, for about an hour or so. Before I knew it I was waking up at 6.30am and, although my heart felt heavy, I felt relieved that I was finally dealing with things. I'm sure that won't be the last time but it's a start.

I was determined to go back to work a week earlier than my doctor's advice – three and a half weeks after getting the news and two weeks after my procedure – but everyone told me to take the time to deal with the emotional side of things and I'm finally realising that they're right.

As for trying again...I don't feel ready yet but I know I will at some point. For now I'm enjoying having my body back and I'm going to get back running to lose at least the 7lbs I've gained in the last few weeks of being sedentary and over-indulging to cheer myself up. I've had some time to evaluate my life and consider what I could do differently so I'll try to use the time I have to explore that more fully. I feel like I have made it over the worst and hope it won't be long until I can fit properly back into my life again whatever I decide that is going to be into the future.

I want to point out that this is an account of my very personal experience of miscarriage. I am sure that it may be very different from one person to the next but there are some things that took me totally by surprise that would have been helpful to read about before I made the decision on which option to take to remove my pregnancy. I very much hope it gives others a clearer picture of what to expect.

Unfortunately, this subject is historically something that people just don't talk about but from my experience, whilst I immediately felt horrified at having to tell everyone the sad news, I don't think I could have coped as well without their love and support. So, when I fall pregnant again I would like to think that I'll do the same...let people share the joy of my pregnancy and if anything goes wrong make use of them to talk things through, distract me and generally support me. What are friends and family for if not that? I am very privileged to have a lot of people around me who love and care for me and who proved themselves fully when I really needed them and I only hope that I can return that favour when they need me.