Black Baby Loss Mini Series



This baby loss mini series is a collection of stories from Black families about their experiences of baby loss.

These are real, honest stories of baby loss. Please take care when reading

We are thankful to the families who have trusted us with their stories. Although our charity's focus is on pregnancy after loss, we believe that the care families experience during their loss plays a big part in shaping their experience of pregnancy after loss. By sharing these stories, we are helping to normalise conversation and break down barriers. We hope that these stories will help families know that they're not alone, but also help professionals understand experiences and where care can be improved.

Contact us at: hello@willowsrainbow.co.uk

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Story 1

Alishia's Story

Being pregnant with my firstborn son was a magical experience. I was never sick and had a natural glow. When I felt my first flutters, it made my heart melt. For 28-weeks I enjoyed my expanding, rounded belly, watching my son grow, singing and bonding with him on a daily basis.

Then one day, my fairytale pregnancy turned into a horrible nightmare. I went in for a routine doctor's appointment at 28-weeks' gestation and was told "we're sorry, we could no longer detect a heartbeat" by my doctors. I still am unsure how I had the strength to get through the rest of that appointment then walk to my car, after my world had been flipped upside down. It was beyond Herculean in that moment

I was in complete and utter shock. I had no clue that healthy babies could die (out of the blue) outside of your first trimester, which I now know...5 years later is an absolute myth. There are truly no guarantees in pregnancy, no matter how far along you may be in your pregnancy. Babies unfortunately can die throughout all stages of pregnancy. I learned this fact the hard way, when the rose-coloured glasses of pregnancy bliss were ripped off. 12-weeks away from delivering my sweet baby boy I was asked to go into the hospital and deliver his deceased body. I was petrified, if I could be completely honest. I wasn't sure I could handle the task of delivering a baby that died in my womb. A womb that was supposed to be his safe haven..

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When my husband and I left the doctor's appointment we went home and Googled "what do you call a baby that dies at 28-weeks' gestation?" That is when we were introduced to the term stillborn/stillbirth for the very first time. For 30 years I had never heard the term stillbirth uttered and all of a sudden I was faced with the biggest challenge of my life (to date). I had just become a statistic. I became 1 out of 160 families [daily], 24,000 annually, dealing with the devastation that stillbirth can usher in, and the aftermath of its impact. Prior to going into the hospital to deliver our son, my husband and I also googled images of stillborn babies so we could mentally prepare ourselves for what our son would possibly look like.

The following day after my world was shattered, I was admitted into the hospital, where I laboured for three days to bring forth my little angel, my angel baby...Derrek "DJ" Anderson Jr. When I held him in my arms for the first time, everything felt right with the world. The room was peaceful and it seemed like the world stood still. My husband and I held DJ. Searched every crevice of his 1.5lb body. We talked to him. Had his fingerprints, footprints, weight, and height captured. Had his photos taken (free of charge) and more. When his body began to turn cold after a few hours of getting acquainted, my husband and I decided it was time to say our final goodbyes.



We held DJ in our arms, prayed over him, and dedicated him back to God. We gave him our final round of kisses and hugs, and cried as our nurse placed his small, lifeless body into the tiny incubator, and rolled him away.

Monday, January 18, 2016 is etched into my mind forever. It is the day the trajectory of my life changed forever. The day a piece of me died alongside my sweet baby. Although DJ's physical absence still breaks my heart; five years later we've found ways to incorporate DJ into the tapestry of our everyday lives. We hang DJ's photos around the house, talk about DJ to our two living sons, and speak his name on a daily basis via social media platforms, prayers, or through casual conversations. As a black woman, who has endured the trauma of baby loss, I am often told how strong I am. But one thing I've realized throughout the grieving and healing process after DJ's death is real strength is wrapped in vulnerability. Real strength can be found in my weakness. Real strength is allowing the tears and emotions to come – without judgement. And real strength is seeking help via my circle of support, a therapist, and God.

These last five years have been a rollercoaster physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and more. But I try my best to honour DJ on a daily basis so that his life and legacy are not ever forgotten.



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Story 2

Karl's Story

My wife and I met late in 2009 and within a year we were engaged and living together in a new city, in what most friends and family saw as a 'whirlwind' romance. Being that I am from a West Indian background, while my wife is very much rural home-counties and British at first was imply one of the quirks that came to characterise our relationship.

our first pregnancy, however, was a lot sooner than we'd considered and was more than a surprise. We were now weeks away from our big day, still somewhat stuck between shock and adjustment when the worst happened. We were caught up in a whirlwind of emotions, from regret over having hesitated to embrace this pregnancy to rationalising it as 'one of those things' but all the while not knowing how to grieve our miscarriage the midst of what should have been the happiest day of our lives.

Needless to say our families also found it difficult to talk about both cultures, but they too were hurting. 6 months later and we were now successfully pregnant with our first son. Having him never replaced the sense of what we'd lost, but the thoughts of grief were pushed back to the periphery as we celebrated all his milestones and development. As he grew, so too did our anxieties about trying again,



The next two losses happened in quick succession. They happened to co-exist with discovering my wife had (initially subclinical) underactive thyroid with thyroid autoantibodies. By now my family didn't know what to say as we continued to encounter loss, and Emma's family were actively discouraging us from trying again. Medical help seemed far off too, having to wait for three consecutive losses before we could get any investigations into our problem. The fourth miscarriage was particularly crushing, as we had stopped hoping our positive tests would lead to children, but might lead to medical answers. It didn't. Instead we suffered yet another crushing loss and had been discharged from our local hospita with seemingly no hope of how to move forward.

Our next pregnancy, my wife made sure was different. She had been researching her condition and found scientific proof that treatments might change our odds. Armed with a print out of the study, she thankfully found a GP who was willing to listen. 9 months later, we welcomed my daughter into the familyl, amidst all the worry and angst of whether the changes were enough to change our story. We'd begun to speak more openly during her pregnancy about the pain we experienced during loss and to our surprise, both families were open, receptive and understanding.

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I began doing charity events in aid of supporting safer pregnancy whilst my wife became a listening ear for friends and social media contacts who were experiencing similar situations.

We eventually had one further loss followed by the birth of our second son. Our joy was complete even though our pain was never too far away. In the process, we'd managed to find ways to open up to our families and share both in our hard moments and our celebrations. We continue to find ways to keep the memory of the babies we lost in how we interact with each other and our wider community in relation to pregnancy loss. We know this process has forever changed our perspective but also those of our families on the preciousness of healthy pregnancies.

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Story 3

Danielle's Story

I found out I was expecting twins during my first 8 week ultrasound. Never did I ever think I would have twins, I was so blown away but so incredibly excited for such a huge journey. My husband and I immediately went into a tailspin of life scenarios because we already have an 8 year old and 3 year old (both girls). We planned space in our home, talked about how many pancakes we would have to cook, looked at strollers and thought about college tuition. All of these thoughts in a matter of hours flooded us with anxiety and indescribable excitement.

Now that I was having twins, my current OBGYN informed me that he would not be able to deliver them as I was considered high risk. He referred me to a colleague of his in a different practice, I wasn't completely sold on this but because he was recommended by my current physician I decided to go ahead and try it out. I went to my first appointment (alone because of COVID) and talked to this new Dr. While he was kind and had clearly been practicing for some time, something he said to me then set off a faint alarm bell. He said "having twins is just like any other pregnancy, except you have two babies."

I left the office not completely put off but definitely wondering if this was a good fit. I naturally seek out information, so as I researched things to expect when pregnant with twins and joined social media groups I became extremely aware that I was lacking information about many things.

After a couple more months, I finally decided that this wasn't a fit I felt comfortable with to provide the information and support I knew I needed. I got in touch with another practice and they let me know they were taking new patients, I requested my complete record be sent to this office from the physician I was leaving. When the office I wanted to part ways with discovered I was requesting this, they called me and said my insurance would not cover this office. This is when becoming an advocate for yourself is extremely important because I immediately called my primary care providers, received a referral and successfully transferred my care.

My first appointment with my new Dr. was Friday November 20, 2020. It was everything I imagined it would be and was needing. I received so much information and set up appointments for the next few weeks.

Monday November 23, 2020. I was 22 weeks and 4 days pregnant. I found out that I was having identical twin girls! They were both developing well, plenty of fluid, both about the same size. Then the heavy information that I was never expecting. My girls were mono mono twins (monoamniotic-monochorionic), which means they were sharing the same amniotic sac and the same placenta.

I was informed that this was the rarest type of pregnancy and extremely high risk. Since mono mono twins share one sac and one placenta (two separate umbilical cords), the chance for their umbilical cords getting tangled is high and would be fatal to one or both of my girls. They let me know that in about 4 weeks they would admit me to the hospital for full time monitoring because of this. They also said that they noticed one of my girls appeared to have fluid around her heart and they were sending me to a pediatric cardiologist. Besides everything I had just been told, I was okay, overwhelmed but okay. I was confident in my team of doctors, myself and my family support system. My husband and I picked their first names that night.

Wednesday November 25, 2020 (the day before Thanksgiving). My husband and I drove two hours to a pediatric cardiologist so that they could take a look at both of our girls' hearts, specifically Baby A. They were both fine and in perfect health, the cardiologist had no concerns at all and said the fluid they spotted was in normal amount (minimal) to how old my girls were. This was the first appointment my husband was allowed to be at (again because of COVID) and he finally got to see our girls on an ultrasound. We decided to do a gender reveal on Thanksgiving and record it and show everyone who was dying to know what we were having!

We left that appointment feeling so incredibly optimistic, hearing they were healthy again for the third time in less than a week.

Thursday November 26, 2020. 23 weeks and Thanksgiving Day. We were so excited to pop those confetti tubes! Our two daughters didn't even know what we were having and they couldn't wait either. I popped the first one and pink squares filled the air as my girls danced under them. My husband popped the second and more pink squares gently floated down...my parents were there to record for us and were ecstatic! We went inside, ate Thanksgiving dinner, talked about the future with a family of 4 girls, shared their names, announced on social media and simply basked in the amazingness of that day.

Saturday November 28, 2020. I woke up. My husband had gone to work, my youngest was still in bed and my oldest had just climbed into my bed playing on the ipad. I laid there for a few minutes and realized I didn't feel Zaia and Amara moving. So I got up, went to the bathroom and came back and got in bed. Still nothing. My mind was panicking but I was trying not to freak out.



So I went about my morning, made breakfast for the girls, took medication for morning sickness. Still nothing. Ate breakfast myself and drank juice. Nothing. Then I threw up (which wasn't abnormal for me), but the force of my throwing up should have elicited movement and it didn't. I called my husband and even then I was in denial, but I knew...I just didn't want to know. He raced home from work to pick me up and take me to the hospital. Again, alone, I walked in and went to the maternity floor. They put belly monitors on me and I was just praying for two heartbeats...that I was just not able to feel them that day...but that they would be okay. But there was nothing. They very casually said they wanted me to go for an ultrasound. So I went to get an ultrasound, terrified. I lay on the table looking at the screen knowing I wasn't seeing what I should be and letting the silence in the room confirm it. The technician said that she would be right back, I knew what that meant. The doctor came in and started looking as well, then she finally said it "I'm sorry there's no heartbeat." And I lost it, alone. I called my husband laying on the table in tears and as I was walking out the room with the doctor helping me he was running down the hall to me. Everything after that was a blur...

It wasn't deciding what cute outfits they would come home in, it was burial or cremation. It was how do you want to induce labor? It was literally unbelievable. That we went from perfect appointments just two and three days prior seeing and hearing them to completely losing them.

To praying that when I pushed them out I would have a miracle of two babies that were actually alive. We just celebrated them and shared them with everyone and now I watched my husband hold back tears trying to hold me up as he made phone call after phone call. As he called to tell our oldest daughter what happened...explaining death to kids is hard.

I wanted to go back in time so badly. I wanted to know what sign I missed. If I had slept wrong. I knew for sure I felt them Friday night before I went to sleep and hated that I didn't wake up in the middle of the night that night to go pee. I wondered if I had known earlier on from the OBGYN I wasn't happy with if it would have made a difference, I was told no. But my mind wanted to know why...my heart needed to know why I wasn't able to bring my happy healthy girls home.

I induced labor and 7 hours later Zaia Sasha (1lb 2oz, 12 inches) and Amara Noelle (1lb, 12 inches) graced us with their beautiful presence and changed my world forever. I will never be the same, my heart is completely broken and I ache for them everyday. Walking out of the hospital is the hardest thing I have ever done. No one prepares you for this, I don't know that they could honestly.



We always think there is a "safe" period in pregnancy. The truth is there is no safe period, creating babies is hard work. I've lost the trust I had in my body to do what it was able to do twice before, despite the high risk label. That breaks my heart. I feel cheated out of this extraordinary pregnancy, the rarest type of twin pregnancy. I'm sad, and angry and confused and depressed...and I would do it all over again just to have them, even with the same outcome.

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Story 4

Elizabeth's Letter

To my beautiful daughter Ava-Quinn

I still cant actually believe that I`m sitting down to write you this letter. I never imagined that this could happen that I'll never be able to have a real conversation with you or hold you in my arms again.

When we first went into hospital I knew we were going to have a fight on our hands the odds were against us and the doctors told me and your daddy to prepare for the worst which was hard to hear but I knew you weren't ready to meet us just yet because I knew you Ava-Quinn. We lived together as one for nearly 6 months I knew when you were asleep I knew you would wake up every day at 4.30pm and I knew what time you kicked and we both knew you would hide from daddy every time we tried to get him to feel you moving about I knew my little girl.

We stayed in hospital together for nearly a month and every night when everyone was gone I'd talk to you about our plans for the future and I'd beg you not to leave us and with every day that passed your little heart beat strong and you gained weight and despite everything being against us you fought on and the weeks passed by I really thought that we were going to make it we all did it never entered my head that I'd meet you quietly.

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The morning I was told that your heart had stopped beating still plays clearly in my mind every day, my absolute disbelief because your heartbeat was always there every day and every night and now there was silence.

The decision to bring you into the world was one of the hardest decisions your daddy and I have ever had to make but with his help along with Nanny Ava and Aunty Kirsty I brought you into the world and you were so tiny so perfect and so beautiful my Ava-Quinn.

It all seems so unfair I still cant believe we will never get to see you grow up, never get to see you smile or laugh or do any of the things we'd been planning everyday it hurts. Your daddy and I have struggled everyday since you passed and It's hard to find the strength to bother with anything but your daddy has been so brave and strong even when I can see sadness in his eyes he's been by my side. He would and still is the best daddy to you Ava-Quinn he would have given you the world i couldn't get through the days without him. We decided to call you Ava-Quinn Susannah-Verrier Griffiths after some very special people in our lives.

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Ava and Susannah after your very special nanny's and Verrier and Griffiths after your strong and protective grandads, along with your Aunties Nicole, Sophie and Kirsty and uncles Micheal, Adam and Gareth and the little Jacobs they would have played a huge part in your life and I'm so happy they have all had a chance to meet you, you are everyone's special little girl.

Ava-Quinn I miss you everyday and everyday my heart hurts. I understand now how much you must have been fighting to stay with us and i know you are at peace. Your tiny foot prints have left an inprint on all our hearts especially mine and you will stay with me forever. I will never ever forget the time we spent together and I want you to know just how much I love you with all my heart my beautiful girl.

Lots of love

Mommy xx