

## A different kind of day



My first pregnancy ended in May 1999 with a miscarriage. Neil and I were devastated, so when we found out I was pregnant again in September 1999 we and our families were over the moon.

Our 10 week dating scan showed a tiny but VERY active little blob on the screen and a heartbeat that was clearly visible. We were both relieved.

My pregnancy was progressing well with no morning sickness, just backache. We were asked if we wanted a triple test by our midwife but decided against it. What would we do with the information? We certainly wouldn't have any invasive tests, due to the risk of miscarriage and even if the tests came back to say the baby had any of the conditions I couldn't have terminated the pregnancy. Any way at the age of 26 my risks of having a baby with Down's syndrome were Low, weren't they? Our 20 week scan showed nothing unusual.

During the hot summer that followed I swelled up like a balloon and so was pleased when, a week overdue I went into labour. At 3.25am I got up to go to the toilet and felt a contraction. I ran back into the bedroom and shouted "Neil wake up I'm in Labour." Neil excitedly timed the contractions, which were 30mins apart. "Perhaps we should go back to sleep," I said. "Yeah right," came the reply. We sat in bed, watching the Learning Zone (We can now speak Spanish and Italian!) and eagerly timing the contractions. 10 mins apart, 15, 5, 30. Was I really in Labour? I decided to telephone the Delivery Suite and was told that I should wait at home until the contractions were about 5 mins apart or they became too painful. All day I paced the living room timing the contractions, which were anywhere from 1 hr 30mins to 9mins apart. By 11.30 the following night the contractions were still not regular but the pain was becoming a little hard to take. We decided to go to Pinderfields.

When we arrived, Cathy, our midwife came and introduced herself. She examined me and said I was 10 cms dilated and that the contractions were irregular due to the baby coming down spine to spine. After 2 hrs pushing and feeling completely exhausted the obstetrician was called who suggested a ventous delivery, "yes please," I said.

Two pushes later a baby girl was delivered, at 4.25am weighing 6lb 8oz. We called her Beth Hannah and she was taken into the adjacent room to be checked whilst I was checked over. Why did the doctor ask the midwife to watch the baby while he went and got someone else? Was there something wrong? No, don't be silly.

The doctor gently placed our beautiful baby into my arms and explained that she had almond shaped eyes more commonly associated with oriental babies. What? Had I had a Chinese baby? (After 26hrs of labour you think some daft things.) Her muscle tone was floppy and her nose a little flatter than usual. I looked into those almond shaped eyes and knew the words that would come from his mouth "We suspect she has Down's syndrome, but would like to do some blood tests." I burst into tears WHY OUR BABY? I wanted to scream. Then I thought, "What am I crying for, I have what I wanted a lovely little baby."

Neil's reaction to the news was, "Well, we best get on with it then," and his strength has been my strength.

The day that followed was a blur of doctors undressing and examining her. The paediatrician came to see us and told us all about Down's syndrome. When we asked if they could tell how badly she would be affected he replied, "I wouldn't dream of looking out onto this ward and predicting the future of any baby. Why should I with Beth?" He also told us to treat her like any other baby, something we have strived to do ever since.

I tried to breastfeed but she seemed too sleepy and felt a little cold. I called the midwife who arranged for her to be transferred to the special care baby unit. Beth was put under the heat lamp and tube fed until she was feeding properly. We left the hospital, with our little bundle of joy 6 days later following lots of tests. These confirmed Beth had the most common type of Down's syndrome, Trisomy 21, this means she has three chromosome 21's instead of 2. The hospital gave us lots of leaflets and information but I didn't want to read them straight away I just wanted to be Beth's mummy.

Since then my life has been a roller coaster of emotions from joy to deep sadness. Never sadness for myself, I have a wonderful little girl. No sadness for the fact that not everything comes easily for Beth. She has to work hard to achieve the things other children do naturally.

What's it like being the mother of a child with Down's syndrome? Well the answer is simple. The same as being a mother to any other child. Bloody hard work, frustrating at times, but the most rewarding job in the world.

So, when you see us at Toddlers or in ASDA, don't look at us and feel sorry for us. We and our families love Beth with all our hearts and wouldn't change her for the world.

ALL I want from life is for my children to be happy. Isn't that what every mother wants?

Amanda Courtman.

### **Facts about Down's syndrome.**

- Two babies with Down's syndrome are born every day in the UK. Around one in every 1000 babies born will have Down's syndrome.
- There are 60,000 people in the UK with the condition.
- Although the chance of a baby having Down's syndrome is higher for older women, more babies with Down's syndrome are born to younger women.
- Down's syndrome is not a disease. People with Down's syndrome are not ill and do not "suffer" from the condition.
- It is inappropriate to talk about a Down's person. They are a person with Down's syndrome. They are a person first; the fact that they have Down's syndrome is of secondary importance.
- Down's syndrome is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome in a baby's cells. It occurs by chance at conception and is irreversible.
- People with Down's syndrome will have a degree of learning difficulty. However, the majority will walk and talk and many will read and write, go to ordinary schools and lead fulfilling and semi-independent lives.