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Richard Madeley: 'It was utterly devastating - our baby had just died and he was still in Judy's womb'



Save 14



The TV presenters Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan, whose first child together was stillborn
CREDIT: CLARA MOLDEN/THE TELEGRAPH

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Around one in every 200 babies in the UK is stillborn - one of the highest rates in the developed world. But while the number of couples affected is significant, their experiences often fly under the radar; their grief not fully understood.

This can be particularly true for men. During Baby Loss Awareness Week, which ends today, Professor Phillip Bennett, director of the Institute of Reproductive and Developmental Biology at Imperial College London, warned that men are often the forgotten mourners. “I think we seriously underplay the effect that pregnancy loss – whether it be miscarriage, preterm or stillbirth – has upon male partners,” he said. “Maybe it’s partly the fault of men for not opening up about it, but I think it’s largely the fault of medicine and society for not recognising it as a problem.”

Here, television presenter Richard Madeley reflects on his own experience of stillbirth, while Bruce Wagstaff and Niall Cassidy, who this week appear in *Child of Mine*, a Channel 4 documentary on the subject, share their stories.

Richard Madeley

For the man, it is linear. The mother loses her baby. The father (who has also lost the baby, but one place removed) simultaneously loses the mother to her grief. So he must make a choice: or whom to focus? The lost child, or the distraught mother?

For me, the choice made itself: the mother comes first. The experience of miscarriage or stillbirth is fundamentally a woman’s experience and must be treated as such.

Judy was 16 weeks pregnant when she went for a routine scan. It was our first baby together (she had twins from her first marriage) and there had been no cause for concern. But I’ll never forget the nurse hurrying towards me, an agonised expression on her face: “Mr Madeley, you need to come this way...”

I joined Judy in the examination room. Tears were streaming down her face: "It's died, Richard. It's died."

The scan had revealed a perfect foetus with a non-existent heartbeat. Something - we never discovered exactly what - had gone wrong at a critical stage of his development. (The post-mortem revealed we would have had a boy).

It was utterly devastating: no warning; no earlier, gentle, indication of the possibility of catastrophe. Our baby had just died. And he was still in Judy's womb.

She was kept in hospital overnight for a second scan ("just to make absolutely sure") and was then put into an induced labour. My heart broke for her as I waited outside the delivery room. What a dreadful experience: to go through the motions of childbirth, knowing what the grim outcome would be.

As the father, you focus on the mother 100 per cent. Do you need support? You don't even ask the question; you're there to support your partner, nothing else.

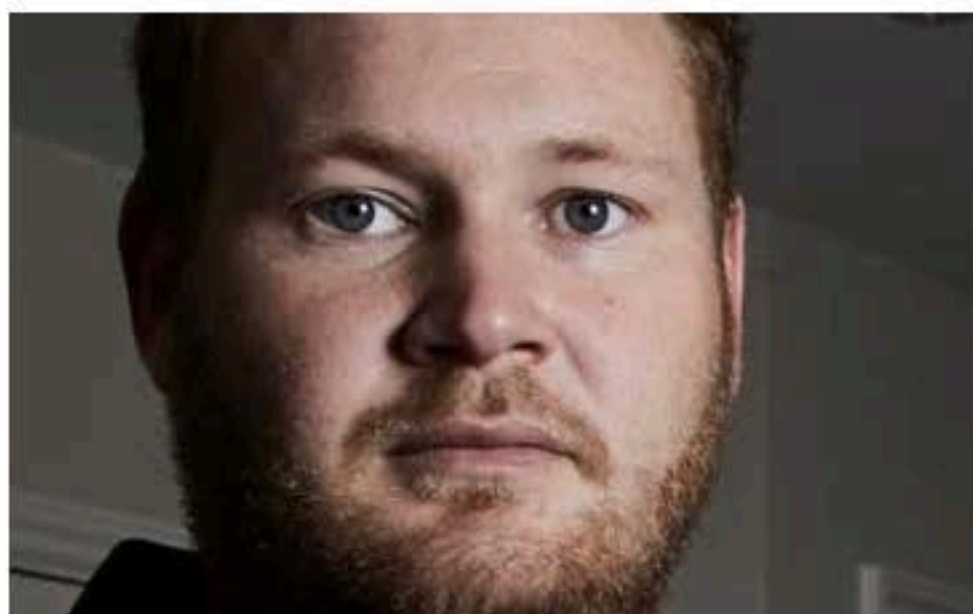
A day or so later, Judy was discharged and we went home, baby-less. It was horrible: empty, cold, defeated and drear.

I booked a week in the south of France, and took her there to find some kind of solace. The sun shone, but every beach restaurant seemed to be crammed with newborns, cooing in their mothers' arms. It was torture for Judy, and she - like so many mothers of stillborns or miscarriages - blamed herself; felt she'd somehow failed. It was my job - like countless men before and after me - to assure her that she hadn't.

Three months later, Judy was expecting again. It was, as you can imagine, the tensest of pregnancies. She passed the 16 week barrier with flying colours but, as the months went by, any decrease of kicking would prompt panicky trips to hospital.

Jack was born on May 19, 1986. He's a handsome, successful businessman today. As Judy said to him this summer, when we were discussing our lost child: "The thing is Jack, if I'd had him, you wouldn't be here, would you?"

We have so little control over these things, so we must somehow find acceptance. But as fathers, husbands and partners, our role when tragedy strikes is abundantly clear: support, sustain, cherish and encourage. Yes, of course it's our loss, too. But it's infinitely worse for the woman. Uphold her. Love her. But accept that you need to grieve as well.



Bruce Wagstaff: 'We were devastated, but Vicki stayed the strongest' CREDIT: RICHARD ANSETT

Bruce Wagstaff

Vicki and I had been friends since our schooldays and were thrilled to learn we were expecting. All progressed smoothly at first. But last December, at around 26 weeks, she sensed there was a little less movement. So I returned from my job as a property developer on the Isle of Man, and we went to the Rosie Hospital in Cambridge, to check all was ok.

When they couldn't detect a heartbeat, I thought, "it's alright, they'll find it." But then they looked at us - and we knew. I froze; then it hit me. We cried and were both deeply in shock.

Vicki was induced; it was all so quick, and awful to know that our daughter - we named her Ruby - was not coming out alive. I felt helpless as I watched Vicki deliver her. When our baby arrived, so did the love, but we knew we didn't have long with her.

We were devastated, but Vicki stayed the strongest. It's assumed that role will fall to the man - yet it was me who crumbled, and who'd probably have run from the hospital, had it not been for her.

I struggled through the rest of the month, but by January I could no longer cope. I still loved Vicki, but felt unable to be around the pain and the hurt, and just longed to feel normal again.

She was grieving, but I wouldn't allow myself to. I needed to get out, and we split up for a couple of months.

In February, I finally had a breakdown. But Vicki was there to support me, and in the spring we got back together; with the help of a counsellor, we worked through things.

I hope we will have a second child. But Ruby will always be with us.



Niall Cassidy: 'It was the worst feeling of our lives' CREDIT: RICHARD ANSETT

Niall Cassidy

Fiona and I met in 2006 when we were working at a healthcare company in London, and had been together almost a decade when we decided to start a family.

Throughout the pregnancy, the baby was slightly small, but it didn't seem anything to worry about. Our daughter was due on September 28, 2016, but at the 41 week appointment they said that she needed to be out in 36 hours, and to call in the morning to schedule an induction.

Both of us felt very excited, and when Fiona started experiencing pain before the induction, we assumed she was having contractions.

We arrived at University College Hospital and soon sensed that something wasn't quite right. Our fears were confirmed when we were told, just like that: "I'm sorry, we can't find a heartbeat."

It was the worst feeling of our lives, and we both broke down in tears. With the help of some incredible midwives, Fiona gave birth to Matilda.

We'd been told at 10.30am that our daughter had died, but the labour lasted until around 4am the next day. In a strange way, it focused the mind. Once it was over, and Fiona was taken away for surgery to fully remove the placenta, I collapsed with exhaustion. When I awoke, we held Matilda, and I'm so glad I did, because those memories of her have stayed with me.

After that, my priority was looking after Fiona; helping her heal, before I could deal with the trauma. Then came pain, anger and tears.

Neither of us could have got through without the other, but for me it's a hard thing to talk about. I have colleagues I still don't discuss it with; some may not even realise I've been through it. It's tough for men to speak openly about.

On October 7 last year, our second daughter, Emmeline arrived, sharing Matilda's birthday. She should have had a big sister to guide her through life; instead Matilda now looks down on her.

Bruce Wagstaff and Niall Cassidy were speaking to Rosa Silverman

Child of Mine is on Channel 4 on October 18 at 10pm