

Still Loved Participatory Web Site

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STILL LOVED - PROPOSAL

Still Loved is a 70 minute feature documentary, breaking the silence around stillbirth and baby loss. Filmed in the UK, which "...has one of the worst rates of stillbirth in the developed world. While Scandinavian countries...are in the top 5, according to figures from the Lancet, Britain comes 33rd, below Poland and the Republic of Korea."¹. 17 babies die, within the first 24 hours of life, every single day in Britain.

The death of these babies is still a taboo subject, many people are unwilling to acknowledge it, to discuss or to recognise the reality of it. However, this loss devastates thousands of people each year, not only parents, but also their families, friends and colleagues. It has a profound impact, too, on those working in the areas of pregnancy and childbirth.



Still Loved tells 3 unique stories, each focussing on a different aspect of baby loss and all connected by a common thread.

Supported by an interactive website, complete with a regularly updated blog, gallery and user generated content - a space for the audience to share experiences- this documentary has already gained a strong social media following across the international baby loss community.

Although our coverage of the couples' stories does ensure that the unique viewpoint of fathers is included in this film, our emphasis is the particular challenges of the mother's experience of stillbirth. In this way we ensure that a voice is given to these women and heard by all.

Working with a largely female crew, we go to great efforts to redress the imbalance in a male dominated industry and to improve the opportunities for

¹ Channel 4 News, 18/7/13

female film professionals and to offer internships to young women who have recently graduated from film studies programmes.

Our Cast

Juliette and Matt Gaunt

Juliette is a senior lecturer and Matt is a police officer in Birmingham. They lost their first son, Ben, to stillbirth at full term. Desperate for another baby they became pregnant again, tragically this pregnancy ended in miscarriage.

Matt talks candidly about the unrecognised predicament of fathers, about paternal bereavement, the pressure inherent in 'being a man' and, as a police officer, the impossible expectation that one should be able to bounce back from the grief as if nothing has happened.

The couple have become very active in raising money for Sands, the UK's largest stillbirth and neonatal death charity, and Juliette is now on the board of another, The Lily Mae Foundation, we attend their moving Christmas service.

During our time with this couple they celebrate what would have been the first birthday of their son, Ben, at an intimate party in their home, attended by close friends and family. Reading a heartfelt letter to their son, they release balloons into the sky, each one carrying a message to Ben from the gathered throng. We see their friends struggle with their own experience of this loss.

Now pregnant for the third time, Juliette and Matt attend antenatal appointments and together, strive to come to terms with the conflicting emotions of fear and hope, of regret and anticipation, of grief and joy. This time there is no nesting, no preparatory baby showers, no expectant buggy in the hallway, this pregnancy is so different to their last. We witness both their agony and their reluctant joy. They are just killing time from scan to scan. Unable to bear the pain of dismantling another nursery, they will buy nothing at all for this baby, until it is born alive and well and they can bring their son or daughter home.



A subsequent pregnancy is often seen as a way to of the previous loss, but this is a misconception. In reality the 'rainbow baby' (the name given to the successive child) pregnancy brings doubt and distress into sharp relief, often reopening the wounds left by the families' bereavement, leaving them tragically conflicted, both guilty about the baby they lost and anxious about their future.

We will film with Matt and Juliette right up to the birth, visiting them with their new baby soon afterwards, documenting their joy when they finally bring their child home.

Beth and Steve Morris

Beth and Steve lost their identical twin girls, Harriet and Felicity, at just 21 weeks due to twin to twin transfusion. Technically a late stage miscarriage, Beth still had to give birth to her daughters and they still had to bury them, leaving their whole family devastated. We met Beth and Steve just four months after their girls had died. They had no other children and were bereft, sitting, mourning in their girls' nursery, still struggling to come to terms with being parents without any children.

Yet they had already begun the fight back from their nadir. Not particularly athletic in the past, they soon established the Born Silently Cycle Challenge, a 325 mile sponsored bike ride from their home in East Sussex to Northallerton, where their daughters had been born prematurely during a holiday. Joined by friends, many of whom shared their previously sedentary lifestyle, they push themselves to the very limits of their physical ability and undertake this gruelling challenge, cycling across the country for 5 days, raising over £20,000. We filmed this journey, capturing the incredible determination and dedication they have for fulfilling their ambitions.



Their challenges take us around the country. From a moving and joyful birthday beach party for their daughters to an illustrious tea party at number 10 Downing Street, we follow their highs and lows and see their relationship blossom as they grow ever closer. Throughout these experiences, their families have supported and grieved with them. We meet Kathie and Phil, grandparents who grieve, not only for their grandchildren, but also for the crushed hopes of their daughter, doing all they can to offer support to Beth during her darkest days.

Beth's diagnosis with Poly Cystic Ovary Syndrome delivers a further blow as the couple struggle to conceive and to comprehend the possibility of a future pregnancy.

Beth, now in the early stages of a pregnancy, is starting to feel the beginnings of the emotional turmoil which Juliette is coming to the end of, the anxiety and fear about what will happen in this pregnancy, wondering whether she will ever be the mother of a living child.

Louisa and Matt Evans

Louisa, a health worker, Matt, a fire-fighter and their son, Finn were a close and happy family until Louisa's second pregnancy, which promised the gift of the daughter that she had always wanted. Lou was convinced from the start of the pregnancy that her baby would die. Such was her terror about the possibility of losing this baby that it drove her into a severe depression, Lou was nearly sectioned under the mental health act as a result of repeatedly begging medical staff to remove the baby from her body to 'save her life'. They refused and the tormented Lou carried Lauren to full term.



Her prophesy fulfilled, Lou's devastation at the loss of the longed for daughter was complete. As she suffered further mental health problems, Matt coped with his grief over Lauren's death in a very different and stereotypically male way, converting a bedroom in the house into a gym and focussing on his relationship with their son, Finn. As Louisa looked on, Matt and Finn grew ever closer and their closeness seemed to exacerbate her feelings of loneliness, her craving for a daughter became more and more desperate. Matt refused to try for another child, feeling that neither he nor Lou could cope with the risks involved in the possibility of losing another child, with another pregnancy's potential to jeopardise Louisa's emotional wellbeing. Matt reminds Lou that she doesn't actually want another baby, what she wants is her daughter, Lauren.

Lou took over running the local baby loss support group she had been attending and threw herself, heart and soul, into helping other parents through their loss. She runs events, raises money and offers counselling and emotional support. Although this helps Lou enormously, Matt is fed up and wants Lou to spend more time with him and with their son. He believes it's unhealthy to spend too long doing this work. Matt feels that the place for grief is beside Lauren's grave at the cemetery, and that it should be left there. He doesn't like the amount of time Lou dwells on Lauren's death.

They are clearly becoming alienated from each other as Lou spends more and more time on her charity work and Matt and Finn spend more time together without her. Finn is now 7 and is developing behavioural difficulties that Lou puts down to his grieving for his sister. But there's a strong possibility that Finn struggles with living with a ghost child, a perfect sister that can do no wrong in his mother's eyes.

Lou is a plain speaker, straight to the point, often irreverent and fun. She certainly doesn't mince her words and has a wry sense of humour.

Culmination

These three story lines will be intercut with footage of additional cast which connect and support these stories, highlighting the diverse ways different parents come to term with their loss. Looking at key themes of memorialisation, father's grief, extended family, birth certificates, charity work, mental health and transformation.



The cast are united for the first time at the Wave of Light event on International Baby Loss Remembrance Day. They meet in the day time before the main event begins, and spend time together sharing their stories and talking candidly about losing a baby in a way that is impossible in most social situations.

There is a wonderful, emotive and humorous scene in the car park when 4 of the fathers talk frankly about paternal bereavement. The raw honesty in this conversation goes right to the heart of the reality of paternal, as opposed to maternal, loss. These men were surprised by the strong connection they felt for each other, and have gone on to develop close friendships

The Wave of Light takes place in an elegant, wooded baby memorial garden, illuminated and decorated especially for the event. It begins with a lantern procession through the gloaming woods. A powerful image, as hundreds of families arrive, each carrying lanterns, parading in a procession of remembrance for their lost children.



As poems, speeches and dedications are read the many candles are lit. We see the raw grief still so present for the parents, some of which lost their babies many years ago. Families then write dedication tags with messages to their children and tie them in the beautifully lit, wooden apple-shaped shelter. The families share their grief, but also happiness and laughter too. The special connection made between them is the start of many lasting friendships.

This event, as well as the birth of Juliette and Matt's new baby, will bring our film to a poignant close, showing love, transformation and hope for the future.

*"It's a happy life, but something is missing.
It's a happy life, and something is missing.
It's a happy life"*

Quote by Elizabeth McKraken in her book about baby loss:
An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination.



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