

Stillbirth is rarely talked about – but for Chris and Kezia, sharing the story of their daughter Grace helps ease the pain

LIKE ANY 14-MONTH old who has just taken his first steps, Joshua is eager to explore the outside world. “He’s a little adventurer,” says his mum, Kezia Kerr. A sunny, “chilled-out” baby, Joshua has brought his parents incomparable joy. Yet it’s a joy that has – and will always – come tinged with immense sadness. Because Joshua is a twin, albeit a twin who will never get to grow up alongside his sibling.

His sister Grace died in the womb, one of the many hundreds of babies who are stillborn each year in the UK. Every day around nine babies are born with no signs of life after the 24th week of pregnancy, making the rate one of the worst in the developed world. Yet stillbirth remains largely a private grief shrouded in silence. Now a groundbreaking documentary aims to change that by following the journeys of three couples facing this most tragic of ordeals.

First-time parents Vicky and Bruce arrive at hospital when Vicky is 26 weeks pregnant, concerned that she has felt no movement, only to learn the heartbreaking news that their baby’s heart has stopped.

For another couple, Niall and Fiona, a second pregnancy is deemed high risk following the previous loss of their daughter Mathilda at full term. Then there’s Kezia and her husband Chris, who learnt during the course of filming that one of their babies had died *in utero*.

All of them feature in extraordinarily intimate and moving footage, including, in two instances, the moment of delivery of their stillborn child – a first on British television.

That the documentary could happen at all is the result of many months of painstaking work by the filming team, who shadowed a number of high-risk pregnancy units, building relationships with staff and expectant parents.

That included Kezia and Chris, who were first approached at London’s University College Hospital when it seemed that one of their twins was not developing as it should. “At first we really weren’t interested, but as time went on we did allow the director to sit in on a scan and

Sadness behind the smiles



REMEMBERING GRACE
Chris and Kezia Kerr with their son Joshua and (inset right) a memento of his twin sister Grace, who died at 29 weeks



I would never have, which I occasionally struggled with.”

Kezia was also facing the particularly difficult prospect of giving birth to both babies. “I knew that when I delivered Grace she was no longer going to be part of me, that that would be that,” says Kezia. “I tried not to dwell on it as it was just so hard and sad.”

Joshua’s birth, nonetheless, was “beautiful”, his arrival coming naturally after Kezia’s waters broke at 37 weeks. “I remember he was put on my chest and I just cannot describe the joy and love for this little being in my arms,” she recalls.

Then came Grace. “I remember the midwife saying now there would be the hard bit. They told me it wouldn’t look like a baby and when she came she looked like a little bird that had fallen out of a tree.”

AT FIRST, KEZIA was unsure whether she could hold her baby daughter, but the following day, a bereavement midwife brought her wrapped in blankets, and Chris and Kezia held both their babies in their arms for family photographs. “I’m so glad we did that,” says Kezia. “It was something beautiful before we said goodbye.”

Grace was cremated following a funeral provided by the hospital. Fourteen months on Kezia admits that the grief remains raw. “I do sometimes find it hard looking at twins – it brings up that pain,” she says. “At the same time I choose not to think she could be here, as it’s just too hard and not helpful.”

Both Kezia and Chris agree that, for all the pain, the process of filming proved both cathartic and healing. “We found talking about it really helpful from the start,” says Chris. “By sharing our story a lot of barriers have already come down with other people.”

It’s a process they hope will continue via the documentary. “I think it’s so important that stillbirth becomes a conversation people are not afraid of having,” says Kezia. “Even a generation ago it just wasn’t talked about it at all. But Grace will always be part of our family and our story.”

ISOBEL JAMES

when she asked us again if we might consider it, we looked at each other and thought that if it’s going to help someone then let’s do it,” recalls Kezia. “At the same time we didn’t know what was going to happen. We were still hoping Grace might be the miracle story.”

In some ways she already was: Kezia and Chris, both 37, had taken years to conceive and had undergone IVF when, in late 2016, they learnt that Kezia was pregnant with twins. “We had really expected only one embryo to survive, so it was a shock,” says Kezia. “You start thinking, ‘That’s two cots, two car seats.’ We were excited.”

The risk of stillbirth is increased in twin pregnancy, as both fetuses compete for precious resources in the womb, yet while the 12-week scan showed that one twin was slightly smaller, no one seemed unduly concerned. “We thought, ‘No worries, that little guy will speed up,’” says Chris. That changed at the 20-week scan shortly before Easter last year, when it was clear the baby wasn’t thriving. “Josh was all good, then when the sonographer started to scan Grace – the atmosphere just changed. Everything went quiet and eerie,” says Kezia. “She said she had to talk to one of the doctors. You just feel this horrible dread.”

With Easter looming, the couple were told they would have to return after the holiday for further investigation. “We had to leave not knowing what was wrong, which was tough,” says Kezia. Fortnightly scans at a specialist fetal medicine unit followed, at which point the couple were approached once more by the documentary team. “They started filming around a month before we got the bad news, although we were still hoping for the best outcome,” she says.

IT MEANT THAT cameras were present for the moment when, around 29 weeks, the sonographer confirmed that Grace no longer had a heartbeat. “It was just horrible,” says Kezia, quietly. “Words can’t really describe how I felt in that moment.”

“It’s like a nightmare you want to wake up from and it will all be different,” adds Chris. “We’d spent a long time thinking about what the twins would be like – you picture them growing up. Then that vision comes crashing down.”

‘I find it hard seeing twins – it brings back that pain’

KEZIA KERR

The reality of the situation meant that while Kezia was nurturing one life the couple were also grieving for the loss of another. “It was particularly hard for Kezia being the one carrying the babies, so in some ways it was easier for me to process the loss,” says Chris. “At the same time she was the only person who had experienced Grace alive, so she had a connection