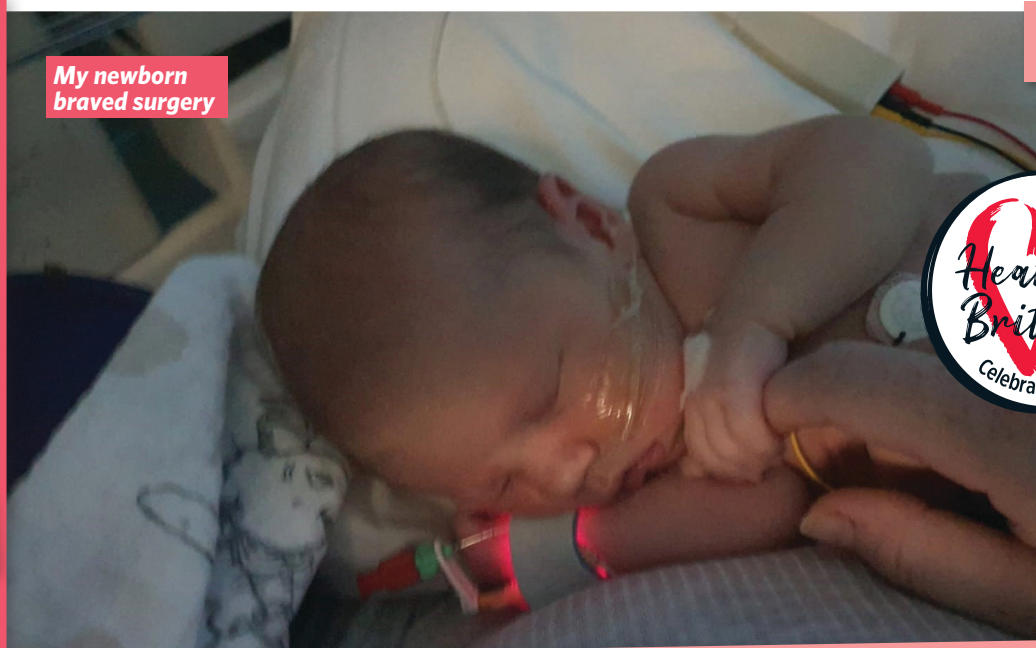




My newborn braved surgery



Daphne completes our family

SHE'S OUR MIRACLE

Heart breaker

When Hayley Farrer, 35, from Fleet, had the smoothest pregnancy experience, she never expected it to take a sour turn...

Lying down on the bed, the lights dimmed and I was at peace.

Me and my partner Chris, 36, held hands as the nurse spread the cold gel across my belly and we waited to see our baby.

So far, my pregnancy was smooth – and so going in for our 20-week scan at Frimley Park Hospital, we weren't at all worried.

Watching as our tiny baby appeared on the screen, I was overjoyed.

It only made me more excited for when we'd finally meet our little boy or girl.

Only, as I looked closer at the screen and noticed the sonographer frowning, my reality came crashing down.

'I can't see...' she muttered. 'I just can't see...'

'What's wrong?' I interrupted her.

Chris held my hand even tighter than before.

I froze in horror at what she said next.

'There might be an issue with the heart,' she said quietly. 'The arteries don't cross, but they are meant to.'

Frowning in confusion, I struggled to understand.

Does this mean my baby is going to die? I thought.

'Is it something we should worry about?' Chris asked.

'Go and sit out in the waiting room please,' she said. 'I'll get someone to talk to you.'

'But why?' I demanded.

'What's going on?'

Whatever it was, I knew I could handle it. I just needed to know if my baby was OK.

Chris and I sat in the waiting room, fighting off the panic.

Within a few minutes, a senior midwife beckoned us into a separate room.

'We've identified that your baby could have congenital heart disease,' she said. 'As we're not specialists in that area, we can't confirm it.'

I froze, silently taking in the shock diagnosis.

My pregnancy had been so smooth... how was it all going wrong now?

It was a Friday, and we were told we'd be seen on Monday by the specialists at Evelina London Children's Hospital.

'Why can't you tell us now?'

Chris demanded, frowning.

I knew he was just as frustrated as me.

'It will be OK, whatever happens,' I said as we drove home, staying strong.

And so we spent the painstaking weekend glued to our computers.

Remembering an abbreviation I'd spotted on the scan, I took to Google.

That's when I discovered TGA – transposition of the great arteries.

Watching videos of open-heart surgeries on YouTube and Googling the success rate – it was a reassuring 98%.

'It seems like this is manageable,' I said to Chris.

Although the pending diagnosis was scary, we rationalised what our baby's future would look like – and it looked promising.

Going to the appointment on Monday, we faced it calmly.

After my ultrasound scans, the consultant had a result.

'We believe your baby has transposition of the great arteries,' she said.

Weirdly, I felt relieved.

I knew what it was and I'd

even gone to the appointment with a list of questions.

Is it anything I've done wrong to make this happen?

Will my baby suffer any long-term brain damage from the surgery?

But luckily, the doctors answered them all.

My baby would have two surgeries, including open-heart surgery to cross over their arteries.

Although the thought of my newborn being cut open after birth was horrifying, I knew I couldn't change it – I just wanted what was best for them.

And it was the doctors' bread and butter – they performed 25 of these operations a year and so I put all my confidence in them.

After the appointment, we felt much more positive.

Luckily, the rest of my pregnancy went smoothly – I even exercised at the gym.

If I'm fit and healthy, this baby will be, too! I thought.

We started preparing for

our new arrival at 28 weeks.

Not wanting to know the gender, we settled on a jungle-themed nursery.

The doctors decided I should have a C-section so they could control the delivery.

The birth was planned for 26 August 2022 and during the 30-minute delivery, I relaxed to a long birthing playlist Chris and I made.

And at 12.30pm that day, our baby was here.

'It's a girl!' the midwife announced, holding her up.

'What?' Chris and I exclaimed in shock.

We had been convinced our baby was a boy – we'd even picked out a boys' name, too!

'Oh my God!' I gasped. 'We have a little girl!'

Smiling, Chris did the honours and cut the umbilical cord for me.

It was a relief to know that she was healthy at 6lb 13oz.

As our daughter was laid gently on my shoulder, I gazed at her button nose as Chris snapped photos of her.

But then she was rushed away to the neo-natal

intensive care unit to begin her recovery journey.

Chris went with her, while the nurses stitched me up.

'When can I go and see her?'

I asked the midwife.

But first, I had to recover.

The midwife set me goals along the way – moving my legs, drinking and eating – which kept me focused.

And Chris reassured me that our baby was OK, showing me photos of her in the incubator as she received support with her breathing.

Before I knew it, it was 9pm and I was wheeled up to her.

Holding her in my arms for the very first time, my life felt so complete.

Gazing at Chris, I instantly knew what to name her.

'I would love to call her Daphne,' I said. 'After my nan.'

'Of course,' Chris nodded.

'And Irene can be her middle name after my nan, too.'

Our happiness continued until one day after her birth, when her oxygen levels started to drop drastically.

As the gap in her heart was closing rapidly, our baby was in a life-threatening position, meaning she needed surgery and she needed it now.

Undergoing a balloon

septostomy on Sunday, Daphne was prepared to face the biggest surgery of her life.

Luckily, her first surgery on 28 August went smoothly, where she had a stent inserted through her groin.

And with her open-heart surgery booked for 5 September, we spent every day cuddling her.

Luckily, I was staying in the hospital's Ronald McDonald House, so I could stay as close to her as possible until we were both discharged.

Signing the consent forms for her surgery, it all hit me.

One of the risks, highlighted in bold,

was death.

'God, this is really real...'

I whispered to Chris.

Saying goodbye to Daphne, it dawned on us – this could be the last time we ever saw her.

It's a 98% success rate, but someone has to be that 2%... I thought warily.

The surgery took most of the day to complete and I distracted myself by sleeping in our room.

After eating lunch with my dad Mick, 70, that afternoon, while Chris distracted himself at work, I got the phone call.

'Everything went smoothly,'

Death was the biggest risk

chest open again – it was stitched up after surgery.

And bath time was an extra challenge, too – we couldn't bathe her properly until the scar down her chest was healed.

But as Daphne grew older, she smashed every milestone along the way.

Now one, Daphne is walking and always toddling about.

But she definitely has a cheeky streak – smashing the keyboard of my laptop when I'm not looking and changing the TV channel!

Luckily, her favourite YouTube channel, Baby Sensory TV, makes for the perfect distraction.

At her most recent review, the doctors said she's perfect – now, she just has yearly reviews.

With that being the only disruption to her little life, Daphne is a happy and healthy baby.

While her heart was wired the wrong way around, our lives with her in it have never felt more right.

● For Daphne's progress, follow @mytgajourney on Instagram

● To make a donation to Evelina London Children's Charity, search: Just Giving – Paul Farrer

London Marathon 2023

the nurse said. 'You can come and see your baby.'

I rushed straight over there!

I needed to see her, this time with her heart wired the right way around.

Looking down at her, my heart swelled with love.

I was just so relieved that she'd made it through.

From there, Daphne's recovery was smooth.

She met every goal – coming off the ventilator in 48 hours and being stable enough to come down to the hospital café with us.

And within 16 days, we were both discharged.

Bringing her home and settling her into her jungle-themed nursery was an amazing experience.

Carrying on the diary the nurses started for Daphne, we wrote that it was one of the best days of our lives.

And yet the first few days were difficult.

We took each day as it came – making sure to be extra careful with her.

Scoping her up, we couldn't hold her under her arms in case it cracked her



She's a cheeky girl