

# Save Our Smiler

**It's a race against time for Jade's brave boy to be given a life-saving operation...**



We recently got married

25, I was having scans every other day to keep an eye on him.

Our doctor explained that our baby needed to make it to at least 25 weeks to stand a chance of surviving.

I desperately counted down the days.

But even when I made it to 25 weeks, we were far from being out of the woods.

Then, three weeks later, things took a devastating nosedive.

'The baby's bowel has perforated, and there's a danger that faeces could enter the womb, which would endanger both of you,' the doctor explained.

At just 28 weeks pregnant, I needed an emergency Caesarean and was rushed to hospital with Rhys.

*It's too soon!* I thought. But I had no other choice. 'You're both going to be OK,' Rhys soothed.

As I was prepped for surgery, I said a silent prayer that my little man would keep on fighting.

And I hung on to the fact that he'd managed to cling on for those three extra precious weeks.

In the blink of an eye, our baby - who we'd decided to call Zachary - was brought into the world.

But I barely had a moment to take him in before he was whisked off.

He was so tiny but, to me, absolutely perfect. Rhys and I waited for six hours while surgeons operated on him,



Zachary

removing his bowel as they couldn't save it.

'He looked so fragile,' I said, swallowing back tears. 'How on earth can his little body cope with that?'

But despite weighing only 2lb, our brave boy got through it.

'He's the smallest patient we've ever performed that operation on,' the surgeon said afterwards.

Zachary spent the next three months in neonatal intensive care.

As he struggled to adapt to feeding, he needed to be artificially fed via

a tube. Doctors explained that a potential adverse side-effect of this was that it could affect his liver, but that the risk was small.

'We'll do whatever it takes to help him,' I said.

But sadly, there was yet another battle on the horizon for Zachary. A week on, he was diagnosed with liver and intestinal failure

**'We'll do whatever it takes'**

due to the feeding.

'He'll need a liver transplant,' his doctor told us.

Rhys and I were devastated. 'He's not even one yet,' I cried. 'How much more can he go through?'

The donor needed to be a size match too.

But finding an infant donor was incredibly rare.

From then on, Zachary spent his life in and out of hospital, with the occasional few days at home when he was well enough.

During that time, I also fell pregnant.

'How are we going to cope with another little one?' I worried.

'We've got this,' Rhys reassured. 'If we can make it through this, we can make it through anything.'

The pregnancy went smoothly and nine months later I gave birth to another little boy, Reuben.

Zachary doted on his baby brother. He'd forever fuss over him, and the two became best



Zachary and Reuben

buddies.

Due to Zachary being immunocompromised, his social circle was small and most of his friends were other sick children on the ward.

But Reuben really brought him out of his shell.

However, as time went on, Zachary got sicker and weaker. With no donors available, his doctor had a suggestion.

'If we put Zachary on the adult waiting list, we could cut down a liver to size as soon as a donor becomes available,' he said.

Without hesitation we joined, and seven months later doctors found a match.

While it would only be a temporary fix, and Zachary would still need a more appropriately-sized liver and bowel as he got older, it was a



He's spent most of his life in hospital

sliver of hope that we could cling to.

At first, the transplant was a success.

But just one month later, he contracted sepsis.

It damaged his liver badly, and he was put back on the paediatric donor waiting list.

Now Zachary is just three, yet he's been through so much in his short life.

His development has been delayed due to growing up in hospital.

But while he can't walk, crawl or talk, he's started to say a few words and can chuckle.

And our mini warrior is always smiling, no matter what is thrown at him.

Throughout his journey, Rhys and I have met many families who've broken up due to the stress of having a sick child on the donor waiting list.

But we've managed to stick by each other, and we recently got married with the boys by our side.

In the meantime, I've had to give up university while Zachary requires constant care.

Every day is spent wondering when we will get that life-changing phone call.

Doctors have said if he doesn't get his transplant in the next few weeks to a

month, then unfortunately we will lose him.

It can be an upsetting topic to talk about, and the thought that another child will have had to pass away for Zachary to have a future, is both heartbreaking and difficult to accept.

But we can't shy away from uncomfortable conversations.

Currently, about 1% of child deaths allow for donation, and in half of those the parents have said no to donating their child's organs.

It means that while around 200 children a year are waiting

for organs, only 40 to 50 will receive one.

I hope by sharing Zachary's story we can raise awareness around organ donation, no matter what age.

If someone would be willing to accept an organ, they should be willing to give one.

A new liver and bowel would drastically improve Zachary's quality of life, and in the long run, save it.

We've seen other children who were sick go on to receive donations that have transformed their futures.

We just hope and pray that, one day, that will be our little smiler too.

**Jade Bradford, 24, Kirkintilloch, East Dunbartonshire**

● To donate to Jade's GoFundMe, search 'Zachary's Fundraiser'.



Our little smiler

By Danielle Lett. Picture: Kyle Still Photography