

Keep on shining, Syd

When tragedy struck my family, a holiday game became the perfect way to keep my daughter's memory alive. By Sam Legg, 39

Dear Sydney,

From the moment you arrived, we knew you'd be the life and soul of the party because you instantly stole the spotlight from your dad and nan after being born on their shared birthday.

Holding you in my arms, I laughed and said, 'Looks like we're going to need a bigger cake each year!'

As you grew, your confident personality shone through – and even from a dot you were grown up beyond your years!

On your first day at preschool, you said to your teacher, 'Shall I help you line all the kids up, and get them to the toilet?'

You were still in a nappy yourself but it didn't stop you wanting to help.

Your dad Jeff and I later split, but he always remained in your life and we always got on.

Eventually, I met your stepdad Matt and when baby Ivy arrived, you took to

being a big sister instantly.

Like all siblings, you bickered, but you were always quick to make up.

'Come to my room and we can watch a film,' you'd say, poking your head into her room.

When Matt and I took you and Ivy on cruise ships for holidays, you were excited to discover people often hid rubber ducks around them for other passengers to find.

You quickly made a game of seeing how many you could spot.

Music was a big part of your life and whenever we went anywhere in the car, we'd end up singing along to something at the top of our voices.

'Mum, can we put Shania Twain on?' you'd ask.

You had such an incredibly varied taste in music – you were never stumped for choices. We'd sing along to anything from Green Day, Wheatus and Avril Lavigne to Dean Martin and Tom Jones.

You never missed a word and never skipped a beat.

But at 10, after you lost a lot of weight over a short period of time and couldn't stop drinking water, you were diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

At first, I felt devastated but you took it in your stride, making sure you looked after yourself and educated others about your



condition.

'My pancreas doesn't quite work as it should, so I use insulin,' you'd explain.

Rather than injecting yourself, you had a pump fitted which delivered insulin continuously to your body.

And you never let it stop you doing anything, always living your life to the fullest.

When your cousin took you to see Green Day, she said you were belting out every lyric.

And after we took you and Ivy to the local dry ski slope, you made a decision.

'I want to be a snowboarding instructor,' you told me.

We began to look into snowboarding courses in Austria for you after you finished your GCSEs.

It was something to look forward to and in the

meantime, you juggled your studies with a part-time job in a local café.

'Your Syd is such a big help,' your boss told me one day. 'She's not afraid to get stuck in, and the customers love her.'

I'd never felt prouder.

Everyone in our home town of Fordingbridge, Hampshire, knew and recognised you. I always let you dye your hair, and its

ever-changing colour became your signature style.

After your exams, you went to stay with your dad in Guernsey for a few weeks.

'Mum, can I come off my pump for a bit and go back to daily injections?' you asked me before you left.

'I'd rather you stayed on your pump,' I said.

But I knew that I had to let you make the decision for

yourself.

Only a week later, your dad called and said, 'Syd's had a seizure. We're in hospital.'

You'd never had one before, but doctors said it wasn't linked to your diabetes.

Worried, when you arrived home, I pushed for an MRI scan, but was told you didn't need one.

Then one morning, weeks later, I went in to wake you and found you face down on the floor.

Knowing you like to pull pranks, I said, 'Come on, Syd. Up you get.'

But when I prodded you with my foot, you leapt up screaming, completely delirious.

Panicking, I realised you'd just come round from another seizure, so I emailed the doctor and asked for an MRI again.

'She had a seizure five weeks ago too,' I told the doctor.

However, he referred you

to the epilepsy clinic instead.

'In the meantime, be careful when bathing and swimming,' he warned.

While we waited for an appointment to come through, life carried on as normal.

A few weeks on, I woke you early so you could wash your hair. It was Halloween and my birthday, so we'd planned to celebrate later.

'Up you get, love, we've got a big day ahead of us,' I said. 'If you don't wash your hair now I won't be able to do anything with it tonight.'

While you groggily got up and headed for the bathroom, I got back into bed with a cuppa, waiting for you to finish.

But after 15 minutes, I grew concerned.

'I'll check on her,' Matt said. 'I'm desperate for a wee anyway.'

But when he knocked, you didn't respond, and panicking now, I grabbed a pair of scissors and used them to unlock the door from the outside.

The shower was still running and had flooded the bath. You were face down in the water.

'She's had another seizure!' I screamed, pulling you out.

Matt called an ambulance while I started CPR.

Your gran was with us too and when your sister tried to walk in, I shouted, 'Mum, get Ivy out of here.'

The ambulance took half an hour to come and paramedics then spent an hour trying to bring you back. But it was too late and, as you were pronounced dead, I felt my heart shatter.

Grief blurred the next weeks until we were able to



Your ducks

hold your funeral. We kept it small, just me, Matt, Ivy, your dad, grandparents, your dad's girlfriend and your half-brother.

As you loved music so much, we all picked a song each, with Green Day's *Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)* as your final one.

In time, an inquest into your death found you'd died from drowning after you passed out in the shower which filled up during your seizure.

But while we had to accept you were gone, your memory had to live on.

'Syd loved spotting rubber ducks on cruise ships,' I said to Matt. 'Let's get some and have people leave them around the world on their travels.'

I started a Facebook group and it quickly took off.

People from Fordingbridge and further afield showed interest, so I ordered a whole range of rubber ducks and we set up an area in the pet

food store we ran, which we called The Duck Pond.

Seeing it filled with ducks made me smile and our customers loved it too.

We created a label with a QR code so people could let us know where their duck had travelled to.

One person took his snowboarding and soon others had gone as far as Japan, China, Thailand and New Zealand. I was so thrilled, but then I had another idea.

'Maybe we can get a duck custom-made to look like Syd,' I said to Matt.

Before long, I had a thousand Syd ducks, with rainbow hair like yours, ready to give away in the shop.

'They look just like her,' I said to Matt, as we put them on display.

Now, my darling Syd, although we miss you every day, I know you'd love the idea of people taking you on their travels with them, and leaving a piece of you in all corners of the globe.

This way, you'll continue to bring the light and laughter that you brought in life everywhere you go.

Love always, Mum x

● To find out more about Sydney's ducks, and to donate, visit [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/sydney-memorial-travelling-ducks) and search 'Sydney's Memorial Travelling Ducks' or search for 'Sydney Jade's Travelling Ducks' on Facebook.



By Danielle Lett

