

# 'She should be with us'

*My boyfriend Craig and I couldn't wait to meet our baby. But as hours passed in labour, something felt very wrong.*

**By Laura Bowtell, 37**



Me pregnant



Craig, me and Margot



Margot

**M**y name was called and I waddled in for my check-up.

As my midwife Lisa got me up on the bed for an ultrasound, she laughed and said, 'The baby must be comfortable in there.'

'I know!' I replied.

I was now 40 weeks pregnant with my first baby and while my boyfriend Craig and I couldn't wait to become parents, our little one definitely wasn't in a hurry.

For the first seven months of my pregnancy, everything had gone well. The scans had been fine and we'd excitedly read baby books, put up the cot and picked out names.

Then as COVID-19 began to spread, I started to feel unwell, so I'd isolated for 14 days at our home in Brockworth, Gloucestershire, and during that time, I'd noticed the baby wasn't moving as much.

And when I'd suffered a bleed too, Craig had taken me to hospital.

Thankfully, Lisa reassured me everything was fine and

even showed me our baby kicking about on screen.

I was due to have my baby at the local birthing centre and now, after confirming the baby was still OK, she said, 'If we get to 41 weeks and there's still no sign of baby, we'll do a sweep.'

In the end, I was 41 weeks when I finally had that done in the hope it would induce labour.

The following evening, as we sat down to eat a Chinese takeaway, I suddenly felt something.

'I think I'm having contractions,' I told Craig.

I rang the birthing centre

and spoke to Lisa. I was happy at home, so I waited until my contractions were just 10 minutes apart, before heading to the birthing centre.

By the time we arrived, I felt sick.

'It's just your body getting ready for labour,' Lisa reassured me.

But over the next hours, my contractions began to feel strange. There'd be a big one then two or three weak ones in between that didn't feel strong enough to help me push our baby out.

Then after I suffered two

bleeds Craig asked, 'Is that meant to happen?'

Again, we were reassured it was all normal.

By the following morning, when Lisa left and the unit's head midwife Hazel took

over, I was no closer to giving birth.

Although the baby's heartbeat was still strong, I felt utterly

exhausted and frustrated too.

'My body isn't giving me what I need,' I cried. 'I want to go to the hospital.'

'I can feel the baby's head, it won't be long,' Hazel said, encouraging me to try a

different position.

When putting my legs into the stirrups didn't help, I begged, 'Please just call me an ambulance.'

This time she did. But in the 10 minutes it took them to arrive, my labour accelerated and the baby moved down into the birth canal.

As Hazel searched for their heartbeat, the room filled with panic.

'You need to push,' she told me.

Soon after, I finally gave birth.

'Is the baby OK?' I cried, as they rushed to resuscitate them.

When paramedics left to take our baby to hospital, I urged Craig to follow.

'I'll get there when I can,' I said, helplessly.

As I was stitched up, a midwife asked, 'Do you know what you had?'

'No, no one's told me,' I

replied.

'You had a girl,' she said. 'Do you have a name yet?'

'Margot,' I replied.

Soon after, Craig called me. I'd never known him to cry, but now he was in tears.

'She's really poorly,' he said.

After months preparing for Margot's arrival, there was now a chance she might never come home with us. I was sobbing as an ambulance took me to the hospital.

There, a doctor came to speak to us, and said, 'Margot is one of the most poorly babies we've ever seen.'

Seeing her for the first time, I felt a rush of love and heartbreak all at once. Margot was in an incubator, hooked up to wires and lying on a cooling mat to bring her body temperature down.

Doctors said her brain had been starved of oxygen for so long that she was having seizures.

The following day, while Craig went home to get us fresh clothes, I went with Margot as she was taken for an MRI and was able to hold her for the first time.

'She's so small,' I whispered as the nurses carefully handed her to me.

The results of the scan were devastating.

'There's no sign of brain activity,' the doctor told us. 'Margot's not responding to any stimulants, and the oxygen is breathing for her.'

We both knew it was time to let her go.

Close friends and family were allowed to come in to meet our baby girl and say goodbye.

Shortly after, Margot let us know it was time to go. Her feet started to get cold, and we made the decision to take her off the oxygen.

'I love you, Margot,' I whispered, cradling her in my arms as she slipped away at just three days old.

Going home without her broke my heart all over again. It wasn't right. We shouldn't have been coming home with

an empty car seat.

And soon after, we were told her death was being investigated by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB), a body set up to improve patient safety.

The grief felt overwhelming as we held a funeral and said goodbye to our baby girl.

Months later, we were told what we'd felt in our hearts, that Margot's death had been entirely preventable.

A report found that I should have been taken to hospital as soon as my first bleed was noticed.

My placenta had partially ruptured, which meant Margot was compromised and starved of oxygen when she was stuck in my birth canal.

When her heart rate dropped that should also have triggered an emergency response from the whole team at the unit. But that hadn't happened.

'She should still be here with us,' I said, tearfully.

Eventually, after a hearing by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) into the deaths of Margot and another baby at the unit a year earlier, midwives Hazel Williams and Lisa Land were both struck off the register.

I was glad, but it wouldn't bring our babies back and we'd be forever left mourning their loss.

What happened has left me suffering from PTSD.

When I fell pregnant again, my anxiety was through the roof, but thankfully our baby girl Winter was born safely by Caesarean.

Winter is one now and has brought so much joy back into our lives.

But when I see children the age her big sister should be now, it's hard not to think about how different things could've been.

Looking back, I wish I'd been more forceful from the moment I'd felt things

weren't right. But I put my faith in the experience of those midwives.

I'd urge all mums-to-be to trust their gut and never back down. Your baby's life might depend on it.

**Medical Director of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Professor Mark Pietroni, said,** 'We are deeply saddened by the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of baby Margot and our thoughts and condolences remain with the family.'

'We are truly sorry for the failures in care, which were fully and independently investigated by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB). The Trust also acknowledges the decision by the Nursing and Midwifery Council, who, following their own independent process, removed two midwives from the professional register.'

'Following this incident, the Trust has taken significant and ongoing steps to improve maternity care and has fully accepted the recommendations made by HSIB.'

'We remain committed to learning from this case and we continue to work closely with our maternity teams to ensure that learning is embedded and that every single mother, expectant mother and their baby receive safe, high-quality care.'



Me, Craig and Winter

By Danielle Left. Pictures Still Moving Media