

WHEN her daughter, Eilidh Beth, was stillborn at 32 weeks two years ago, charity worker Susan Simpson, 43, struggled to cope with her grief. But Susan, who lives in Inverness with her husband, Andrew, and daughters Charis, seven, and Niamh, three, found solace writing to the little girl she lost. These impossibly moving letters show how she tried to come to terms with her loss...

*My darling
Eilidh Beth*

SEPTEMBER 17, 2011

ONE year ago today exactly, my sweet, we were told how poorly you were. That day replays over and over. The look on the sonographer's face, the image of you on the screen, the words as Dr Caird explained what was wrong. And that awful stomach-lurching feeling, like being punched, as my heart broke.

Daddy and I had known since your 12-week scan that you might have Down's Syndrome. The sonographer gently patted my foot as she calmly and empathetically explained. But you were growing well, your heart was strong and you were an active little baby. Daddy and I knew we could face whatever lay ahead for you.

But on this day 12 months ago, our 32-week scan showed you had a build-up of fluid in your body and you were a very poorly baby. We had been so excited about seeing you again. Within five minutes our world collapsed.

Doctors decided your best chance of survival was to deliver you quickly and admitted me to hospital. They kept me in hospital for a week to keep a close eye on you before you made your entrance into this world.

The medical team was sympathetic but honest about your chances. You were such a determined baby with a strong heart that, despite slim odds, Daddy and I held tightly to the hope that you would live. Each time we heard your defiant little heartbeat, we had faith that we would be able to hold you in our arms, that a miracle would happen.

SEPTEMBER 23, 2011

Dearest Eilidh Beth,

THIS evening last year was the last bedtime I felt you move and live within me. I said goodbye to your daddy and he left me to settle myself for your arrival the next morning. As I prepared for bed I caressed my tummy to comfort you and spoke to you as normal. But you were sleeping. You were gone.

I hadn't felt you move in some hours, so called the midwife. She called Dr Kosseim who performed a scan at my bedside and said those awful words: 'I'm so sorry.'

When I phoned your daddy to tell him your heart had stopped, he fell apart in front of your sisters. I feel so bad about that. Why didn't I ask him to go into a different room?

Daddy was allowed to come back in to spend the night with us in room four, the room at the end of Raigmore Hospital's maternity ward which no one really talks about. The room is for sad mummies like me whose babies are lost before they lived. I cradled your lifeless body within my womb.

And I cried. And cried. And cried.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

Dearest Eilidh Beth,

I CANNOT believe it is now a year since I held you, a year since I saw your beautiful face, a year since I felt your weight in my arms.

That morning I woke with a sore throat which ruled out my epidural. That meant I had to have a general anaesthetic for your Caesarean section and daddy couldn't come in with me.

Our midwife Donna held my hand going to theatre and we both wept. That meant so much to me, to see her moved to tears by you.

You were a wee monkey, Eilidh. They had real problems delivering you. You were a big girl at 8lb and measured 47cm in length. If you had gone to full term, my love, you'd have toppled me over!

When you were delivered, Donna took care of you and carried you back to the ward where Daddy was waiting. I hate the thought that your daddy was alone when they brought you to him. I was overwhelmed by your beauty. You looked just like your big sisters. I look at Charis and Niamh

and imagine how you would look growing up.

The hospital photographer came and took photos for us but I regret not taking more pictures of you. I regret not letting your sisters see you. And I regret not asking to see you unwrapped so I could see all of you instead of only your peaceful face and perfect hands. Hindsight makes us wise.

When your sisters came to visit, they clambered into bed with me and I gently told them you had been too poorly and had gone to Heaven. Charis said: 'With Xander?', her cat who'd died a few months before. Both were quiet for a while.

Those hours spent with you in my arms are precious beyond description and were too few. Noni and Gramps came and had a cuddle with you. After they and Daddy went home, it was just you and I, my love.

I chatted to you about your sisters, your home, the hopes and dreams I'd had for you. I kissed you and just held you and held you. I so wish I hadn't called the staff to take you from me at midnight. I wish I'd cradled you through the night.

Those memories, coupled with the memories of you in my womb, are all the memories I have of you.

And I remember everything so well. I can picture every detail of the room, the only room I have ever been in with you in my arms. There was almost a sense of reverence in that room, a feeling like it was closer to Heaven than other places. The staff felt it and said how much you touched them. What sweeter words can there be for a parent to hear?

I can remember the sounds of the ward, of babies crying while you were silent.

Well my love, it draws near to the time a year ago I kissed you goodbye, so I blow kisses goodnight to you in Heaven.

OCTOBER 1, 2011

My dearest daughter,

IT was so hard to try to feel the excitement of Niamh's second birthday party two days after I left hospital without you. I should have been bustling around while still pregnant with you and feeling you move within me.

Instead my womb was empty. Your Moses basket was empty.

I wanted to give in completely to grief, to crumble. But I had to put on a bright outlook. I know that we gave Niamh a happy day but I was feeling so painfully sad without you.

Every family birthday, every special

Oh my sweet baby girl, how did my beautiful pregnancy end like this?

A mother's achingly poignant letters to her still-born child

day, we talk about you, remember you, miss you.

OCTOBER 4, 2011

Dearest Eilidh Beth,

YOUR funeral was beautiful. The readings, the music, the poems were perfect for you.

I was proud to see Daddy carry your coffin and he and I sat either side of you in the funeral car.

Charis drew you a picture to put inside your casket and Niamh gave you a plastic horse. You wore the pink all-in-one with matching hat which Noni and Gramps bought. You looked perfect.

I'm not superstitious and loved looking for outfits for you when you were in my tummy.

Some friends thought I was really presumptuous. But when I saw beautiful Belgian lace slippers, I couldn't resist buying them. We placed the slippers in your casket.

When I saw your tiny white coffin on the plinth at the front of the chapel I wanted to pick you up and take you home.

I didn't want to say goodbye at the crematorium. It was too final. How could my beautiful pregnancy end like this?

NOVEMBER 15, 2011

My love,

IN THE days and weeks following your death, Eilidh Beth, I went into automatic pilot. I sobbed uncontrollably the night before your birth, wept silently throughout your funeral. But I struggled to let the tears flow after that.

I wanted tears. I wanted the promise of release if they fell. But I went for days, then weeks without any.

Sometimes I wish I could collapse into a sobbing heap and let go of the agony bottled inside. I know I can't and I won't.

People ask 'how are you?' and I wonder how they'd react if I told them exactly how I feel. How I feel utterly spent, wearied, drained, incomplete without you. I am thankful to those whom I can simply answer 'ugh' and they immediately understand.

I stay strong for your daddy and your sisters, and because I know you want me to hold on tight.

DECEMBER 25, 2011

Honey,

WE KNEW Christmas would be hard for us all. We had ornaments

on the tree for you, Eilidh, and we lit a special candle for you.

We thought it would be nice for your big sisters to let balloons go up in the air for you. We hope it brought you a wee bit closer to them for a while. Charis was very proud of the note she wrote for you. We watched the balloons until we could no longer see them.

I wish you were with us.

JANUARY, 2012

My love Eilidh Beth,

DAILY life can be a challenge at the best of times but, with a grieving heart, some days are harder to bear than others. Housework is neglected under the strain.

But it's important to keep your sisters' routines. They are a minute-by-minute reminder that life goes on, even when I just want to stop the world and jump off. I have to make sure their lives are as bright and positive as possible.

But I struggle, honey, I struggle. Well, my love, dinner won't make itself so I better go.

MARCH, 2012

Good morning darling!

CHARIS and Niamh still talk



Mother Susan Simpson (top) wrote to her lost daughter Eilidh Beth. Inset: With husband Andrew, and daughters Niamh and Charis

MAY, 2012
My Eilidh Beth,

I HATE what we have gone through as a family. I hate the fact that I can't hold you, take care of you, watch you grow.

I didn't want to breathe again after we lost you. I didn't want to feel what it was like to live again, to really live and feel, because my life would never again have a carefree aspect to it. There would always be a darkness in everything we did because you were not with us.

But I battle against these feelings because I am so incredibly blessed with your sisters, with all your family and friends. You have taught me to embrace this world.

Though they took your body from me, a part of you remains in my soul. You are my inspiration and I hope I can make you proud.

Rest peacefully.

Mummy x

Interview by JULIE McCAFFREY

about you daily. Charis in particular. She asked to see your ashes tonight because she wanted to know if they were like Xander's. Charis tells me that you are looking after him for her. Bless!

APRIL, 2012

Hello Eilidh Beth,

I CAN'T deny it, I'm not the person I was before you left us. I get so stressed and am so short with our family—I hate it! I don't want your sisters growing up with a crabby mummy.

Anyway, my love, best get my head down before one or both of your sisters join me in bed. Poor Charis had such bad growing pains last night. Oh, and have you seen the temper tantrums Niamh is taking? Crikey! Mummy loves you to the moon and back.