

No longer mourning in silence

Saint John woman organizes special ceremony for pregnancy, infant loss Remembrance

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Saunders

SAINT JOHN - Terra-Lynn Coggan remembers standing in the operating room overwhelmed with happiness at the thought of holding her newborn nephew in her arms for the first time.

The next thing she knew her dreams were crashing down around her. The monitor stopped beeping out his heartbeat.

Silence filled the room instead of life, and baby Riley never opened his eyes.

"I never had the opportunity to hear his first cries or know the colour of his eyes," said Coggan. "But I held him and for those few moments knowing him in that way changed my life."

Coggan's sister was ill at the time and had planned to move in with Coggan's family following the birth. Her sister survived but the baby didn't.

When Coggan returned home, she stood in baby Riley's nursery staring at the crib he would never lay in, at the rocking chair they would never share together and at the teddy bear he would never embrace.

It was in her depths of loneliness and despair, as she was feeling the future she had planned fade away and grieving a life she never knew that she wished she had someone to relate to.

"At the time of my loss I searched and searched and there was nothing specific to help me. When I asked for help people looked at me like I had three heads," said Coggan. "People wondered why I was crying for a baby that was never even born. When you are pregnant you start to envision your future and when you lose that child you grieve the opportunity to get to know your child and have that future. It is a very intense and deep loss."

It was then she decided to start the support group, Bears for Bereaved Mommies. The online group now has members from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom and was designed to give women who had pregnancy and infant loss a place to grieve, cry and talk to people who understand.

Her group gives teddy bears to moms that have had a loss. It hosts an online support group forum where moms can share their stories and seek comfort in each other.

It raises money to buy hospitals better equipment to detect problems early on in pregnancy. It informs people of the importance of doctors and patients sharing information and listening to one another. It educates the public on how to grieve properly.



**Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal
October 10 2006 Terra-Lynn
Coggan looks at a drawing of her
nephew Riley who died prior to
birth.**

"A nurse came in with a delivery cart and told us we would be holding the baby in the morning," said Coggan crying softly into the phone. "You get your hopes up like that to find out the only baby you will be taking home is a memory. The only thing we have left is that memory and that is why it is so vital to me that another family be spared the anguish our family has endured."

Coggan convinced the provincial government to declare Oct. 15 Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day in New Brunswick, as it is in the United States. She said there will be a wave of light across the world Sunday as people light candles in their windows at 7 p.m., in remembrance of all the little ones. Beginning at 12:30 p.m. a walk to remember will begin at King's Square and go to City Hall for a flag raising, then proceed along Harbour Passage.

At 6 p.m. families will meet at King's Square to share a candlelight memorial service full of memories, songs and poems.

"It is a sad statistic that each year 1.5 million pregnancies in North America end in a miscarriage or still birth or the death of a newborn baby," said Coggan. "Most people are not aware of this statistic because many of those people grieve in silence, sometimes never coming to terms with their loss. We need to bring attention to this issue and foster a greater understanding of how to meet the needs of bereaved family members, and how to prevent pregnancy loss and newborn deaths."