

Samphire's Story

Samphire was born eight weeks early. I became aware that there were some difficulties with her immediately following her birth. There was a sudden atmosphere of panic amongst the medics. Samphire was whisked out of the room and straight into the Special Care Baby Unit. I felt a knot forming in my stomach. I didn't even know if she was alive. I hadn't heard her cry.

Two hours later a paediatrician told me that they didn't expect Samphire to survive through the next 12 hours. He advised me not to get attached to her. I scorned his advice initially. How can you not get attached to a baby? However, I had a three-year-old child at home waiting for me and I desperately needed to cling onto my sanity. Despite my scorn for the paediatrician's advice, I felt myself build an emotional wall between Samphire and myself.

Samphire did survive. She spent the next four weeks in a ventilator surrounded by tubes, wires and monitors. The knot in my stomach got bigger and harder. My only contact with her was through a small hole in the ventilator. Samphire had Down's Syndrome. At least she was alive. When I took her home at eight weeks I was determined to love and nurture her as I had my first child. The knot was still in my stomach but I expected that would disappear soon. Samphire didn't feed very well. Sometimes it took two hours. She screamed for attention but disliked being held or touched when we responded to her.

We were exhausted, so maybe the reaction of our friends and neighbours had more impact on us than it normally would. Word had got round that Samphire had Down's Syndrome. Some people avoided us. Others visited but came with a gloomy air – hardly the celebratory welcome into the world that our first child had received! Even my health visitor seemed embarrassed by Samphire. I began to dread taking her out and facing everyone's pitying glances.

We became more and more isolated and downcast. It's difficult to get on the floor and play with a baby when you are feeling exhausted and depressed. The enormous knot in my stomach didn't help. Neither did the fact that for over a year we got very little response from Samphire. I guess there were many times when Samphire got her basic needs cared for but little else.

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