

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a pink t-shirt and blue shorts, is holding a young child. They are standing on a paved area next to a white wall, with a marina and palm trees in the background. The man is smiling and looking towards the child, who is pointing upwards. The t-shirt has the word "NICCE" printed on it. The child is wearing a striped shirt and blue shoes. The marina in the background has several boats docked, and the water is a clear turquoise color. A large palm tree is on the right side of the frame, and its fronds are visible at the top. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

# THE STORY OF RAEYAAN

# **THE STORY OF RAEYAAAN**



**“Father’ is the noblest title a man can be given.**

**It is more than a biological role.**

**A father signifies a patriarch, a leader,**

**An exemplar, a confidant, a teacher,**

**A hero, and a friend.” Robert L. Blackman**

**“A happy family is but an earlier heaven.”**

**George Bernard Shaw**







# PROLOGUE

My beautiful boy, Raeyaan. If you are reading this, it's because I have done what every father should do - raise you into a strong, kind, and loving person.

You are finally ready to hear about the story of how you came into the world. I hope that reading this helps you to realise just how loved you are.

Your mum and I's life so far has been a fairytale - a successful business, a gorgeous wedding, a house to call our own. And then along came you, our firstborn son, our most precious bundle of joy. Having you was one of my greatest achievements in life. As you read, you will find out that the pregnancy was not plain sailing, and there were plenty of heartbreak and tears along the way.



It has been a rollercoaster of emotions. Through all the ups, all the downs, the guilt and the pain, the ecstasy and the joy, there has been nothing but an intense, overpowering love for you. Having you changed me and my life for the better. Everything I do is for you, including this book.

I hope you enjoy reading this book - it's a love letter, from me to you.

Love, Dad.



# OUR FAMILY





## CHAPTER 1

# THE BEGINNING OF OUR JOURNEY

*"Heaven on Earth is simply looking at my little boy." -*

*Jenny McCarthy*

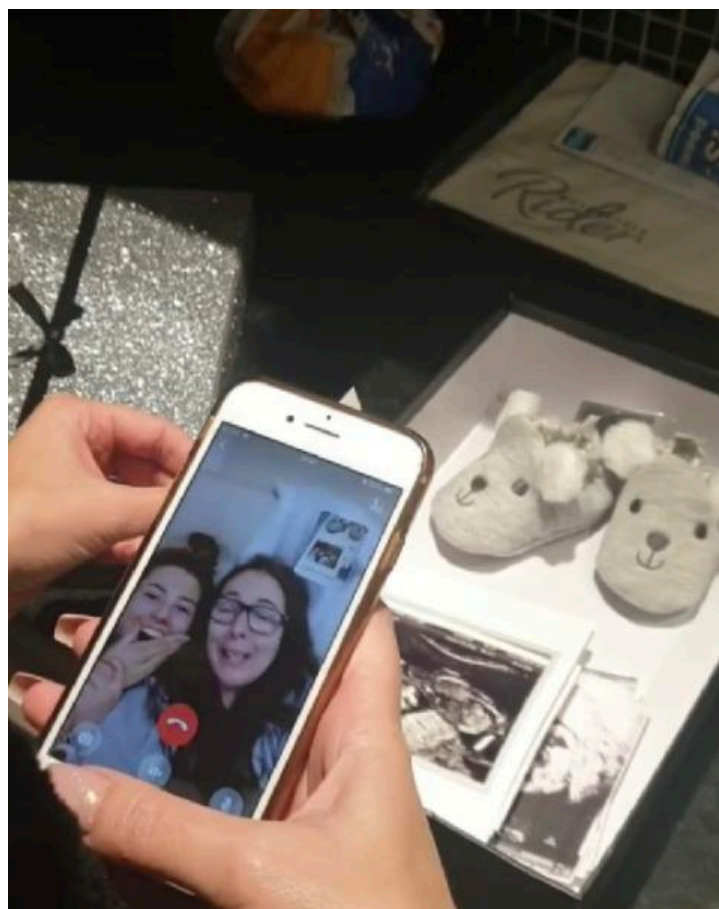
**A** whole year of trying for a baby had taken its toll. Your mother and I were physically and emotionally exhausted, and beginning to lose hope. We were clouded over by doubt - your mum was feeling more and more broken by the day, and I was desperately trying to be strong for her. Inside, I was worried too - I so badly wanted a son, a mini-me to call my own. The two miscarriages we had before you only heightened our anxiety, and we were in our 30s now - was it too late? On reflection, I now understand that perfection takes time - you were destined to be ours, we just had to have patience. The added stress and pressure had a huge impact on

the time taken to conceive you, and I wish I could go back and tell myself then it would all be okay.

After a year of trying, medical checks, blood tests, urine tests, fertility tests, and concocting our own science experiments at home with the different home testing kits and lab equipment, we finally got the all clear that there were no medical issues that were preventing us from becoming pregnant - only time and patience were the key. From then, our whole demeanour changed. We felt lighter, more relaxed. With the relaxation and the reduction of stress, all of our barriers and mental blocks fell away - 2 months later, we received the best news we had ever gotten. Your mum was finally pregnant, with the baby we had so desperately prayed for - YOU!

After 2 devastating miscarriages, your mum was over the moon. She couldn't contain the excitement, and began plotting and planning how to tell me. She is so loving and wanted me to be as surprised and happy as she was. We are so lucky to have her.

In the end, after contemplating all these different and crazy reveal ideas, your mum just couldn't wait and got me a surprise box. Inside were the tiniest pair of baby shoes, shaped like bears with a cute little button nose and a beautiful card which told me of the amazing news. Tears rolled down our cheeks and we cuddled each other so tightly. Holding that little box, knowing that you were growing in her tummy day by day, filled me with overwhelming hope and love. I lay in bed with her, tears rolling down my cheeks and joy spreading through my heart. My life was complete. I was finally a dad.





## CHAPTER 2

# THE FIRST SCAN

"A pregnancy is proof that love before first sight does exist". - Araceli M. Ream

**O**ur first time seeing you was supposed to be the most exciting time of the pregnancy. 12 weeks we had waited for this precious moment. Although we were brimming with excitement to see your little face, your button nose, your kicking feet, there was always that impending sense of doom. Would there be a heartbeat? Would we get bad news? We should have trusted our gut instinct and known that something wasn't quite right.

Your mum's belly was getting rounder every day. They were spreading jelly on her stomach for the scan. She was growing you so well and I could not believe that she was bringing me our greatest joy in life.



We waited with bated breath, and finally heard the sound that filled us with relief - your heartbeat, the confirmation that you were alive. It was music to our ears.

Our joy was short lived. The nurses, who were once chatty and bubbly ladies, suddenly started whispering to each other tensely. We could feel our hearts sink. You could cut the atmosphere in the room with a knife. They slowly zoomed in to

where your heart was located, and I could feel my stomach turning in knots. When they fetched another nurse to confirm their opinion, I could feel a lump in my throat beginning to form. I squeezed your mum's hand tightly and tried to take deep breaths. Whatever came our way, I knew your mum and I would work as a team. They finally confirmed to us our worst fears - your heart wasn't presenting as normal, and they would need a professional cardiac specialist to examine it. They booked us in as soon as possible, we were to return to hospital within the next three days. Thanking the nurses, we left the hospital clutching your scan picture, still trying to maintain positivity, but filled with uncertainty about the road ahead of us. Little did we know the twists and turns our journey was going to take.

## CHAPTER 3

# TETRALOGY OF WHAT?

"You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have." - Bob Marley

**M**onday morning. The morning we had been dreading all weekend. Your mother especially felt nauseous - not with morning sickness, but with dread. Each appointment brought us a fresh wave of worry that we would hear the worst news imaginable. I had to be strong for the family, but inside I was terrified that I would never hold you in my arms.

We sat in a hospital room with two very experienced cardiologists, dressed in white lab coats. Your scan was projected on the screen, and although I was relieved to see your little hands and feet wriggling, I just wanted the doctors



to confirm what they were thinking. As they murmured away, rolling the device around your mum's belly, they stated "Don't listen to us whilst we talk, we're just having a discussion about everything". As if that was supposed to reassure us. The medical terms they were exchanging with each other seemed as if they were talking a different language - there was no way of us understanding anyway. Realistically, there was a tiny part of us that didn't want to know. As your mum gazed at the ceiling, I could tell she had zoned out. I didn't blame her. Until the cardiologists gave us an official diagnosis, we were still in our happy baby bubble.

We were completely in the dark - to your mum and I, we could hear how strong your heart was, thumping away rhythmically during the scan. To us, your heart on the scan looked absolutely fine. What on earth were the cardiologists going to say? Still, we knew they were the professionals, and we had to have the same patience with discovering your condition as we did to conceive you.

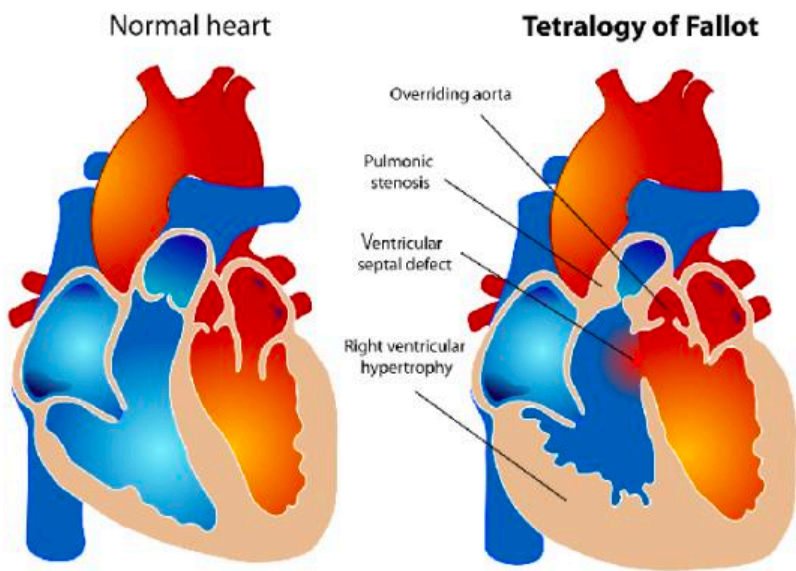
Finally, they seemed to make a confident decision, and told us to meet them in the next room. As we walked in, every step felt like walking a mile. Our bubble was about to burst.

**"I'm very sorry to inform you that the scan revealed that your baby will be born with a heart problem.** The medical condition is called Tetralogy of Fallot, also known as TOF. I'm so sorry to tell you this, I know this must be difficult."

Although the doctors were speaking, their words slowly faded away, replaced by a ringing in my ears and a heaviness in my heart. Tears began to roll down **mum's** cheeks, **she began to sob** as I gripped her hand tightly. My body and brain was bombarded by emotions - shock; how had this happened to my little baby? Devastation; would you ever live a normal life? Curiosity; what on earth is TOF and why had I never heard of it?

The doctor calmly explained that TOF is a condition where a hole has formed in the heart as the heart has not developed correctly. As a result, there are four defects **commonly** present: ventricular septal defect (VSD), pulmonary stenosis, a

misplaced aorta and a thickened right ventricular wall (right ventricular hypertrophy).



We asked an onslaught of questions, which the doctors answered so professionally to try to put our minds at ease. They explained that TOF was linked to a number of other defects, such as a possible Chromosome Defect, narrowing of the heart valve, deformed/ tilted heart, Down's syndrome, DiGeorge syndrome, low immune system, schizophrenia, learning difficulties, the list was never ending. With each new possible complication, our hearts grew heavier, but we stayed strong for you. It was our only choice.

The doctors nonchalantly said "The good news is, we've detected it early, meaning you have the choice to intervene."

I was confused. I heard the word 'intervene' echo around my head. I stopped the cardiologist, Dr. Brown, as she was talking.

"Sorry, what do you mean by intervene?"

"I mean have an abortion."



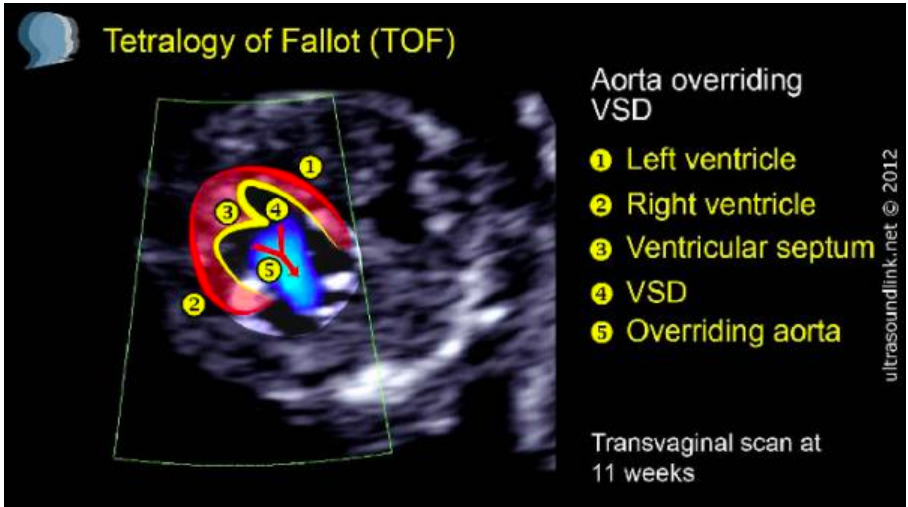
I felt like I had been hit by a bus. I could not believe that a medical professional was suggesting this. Was the condition really this deadly? Your mother and I were swamped by an overwhelming amount of pain. It was getting harder and harder to keep calm. This was never, ever an option we would ever consider.

Today was without a doubt the worst day of our lives. We had never received news like this before. Our heads were tangled and confused with thoughts, decisions and emotions, crashing into each other repeatedly over and over again. Realising the look of anguish on our faces, the professionals handed us a cluster of leaflets, and told us to take time to think. For us, there was no decision to make whether to abort or not; after years of trying, hoping, and praying for a miracle, we finally had you and we weren't letting you go. You chose us to be your parents, and we were going to educate ourselves on how to get you through this. Your life depended on it.

## CHAPTER 4

# SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

"Hope is being able to see that there is a light, despite all of the darkness." - Desmond Tutu



**Y**our mum and I slowly stumbled out of the hospital, still dazed from the news. We didn't speak for a while, both processing the information we had just been hit with.

We walked slowly towards the car, our heads spinning with information. As we walked, our faces were expressionless; we were emotionless, despite being told the heartbreaking news about your heart condition.

Suddenly, the emotion washed over me. My heart split in half as I thought of the pain and difficulty you must have been experiencing in the womb. I sighed and said 'The poor thing', wishing I could swap places and give you my healthy heart. I wasn't expecting your mum's reaction, but at this point, we couldn't hold it together in any more. In the middle of the car park, your mum broke down in tears, holding onto me tightly and sobbing in my chest. "I just feel so sorry for our baby," she cried, my shirt becoming wet from her tears. It felt like our world had been shattered, and the happiest moment of our lives had quickly become one of the saddest. This was the first time where we both realised the seriousness of the situation; our first baby was going to be born with medical problems, a

situation no parents wanted to find themselves in. Although we were so excited you were coming, at the same time we were so worried for your health. I squeezed her tightly as she bawled for a solid 5 minutes, reassuring your mum that it would be okay. I had to be strong for her and for you, my precious baby; my fatherly instincts had already driven me to protect you at all costs. After we had both released our sorrows, we had a sombre and depressing drive home.

Cuddling each other on the sofa, we thumbed through the leaflets that the cardiologists had given to us. Every page we read filled us with dread. The information we found was so useful; luckily, I found some detailed videos about your condition which were filmed by a private hospital, and they were a real eye-opener. They explained the whole process of discovering your heart problem, and how it would be fixed, from beginning to end. We discovered that after only 6 months of having you in our lives, you will have to have a dangerous and risky major heart surgery, to replace your heart with a mechanical heart machine so your heart could have a surgical repair procedure. The thought of your body relying on

a machine to keep everything else functioning made me feel sick. The worst part was, we discovered that as your body outgrows the repairs you would have to go through the same procedure and pain all over again. It seemed like your short little life was already going to be filled with obstacles, hurdles, pain and operations.

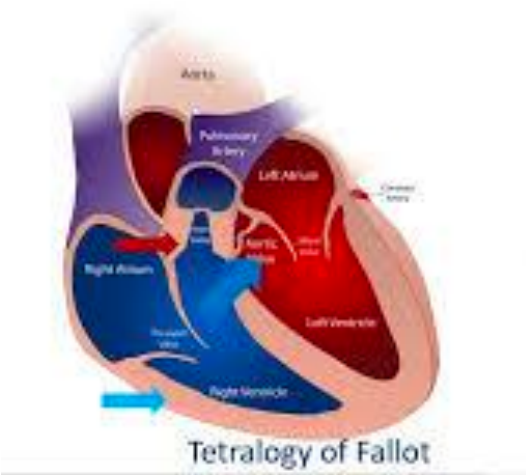
We spent the whole afternoon researching, reading, watching documentaries, reading books, Googling questions, basically arming ourselves with as much information as possible. The most useful resource was a book from the British Heart Foundation, kindly given to us by the hospital. It was so informative, and easy to read and understand. I quickly read through the book, eager to get as much information as possible, your mum and I informing each other of little snippets of information as we came across them. As I got to the end of the book, it told us the different stories of people who had been diagnosed with TOF, and their families. There were a series of questions at the end of the book that resonated with me:

- I thought only old people had heart problems?

- Will my baby survive?
- How will it affect their life?
- Why does this have to happen to *my* baby?

The last question broke me. It was the question that had been spinning round in my own head since the doctors gave us your diagnosis. My eyes welled up with uncontrollable, salty tears that gushed down my face. I sobbed like a baby, as all the emotions of the past 3 days poured out. My mouth was releasing sounds I had never made before; all I can describe it as is an uncontrollable wail, and I didn't even care who heard. I was gasping, sobbing, I couldn't breathe for the tears that were flowing. I felt the cry deep inside of me, as if my heart was actually breaking over. Your mum held me tightly and comforted me. She was being strong for me now, just as I had been strong for her. I feel so blessed to have had her through this journey. Although your diagnosis was easily one of the worst moment of our lives, and both of us would change it in a

heartbeat if we had a magic wand, it definitely brought your mum and I closer together as we had to support each other through this turbulent time.



## CHAPTER 5

# THE NEXT STEPS

“Trust your instincts, and make decisions based on what your heart tells you. The heart will not betray you.” -

David Gemmell

**A** week after our devastating meeting, the cardiologist Dr. Brown called us back in to discuss the following options, each of them with their own set of complications.

1. Conduct a test to diagnose any syndromes or genetic problems.
2. To abort you.
3. To carry on with the pregnancy as normal.

As you can see, there was no easy option. The first option would mean a Chorionic villus sampling test, where a sample



of the sac fluid inside mum's belly is taken. Due to the nature of the procedure, there was a risk of 1/150 that it could cause a miscarriage as the sac could rupture. I shuddered at the thought. The odds seemed extremely high when considering your life - were we playing with fire?

The second option was not even an option, we didn't want to discuss it. Imagine if we aborted you, after trying for a baby for so long, and then finding out we could never conceive again. Your mum and I's perfect relationship would have been destroyed. The thought of aborting you turned my stomach. It wasn't happening.

The third option seemed the safest, although the cardiologist tried to be realistic and warned "There is a high chance your baby will have 1 or all of these problems we discussed."

Your mum and I were united as a couple. If you arrived with major disorders and defects, were we prepared to care for you,

no matter what? The answer was simple. The answer was yes -  
NO MATTER WHAT.

We never looked back, what was the point? We didn't even want to risk the chance of having the DNA sample as we were already having you, no matter what happened.

Finally, after our decision was made, it was time to tell the family. We went on to explain to the family what we had been talking about and discussing. We shed so many tears sharing the information with our family as every time we talked about it the emotions came flooding back. Above all, what was clear was how loved you were already, little man. Every family member was so supportive of us, and so excited to meet you. I knew that, surrounded by this love, you could overcome anything.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE SECOND MEETING

“It’s not about making the right choice. It’s about making a choice and making that choice right in the end. ” - J. R. Rim

**I**t was our second meeting with Dr Brown, the cardiologist. This meeting brought less anxiety, as your mum and I had made a firm decision that we would be proceeding with the pregnancy, with no abortion and no testing for defects. We had had over a week now to process our emotions, so although it was still very raw and new the feelings of shock had definitely subdued for me.

For your mother, it was a different story. Not only was she pregnant, causing huge physical and hormonal changes, but

she also had to process the fact that her unborn baby had a heart defect which would change your little life. It hit her a lot harder, and with every appointment she was nauseous, with a racing heart and high anxiety. I had to swallow my feelings of worry and be there for your amazing mum. She needed me, and you needed me.

Again, Dr. Brown repeated every single possible outcome and complication, weighing up the benefits and disadvantages of every single defect and disorder that we may face up ahead. She was well-meaning, and just wanted to prepare us, but the repetition just brought back the raw feelings of panic and worry. I knew that I had to fight it, be strong, and be a firm shoulder to cry on as that's what held us all together and got us through these tough times.

Re-living the talk was like experiencing horrible déjà vu, however we were strengthened by the fact that we had made our final decision. Dr. Brown respected our decision, reminded us of the possible consequences, but ultimately wished us luck and told us to return when you were 36-37 weeks along. We

said goodbye, and I was uncertain what exactly would happen the next time we saw Dr. Brown. The future was so uncertain.

Nevertheless, we walked out the hospital with our heads held high. We were a team, united, ready to take on any challenge. As we walked out of the hospital again we managed to get a little bit further than last time, making it further than the middle of the car park before mum broke down and started crying in my arms again. However, it wasn't as intense as the first time, as we had each other, and we both knew we would do whatever we could to keep you safe.

## CHAPTER 7

# 9 MONTHS OF HEAVEN

"A baby is carried inside a woman for 9 months, then in your arms for 3 years, and in your heart until the day you die. " - Mary Mason

**A**fter a tumultuous start to the pregnancy, your mother and I decided that what will be will be; it was time to enjoy the remaining pregnancy, no matter what else was thrown our way. You were coming, no matter what, and we knew there would be complications, but every day we grew stronger. We decided that we would cross any bridge that came, when the time was right and when the problems were in front of us. And most importantly, I wanted your mum to have a calm, relaxing pregnancy. She is an amazing woman, and deserved an amazing pregnancy. So, we decided to embrace the natural beauty of pregnancy and enjoy every minute until you were born and we were faced with more difficult decisions.

I remember the first time I felt you move, it was absolutely mind-blowing and one of the best experiences of my life. Lying in bed with your mum, she excitedly squealed 'The baby's moving!' I placed my hand on her gorgeous baby bump and felt you wriggle and kick, as if you were saying hello. We zipped right back into our blissful baby bubble from that point, comforted that you were okay and progressing as well as you could be. With every tiny milestone, we wanted to shout it from the rooftops; family and friends were so excited for us, knowing how difficult our start to the pregnancy was. We shared the news with everyone and it was amazing. It was even more precious knowing that there could be complications so a sign of life was an amazing sign from you.

Every day you amazed us with more beautiful moments as mum's belly grew bigger. Mum continuously sang songs to you which you loved wriggling to. I started listening to you moving around in mum's tummy; I used to excitedly say, 'I can hear his heart beating!' Which mum didn't believe at all, until we looked it up on the old Google search - well, by the time you read this Google will definitely be old! - and we realised I was

right. One thing we loved to do was put a remote control on





your mum's tight belly to see your kicks wobbling the remote. It really was amazing, and gave us hope that you were going to get through this. You were our strong healthy baby boy, and you were showing us just how determined you were every day!

Another special day was when we went and got our new family car - a new, jet-black Mercedes. We sold mum's car, her precious sapphire blue Audi S3 which was given to her as a wedding gift, to get you a bigger car, for all of your baby items like the pushchair and car seat. It was a very proud and significant moment for your mum and I as it proved our family was expanding - and hopefully you remember your first ever family car!

Every time we were around mums, cousins, friends and sisters we always asked them to feel you in mum's tummy because I was already so proud of my little bump. I could tell you were a little fighter, and we were going to get through this.



## CHAPTER 8

# COVID-19

*"Life isn't about hoping you get dealt good cards, but about playing a poor hand of cards well." - Robert L. Stevenson*

**A**nd after all the emotional rollercoaster we had already been on, life decided to throw another spanner in the works: COVID-19, or Coronavirus. Now, I am sure that one day you will be studying about this in History at school, so make sure you read this carefully!

Coronavirus was especially dangerous for your mum as she was pregnant, and not only pregnant but with a high-risk pregnancy due to your heart condition. Pregnancy and the prospect of giving birth can be an anxious time, even more so during this unprecedented time of COVID-19.

If you told me a few weeks ago, when we were receiving the terrible news about your Tetralogy of Fallot, that we would be giving birth to our first child during a worldwide pandemic, we wouldn't have believed you.

I was one of those people, that when we first heard about the coronavirus outbreak in China, who thought "ahhh it will never reach the UK!" Oh how wrong I was. As the next few weeks flew by, we experienced the most ridiculous range of emotions. Appointments suddenly became really scary; they were either cancelled completely, or only your mother was allowed to go. I felt completely sidelined as the dad; all I wanted was to support my wife and be there for you, my little prince.

Your mum's maternity experience was completely destroyed, and I felt so sorry for her. She wasn't able to have a baby shower and get spoiled by our female family members and family friends. We weren't able to go to prenatal classes, and meet other people having babies at the same time as us. Shops were panic buying, and nappies and bottles were selling out quickly. Fear, panic, and shock was settling in.

All the 'what ifs' came flooding in. What if you, my precious baby, caught COVID-19 and couldn't cope because of your heart condition? What if your mother caught it, and - God forbid - had a miscarriage? There was so much uncertainty, and nobody really had the answers.

But more importantly, we were becoming increasingly anxious about what labour and bringing you into the world was going to be like. Again, there were lots of rumours circulating about birth partners, visitors and appointments. Whilst I didn't want to panic, it was hard not to. I could not miss the birth of my firstborn child.

They soon announced that all appointments needed to be attended alone. Every time I sent your mum off, I felt sorrow and anxiety at the thought of her receiving some bad news without me. It was crushing. I was supposed to be her provider, her rock; and the pandemic had taken that way from me. A lot of rumours have said that hospitals will be saying no birth partners, or that the man will have to leave immediately. I am

definitely scared about this being on the horizon. We just have to take every day as it comes.

Although we are trying to stay positive for you, our son, it was difficult to not feel hard done by about the whole thing and that everything was a little bit unfair. Our first experience of birth and parenthood wasn't at all what we expected, and there will always be a part of me that will be jealous of all the people that get to experience "normal" complication-free, restriction-free pregnancies and births.

Part of me wants you to hurry up and get here. The other part wants you to stay put for as long as possible, so we have just that little bit longer without having to deal with COVID-19, heart complications, and operations. But. I also feel lucky and grateful that something so positive is going to be happening to our family amongst all of this. At the end, we will have you, our beautiful bundle of joy. It will all be worth it in the end, no matter how many hurdles life throws at us

.





## CHAPTER 9

# BOY OR GIRL?

*Almost time to see, which will it be?*

*A handsome little he,*

*Or a beautiful little she?*





**W**e got a private scan, called Window to the Womb, where they wrote down your gender on a piece of paper, and two confetti canisters to pop. Normally our appointments were filled with anxiety, but we absolutely bounced out of this one, feeling on top of the world. In the appointment, we could hear your strong heartbeat, pounding away and letting us know you were ready to fight. The sonographer recorded your little heartbeat, and placed the



recording inside an adorable teddy. I will treasure that teddy forever. She wrote down your gender for us and placed it inside an envelope, telling us to open it when we were ready. We clutched that precious little piece of paper all the way home, worried It would blow away or get lost!



Coronavirus had put a dampener on our plans to reveal your gender to our family, friends, and the world. We already had to cancel the baby shower, and now the gender reveal. We really didn't want to miss out on your gender reveal, your mum and I discussed "Shall we just sit at the table and open the envelope together?". After all we had planned, it seemed a bit sad, especially when we were so excited. So we decided to go live on Instagram and on Facebook, which probably don't exist when you're reading this!

On the day of the gender reveal, your mother and I were so excited to find out, it was like Christmas morning. The feeling was truly magical. We ran to the shop and bought all the decorations, including a backdrop with all the trimmings and little dangly words hanging off our tree.



The suspense built up for around 15mins whilst all our friends were watching, commenting, answering the questions.

Finally, it was time to open the envelope. The suspense was through the roof. I had the envelope with boy or girl, your mum had the confetti. And we were ready to go! 3...2...1...

1...1...The suspense continued! Mum just could not pop the confetti, despite her trying, and it was so funny we just giggled away as all our friends and family waited to see the colours explode into the air. After what seemed like hours of counting down all we could see was an amazing explosion of blue confetti, like a shower of happiness.

As every piece of confetti landed around the garden, your



mum leaped high in the air with you in her belly and landed in my arms with joy, as we kissed each other our friends had their phones and their glasses in their hands and we all made a toast to your health and happiness. We were having a little man! Tears of joy streamed down my face.

Whether you had been a boy or girl it wouldn't have mattered, but after so much upset we finally had a moment of pure joy. Now all I wanted was to hold my little man in my arms. We knew you were going to be so spoilt and loved by your family;



strangely enough, 90% of people predicted you would be a boy, and they were right! It seemed that everybody knew we would have a little prince.





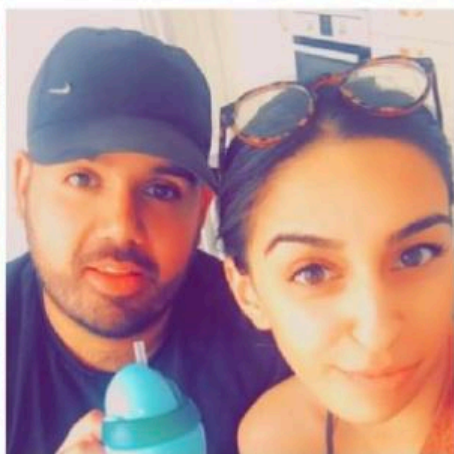
**Sonia Kaur** is 😊 feeling excited with **Gurms Singh Nagra**.



7 mins • 👤

So excited for **Jemma Kapre** & **Aqib Kapre** 🎉🎉  
Thank you for having us involved with your  
LIVE **#GenderReveal**! Welcome to the Boy  
Club!

Little Kinny got another Play Date Buddy 😍💙  
Happy Birthday Kibs! From the Nagra's 🥳 xx  
(Yes we raised Kinnys flask for a cheers Lol)





**Kelvin Charles**



1 min. •

Congratulations @kapre2012 and @jemma\_jems on the announcement of your precious baby boy. We had a little celebration 🍷 for you both. Can't wait to meet him and happy birthday bro, what a birthday to remember. Stay safe! Blessings from me @charljbr, Cerisse and baby bump.





## CHAPTER 10

# THE FINAL TRIMESTER

*"When giving birth to a baby, you give birth to new possibilities within yourself and your life."*

- Myla and Job Kabat Zinn

**I**t was getting close to D-Day - the arrival of you, our most precious blessing. We were in turmoil; mum's placenta was low-lying, meaning your exit passage through the birth canal was completely blocked. This meant that our hand was forced; we were to have a Caesarian section, or else risk losing both you and your mother. My heart sunk at the thought of living life without the two things most precious to me. I knew I wouldn't cope.

This was really difficult for us to comprehend; after expanding on our knowledge on pregnancies, and looking at the proven

health benefits for natural births and a natural upbringing, such as breastfeeding, we wanted to give you all of this considering your complications. All me and your mum wanted to do was give you the best of everything to get through the hurdles ahead.

We kept going back and forth, really not sure of the right decision to make. Your poor mum was so uncertain; she didn't want to have a C-Section, and firmly believed that a natural birth was best. I told her firmly that it was her decision at the end of the day, and they couldn't force her to have a C-Section if she didn't want one.

On top of that, they wanted to do the C-Section two weeks earlier than your due date, which we really struggled with. You were already going to be born with heart problems, having you two weeks premature seemed to make it even riskier to us. When we addressed it with the midwives, we expressed our concerns and asked if there were any other options. Luckily, the midwives were very accommodating, and told us to come in for another chat. That way, they could do a further inspection on your mum to see what the situation was.

When we arrived, luckily we were in the capable and caring hands of Dr. Simpson, an amazing doctor whose praises we couldn't sing highly enough. He was assertive and straight to the point, but he was clearly passionate about his job, to look after these women that are going through potentially life threatening and traumatic events.

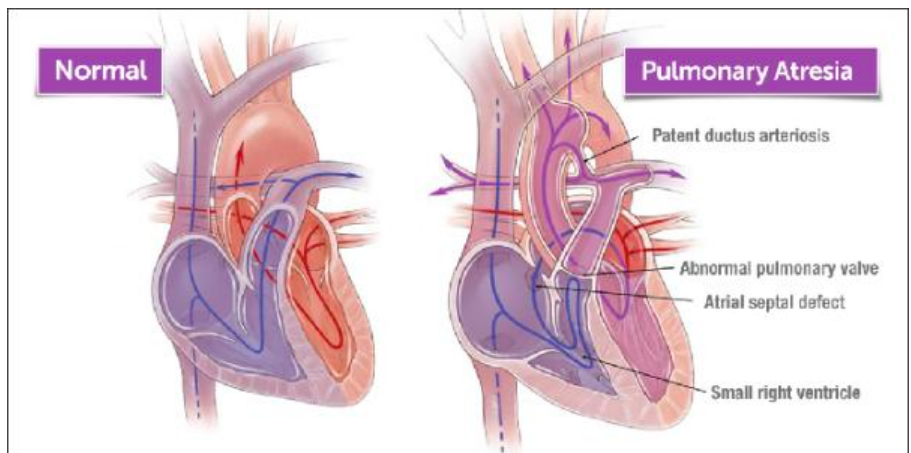
Dr. Simpson said in simple terms, "We could respect your wish to have a natural birth, but the risk to both you and your son would be very high."

I tried not to concentrate too much on the outcome and we both settled on the clear decision to have the c section, it was definitely a good choice to make given the circumstances although not ideal. We decided to delay the c section right up until the 37 weeks point, still holding onto the hope that you may come out naturally. However, as we all know by now, life doesn't work that way! As long as you arrived safely, that's all we wanted.

As we arrived for the final cardiac scan, it felt like history repeating itself. The cardiologists had a deep, intense,

thorough look again, rolling the ultrasound all around your tiny little heart, which thumped away in the background.

Around 30mins we went back to that small consultation room. We could tell something was wrong. Just when we thought we was better prepared for the whole situation, another heartbreaking obstacle was thrown at us. We then found out on top of all the complications you already had, one of your arteries was completely blocked. Dr Barwick explained that this was called pulmonary atresia.



This meant that, in only the first precious few days of your little life, you would have to undergo life-threatening surgery where they use a stent to force your heart duct to stay open. The stent would act as a metal cage, keeping the valve open and allowing blood to pump through easily. Dr Barwick said that your case was severe as it was combined with TOF, and that without this surgery you would not survive.

It felt like our world had crumbled all over again. It didn't seem possible that we could feel any worse. Being so close to the end of your mum's pregnancy, we knew that there was nothing we could do; we had to take each day, each hour, each minute as it comes. We were helpless, but we were together and united as a family, and that's all that mattered.



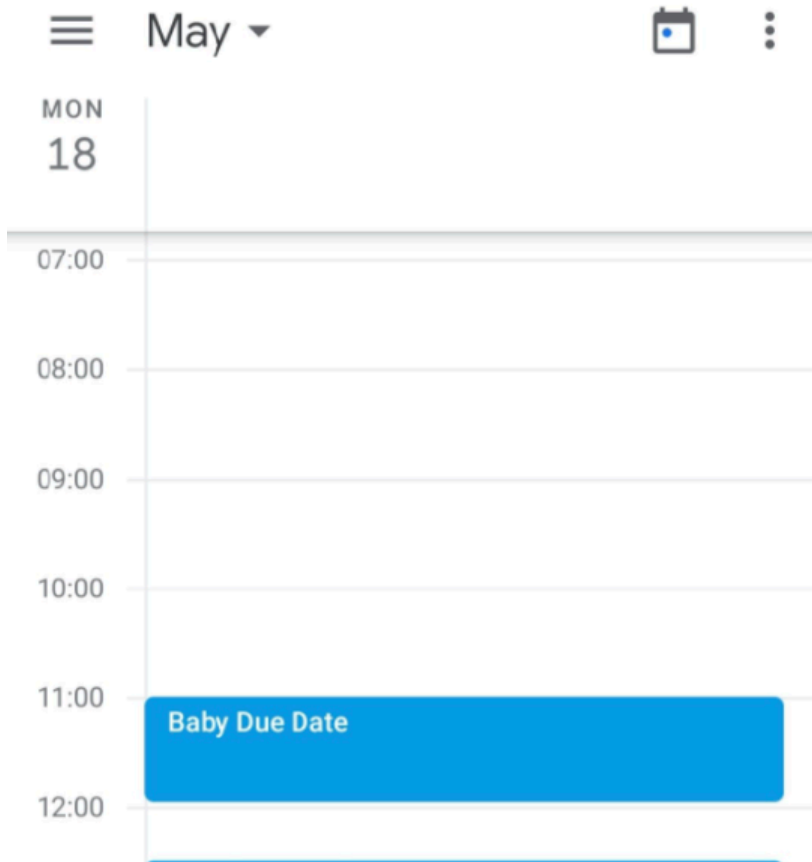
## CHAPTER 11

# D-DAY!

*"Some people are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." - William Shakespeare*

9 am, 27th May, 2020. The day and time our lives would change forever. Awake at 05:30, two overstuffed bags full to the brim with things we may need for your birth. It was the most exciting day of our lives. We weren't due in for another 4 hours, but we were so desperate to get to the hospital.

You were the best diary appointment I've ever written in my calendar. We had originally pencilled you in for the 18th May, however we wanted to leave you snuggled in your mother's belly for as long as possible. You were our most precious arrival, and we knew you would have a difficult start anyway.



We felt absolutely no need to rush so you could grow as much as possible before we brought you into the world.

The time was creeping closer and closer to 9am. We frantically called LGI a few times on that morning to try find out the next steps, but each time we hit the engaged tone. After the 4th

ring, we finally made contact, and the nurses informed us that they were holding a meeting to discuss your birth. 30mins later they had called us back and informed us that there were no beds available, meaning your birth may not go ahead today. It felt like another hurdle to jump. Your mum, being her and feeling so protective over you, instantly snapped "His due date is in 4 days so how are you going to manage to reschedule another appointment!"

After about 10mins of heated debate they instructed us to come right now, and suddenly all stations were go. Although we were fully organised, thanks to your mum, we still felt a blind fear that we had forgotten something. We rushed in an organised panic to get to the hospital. It's now past your appointment time around 9:30, and we were worried sick that something else would go wrong, but also filled with excitement at the thought of seeing your perfect little face.

The walk down the corridor to the delivery suite felt like we were walking 1000 miles. We suddenly reached the point I was dreading, where I thought I would be cast aside like a stranger in the building.



The reason I was panicking about being rejected as the birthing partner was because of what our friends, who themselves had been through the ordeal of delivering a baby during a global pandemic, had recently said. Mike said, "It's not good, they tell you that you are allowed to go into the delivery room over the last few months, but really it's all a lie when you get there they don't let you in, I had to pull my phone out and record them and tell them that my wife doesn't speak English and you can't leave her by herself that's the only way I could force my way in. "

Kelvin said "They have told me that we aren't allowed to go into the delivery suite but they will call me just before the baby arrives and I'm allowed to stay there for 1 hour with the right PPE". Either situation seemed horrible. I needed to be there for you and your mother, especially when we knew that you were going to be born with heart problems. In my head, I was thinking the worst, and I didn't know how many days I would get with you in total, so every minute was precious.

I imagined every single scenario in which I could be with you and your mum; bribing the nurses, claiming my civil rights,

causing a commotion...in every scene, I knew it would worry and panic your mum and I couldn't put her through that. I scolded myself for being so inconsiderate at such a vital time, when your health hang in the balance.

We walked through the doors; the nurse stated 'Can you both wash your hands please?', which gave me a wave of relief that I was maybe going to be allowed to stay and comfort your mum for just that little bit longer.

The nurses sat us down in the room where a heavily pregnant woman opposite, waiting to be induced, said, "You came at a perfect time, a woman has been screaming for the last 2 days and has just stopped". She looked so uncomfortable and exhausted, bless her, and I don't think it made your mum feel any better.

The lady looked me up and down, saying "My husband isn't allowed to be here, he is waiting downstairs". That confirmed my worst fears.

"Oh," we replied in disappointment, me and your mum looked at each other solemnly whilst we could hear the distance screams of women in labour and newborn baby squeals. Every moment, we were thinking I could be sent down to the waiting area. It was now an anxious waiting game.

The nurses attended to mum and took no notice of me, like I was a ghost, although I didn't complain as at least I could still be in the same room as your mum.



After about 30-40mins the nurse finally realised I was here, and said "Are you dad?" I responded yes, glad that they had briefly acknowledged me at some point, although today was all about your mum who was doing so well. My role was just watching and learning.

1 hour 30mins or so had passed, and still no baby! We were so impatient to meet you and check you were okay. Mum's blood pressure was too high, most likely due to the anxiety of the upcoming surgery, and because of this they couldn't send her into the theatre. They gave mum some tablets and checked her around 20mins later to make sure her blood levels had lowered.

While they waited for the blood pressure to come down they did the COVID- 19 test. Hopefully by the time you read this these will be a part of history that you don't have to do anymore. The tests are dreadful and added more discomfort to your poor mum. She hated it. Imagine someone twisting a cotton stick the size of a pencil down the back of your throat,



tickling your tonsils, causing you to gag and retch repeatedly.  
Then, they sweep the inside of your nose, going so far

upwards you can feel your brain being tickled! It truly is horrible but necessary to make sure everyone in hospital is safe.

Afterwards, we signed the anaesthetic disclaimer form, which gave away our rights to sue if anything went wrong with the surgery. We were focusing on the positives, which is that we would meet you soon, our precious baby boy.

## CHAPTER 12

# HE'S COMING!

*"There are two great days in a person's life - the day we are born, and the day we discover why." - William Barclay*

**I**t's time! Mum was getting rolled into a room by 3 caring and kind nurses, which eventually increased to 5 nurses. They were chitter chatting away about the telly they had watched last night, which really relaxed me as it meant they were relaxed too. This was an everyday procedure for them.

It was time for the epidural. The doctors brought out what looked like a lance, around 2.5 inches long and 2mm thick. . This was the guide for the anaesthetic needle which looked around 100mm long but very fine and bendy. Both of them looked terrifying, and your mum was so brave. She was about to go through so much pain to bring you into the world.

The nurse loaded the needles with the anaesthetic, and slowly pushed the injection, squirting the liquid into the air like you see in the movies. Then, it was time to inject your mum. The first time the nurse inserted the fine, bendy needle it didn't seem to want to go in. I was so worried for your mum, seeing the nurse wiggle this long needle around in your back so close to your spine. I knew he was the expert, so I let him do his job and all I could do was silently watch over your mother. Your mum's temperature went through the roof, and she complained she was feeling sick, which worried me. I laid a hand on her forehead and it was burning hot. Luckily, the nurses are so caring and laid a cool, wet flannel on her forehead which helped. I knew they were going to get us through this as safely as possible.

And then suddenly, everything seemed to hurtle into fast forward mode. I couldn't even take in or process everything the doctors and nurses were doing, because they were doing it so quickly and professionally and I had absolutely no clue what a C-section involved. I wanted to soak in every minute, but it



was physically impossible. All I could do was wait for you to arrive.

And it was nearly time. They were testing if mum's lower body was numbed by pricking her with the tips of small needles. She was completely numb, which must have felt terrifying for her, but we were one step closer to seeing your perfect face.



## CHAPTER 13

# IT'S SHOW TIME

*"Making the decision to have a child — it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." - Elizabeth Stone*

**T**he theatre room was filled with 11-13 nurses and doctors, dressed in scrubs, masks, gloves, the full works. Shiny, sharp instruments glittered in a row and I cringed at the thought of scalpels slicing your mum apart. The medical professionals introduced themselves and said their role, but their names and faces are a blur now, I was just concentrating on hoping you got out safely. They pulled up a cold, plastic seat for me that they faced toward's your mum so I was looking at her, and placed a curtain over mum's belly so she wouldn't be able to see the cut they would make, but I could still see over and look at what they were doing to the bump. As I was positioned towards mum, I felt so relieved I was able to be

there for her. So many other men were not as lucky during the pandemic. I held her hand tightly as I curiously peered over the curtain, wanting to see my son come into the world.

Mum was talking to the anaesthetic nurse, who was reassuring her that everything would be fine. We were so lucky to have such a kind and professional team around us.

The doctors made the first surgical incision, slicing through layers of mum's stomach, positioning their fingers around you to make sure they didn't accidentally cut you. Suddenly, your mum's stomach was sliced wide open, and the doctors used their body weight to plunge their hands so deep into your mum's stomach. I was absolutely shocked at the power and force of their body that they used to delve their hands past your mum's organs and into her womb. I was stunned, fascinated, curious, but above all desperate to see you and hear your cry.

Suddenly, gushes of opaque, rosy red fluid poured out of mum's belly. I was shocked, looking back now I can understand it was the amniotic fluid that was keeping you safe in the

amniotic sac, and it had to come out for you to come into the world. It still didn't stop my jaw from dropping, Your mum immediately noticed and started panicking, of course she couldn't feel or see anything so she had no clue that fluid had just exploded all over her. I tried diverting the conversation and asked your mum, "So what was the anaesthetic nurse saying about your recovery time?", maintaining eye contact directly with your mum and I completely avoided her question. I acted oblivious, as if I couldn't see that their hands were elbow deep in her stomach. I kept mumbling along to your mum, I don't even think what I was saying was properly making sense. I was just trying to make conversation. Thankfully the nurse caught her attention and she was back to being distracted. I was so glad she couldn't feel any pain, even though she had been sawn in half with doctors rummaging around her inside.

9 months, 273 days, 394,200 minutes, 23,670,000 seconds.

That was our long, agonising wait to meet you, my little prince.

After 9 months of anticipation and suspense, I caught my first glimpse of you, and wow you were breathtaking. Your face was everything we had dreamed of, so perfectly formed, with the cutest little button nose. Slowly they pulled your body out, it was so long! I can't believe your amazing mum had carried something that size around inside her, it felt so overwhelming. I felt a beam of happiness spread across my face, I was grinning ear to ear, my boy has arrived! I said to mum, "He's here, he is out!" You hadn't made any noise yet, I think you were shocked at your entrance! This began to concern your mum as she couldn't see or feel anything, however as I had seen your beautiful face I wasn't as worried. I reassured her you were fine to keep your mum calm, but inside, I was uncertain. Why weren't you crying? Why was it so quiet? A minute or two passed, however it felt like an hour, but eventually we heard your first little cry, sounding so surprised. I saw your mum break out into an amazing smile, and I suddenly realised we were a real family now. Holding you high into the air, they cut the umbilical cord and then took you to examine you on some sort of baby bench. Me and mum were still clenching hands as we smiled lovingly at each other, the moment had been filled

with an overwhelming feeling of relief and momentary happiness. Still, I knew what was coming, and the dark thoughts of your heart problems lurked in the back of my mind.

I heard a nurse calling “Dad, come over!” And I couldn’t move fast enough. I let go of your mum’s hand, dashing out of my seat to come and meet my darling boy. I came over to the table, heart pumping loudly,



and you had such a soft and precious cry. I looked at your perfect little hands, feet, and perfectly



formed face. I was blown away. Wriggling like mad, you were startled and shocked in this large white room. You looked so healthy! However, in the back of our mind I remembered that awful appointment where they reeled off a list of all the different syndromes and conditions you could be born with.



Although I still was unsure what to expect next, just by looking at your face I knew I would do anything to protect you.

I was overfilled with joy and love. I nervously asked, "Can I touch him?", desperate to have some physical contact with you, my newborn son. It just all happened so fast. Suddenly,



you were all clean and swaddled up, ready to take you over to mum who was desperate to meet you. As they passed you over into her arms, she cried "He's PERFECT!", feeling the same overwhelming happiness that I did. She was still feeling hot, and the nurses were so good at keeping her cool with flannels over her head, and they dabbed her as she cuddled you. You had finally arrived, and now the real adventure could begin.





## CHAPTER 14

# NEONATAL UNIT

*"Nothing is scarier than having a sick child, and one so newly born, and so vulnerable. It's a parent's worst nightmare. " - Ken Oppel*

**A**nd just like that, you were whisked away to the neonatal unit. I was so torn, I didn't know whether I was coming or going. Should I stay with your mum? Should I go comfort you? How on earth was I meant to choose? I was pacing back and forth like a wild animal, unable to make a choice, until eventually your mum said it was okay for me to stay with you. Your mum had the doctors watching over her, plus they had confirmed that the operation went routinely and you were expected to make a good recovery. Feeling reassured, I kissed your mum and sped down the hallway back to you.

I had never even heard of a neonatal unit until I experienced it first hand. It was filled with tiny, sick babies and worried parents. As soon as we entered the room they laid a soft towel down and placed you on a set of scales, weighing you. They took your weight in kilograms - 2.9KG, which is 6.4lbs, my beautiful and healthy baby boy!

I was hoping for a cuddle, just to hold you and smell that precious new baby smell. To my dismay, I saw them wrap you up and place you in the incubator, shutting you in a plastic prison. I was heartbroken. I feel like I didn't even get a chance for some precious father-son time yet.

A couple of polite, professional nurses were caring for you at this point, putting your nappy on, taking your blood, attaching all your wires. A strange wave of jealousy washed over me - shouldn't I be helping? Why wasn't I allowed to touch my baby?

I felt like a ghost. Although, the most important thing is that the nurses were so attentive to you; they were making sure



they gave you everything you needed, I couldn't ask for anything more.

They were then discussing administering the Prostin into your body to keep your ductal valve

open. A wave of panic stabbed into my heart, it felt like a rock in my stomach weighing me down. Only an hour old, so tiny and frail, and already being given heavy duty medication. This was the beginning of a long journey. Secretly, I was glad your mum was not here to see this, she didn't need anything to upset her after having major surgery. I knew I had to be strong for you, my boy.

Part of me was still hopeful that your heart had been born correctly formed - I wanted to shout, *'You shouldn't be putting any drugs in my baby until you are sure he has this condition that you claim!'*.

Deep down, I still held onto a glimmer of hope that a medical professional would appear and say "We've made a mistake, there is nothing wrong with your son." I knew I was just being naive, and that they had directly checked your heart from out of the womb.

Looking back, I completely understand why they started the Prostin treatment without thoroughly examining your heart and it was literally to keep you alive after birth without any side effects. How could I argue against that? As I sat in the father's seat by the incubator, I could only feel intense worries for your safety. Not holding you was going against every single fatherly instinct, but unfortunately as I was about to find out it was a feeling I was about to get used to.

I was so close to holding you, yet so far from actually feeling your warmth and holding your tiny body close to mine. I felt hopeless as I watched your tiny lips tremble in fear. Watching you through the incubator, I felt like you were trapped and I couldn't reach you. I couldn't comfort you. In all honesty, even if I could reach you, would I know what to do? I had only been a dad for less than an hour. All I could do was gaze into your beautiful eyes, memorise every inch of your dreamy face, taking pictures and videos to remember this later on, and show you when you're older.

The incubator - your prison - was a plastic box with around four small, doors like holes that you could poke your hands in and out of. Checking that nobody could see, I sneakily opened a door so I can stroke you or put my finger in your hand. My finger looked so massive in your tiny fist, and even this small amount of contact made my heart burst. I didn't even know if I was allowed to do that - maybe I was letting the warmth out of your incubator, maybe I was putting you at risk of COVID, I wasn't sure. To be honest, I didn't care. I didn't know anything, but I just wanted to touch my little baby as it felt so sad not

being able to cuddle and kiss you. All I wanted was to squeeze you and tell you how loved you are. I was all alone, your mum was all alone, and you couldn't get any affection from either of us. I felt like I was a useless dad, just sat in his chair with nothing to do at the most important time of our lives. I really beat myself up in that plastic chair.

I stayed  
with you  
for around  
4 hours,  
just  
watching  
your every  
move and  
absorbing  
the first  
start of  
your life.





Eventually, the nurses forced me to leave, as they were placing feeding tubes into the remainder of your umbilical cord, as the medication would absorb quicker and therefore make you better faster. For the procedure, which I'll never understand, the curtains have to go up and the parents get sent off. Feeling unnatural, and going against my fatherly instincts, I left you for the first time and went looking for mum. Every step I took away from you, I wanted to turn around and come straight back, and I was counting down the seconds until we were reunited.

I tried walking down the same corridor, but all the corridors looked the same. I was totally lost, I had forgotten how I made it to neonatal, I was going back on myself and getting into a panic. I just wanted to get back to either you or your mum as soon as possible.

I was so consumed with your safety nothing else was going through my mind at the time I rushed off with you and the nurse. I could not retrace my steps whatsoever. After what seemed like forever and a few circles, spinning round and round, I saw your mum's face and instantly ran over.

We had a tight embrace and I kissed her cheek. The poor thing was supposed to be resting and recovering from a major surgery, but how could she relax? You were now 4 hours old, and you were on your own in the neonatal unit. Your mum had only met you for a brief moment before you were ripped away. You could be crying your eyes out and neither of us would have known. It broke us to pieces, we felt useless.

At least I had gotten to spend time with you, albeit through a plastic wall, but it was better than what your mum had. She was desperate to see you, feel you, hold the boy that she birthed. I asked mum how she was doing, which she completely ignored and instead said "How is he?" All she wanted to know was how you were doing. I pulled out my phone immediately to share the gorgeous photos and video collection I had already stored. It looked like I had hundreds, but even thousands wouldn't have been enough. Mum couldn't stop watching the videos, and she began to sob, again overwhelmed with emotions. I wish I could have taken her pain away. How was it fair that she wasn't able to see you

but carried you for 9 painstaking months? She had been stripped of her very beginning to motherhood.

Of course, your mum was already acting like super-mum - not much has changed, eh! When I was gone, she was already in mum mode and had already expressed her first bits of colostrum with the expressing machine given at the ward. She had expressed 10-20mls, but all the nurses were amazed, and so impressed with your mum's efforts. They kept repeating, "Have you been practicing this at home?" Which your mum hadn't been, she was just an absolute natural like I knew she would be.

After spending a couple of hours with your mum, it was time to make the difficult decision again to leave the love of my life to go back and find my little man. It didn't get any easier, except for finding your room, which was more straightforward now I had my bearings.

As I ripped back the curtains, eager to see my beautiful baby boy, I gasped in shock. Your tiny body was laden with even more wires and even more tubes, as if you didn't have enough

already. You poor thing, you just looked so uncomfortable, your bellybutton stuffed with wires and cables. I knew that your mum would break down when she saw you.

It's crazy how you just get the hang of parenting. After 4-6 hours of being a dad, I became more and more confident by the minute. I was asking questions, I was telling the nurses how I felt. And also I was becoming more exhausted, and more starving. I thought of your poor mum, who was also exhausted and starving, but with her stomach cut open and kept away from her firstborn child for hours on end.

What hurt me the most is how you looked and felt.- and it wasn't happy, or comforted, or pain-free. How could you be, in



that tiny plastic box, hooked up to wires and tubes? Your tiny lips, perfectly formed, were wobbling and it broke my heart.

Hours later, the darkness of the evening had taken over finally, our first night as parents was about to begin.

Eventually, mum rolled in, placed in a wheelchair and being pushed by the nurse. Bless her, your mum looked physically exhausted, but all she could care about was seeing you. Mum wheeled towards the bed, just glad to be finally able to see you up close and in person. She wheeled right up to the side of the incubator, and despite the pain slowly stood up to see your precious face and tiny body.

Without thinking or asking, she immediately opened up the incubator to stroke you and feel you for the first time. It was a magical moment for all of us, mum was so overjoyed to see you and to hold your tiny hand. She felt the same overwhelming sadness as me to see you hooked up to a multitude of wires and tubes. As the tears rolled down her face, your mum started to sob as she whispered to you "Mummy's here, Mummy's here, beautiful boy, hold mama's

hand, it's okay baby boy". Hearing those words made tears well up in my eyes as well, not just with sadness at the situation but also pride in our family unit. The tears and sniffles continued. Shortly after, the kind and caring nurse asked mum "Do you want to hold him?" Mum couldn't say 'YES!' Fast enough.

Hold on, nobody told me you were allowed out of the incubator?! I was frustrated, I had let you sit in there all alone for 8 hours, thinking I couldn't hold you. Although unwrapping



all the wires would have frightened me, there were so many times that I wanted to comfort you and cuddle you.



Nevertheless, mum was doing an amazing job and she looked like such a natural. Despite your mum having major abdominal surgery, and not being able to feel her lower body, she managed to hobble to your incubator, stand up on wobbly, numb legs, navigate her way through the maze of wires which wrapped around you, and hold you tightly in her arms. That woman is a superhero, and we are both so lucky to have her.

Upon finally having that contact with your mum which you were clearly waiting for, you finally settled, so happy and content with the warm cuddle from mum, whom you shared 9 amazing inseparable months inside. It was a moment of major pure fulfilment to see our family united for the first time.

Although we knew there was more obstacles to come, it was a major milestone for all of us and a really special moment, one that we will cherish and tell you about for years.





## CHAPTER 15

# THE HARDEST WEEK OF OUR LIVES

*"If you're going through hell, just keep on going. "* -

*Winston Churchill*

**A**lthough you had safely entered the world there was still a mountain of emotions that we couldn't even start to comprehend, and we were only at the beginning of our journey as a family. In all honesty, we thought it had already been tough, but little did we know the difficult times were actually laying ahead. Kept secure in our little baby bubble, we didn't prepare for the future worries and unknowns because we were only concerned about you being alive and safe from the moment you came out. Little did I know that the next week

was about to become the hardest week we would ever face as a family in our lives.

When you were only 1 day old, the doctors whisked you away to analyse your heart condition, performing test after test to see the extent of your diagnosis. At my wit's end with pure desperation, I fell to my knees and I prayed to God that night. Speaking from the heart, I prayed desperately for a miracle; for the doctors to tell me they were wrong, and that your heart was perfectly healthy. Because that was what matched the picture of you in my mind; take away the tubes, the wires, and the incubator, you were a happy, healthy baby boy.

We had first had your diagnosis at 20 weeks, which shows the brilliance of technology. I'm sure that when you go on to have kids, they'll be doing all sorts of crazy things like being able to choose your child's gender!

After they had analysed your heart, we briefly had a glimmer of good news. There was a slim hope they could open the narrow valve without the open-heart surgery. We were over the moon at the possibility that you wouldn't have to have such an

invasive procedure at such a young age, and we felt like things could only get better.

After further testing and extensive professional meetings and discussions, the doctors confirmed at the end of the day that it wasn't likely they could help the narrowing of the valve yet. Back to square one.

Every day we were becoming more familiar with the nurses, who were literally angels walking among the hospital. They were so kind, so caring, and loved me buttering them up with chocolates! We got to know them all on a first name basis and constantly told them how grateful we were for caring for life's most precious gift - my firstborn son.

Our NHS, although absolutely amazing, was still struggling to get to grips with COVID-19. With all the restrictions going on, the nurses were getting stricter by the day, and stated that we couldn't be in the same room together. As the nurses were doing such a fantastic job, we decided not to push our luck

too much as they already had a stressful job without a pandemic to deal with.

From that point, mum and I started alternating meetings, appointments, and time spent with you in hospital. It was distressing for both of us, as neither of us wanted to leave you. We both missed beautiful moments, but your mum and I tried our hardest to make each other feel involved with Facetime. I'll never forget when your mum video called with an amazing surprise for me; a precious moment of you breastfeeding! I was so happy you were getting the nutrition that you need. To see you latch on so easy was naturally beautiful, there are a lot of concerns with new mothers being able to achieve this. I was so proud of you and your mum, it really did feel like we can challenge anything that came our way.

It was torture having to go home without you in my arms, and without your mum. The house felt so empty; why were my family not home with me? I was only allowed to visit the hospital once in the morning and once in the evening, for an hour each. As if I was a visitor, and not your father, the person who gave you life. It was wrong.

Having this extra bonding time made your mum's motherly instincts flood in. She was making sure she could give you every ounce of nutrition and all the cuddles she could. She was by your side constantly and stayed only a walk down the corridor at most when she lay down her head for a short while, so it was quite handy for you both to recover together. She knew that no matter what happens she has to make sure she dedicates her life to you to help you through your next days of life. Over the next few days, your mum would go above and beyond for you, showing you so much care it almost bordered on an obsession. Whenever I asked people, "What's it like having a child?" And they replied with "You won't know until you have kids", well I finally knew. I really admired your mum for providing you with so much love and support in your first few days. She really was Super-Mum. And boy, would you need that extra love and support later on in life.

After a couple days, mum was then discharged because she had recovered enough to not be in the hospital. You, my little fighter, were also moved to Lower Dependency Unit, as you had progressed so well. This should all have been good news -

however, this now meant that mum had to come home without you, and there were no fathers allowed in the Lower Dependency Unit. I had to accept the fact I may not see you for a little while, which was very hard to come to terms with. Your mum had to face coming home without her baby every night - and if I thought that was hard for me, it was torture for your poor mum. This was not the start to parenthood that we wanted, but it was the one we got, and we were going to make it work.

Initially, we were advised that you would be on Prostin for just a few days. Then, they would attempt the procedure that gave me waves of anxiety - the stents - so you would hopefully be home in 4 days. However, along came the weekend, with the news of "no surgery on weekends". It felt like a kick in the teeth because I just wanted to bring you home and now you had to stay there for an extra 2 days, with no progress just to pass the time because it's convenient for them. It was necessary but felt so frustrating being told he would be out in four days but only for them to extend the time. I just wanted my baby home.

## CHAPTER 16

# OUR MENTAL HEALTH

*"You look at me and cry; everything hurts. I hold you and whisper: but everything can heal." - Rupri Kaur*

**H**aving a seriously ill child is extremely stressful for parents, and nobody understands what it is truly like until they have been in the situation. Your mother and I felt so alone; people said that they were sorry, and they wanted you to get better soon, but did they truly *know*? The sleepless nights? The separation anxiety? Walking out of the hospital, wondering if your child would die while you are gone? The stress, depression and the exhaustion caused by uncertainty was certainly having an impact on your mum and I's mood and behaviour.



Everything was happening at once; I was worrying about my son, worrying about my wife, having work problems, car problems, the pandemic, moving offices, landlord issues...If it could go wrong, it was going wrong in my life.

Son, I don't want you to read this and think that mummy and I didn't love each other, because we do; that's why we felt vulnerable enough to take our anger out on each other. But we have to be honest and say that the relationship became very strained. The stress and pressure to keep it together for you was unfathomable, and your mum and I were taking it out on each other. We were getting agitated, being short tempered and snappy; Everything your mum did annoyed me, and everything i did annoyed mum. I was juggling too many responsibilities, not really doing any of them very well, and I knew one day that something I was trying to juggle would drop and fail. Nothing I was doing was good enough, and the thing that hurt me the most was feeling like I couldn't be a good dad to you.

Life was literally piling up around me; the letters were piling up, the bins were overflowing, my work tasks were getting

longer and longer. It wasn't like me at all. I was normally about spreading positive energy, but I just felt myself exuding negative vibrations. For once, I just wanted someone to listen to me vent. I felt so selfish; there you were, looking at me with big eyes and heart complications, and your mother had just had major abdominal surgery. Who did I think I was? Compared to you two, I had nothing to complain about.

And yet...I was broken. When well-meaning people tried to comfort me and say "Everything will be okay!", and I used to want to scream at them: *IT WONT! My newborn baby has to have surgery, please tell me how it will be okay!*

Your mum and I began to argue over insignificant things, such as how long she was taking to leave the hospital when I had to pick her up. My day would be spent driving your mum, who was already angry and upset with the situation and with life, to the hospital. Then, I would go to work, to continue providing for my family, dealing with all the stresses that work had. When I was finished, your mum would call me to come pick her up, normally around 10pm when she had finished your last feed and had put you down. She first told me to come up and wait

outside the ward in the long corridor, but it just kept taking so long I eventually said I'll just stay in the car. Even then, she was just taking longer and longer; '10 more minutes' turned into hours, until eventually I would fall asleep in the car, physically exhausted from work and emotionally exhausted from our situation. I would wake up in the car, with sharp pains in my neck, legs and back, with mum shouting at me because of the way the car was parked, which only made both of us more annoyed. Both of us would lose our temper, and it became more uncontrollable by the day. In reality, she wanted every last minute with her baby boy; to my tired and exhausted brain, she was taking the mick out of me. I would be left waiting outside the hospital for hours before she came out. The sleep deprivation did pile on to my anger and grief. In the past, I've told negative people to 'look on the positive side'; now that I was dealing with my son's medical emergency, from which there were no positives. I realised I was completely wrong, until you go through a similar situation yourself, you can't grasp the mental pressures, the mixed emotions and the chaotic thoughts that go around inside your mind. The thoughts I had were uncontrollable, some of the things that

would pass my head would make me feel horrible. I distinctly remember thinking "What if he dies? How would we cope? How could I fix your mum's broken heart and get her back to her normal self? It would be an impossible task".

In my deepest, darkest of days, the thought would run through my mind "Would this whole situation be easier if it just ended now? Would this be easier if he just died?" Just the thought made me feel sick and evil, shivers travelling down my spine. Looking back, I understand that I was going mad; my thoughts were racing at a million miles an hour, of course I was going to think about every possibility. It didn't take away my love for you in the slightest. All I could do was pray, pray, and pray for my little miracle to pull through this.

From those prayers, I decided to start your book. Writing the ideas was a form of therapy, and I quickly realised I had become unfocused and fragile with our huge life changes. So, when I wrote my thoughts and emotions I started to make sense of and analyse the situation. Upon further reflection, I started to understand what I was feeling and why these different thoughts are passing through my mind. Realistically, it

was actually quite exciting and I can't wait to show this to you when you are older.

Then, it was time for some tough conversations. Your mum & I spoke to a consultant who had laid out a roadmap of what to expect for your little life. Although I just couldn't comprehend what was going to happen, I wanted to know every single detail, I wanted to leave no stone unturned so we had all the information possible to prepare. I asked a a barrage of questions, to make ourselves feel confident in the surgeon; what his success rate was, what their medical history was. We only had one shot at this operation, and if anything went wrong, I could never forgive myself.

That night, I had a conversation with your mum that we needed to spend less time at the hospital and spend time together as a couple, maybe go out for dinner to distract ourselves. I was starting to feel crazy; my mind was constantly going round and round with all the different situations that could play out, and I needed something to shut that noise out. Your mum was so angry; she has a completely different approach, she didn't want to leave the hospital at all. My

approach was to distract myself, your mum's approach was to stay right where she was, although she couldn't physically do anything. Then the argument began, which looking back was so silly, and really the argument came from the immense guilt and the range of emotions we were both feeling.

Thankfully, I had your auntie Sarah who knew exactly what we were going through as a family. Your uncle Dameer also had a hole in his heart which caused a whole range of complications, she completely understood the vast range of emotions we were feeling and chatted for about 2 hours, discussing everything. Auntie Sarah gave me some really good advice, about asking the doctors and consultants everything that comes to mind, voicing any concerns, and knowing that we always had a choice, even though they are the medical professionals. I really needed that advice at the time, as I felt so hopeless and useless. All I wanted to do was to protect you, but I was powerless. Auntie Sarah and I were so brutally honest about how terrified we both felt, and I was so grateful to her for opening up.

Auntie Sarah was brutally honest with me, which I really appreciated, and said with all the love and care in the world:

“No babe, everyone says ‘it’s going to be alright’ because they want to comfort you and they don’t know what else to say... but nothing is alright about your son having heart surgery after only being alive for a week. Nothing at all is alright about it, and he will continue to be in hospital for the rest of his life. You will have to have regular check ups all the time, really nothing at all is alright, and nothing at all is going to be ok... because it’s your precious baby! But, it does get easier. It really does get easier to manage and it becomes part of your life and you adjust to it. You can get through this.” I will never forget her words, I finally felt like someone acknowledged how deep and dark my feelings were, she broke through to me and showed that it’s not all doom and gloom, that there was some light at the end of the tunnel when all felt so hopeless. I knew I had to keep going for you, we had so many precious memories to make.

## CHAPTER 17

# THE OPERATION

*"Life isn't about avoiding the bruises. It's about collecting the scars to prove that you showed up. " - Hannah Brencher*

**I**t was the day before your operation, and honestly your mum and I hadn't slept properly in the days leading up to it.

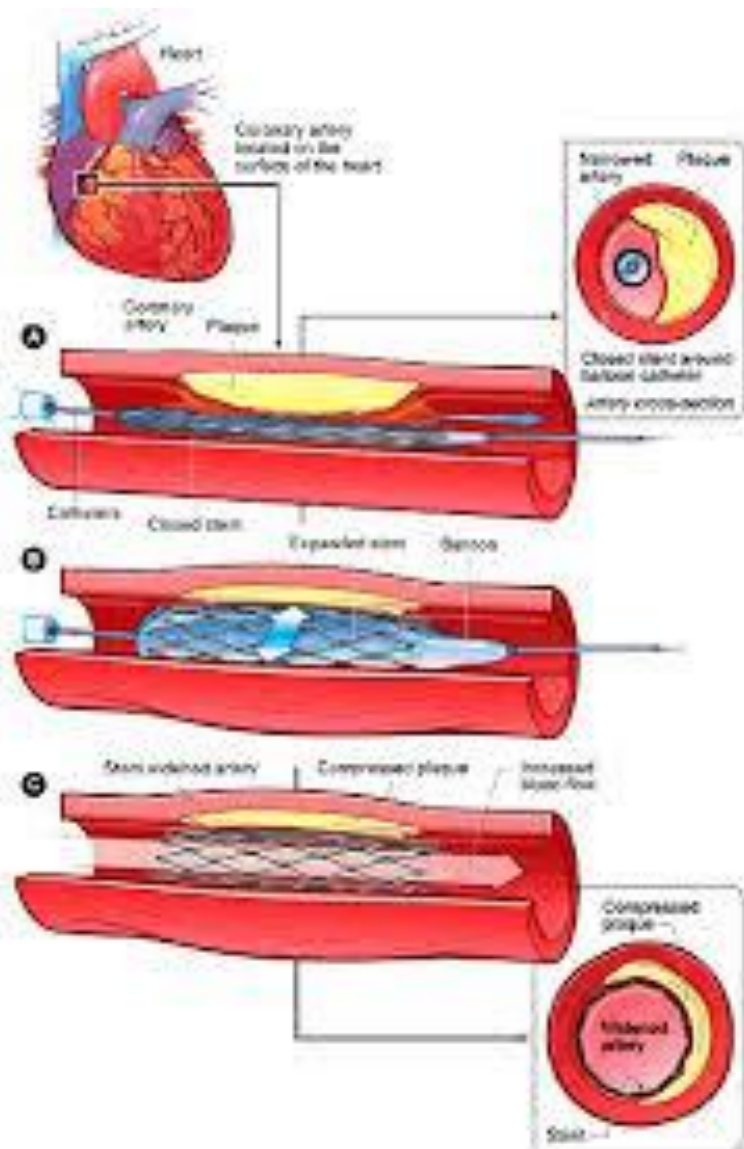
Thanks to the pandemic, I still was separated from your mum during the appointments, which made me feel like an outsider looking in to a situation I had no control over. Your mum could video call me on WhatsApp, but it still wasn't the same; I wasn't able to squeeze your mum's hand, or look your surgeons in the eyes. It was torture.

We had an in-depth conversation with Dr. Thomson, your surgeon, who explained in detail how he was going to handle your surgery. He explained it so professionally and matter-of-fact, but the thought of it made me sick. He was going to



operate on your tiny little heart by entering through your groin or below your armpit, pushing through a tiny camera and stenting apparatus. He would travel through the blood vessel, into your heart, and then through your aortic valve. The stenting apparatus was a small balloon with mesh-like metal around it, so when they inflate the balloon the mesh would be enlarged and keep the ductal valve from naturally closing. This would keep your heart beating and keep you alive. Luckily, as we had the diagnosis from your early pregnancy, your mum and I had already spent months researching this so we were already as knowledgeable as we could be. Still, there were some surprises, like finding out you had a curly ductal valve, meaning you would need more than one stent put in which would have to overlap each other. He said the ductal valve was 13mm long and sounded quite big for what we had anticipated. This was probably due to the fact that your blood had been pumping through this passage more than normal, so it had deformed the duct with all the pressure. I felt a fresh wave of hopelessness crash through my body; what other bad news were we going to receive?

Dr. Thomson also said that they will need to take you off the prostin drug so your ductal valve will start to close naturally and then become a more snug fit for the stents. I have to admit the thought of taking you off the very drug that was keeping you alive was a little daunting, but I trusted the medical advice as I knew we had to take the next step.



I felt so paralysed with fear, that I had been praying for the first time in 10 years. The night before your surgery, I remember once again falling to my knees and praying to God. I whispered, "Please God, help me and my family get through this. I have led a reasonably moral life and I have helped and supported people through my life too. This is the first time I am begging for help. Please, God, help my son get through this operation. If there is anything, *anything*, you can do to help, please make sure he makes it through. Amen." I had been asking people to say prayers for you, and I had hoped that these had gotten through to some higher power. After all, we had nobody else to turn to; your fate was in the hands of God, and we realised just how truly powerless we were. The situation was completely out of my hands, and I felt so useless for my firstborn baby, and my wife who needed me. I felt like I had let down my family unit.

The day had finally come. The day of the surgery. The day we had been mentally preparing for since your diagnosis, but still was so hard to come to terms with. The day that was causing

us sleepless nights, tears and fights, but still was one more hurdle we had to jump. The day of your surgery.

My job was to walk you down to corridor and take you to theatre. It was my honour to take you down and be strong for you one last time, even though I was dying inside. You needed your daddy more than anybody at that point, and I hoped that I would pass my strength onto you and make you strong for the surgery.

The journey down the corridor felt like the journey of a million miles. With every step, my feet seemed to get heavier. As I walked down the corridor, all sorts of morbid thoughts were racing through my head. Would this be the last time I saw you alive? Did you know what was happening, did you feel worried and scared? I had to stop these thoughts from gathering in my anxious mind, otherwise I would cry in front of you and I couldn't do that.

Your mum, the nurse and I took you into the theatre room. Thanks to 1.3 million pounds worth of donations, the theatre was modern, pristine, gleaming white, and kitted out with

high-tech specialist equipment. The first theatre room was filled with 7 senior doctors, and another 5 nurses in the second theatre room.

They placed a tiny gas mask over your perfect little nose and mouth. The smell of the gas flooded through your mask; you were squirming and writhing, arching your back and struggling. You clearly hated it. Your mum had to leave the room, she couldn't bear to see you struggle and rushed out the room crying. I managed to hold on for a little longer, until the doctor asked me to leave; the operation was about to begin, and they would call us when you were out the theatre room.

As I walked out with a lump in my throat, your mum desperately asked me how you were. I told a white lie and said you were fine, even though you were clearly in pain. I didn't want your mum to be any more upset than she already was. I suggested that we leave the hospital for some fresh air, to your mum this was the worst decision ever and she wanted to stay. We sat downstairs by the entrance, on a freezing cold bench, in silence, feeling miserable and useless.

3 hours had passed, I had passed the time and distracted myself by phoning friends and discussing our life issues. I phoned my good friend Kane, whose grandma had just sadly passed away. We passed the time discussing our dreadful circumstances, and the talking seemed to act like therapy for me; the time passed quickly, and I felt so much better for getting things off my chest.

Your mum just sat there, fretting and worrying, unable to take her mind off of what you were going through. Suddenly, and an hour earlier than we anticipated, the nurses phoned us to say you were out of theatre. We were over the moon - you must be alive! We jumped up as if we were on fire, dashing back to the ward, with every step our hope increasing that you were okay.

Two nurses were waiting for us, and they stopped me dead in my tracks before I walked through the ward door. Firmly, they reminded me I wasn't allowed in to see you, which felt like a stab in the heart. I just wanted to see how you were doing. Mum rushed in quickly to get you, coming back out with you wrapped up in her arms. It seemed like it took her forever to

walk towards me with you her arms, I just couldn't wait to see you. She got closer and closer, I was shouting, "What's happened? Is he okay?" I finally set eyes upon your gorgeous face, so beautiful but drowsy. Mum said "Yes, it went very well, he is starving so I'll call you when I've settled and fed him." Waves of relief went through my body. Although you hadn't eaten for 10 hours, you were okay and you were going to make it through this. It was time for me to return home as I couldn't stay, and before I even got out the hospital exit I had already broken down, overwhelmed with joy and relief. I rested on the wall of the corridor, sobbing and sobbing, releasing all the anxiety and worry that had been building up and letting tears of happiness flow out. This was easily, apart from you being born, the best moment of my life - knowing you were safe, and my prayers had been answered. I composed myself and went home, physically exhausted from the adrenaline that had been pumping through, but so relieved. Now, all we wanted was for you to come home for the first time.

Your mum and I would have to regularly change over to spend time with you, due to the pandemic. Although we were



concerned, you didn't show any signs of distress - you were our little fighter. You carried on gaining strength, even the nurses kept saying "He's doing so well!". We loved treating the nurses for looking after you so brilliantly, we always brought them chocolates as a gesture of thanks. The nurses, and you, were our heroes and made the experience so much easier.

One of the few good points about this terrible experience was the emotional support and bonding we made with other parents in the same situation. In the parents room, we could talk to other parents of seriously ill children. It made us reflect, and honestly although your condition was serious, it made us count our blessings. There were families who had been told their children would never recover. This brought me back to reality, and made me realise that although I wanted you home so badly, I just had to be patient as there were people worse off than me.

After a couple of days in the High Dependency Unit, you were doing so well that you were transferred to the main ward. I was so proud that my little man was doing so well, so strong at such a young age. To progress even further that you were

allowed home, the doctor said that you had to put on 20g of weight every day for 3 consecutive days, This made mum so determined to feed you, we were both so desperate to have you home. Your mum was amazing, she was doing everything she could; making the nurses weigh you after your feeds, not before, making sure you weren't being sick, and feeding you all the time. All we wanted was to snuggle you tight in the comfort of our own home, and leave this sterile hospital environment.

Especially because, as you were on the main ward, I was no longer allowed to visit. Son, until you have your own children and make me a granddad, you will never understand the pain that put me through. To be told I wasn't allowed to see my own child who had just had surgery. I understood that there was a pandemic, but it deeply affected us and our bonding time as a family. So, we hoped and prayed for you to gain enough weight that we could take you home, sit on the sofa and have a family cuddle.

Up until Day 4, you were losing weight rapidly, but this tailed off after 4-5 days until you were maintaining your body weight.

With every few days you got that little bit healthier and chunkier, and our concerns that you would be in there for months were eliminated. They still had to monitor you to check for rejection of stents, but by this time I was sure you could make it through anything.

I was so desperate for some physical contact that one day, I visited the hospital and begged mum to pass you through the door and let me hold you. She combed your hair to the side especially for my visit, to make you look even more handsome like your dad!

I was sat down on the corridor chair, squeezing you tight, kissing your beautiful face, gazing into your gorgeous eyes and feeling so blessed. Suddenly, I heard a loud "Excuse me, you're not allowed to do that. Mothers only. No extra visitors."

I immediately saw red, my blood boiling. In my head, there was a devil on my shoulder who was shouting, *'This is my firstborn son, who's just recovering from heart surgery, how dare she tell me what to do with my own son? Is she being serious? How can she tell me what to do?'*

On the other hand, there was an angel on my shoulder who was whispering, *"Well its not just me going through this, they did say no visiting, they've given us plenty of warnings, and she is just doing her job."* I had to remember how amazing the nurses had been caring for you, in order for me to swallow my tongue and not lose my temper.

With regret, I handed you back to your mum and stormed off home. I was absolutely seething. As soon as I got in, I called your mum and vented how I felt, without censoring anything. Your mum was so sympathetic, she knew how hard it was for me to leave the both of you, and she needed my support as well. She was becoming so agitated, trapped in the four walls of the hospital, only able to wave at me in the car park from 5 stories up like Rapunzel in the fairy tale. The only good thing about that situation was she could help me find a parking space from that high up, and that the parking attendants weren't working so I could never get a ticket.

Your mum and I used to chat mainly at night. She felt so frustrated that you weren't already home; you simply hadn't put on enough weight as we hoped. The fact we expected it to

be just a few days had made it so much worse, as we had built our hopes up that we would be cuddling you on the sofa at the end of the week. So when time was ticking by and it ran into the weekend, it deflated us as we knew they would wait until at least Monday to discharge you. Weekends are normally fun and exciting; however, those days dragged on forever because we were doing everything in our hands to help you through. Ultimately, bringing you home was never down to us. Only God knew when you would be home.

The days turned into weeks, and your mum and I were becoming more and more stressed. It felt like we were fighting a losing battle with ourselves. Although we were so happy you were alive and recovering, we were getting greedy and desperate to have you home. You hadn't even slept in your own nursery yet, which your mum and I spent so long putting together.

I tried my best to be positive and said to your mum, "He's been here for two weeks already, there's no point rushing the last few days just to get him home as soon as possible. He's safe with the doctors, this is the best place for him right now".



Your mum reluctantly agreed, although I don't think it made it any easier for her.

On day 7 of your weighing, you had put on an extra 60 grams! We were ecstatic, and so proud of you for being such a little fighter. Surely this meant you were coming home that day! To our dismay, the nurses and doctors denied our request. You hadn't hit 20g gain consistently, there were still little losses here and there.

We hoped and prayed for a miracle the next day, just 20g would mean we were taking you home. Mum did everything she could, she fed you until you were stuffed! As you were placed on the weighing scales, mum video called me, and we waited with bated breath. Could this be the result we wanted so badly?

'15g' flashes up on the scales. My heart sank. I was sure today was the day. Another day without having my baby boy home. Mum wasn't taking no for an answer, and rang the doctor for a second opinion. I waited anxiously for her to ring me, hoping that we would get the answer we've been dreaming of.

The last two weeks of your birth had been torture. All I wanted was to have you home, in your home comforts, cuddling you tightly on our sofa. I swear, if I could have you home and clutched to my chest, I would never let you go. Although the stenting procedure was only a basic level surgery and was keeping you alive, in the grand scheme of things. Despite this, I couldn't mentally prepare for each day that came until I knew you were safe at home in my arms. Suddenly, my phone

began to ring. It was your mum calling me back with the news. I answered the phone excitedly.

“Babe, he’s coming home!”

The four words I wanted to hear more than anything. Finally, the doctors were confident in giving you the dietary, physical care, and endless love that you would need to be able to come home with us. A wave of relief washed over me. For days, I had prepped the house ready for you and your mum to come home - it was pristine, it was almost as clean as the hospital! I would have done anything to make sure my home was perfect for my baby boy’s arrival.

I rushed to the hospital, so overjoyed that I was finally going to get to do that duty that so many dads take for granted - taking you home. We may have done it later than most families, but you were coming home safe and sound, and that was all that mattered. My strong, precious, beautiful baby boy had proved to everyone that he was a FIGHTER!



We were still yet to endure the painful ordeal that was your open heart surgery. But that's a story for another day. This, my baby boy, I will tell you in the next chapter of your story. We have many more adventures to cover!



## CHAPTER 18

# HOME COMING

*"Life takes you to unexpected places, but love always brings you home. "*

**W**elcome home, Raeyaan Liev Kapre. You're home now, where you belong. Just from being your daddy, I have never felt such strong emotions - fear, anxiety, worry, hopeless, lost, unconditional love, fearful, begging to God for you to pull through. I will always be grateful that you taught me how to love.

You may be wondering how we chose your name. It was actually your mother who made the final decision - I liked Kayaan, she liked Raeyaan. Your mother had carried you, birthed you, and spent so much time

crying, stressing and worrying over you that the least I could do was let her choose your name.

Raeyaan, also spelled Rayan in Arabic or Rayyan in Latin, is Indian/Arabic original, meaning Watered, Luxuriant, and Plentiful. It is also named after one of the gates of heaven, which only those who observed the fast of Ramadan can enter. We chose this name as we felt so abundantly blessed that you chose us to be your parents, and that despite many setbacks, we came through the other side as a family.



Liev, is Russian Hebrew origin, meaning Lion heart.

We chose this to signify how brave you were to have heart surgery so young.

When put into the name numerology chart, RAEYAAN LIEV is derived from the following:

$$\text{RAEYAANLIEV} = 9 + 1 + 5 + 7 + 1 + 1 + 5 + 3 + 9 + 5 + 4 = 50 = 5 + 0 = \underline{\mathbf{5}}.$$

5 in the numerology calculator means a child who is born with intelligence, curiosity, daring, successful, and willing to take risks. As you had 5 stents in your heart, it also has special personal meaning for us and your medical needs.

Having you home and watching you grow has been the biggest blessing of my life. I didn't know true heartbreak, or true love, until we found out you were

arriving and that you had a serious medical condition.  
You will always be my Little Lion Heart, and I love you  
so, so much.









**THE END**

