

“My newborn stopped breathing”

After an enjoyable pregnancy and straightforward labour, the first few weeks of motherhood were challenging for Trish and baby Bianca

“THERE WAS NO NOISE – SHE JUST WENT WHITE”

Trish Rechichi, 44, and husband Angelo, 43, are parents to daughter Bianca, 15 months

Angelo and I had been together for 20 years and married for 15 when I fell pregnant. We were delighted and enjoyed every moment of it. I felt really well and continued to work, socialise and be active. We kept our pregnancy quiet until the sixth month – and no-one had any idea that

we were in fact going to become parents. While I loved my job as a marketing manager, I was really looking forward to becoming a mum.

Three weeks before my due date, early on a Sunday morning, my waters broke. After four hours of contractions I had an epidural and, seven hours after labour began, our daughter Bianca arrived. She weighed 2.7kg, scored 9/10 and 9/10 for her APGAR tests and was described in the medical reports as a vigorous baby girl, born after an uncomplicated labour.

SUDDEN TROUBLE

But just two hours later, when we were still in the labour suite, Bianca stopped breathing. There was no noise – she just went white. We pressed the emergency button, a midwife rushed in



Baby's name: Bianca

Weight: 2.7kg

Planned delivery: Hospital birth

Actual delivery: Hospital with epidural





– followed by all the other staff who were paged – swooped her up and took her to the nursery, where she was resuscitated with oxygen via a mask and chest compressions. During this time Angelo watched from the nursery, while I was left in the birthing suite on my own, wavering between feelings of despair, that the worst outcome would eventuate, and clinging onto my belief that we'd have the best result.

After 23 minutes, a slight respiratory effort was reported and by the time she was three hours old Bianca's colour had returned and she was breathing properly. The doctors told us they thought Bianca had had unswallowed mucus in her mouth.

But as she'd stopped breathing for so long, Bianca needed extensive testing for brain and tissue damage and major organ function. At midnight she was collected by a neonatal unit and taken to a children's hospital where she stayed for nine days, wired up to various machines and monitors. After seven days, we were finally able to hold our baby girl again.

It was a hard week. I was still a patient at the hospital where I'd given birth, had haemorrhoids and painful stitches, and was hooked up to

a catheter for three days. Every morning I'd travel by taxi the 10 kilometres to Bianca's hospital, where Angelo would meet us in the evening and take me back to my hospital. No-one could come onto the ward so I was often alone, but we felt immeasurable support and love from our family, friends and community.

GOING HOME

Fortunately, after all the tests, Bianca was given the all-clear and was returned to the hospital I was at, where we stayed for five days of mothercraft. Breastfeeding had been delayed due

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to the separation and I'd had to express my milk. We were just mastering breastfeeding when I started bleeding blood clots the size of a saucer. I needed an emergency dilatation and curettage (D&C). Breastfeeding was shaky at first but we persevered, and when she was just over three weeks old, we were able to take Bianca home at last.

Throughout this introduction to parenthood, Angelo and I remained

positive. The medical staff commented on how mature and calm we were. It was just one of those mysteries, but we had faith that everything would turn out well.

Even today, the doctors and midwives still can't explain exactly what caused Bianca to stop breathing. They think she either forgot to

breathe or got "lazy" and didn't breathe. Apparently babies don't need to breathe in utero as mum does it for them. Once they are born, they need to do it for themselves.

Our little angel is now 15 months old and Angelo and I love our family life. Bianca was hooked up to a mobile breathing monitor for the first five months but there have been no recurring incidents. She has reached all her milestones, some earlier than expected. Bianca is a happy toddler who sleeps well and loves talking, dancing and music, socialising with our lovely neighbours, mixing with her grandparents, nephews and other family and being read books.

I am healthy and have adjusted easily to motherhood. I'm still on maternity leave and manage to squeeze in exercise, community and voluntary work, and have completed writing my second book. Although I enjoyed my glamorous pre-mum career, I feel very privileged to have my new 24/7 job – which does not seem like work at all. It's a job of love with Bianca and – all the challenges life throws at me. **P&B**

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