

**A**lthough I'd been feeling ill all day, I was still shocked when the doctor delivered the news. "You're going into labour early with your twins," he told me.

I was only 23 weeks and five days pregnant. This couldn't be happening.

As it was my first pregnancy, I didn't know what was wrong, so my husband Scott had taken me to our local hospital in Maidstone, Kent. When the doctor said I was going into labour, I was terrified. "I can't give birth now!" I cried. How could my tiny babies survive?

This wasn't how things were supposed to turn out. No one knew why I'd gone into labour so early.

"We'll need to get you a bed at a special unit – your babies will be very small," the doctors warned. In the early hours of the next day, I was rushed to the neonatal unit at St George's Hospital in Tooting, south London, where they had space for me.

"Will my twins survive?" I asked as I was wheeled into the ward.

"We'll do everything we can for them," was all the doctors could say.

Scott had said he wouldn't be able to cope with being at the birth, but he came. I don't know how I'd have got through it without him.

"Remember your breathing," the doctors told me.

"But I don't know how to breathe to give birth," I said. My antenatal classes weren't due to start for another three months. Scott did his best to encourage me, and my labour progressed that night. The following afternoon, Scott held my hand as Katie, then Lauren 10 minutes later came into the world. The girls were rushed into intensive care before I had a chance to see them.

After a few minutes, the doctor returned. "Katie's in intensive care, but Lauren's not going to make it," he said. "She was born breech and is badly bruised. She's too small to live."

A nurse came in with Lauren. She was a tiny, frail bundle wrapped in



**Above:** a scan of Helen's womb. **Right:** Helen and husband Scott with Katie. Her twin, Lauren, sadly died shortly after she was born



Left: Helen proudly shows off her baby bump. Below: tiny Katie after she was born, weighing only 1lb. Right: Katie as she is today - with the teddy bear that she was once as small as



# Mummy, was I really the size of this teddy bear?

Helen Stevens, 37, thought she was going to be the mum of twins - but her pregnancy wasn't so straightforward. She faced heartache, but with the sorrow came joy...



a white blanket. I thought my heart would break as I took her into my arms. "We love you so much," I told her. She was perfect - just so small.

Scott and both our parents who'd arrived by then, held her, too, but after three hours, Lauren slipped away. I was grateful I'd had those precious hours with her. We later held a funeral at our local church.

"We have to concentrate on Katie now," I told Scott. "She needs us."

When I saw Katie for the first time, she was as tiny as Lauren and in an incubator, with a machine breathing for her. Our baby was no bigger than a tiny teddy bear that had been placed in the incubator with her. She wore a little knitted hat to keep her head warm and was so small, the ventilator mask covered her whole face.

"Let her be all right," I prayed. But Katie was weak and her weight dropped to under 1lb. I couldn't breast-feed her, but I did express milk for her and she slowly put on weight.

Ten days after the birth, I was discharged, but Katie had to stay on a ventilator for three months. We lived and breathed for her progress. It was

draining with all the travelling, but I couldn't concentrate on anything else. The nurses used to weigh the premature babies at 2am and I was so anxious I'd wake up in the early hours at home and call them to see if she'd put on any weight.

I was only allowed to hold Katie briefly. I was terrified of hurting her, so Scott changed her tiny nappy for the first time. It was strange seeing his great big hands inside the incubator.

Because Katie was so premature, her heart hadn't developed fully.

At just two months, she was taken to London's Royal Brompton Hospital for heart surgery. The operation took just 45 minutes, but to us it felt like an eternity. Thankfully, it was a success, but Katie had further difficulties. She was treated for meningitis and had septicaemia. And her eyes had been damaged by prolonged exposure to oxygen, so she had laser surgery to save her sight. Somehow, she survived.

A month later, weighing 4lb, Katie was well enough to leave the neonatal

unit and was transferred to our local hospital. "Can I hold her?" I asked one of the nurses there.

"Of course," she replied. "She's not poorly now." I'd got used to having to ask, but now I could be a mum at last.

Katie soon put on weight and, aged five months and weighing 5lb, we were allowed to bring her home where Scott and I bonded with her properly.

Katie is nearly three now and is doing so well. She's still underweight for her age - she weighs 20lb 10oz

and wears clothes for 12- to 18-month-olds. But she's happy. She loves going to

nursery twice a week and is popular. We still think about Lauren. Every fortnight, Scott, Katie and I visit her grave. And when Katie's old enough, she'll know all about her sister.

To thank the staff at the neonatal unit, we raised £7500 doing a charity bike ride, and we're holding a summer ball this year. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have our special little girl. And not a day goes past when we're not grateful for that.

**'Katie was so small that the ventilator mask covered her whole face'**