

Life After Loss

Danielle Rouse knows what it means to be broken-hearted. Her journey as a mother has taken her to the depths of despair.

But in this season of love, Rouse's heart is full and there is joy in her home. Rouse delivered a beautiful and healthy baby girl at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center in 2019.

"I didn't know whether to cry, whether to laugh – to shout – I didn't know what to do," Rouse says about the day baby Ellie was born. "But just seeing her and seeing that she was okay was such a blessing."

The baby's big sister and grandparents immediately embraced the new addition to the family. Van Rouse, the proud father, says while some people don't like to hear babies cry, Ellie's wail was music to his ears.

The birth of Ellie Nicole Rouse was an especially happy time because the family had grieved the loss of a stillborn baby in 2018. His name was Levi.

Unfulfilled promise

Rouse had been under the care of Gary Stephens, DO, at Fort Sanders Perinatal Center. Her pregnancy was considered high risk because of some medical complications.

While the greatest care

was taken, the loss of life was unpreventable. With her pregnancy at 29 weeks, Rouse spent two days in the hospital to deliver a baby she would never watch grow up.

She named him Levi. She held him in her arms for a little while, and she cried till it was time to say goodbye.

In the weeks that followed baby Levi's death and birth,

Rouse struggled with deep depression and a crisis of faith. Dr. Stephens recommended Rouse wait about three months before trying to have another baby.

Rouse wanted to fill the empty space in her home and in her heart, but following her doctor's orders gave her some time to heal physically and emotionally.

New beginnings

Rouse was overjoyed when she found out she was pregnant again. At the same time, it was hard to look to the future without remembering the past. Grief made



Danielle Rouse was overjoyed when her baby girl was born, but still missed the stillborn baby she had delivered the previous year. Dr. Gary Stephens, DO, says it's important for mothers to know that grieving a lost child is normal when a new child joins the family.

unwelcome visits. Fortunately, Rouse wasn't blindsided, because Dr. Stephens had warned her there would be some difficult days.

"I caution mothers and families to be aware of significant dates on the calendar," Dr. Stephens says. "For example, the day the deceased baby would have been born can trigger a new wave of grief."

After Ellie was born, Rouse couldn't help having some mixed emotions. In some ways, Ellie resembled the brother she would never meet.

"I loved that she was



Baby Ellie poses for a family photo with her mom Danielle, her dad Van and her big sister Gracie. Ellie was born at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center the year after her brother was stillborn.

there with us," Rouse says. "She was safe. She was healthy. But then again, it made me miss Levi."

A woman who has experienced pregnancy loss can grieve a baby she only held for a short time, or even a baby she never held at all. A mother-to-be carries her baby 24 hours a day and can have a relationship with her baby from the very beginning.

"Women need to know that it's okay to grieve the loss of an unborn child at any stage – whether the loss comes in the first trimester

or when the baby is full-term," Dr. Stephens says.

Rouse remained under the care of Fort Sanders Perinatal Center throughout her pregnancy with Ellie. There she found skilled care, encouragement and compassion.

"From my first visit with Levi till my last visit with Ellie, they all went above and beyond," Rouse says. "They opened their hearts up to us and they opened their arms up to us. I could never repay or thank anybody enough."

Little Ellie is growing and glowing. The Rouse family is full of hugs and giggles, laughter and love.

Levi will never be forgotten, but the sorrow of his loss becomes easier to bear with every passing day.

"You can't keep hanging onto it," Rouse says. "That hurt's always going to be there, but you learn how to cope with it and turn something bad into something good. God's strength can bring you through it and open your eyes to something better."

Coping With Pregnancy Loss

Fort Sanders Perinatal Care Center and Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center specialize in helping mothers through high-risk pregnancies. That includes offering medical care and support for women whose conditions end in pregnancy loss.

Pregnancy loss occurs in as many as one-fourth of all pregnancies. It translates into the loss of hopes and plans for the future, from planning the nursery to thinking about a lifetime of milestones.

Danielle Rouse was 29 weeks into her pregnancy when her son was stillborn. Holding onto her faith, accepting the support of family and friends, and following the guidance of her Fort Sanders physicians helped Rouse move through one of the most difficult chapters of her life story.

"I had a battle – a long,

long battle – after I lost Levi, and I really struggled to cope with it," Rouse

says. "It's something terrible to go through. Whether it be a miscarriage or a stillborn – you don't want to go through the loss of a child, no matter what gestational age it is. No mother ever wants to go through that."

Perinatologist Gary Stephens, DO, advised Rouse to allow a few months to pass before trying to get pregnant again. He also explained that dates on the calendar related to her experience with the stillborn baby would affect her emotions.

Rouse's advice to grieving mothers is to find a way

to pull something positive out of the devastation. She started a fundraiser to donate a Flexmort CuddleCot to Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center.

The CuddleCot is a portable crib unit with a soft water-cooled pad. Its temperature preserves the body of a stillborn baby while allowing grieving families to have time for closeness and closure.

Rouse and her husband both say their faith and the support of their church family was also critical. Dr. Stephens encourages grieving families to seek out encouragement from friends, family and support groups.

A baby doesn't have to

be physically present to be part of the family. Here are some other ways to cope with the loss of a little loved one:

Something to remember.

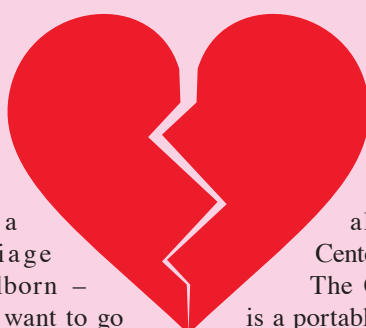
Save a lock of hair, a handprint or footprint. Giving the baby a name and taking photos for remembrance can be helpful for coping with and ultimately letting go of sorrow.

A time to say goodbye.

Holding a memorial or funeral service can provide closure and healing.

Professional counseling.

Pregnancy loss is a loss, even if the baby never made it home. A grief counselor can help a family process that loss and move forward.



Fort Sanders Regional is "BEST for Babies"

Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center is among four Covenant Health hospitals that have earned 2019 "BEST for Babies" award, announced recently by Tennessee Hospital Association and the Tennessee Department of Health. The others recognized include Parkwest Medical Center in Knoxville, LeConte Medical Center in Sevierville and Methodist Medical Center in Oak Ridge.

Created in 2016, the "BEST for Babies" award celebrates 18 hospitals across the state for their efforts to reduce infant deaths and improve the health of Tennessee's newborns. In 2019, 3,158 babies were delivered at Fort Sanders Regional.

Fort Sanders Regional and the other Covenant Health member organizations are the only Knoxville-area hospitals to receive the BEST for Babies award this year.

The BEST award stands for breastfeeding, early elective delivery reduction and safe sleep for Tennessee babies. Award-winning hospitals have successfully increased breastfeeding initiation rates, minimized early elective deliveries and promoted healthy sleep practices for babies. Eighteen hospitals in the state met rigorous criteria for the 2019 award, a substantial increase from just four hospitals in 2018 and seven in 2017.



COMING SOON!

Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center will open our new and expanded **Emergency Department** this spring, continuing our tradition of providing excellent care to our community.

