

COUPLE HOPES THEIR GROUP WILL HELP OTHERS

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Brittney recently founded the Halton Hills Pregnancy and Infant Loss group (PAIL), which held its first event earlier this month — a remembrance evening where candles were lit and speakers shared their lived experience of loss.

The group is also collaborating with the Town of Halton Hills to create a future memorial space in Cedarvale Park, which Brittney said is envisioned as a memorial garden with plaques inscribed with babies' names for local bereaved families.

"I find it really healing to see Baylor's name in places — to hear people say his name and talk about him," she said. "So I thought if it's healing for me, it must be healing for others as well."

With October being Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, the Che family is sharing their challenging journey to parenthood and Baylor's story to let others know they're not alone.

"It's unfortunately incredibly common, and there are people out there who understand what you're going through," said Brittney.

The local couple married in 2017 and were eager to start a family. Just a few months after tying the knot, they found out Brittney was expecting.

"We were overjoyed, but we were young and really naïve about pregnancy. We obviously thought a positive test means you have a baby," she said.

"I miscarried a few days later. That was our first taste of the fragility of pregnancy, and that it's not a guarantee."

Following two more miscarriages, the Ches welcomed their son Bentley into the world in March 2019 at full term. By later that year, Brittney was pregnant with Baylor.

"We've come to realize that it's not about moving on, but rather moving forward."

- Patrick Che

While there weren't any red flags in the early stages of the pregnancy, the local mother says she started wondering about what was happening with her unborn son after being sent to Sunnyside for an ultrasound.

It was there that she learned Baylor didn't have a right kidney, and that she was presenting with risk factors for preterm birth. Despite this, Brittney said she was sent home after being told her obstetrician would follow up, and that she would be seen again in two weeks for monitoring.

"But Baylor was born six days later, at 23 weeks and two days," she said.

The tiny infant came roaring into the world at McMaster in Hamilton after Brittney went into premature labour, with things happening so quickly that she gave birth on a stretcher in the hallway before Patrick could arrive to be with her.

"The doctors were yelling for the NICU team. They put Baylor in a bag to keep him warm, then everyone fell silent. You could hear a pin drop," she recalled. "I kept asking why isn't he crying, is he breathing, is he OK? All of the sudden his arm twitched, and they rushed him away."

From there, little one pound, six ounce Baylor embarked on his challenging journey in the NICU, where he was diagnosed with a severe brain bleed at just three days old, which resulted in hydrocephalus (a fluid buildup in his brain).



Brittney Che photo

Baylor Che was born prematurely at just one pound, six ounces.

Following brain surgery at 26 days old, Brittney said that Baylor did well for a few weeks.

"We finally started talking about when he comes home, not if he comes home," she said. "We came home that weekend to set up his nursery, and then he died the following Friday."

That night, the couple knew something was wrong when Baylor spit up — something he had never done before. When Brittney got to his room to take over for her husband, she said the doctor was sitting there, saying he wanted to observe Baylor for a bit.

"Then, things went downhill so fast," said Britt-

ney, recalling that after she was asked to leave the room so that a sterile urine sample could be collected, Baylor's blood pressure started plummeting.

"The doctor came over and said I should call my husband back to the hospital," she said. "Baylor's bedside was swarmed with about 20 doctors and nurses. It was just like 'Grey's Anatomy' — they were yelling to push epi, and I could hear them counting chest compressions. We just sat there, crying."

While his heart-rate and blood pressure did come back up, Brittney said Baylor's body was purple and limp. What the Ches heard

next is every parent's worst nightmare.

"The doctor came over and said, 'It's time for us to have a talk.' She said this is going to keep happening until Baylor can't come back anymore," said an emotional Brittney.

"So we chose to hold him. They put him in my arms and took his breathing tube out."

The couple was then allowed to have their parents and Bentley come meet Baylor, have him baptized, read a bedtime story to their tiny preemie a bath before saying their final heart-wrenching goodbyes.

"Losing a child is not

something that you ever think of as a parent," said Patrick. "Not in a million years did Bri and I ever imagine having to go through this. We've come to realize that it's not about moving on, but rather moving forward."

The local father said they're now keeping Baylor's memory alive through random acts of kindness, saying his name, sharing his story and advocating support for pregnancy and infant loss, noting he's proud of his wife for founding the Halton Hills PAIL group.

Erin Burger, the Town's community development supervisor (event and neighbourhood support), said staff have been working with Halton Hills PAIL to make connections with others, support its memorial event and plan for the memorial space.

"We are excited to see how this group will continue to develop and set the direction for future initiatives," she said.

The Ches recently welcomed another baby boy to their family — a precious addition who'll be sure to grow up hearing about how his brave big brother is leaving a lasting mark on the community.

"Though Baylor isn't with us here physically, we know that he's shining bright amongst the stars, looking over his two brothers," said Patrick.

For further details about Halton Hills PAIL, visit <https://bit.ly/3nvg51o> or email haltonhillspail@gmail.com.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With miscarriages and infant death impacting many families who often suffer in silence, we wanted to take a closer look at how Halton Hills PAIL and the Che family are raising awareness on this important issue and supporting others who experience loss.