



# Daniel

Daniel George Stanley Karagiannis  
20 May – 11 June 2003

Jim and Stefanie are Canadian expatriates who have lived in Singapore for nearly three years. (Stefanie was born here in Singapore, and lived here until she went to study in Canada when she was 19—returning every year for holidays as her parents have always lived and worked here). Daniel was their first child and they moved back to Singapore very soon after he was conceived, looking forward to starting their new family life here. He was a beautiful, healthy, strong baby, and the first three weeks of his life were joyous for the whole family. But Daniel suddenly lost consciousness in Stefanie's arms after a normal feed, and he died in hospital after one night on ventilation support. In their anguish, Stefanie and Jim felt bitterly let down by the lack of compassion and support provided by the hospital and mortuary, and were desperate to find a support group here.

*Written by Stefanie Zagrodnik, Daniel's mother*

**O**n 20th May 2003 at 7:51 am, my beautiful baby boy Daniel was born. I truly felt as though life had really begun for me. I felt alive in a way that I never knew was possible. I was now a Mommy, and I felt the most beautiful, wonderful and loving feeling inside. I was Daniel's Mommy. It was the best feeling in the world.

On 11th June 2003 at 8:11 am, my most beautiful baby Daniel died in my arms. I felt my world had ended, and indeed, inside, a huge part of me has gone. I thought I could write something to tell my story, but in reality it has proved too painful to do. I still want you to know of Daniel and to realise the huge and immediate need for help and support

to be provided to parents who have lost a baby or a child here in Singapore. I have instead included excerpts of a letter that I wrote to a friend some time after Daniel died.

On 10th June in the early evening I fed Daniel. He was feeding as usual. I then burped him and he made a little burp as he sometimes but not always did after the breast. Then I gave him a bottle. All of a sudden I saw him stop making swallowing motions and his face went a bright red / purple colour. I pulled the bottle out and sort of shook him. My Mom was with me at the time and she started to scream, "Daniel, Daniel!" She then grabbed him from me and I could see his mouth was gaping open but no sound was coming out. I was so terrified.

An ambulance took Daniel to hospital. Already he didn't have a pulse and he was so white and so cold. The doctors were able to get a heartbeat again but were never able to get him to breathe on his own again. With a ventilation tube in his tiny airway he was taken to pediatric ICU and while on the ventilator we held him as he died at 8:11 the next morning, on 11th June 2003. All night long I stroked his soft little head and told him how much his Daddy and I loved him. We held him so tightly and sang little songs to him and told him again and again that Mommy and Daddy could only love someone so beautiful and so good as himself. His little body felt so so cold and he was not the Daniel we knew—Daniel was always so pink and warm and mobile. I can still feel his soft little head and see his big beautiful eyes as he looked at his Mommy when I fed him.

We held a funeral for our little Pumpkin here and then took baby Daniel back to Canada to bury him with my Grandma and Grandpa. I loved my Grandma and Grandpa so much and Daniel is now sharing a grave with my Grandma. It is the worst thing to have to bury your own child, to know that they have gone and that you will be without them until the day you yourself die.

I cannot stop crying, the pain is just too much. Jim and I are devastated. It is impossible to believe that my beautiful little boy will never come back. Jim and I feel like we have died inside. We really wish we had died too as life without our little one is impossible. We stare at his little empty bed and smell his little duckie blanket and we cannot, just cannot accept that he is no longer here. I love my little Daniel so very much and I just want to hold him again and to touch his soft little head and kiss his chubby cheeks and it kills me to know that I will never be able to do anything with him again. All I can do is lie in my bed and cry for my baby who will never grow up to be a big boy and who I will never be able to play with or sing songs to or do anything. I just wanted to be Daniel's Mommy.

When he died, no one approached us about providing support or offering counseling, no one came to comfort us, no one gave me anything for my milk supply, instead, we were hurried out of the hospital and told, "Could you settle your bill please, we're changing shift and we'd like you to do that before you go." My most beautiful love had just died in my arms and all I could do was lie on the cold hospital floor and scream and scream and you want me to pay my bill? Could we see Daniel again? No, that would not be possible. Could we have a lock of his hair? Why would you want to do that? No comfort was

given, no privacy was made for us. In a large PICU room my beautiful son lay dead on a bed so many times too big for his beautiful tiny body and his Mommy and Daddy were being “hurried” along to pay the bill.

We had to go to the morgue to identify our beautiful Daniel. I still cannot believe that Jim and I have had to identify our son as he lay cold and dead on a stupid cold tray all wrapped up in a huge blue sheet. We were given a number and told to wait our turn. When they called our number we got herded into this barren, cement floored room to see Daniel for one last time behind a glass panel. They asked us if he was our son, and then I just broke down and lay on the ground wailing aloud and sick to my stomach. Could we leave now please, others are coming in. Hurry up. You’ll never see your son again...but hurry along. Oh God, I hate the people who work there. Can we not just have a few moments more please to look at our beautiful, beautiful little boy, please, for one last time? No.

The autopsy done on Daniel said he died of pneumonia. His Neonatologist, other doctors consulted and we ourselves find such a claim incredulous. Given his lack of symptoms and the suddenness of his death, other doctors have told us they believe his death was due to a cardiac dysrhythmia—a problem affecting the conduction of energy across the heart muscle. We have researched this extensively, consulted doctors in Canada and the United States and are having his cord blood genetically screened. Our search for a medical reason for Daniel’s death is done alone. Once a baby has died it seems the outside world cares little to assist in investigating why. It is vital for us to do all we can to understand why Daniel died. We realise the ultimate answer may never be known, but as Daniel’s parents we feel we must try our best to uncover whatever we can about the reason for his death.

The lack of support and compassion given to us has only exacerbated our agony at this terrible time. At a time when we needed time, patience, gentleness, kindness and privacy, none have been forthcoming. The pathologist who carried out Daniel’s autopsy was the one exception in our horrific experience. We are so grateful for his empathy and concern. The compassion he showed us was so vital and yet so rare.

A year and a half later, I am thankful to say that after an immense and desperate search, we did find a sympathetic counsellor who helped us talk about our son’s death and our immense feelings of despair. I have also found great comfort in meeting other bereaved parents through the setting up of CBS. Their support has been invaluable in helping Jim and I to carry our pain as we try to go on with our lives. I passionately hope that CBS will be able to make a difference—particularly in the training of professionals in promoting best practice in bereavement support—so that others do not have to experience the painful lack of compassion that only increased our agony at the time of Daniel’s death.

Our pain is still incredibly intense and perhaps it always will be. You do learn how to put on a smile in front of others, but when you lie awake crying at four in the morning, crying for a child you will never see again and reliving every painful memory, only you can realise how suffocating your pain can be. People ask me, eighteen months after Daniel's death, if I often think of him—how can they begin to understand? How can you explain that an hour does not go by when I don't think of baby Daniel, wonder what my little boy would have been like, and so desperately long to hold him again.

## *Dearest Daniel*

Daniel, the nine months you were in my tummy were so wonderful. The three weeks you were physically here with us were the most beautiful we have ever had, and ever shall have.

We watched in amazement as you so intently and eagerly turned your little head to listen to your music box play "Teddy Bears' picnic". We laughed lovingly with you as you scowled so sweetly when we gave you your first bath at home. We walked outside in the garden with you, Mommy telling you all the names of all the plants growing in our tiny yard. Mommy was sure you understood every word of what she was saying! We so proudly showed you off when we took you out to tea with your Grandma, that was such a big day for you! We loved showing you your first rain shower and promised you that we would all play together in the puddles when you were a big boy. We couldn't believe how quickly you could wriggle out of your blanket when we thought we had snuggled you as snug as a bug. We felt we couldn't hug you tight enough or often enough; you were so beautiful; naïvely we thought we would have a lifetime to hug you.

Daniel, you ARE our son and always shall be. You will always be our beautiful baby. Mommy and Daddy will always love you. Always.