

# Nicola's Birth Experience

*Written September 2005*

## Antenatal

**Expectations/worries** – I had always been quite nervous about the thought of pregnancy and birth, I had heard a few horror stories in the past and had seen lots of programmes on television about it. I had also heard some good stories as well, so I knew it was a bit of a lottery as to what one's own particular experience would be. I decided to just take one day at a time and see how I got on; after all there is no point worrying unnecessarily. I fully expected to suffer all of the common symptoms such as morning sickness, being constantly tired and the dreaded swollen ankles! I also expected my history of high blood pressure to cause one or two problems down the line, as I knew this could be a cause of pre-eclampsia. Being an older mother the Downs Syndrome risk was quite high for us and was an additional worry, so we decided to pay privately and have a Nuchal Translucency Scan in Nottingham to put our minds at rest. When I became pregnant, I read a lot of books and magazines about pregnancy and birth as I love to know how the human body works. I was particularly interested in Dr. Gowri Motha's 'Natural Birth Method', after all it worked for Gwyneth Paltrow so why not me as well! I bought all of her recommended lotions and potions and the relaxing CD and video, so I could prepare for a lovely calm water birth. I have always loved swimming and long baths so I thought it would be perfect for me. I was really looking forward to seeing my baby, holding it in my arms and taking it home from hospital. I was not worried at all about looking after my baby after the birth. I thought this would be the most enjoyable bit: once the birth was over with everything else would be wonderful.

**John's perspective:** I don't think I held any lesser or greater worries than any other expectant father. I was glad that we had both decided to try for a baby and was aware of the risks that being slightly older meant in terms of the baby's health. I guess my main concern was "will we be good parents" ... but then who doesn't think that! Nic certainly didn't appear to be at all worried about the whole matter and seemed to be greatly looking forward to motherhood although I knew that she was concerned about the actual child birth bit and the pain involved.

Experiences of pregnancy – As it turned out I didn't suffer any morning sickness at all, I felt really healthy and well and I had plenty of energy throughout. I only suffered from the swollen ankles once or twice when it was very hot. I actually enjoyed being pregnant and watching my body change shape. John and I both felt relieved when the Nuchal Translucency scan results were good, although they weren't conclusive, it did lower our risk of Downs significantly. It was also amazing to see our little baby for the first time, so small and yet so perfect.

Support from my family, friends and work colleagues throughout my pregnancy was brilliant, I also had the support of my midwife who was really lovely. I had regular check ups with her and really looked forward to them, it was comforting to know that all was well. My midwife did however acknowledge my high blood pressure and said she wouldn't be surprised if it needed monitoring more closely towards the end of my pregnancy. I finished work at 31 weeks of pregnancy so I could have a bit of time to myself and take things easy before the birth. I attended aqua natal classes twice a week and found them very relaxing and enjoyable. I also finished decorating the nursery and assembled a cot in readiness for the new arrival.

One day I noticed a few 'floaters' or black spots appear in my left eye, I immediately thought about my blood pressure as my midwife had told me the early warning signs of pre-eclampsia to look out for and it led to being diagnosed with pre-eclampsia and learning that I would probably remain in hospital until the baby was born. I was only 34 weeks pregnant at this point and the consultant told me she would like to keep baby in the womb for as long as possible, 37 weeks at least. I knew it had all been too good to be true, my pregnancy had been too perfect so far. Whilst on the antenatal ward I was told that when the time came my baby would be born by caesarian section as labour would probably push up my BP too high. I was very disappointed that I wouldn't have my calm water birth but aware that we had to do what was right for baby and me. I did however, voice my concern to my consultant that I thought we were

waiting for an emergency situation to occur and I was very worried about it. I was almost 35 weeks pregnant at this time and although I understood the medical reasons for waiting, I didn't feel any less worried about what was going to happen to us. As it turned out I didn't have to wait too long as that evening my baby was born.

**John's perspective:** Looking back it feels like the pregnancy was one of Nic's happiest periods for a long time. I was just very glad to see Nic so radiant and seemingly healthy. The antenatal classes were good fun and it was nice to meet other prospective parents who had similar outlooks on life. Going to the scans with Nic was both enjoyable and stressful but always fun afterwards trying to decide not who, but what, Nic was going to give birth to as the pictures looked very much like a small duck.

Nic's time in hospital prior to the birth was obviously stressful for her, as she didn't have too much to do other than consider her blood pressure and play the waiting game. The difference now though was that the waiting game would end with a medical emergency rather than a natural childbirth.

## Birth Experience

My BP was too high to operate at this point and had to be stabilised before the caesarian could go ahead. The operation itself was a very surreal experience but totally painless and certainly not worth all the worrying. At 7.52pm my baby was born. "it's a girl!" everyone exclaimed, this was the biggest shock to me as I was convinced I was carrying a boy! I remember seeing her pass before my eyes over to the paediatricians and midwives to be assessed. I was relieved to hear her immediately cry, but was then shocked to discover she only weighed 3lb 13oz. I had never known anyone have a baby so small! Within a matter of minutes baby Charlotte was in John's arms and from the small amount I could see of her she looked perfect. Once the surgery was complete I was taken to the High Dependency Unit (HDU) to be monitored. John was taken, with baby, to the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) as it was thought that baby couldn't maintain her own body temperature and would need incubation. Here Lottie was given some formula milk, which she apparently lapped up. John cannot remember being asked for his consent, but I remember being quite shocked to discover she had been fed with formula milk, as I wanted to try to breast-feed her myself. Why didn't I have the chance to feed her myself? This is a question that has never been answered, I never asked anyone at the time as I was too exhausted from the operation and was more concerned that baby was ok. About an hour later, Lottie was brought to me and we spent a wonderful couple of hours together as a family before she had to be taken back to spend the night in the incubator. It was heartbreaking to be separated but I knew she was in the best place.

**John's perspective:** From my point of view, the time from which it was decided to take Nic to theatre was the point at which we diverted from the course we should have been taking. It all happened so quickly that I didn't really have time to think too much about anything other than being concerned about Nic's welfare. Even when Charlotte was born it was difficult to feel those emotions that you want to feel i.e pure relief that everything is okay, as mother was still half submerged under theatre greens having just endured a major operation and baby was clearly going to need some special care as she was so small. I guess I didn't know where to start first. There was however some real sense of relief when the staff reported that all was basically well with Charlotte so we didn't have any serious worries on our hands. Being with Charlotte in the SCBU was very special but still didn't feel right as Nic should have been there too. It was however nice to be giving some milk to my beautiful baby daughter.

## Postnatal

**Expectations** – I had expected this time to be wonderful, this was the bit I was especially looking forward to. All the pain and worry of the birth would be over and you would have your newborn baby at last. I knew it would be difficult coping with sleepless nights and feeding round the clock, as I had always loved to have plenty of sleep, but I was ready for all of that. I was especially looking forward to walking out of the hospital with John and our new baby to start our new life together as the three of us.

**Experience** – For the first few days after the birth I remained in the HDU as my blood pressure was still high. I found it very hard to sleep down there, as it was quite noisy with people coming and going all the time. Baby Lottie was brought to see me twice a day in the morning and afternoon and I was pushed round in the wheelchair to see her a few times as well. It was wonderful to be with her, she was so beautiful and perfect. I wanted to spend all day with her just looking at her and holding her hand, but I was so exhausted and weak I had to return to my bed to get some rest. It was very stressful to be separated. On the third day I was well enough to be transferred to the postnatal ward. I was pleased to be out of HDU but was distressed to be further away from my baby and on a ward with mothers all with their babies - it was torture. I asked if it was possible to be moved to a side room so I could be on my own and get some rest, as I had not slept properly for three days. At this point I wasn't able to get down to see Lottie on my own as I still couldn't walk properly from my caesarian, I had to wait for John to be there to take me down in the wheelchair. I remember getting quite upset through sheer frustration at not being able to get down to her. After a little deliberation it was agreed that the staff on SCBU would bring Lottie to see me when I couldn't get down to her. I was determined to get up and about as quickly as possible and so I set myself daily goals to achieve so I could eventually get to see my baby on my own. That night my parents and John's family came to see us and John pushed me down to SCBU to be with them all and baby Lottie. It was lovely to see them all but I felt so weak and physically exhausted, I had hardly got the energy to talk. I remember asking them to speak to me slowly and not get too excited as I couldn't cope with it and I was worried it would put my BP up again.

A day or so later Lottie was maintaining her body temperature on her own and so was discharged from the baby unit and allowed onto the ward. This was fantastic: at last I could have my baby all to myself. Once she arrived in the room I noticed the floor was very dirty, as my bare feet were black, so I asked an orderly if she would mind getting someone to give it a quick mop when they had 5 minutes. I thought it was a reasonable request as it was nothing more than I would have done at home, but I think they thought I had a hang up about MRSA (which wasn't the case) or was being an overly protective mother. I just wanted my tiny baby, who had just come out of special care, to be in a reasonably clean environment. This was the first day that I had tried to feed baby myself but as she was so small it proved very difficult. The only way to get food into her, whilst we tried to establish breast-feeding, was to cup feed her which was very time consuming and difficult. I was feeding every 3 hours and expressing in-between to build up enough for later feeds. I remember being quite shocked that there were only two mothers on the ward trying to breast-feed and I was one of them, everyone else was bottle-feeding. The 3hr feeds continued through the night and the nurses were brilliant, staying with me and helping me to get the hang of it. It was extremely tiring as it took about an hour to get a couple of ounces of milk down her, then I had to express for later and then try to catch some sleep before the cycle began again. This cycle continued for the next day or so and I found it very difficult to sleep between feeds especially in the daytime as people came to visit me and medical staff came for various check ups. There was barely enough time in the day to eat and have a wash! I had also had an allergic reaction to the elastoplast dressing that I had had after the surgery and this added to my stresses as none of the creams that were given to me made it any better.

It was during a quick nap one day that the feeding advisor came to see us to assess Lottie. She re-weighed her and her weight had dropped again. As she had already lost weight, as all babies do after birth, this caused some concern and it was decided to insert a nasal tube into Lottie so we could get the milk into her more easily. I was very worried about her and thought I had been starving her, as she wasn't getting enough milk from me and I was very emotional. We had been getting a lot of conflicting advice over the last couple of days as to how much milk Lottie should be having and how often and we were getting very confused as to what we were meant to be doing. I am a very organised person and as I was so exhausted from lack of sleep I couldn't retain much in my mind so I began writing down what I needed to do, as I wanted some order to it. It was agreed that I would take the baby every 3hrs down to SCBU, attempt to breast-feed her and at the same time they would inject my expressed milk into her through the

nasal tube. This seemed to work quite well, at least we knew she was getting the right amount of milk and would not lose more weight. Later that night after the 7pm feed when some friends came to visit, I was on an emotional high. When I was telling them about all the goings on in hospital I couldn't stop laughing, I think they thought I had been on the laughing gas! I think this night the nurses recognised that I needed my sleep and took Lottie to be fed for me as I don't remember doing it. It was during this night that I experienced a very weird physical sensation. Suddenly it felt as though my blood had warmed up and had started pumping around my body and I could feel it swishing through my veins. It only lasted for a few seconds but it worried me. I thought it must be a blood clot that had suddenly moved and released some pressure. I called the nurse and told her of my experience and then tried to get some sleep.

The next day was another stressful one with feeding baby, although she seemed to feed okay from me in the morning. I remember telling John when he arrived that I was going to say something to the staff if they said that baby hadn't had enough milk. I thought they were being over protective towards the baby and wouldn't allow us to just get on with it ourselves and find our way. It was all getting too much for me and so we asked the food advisor to accompany us down to SCBU for the morning feed to check all was okay. The staff down there were convinced baby had not had enough milk and needed 'topping up', I disagreed with them and told them that I thought she was okay as she had fed really well. They then tested to see how much milk was in Lottie's tummy by extracting some fluid through the nasal tube. They then agreed with me and said I was right, she had had enough. The sheer relief from hearing this was overwhelming and made my knees give way, in fact I remember slumping down onto the baby's cot. I was far too emotional, but I didn't recognise anything as being wrong. Later that day the food advisor came to see me and said she was very worried about me and could she send someone to have a look at me. I agreed but didn't understand what all the fuss was about. Later that day she sent a psychiatrist to assess me. I didn't realise I was being seen by a psychiatrist, I just remember sitting on the bed looking at John, confidently answering each question. I remember thinking they were very strange simple questions, but thought, oh these are easy – I'm fine! It was at the end of all these questions that the psychiatrist turned to me and said that she believed I was suffering from 'Puerperal Psychosis'. I had never heard of it before and remember being shocked to the core at hearing this horrific name. I didn't know what it was or what it meant – Was I going to die from it? Could they cure it? What was it? John came over to me and held my hand, I was very scared. Had I been my normal self I would have asked the doctor what it was and what the prognosis and recovery plan was, but I didn't. I just accepted it and bid farewell to the doctor. John also never asked the doctor any details, I think he was as shocked as I was. I accept that I may not have been able to take in any details at the time about the illness but why didn't the doctor explain to John what the illness was and the fact that it could be treated and I would get better? We were left shell-shocked. I remember talking to John about the breast-feeding and telling him it was too much for me and I felt it was the root cause of my problems. Lottie was too little and we were both not getting anywhere. We agreed it was a shame but agreed to switch to bottle feeding from now on.

After this everything soon began to get much worse, my mind literally took over my body. That night I remember noticing a picture of Benjamin Bunny on the wall in my room, it was the same picture that my late Grandma had bought for me when I was a little girl. It brought back memories of her to me and then suddenly, one by one, all of my dead relatives were queuing up around my bed to visit me and say hello. I remember talking to them quite happily, it was a nice experience. I thought I must have become a psychic medium and immediately rang John to tell him! Goodness only knows what he thought about that! That day all I remember was my mind racing. It was as if I had been taken over by another being, one minute my emotions were up, the next they were down and I could feel them changing. It was like being on an emotional rollercoaster and was physically exhausting although my mind wouldn't calm down enough to allow me to sleep. I awoke in the middle of the night convinced I was dying – I had the purple thing (this was my term for the puerperal psychosis), I had had the funny sensation that I thought was a blood clot, I MUST be dying! I called the nurse and said to her 'I'm dying aren't I?' I can't remember her answering my question but she asked me if I wanted her to call John and get him to come down. I did. The next minute another bed was being wheeled into my room, John appeared and spent his first night in hospital with me on the maternity ward! It was great to have him with me and it helped me to sleep, but it did convince me even more that I was dying, why else would they allow John to stay with me?

The next day is a bit of blur to be honest, but I do remember my mind racing from one thought to another, I was high one minute and low the next. I was on the go all the time, but it was impossible to stop. A sign was put on the door to my room telling people to see a nurse before they entered, I remember being confused as to why this was. A man came to see me (whom I now know was another psychiatrist), he was talking to John about admitting me to the psychiatric unit. He was telling John how nice the

environment was and how I would like it over there. I just remember being very scared and thinking they were going to lock me up in a padded cell! It felt like I was in a film where they lock up the wrong person – What had I done wrong? And how was I ever going to get out of this terrible place?! Later that day my parents and John's mum came to see me and we all waited until it was time to take me over to the unit. I remember saying to my dad, 'They are going to euthanase me aren't they?' He said, 'Don't be so silly, that's illegal!' I then realised that it was and the thought passed. I knew I could trust my family throughout this ordeal and so I relied on that as I didn't know who else I could trust at this point. One other very scary thing to happen to me whilst we were waiting to go to the unit was that people's facial expressions were opposite to mine. When I laughed, they all looked sad and when I became sad, they all laughed! I remember thinking I had discovered what was wrong with me, my emotions had switched the opposite way! I remember saying, 'I've switched the opposite way haven't I, everything is opposite and they are going to switch me back aren't they?' My family re-assured me and said, 'yes, don't worry, you'll just have some tablets and go to sleep. Think tablets, sleep'. I tried desperately to keep this in my mind, as it was what I needed to do to get better. Tablets, sleep, tablets, sleep, I kept repeating it over and over again. We then began to make our way over to the Mother & Baby unit calling in at SCBU to drop Lottie off so she could be looked after as she was not yet ready to be discharged from the hospital. Whilst John brought the car round I remember standing outside the front entrance to the hospital in my pyjamas for all to see! I would never set foot in a public place in my pyjamas, what was I doing! I got in the car in the back seat and remember feeling like I was a mental patient, I was sitting in the back seat of our car in my pyjamas! I didn't know where I was going or what was going to happen to me, all I knew was I needed to take some tablets and go to sleep.

I don't remember much about entering the Mother and Baby unit, I just remember being taken into a bedroom. My parents and John were with me and I remember being asked if I wanted to have a look around. I refused. I also remember a doctor coming to see me to ask me some more questions, I think I just told him I wanted to have some tablets and then to go to sleep. I remember sitting on my bed, wondering where on earth I was, then the thought that I was dying returned again. My parents had come to be with me, John was with me - this was it, I would never see them again. I realised I would never get to see my little girl grow up, it was horrendous! Mum and dad left and John stayed with me a little longer, I remember him getting very anxious until in the end it got too much for him and he left, I don't know what I had been saying to him but it must have been very distressing for him. After everyone had gone, I remember gathering my things and going to have a bath. When I returned to the bedroom the nurse brought me my tablets. I swallowed them down as fast as I could and shut my eyes to go to sleep, thoroughly believing I would never wake up.

The next morning I awoke, I couldn't believe it - I was alive! It was the best feeling in the world. I decided to leave my room and find out more about where I was. I discovered a living room, a playroom and a nursery. I didn't know where I was but it was lovely and I felt like I was in a safe, homely environment. Later that day John and my parents came to visit and it was wonderful to see them all. Lottie was also brought over for a visit - things were beginning to get better.

I settled into life on the unit quite quickly and met some lovely ladies, all with similar problems. The mania continued for a few weeks before it really began to calm down and the highs and lows levelled out. Whilst I was recovering I did experience some very bizarre things, such as a heightened ability to answer quiz questions on tv or radio and crossword puzzles. I thought everyone on the tv or radio was talking to me and everything had hidden meanings. I became obsessed with colours and each colour would mean something to me, blue makes you better – all the nurses wear blue, black means death, red for romance, etc. I would write constantly day and night about what I wanted to do with my life and what I wanted to buy for everyone for Christmas, I felt if it wasn't all written down I would forget it as my mind was switching from one subject to another every minute. It is very hard to describe a psychotic episode to someone who hasn't experienced it, but the closest thing I could compare it to is of being possessed by another being and not being able to control your thoughts or actions at all. But as day by day and week by week I gradually improved, I slowly felt I was getting back to my 'normal' self.

Lottie became resident with me in the Mother and Baby unit and, with the help of the wonderful staff on the ward, I began to learn to care for her myself. My racing mind began to slow down and the fog began to clear. I took it one step at a time, setting myself little targets to achieve each day, with the agreement of the staff. I felt a little bit institutionalised as I had been in hospital a number of weeks without going outside, even going over to the hospital canteen with my parents for a coffee was a big landmark. One day I eventually made it on my own with Lottie in her pushchair - that was fantastic! I remember going

home for the first time in about six weeks, it was only for an hour but it felt brilliant. My home was just how I had left it and I longed for the day when I would be home for good, I just wanted to be together with John and Lottie like a normal family. One afternoon we were allowed to take Lottie home for the first time, again it was only for a couple of hours, but we had her all to ourselves and it felt wonderful, if a little scary! Eventually I was allowed home for a weekend and then for a week before I was discharged. I still didn't feel 100% but my mind had stopped racing and I could cope with feeding Lottie through the night. John was fantastic and helped me a lot taking on some of Lottie's night-time feeds so I could get some sleep.

Now, nine months on, I can finally say that I feel like the person I was before I became ill. It has taken some months to come to terms with what happened to me and to get over it, as I felt I didn't know myself anymore. Looking back on the whole experience now, I am just so grateful that my illness was spotted early in the hospital and I wasn't sent home with this condition unnoticed. I was also very fortunate that there were mental health services and a Mother and Baby unit in the Derby area to treat me. I don't know how John and my family coped but somehow they did, but it would have been so much worse if they had had to travel to Nottingham or Leicester to see Lottie and me. The in-patient and community care was first class and I will forever be in their debt for making me better.

**John's perspective:** Although all the staff in the maternity ward and the SCBU were Lottie were in hospital after the birth very unpleasant. Looking back this was probably because initially I felt that things were just not going to plan: Lottie was having problems feeding and was already underweight, Nic spent a good few days getting her blood pressure under some sort of control and was having problems breastfeeding because Lottie was so small and sleepy. It seemed to me that we were surrounded by parents just getting on with the whole childbirth experience and we were somehow struggling with just about every aspect.

The increasing anxiety that Nic was showing towards wanting to get things sorted out did not initially strike me as untoward as Nic always likes to have a sense of order in what she does. Our inability to get consistent advice on how to go about feeding Lottie was very frustrating for me as I just wanted Lottie to start putting on some weight and start to look like some of the other babies on the ward (some of whom looked like they were ready to walk home!)

When Nic started to ring me in the middle of the night with stories of how she'd seen her deceased relatives (and mine) and spoken to them then I guess I started to get a little concerned but somehow put it all down to the euphoria of childbirth. I did however start to get more concerned as to how we could go home and look after Lottie when feeding her seemed such a trauma.

When Rachel, one of the feeding advisors took me to one side toward the end of the week and actually came out and asked me if I thought Nic was acting herself, it was only then that I stopped and thought about it. Once I had had a moment to consider the facts then I admitted that Nic was definitely not acting herself. Rachel was very diplomatic and just told me that she wanted to get someone to come and have a look at Nic. Anything that was going to help our current situation was fine by me.

The next day (Thursday) a lady arrived who sat in Nic's room and asked her some fairly straightforward questions relating to her past, the kind of childhood, work and relationships that she had had. She seemed most interested in the deceased relatives that Nic had experienced talking to. After questioning Nic for around thirty minutes she told Nic that she thought she was exhibiting signs of Puerperal Psychosis. I was as shocked as Nic and just went over to her to put my arms round her. Nic took this to be a sign that I knew about the "Purple thing" and was convinced that I was in on it with the psychiatrist.

Things seemed to deteriorate very quickly from that point and although the psychiatrist had said that she would come back on the Monday to see how things were, on the Friday it was clear that Nic needed some help quickly. The psychiatrist was not in work on the Friday and so another one came to see Nic. He told us that he could find a place for Nic in the mother and baby unit that day (which could have been Mars for all I knew). Nic was now so utterly

exhausted, confused and experiencing severe emotional highs and lows that she was difficult to communicate with properly. She was just desperate to sleep and whilst we were waiting for the room to be readied in the mother and baby unit, Nic would repeatedly ask me what she should say to them down there... 'tablets..sleep...tablets..sleep' she would repeat over and over. She just wanted a magic tablet to send her to sleep. By the time the room was ready Nic was a very forlorn figure in her pyjamas standing in the hospital foyer. She was convinced we had bundled her into the back of my car rather than the front. I can't remember why she ended up in the back but it didn't matter much to me – she was going somewhere where she would get some help.

Once in the MBU Nic became more convinced that she was going to die and that the tablets she would be given would be the last she would take. We eventually got her things unpacked and the staff were all very nice (and firm when they needed to be). I remember a junior doctor coming to examine Nic that evening. I don't think I've ever seen anyone with less bedside manner. He looked about thirteen and didn't seem able to even pass the time of day. He soon left (without a word) and I stayed for a little while longer. Nic was slowly convincing her self that the tablets she was due to have later that evening were going to kill her and when I decided to leave (as I was becoming exhausted myself) Nic told me she loved me and Lottie and goodbye for the last time. This was obviously very upsetting for me. Early next morning Nic had obviously woken to find she was still with us, and promptly sent a text message to all and sundry proclaiming that ....'the buggers didn't get me' - typical Nic.

The staff on the MBU were lovely and whilst I knew I could approach them to ask questions it would have been nice to sit down with them early on to discuss Nic's illness and their intended plan for her recovery. I didn't know anything about Puerperal Psychosis and information was lacking. I did pick up a leaflet from the MBU but it didn't give me much information so I had to find out more on the internet. The following weeks were spent just being with Nic and Lottie when I could. Work were very good and gave me time off and reduced my workload so I didn't have to travel or work such long hours. This time looking after Nic was a whole new experience as Nic was such an independent person who would normally organise me! It was like looking after a little girl sometimes and although quite sad was actually nice in other ways. Nic got slowly better and we all saw improvements week by week. Having Lottie in the MBU was a huge boost and gave Nic a new sense of purpose. Just going out for a walk to the hospital restaurant was a landmark that we celebrated.

It wasn't long before we were having home visits with Lottie and Nic was longing to be home for good. I think she actually knew that she wasn't ready to face being at home with Lottie 24/7 until the psychiatrist advised that it was time. Having Nic and Lottie home for Christmas was the best Christmas present for 2004.

The six months after Christmas were, I think, actually harder to cope with than the period in the MBU. Although the symptoms were not as severe, actually adjusting to a normal life and routine, whilst still suffering from the depressive symptoms was very hard for Nic and me. We did have our first holiday in the Lakes in April which was a nice break but it wasn't until June/July (after Nic had completely finished her medication) that we could see that the symptoms had completely gone and Nic was really getting fully back to her old self.

All in all the last year has been a long one and not one I'd recommend. However, as our NCT teacher told us in one of our classes when discussing 'birth disappointments', it's like going on holiday and finding out en route that you're not going to the country you thought you were going to. It's still a holiday but just different from the one you booked. I think our experience was not as severe as that and we just had a long stop off at a dodgy resort somewhere – but we actually ended up in a country that exceeds our expectations as we have the most beautiful baby daughter that we could have hoped for.