



Upper Stratton Baptist Church

## Parents' Sorrow at Death of their 'Cheeky Monkey'

Stephen Croucher beat all the odds to live long enough to see the birth of his beloved little sister. Stephen died on November 8 at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, aged only two years and 11 months after he was given a less than 50 per cent chance of surviving a major operation the day after he was born. He suffered from a weak heart and other complications that eventually led to his death. Stephen's mother Lois, 23, from Shenton Close, Stratton St. Margaret, said: "It was a very tough time for us both, the surgeon came to see us to tell us Stephen needed the operation and there was less than 50 per cent chance of surviving. "That was really hard to hear seeing as I had just given birth to him. "We knew he had some problems with his heart but when we were told about the other conditions that was a shock." Lois gave birth to her second child, Jasmine, at Great Western Hospital on September 2 and thinks that Stephen held on to see her.

Stephen's father Philip, 40, said: "The nice thing that came out of this was that Jasmine got to see her brother. "Stephen absolutely adored her, I was so glad and I think he knew something was happening and hung in there to see his sister." Stephen spent his short life in and out of hospital and had to have five major operations, but this didn't stop him enjoying himself. Philip said: "He spent a lot of time in and out of hospital which was difficult. "The times we did have him at home were a real gift. "He had such a personality, he was always happy even though he was ill. "He used to smile and clap his hands and high five people, he was so lively and was a cheeky little monkey. He definitely made the most of his short life. It's just been a struggle, we really loved him, and he brought a smile to our faces. They didn't think he was going to survive but he was a fighter and was very strong but, unfortunately, it got the better of him." Stephen shared the same birthday as his father. He said it is going to be hard to celebrate that day from now on. "It was so special that he was born on the same day, and that is going to be so hard for me to get through now," he said. "It's strange, because my mum and sister were also born on the same day."

Stephen lost his fight for life after his weak heart began to fail, along with his liver and kidneys.

Stephen's funeral was held on Monday at Upper Stratton Baptist Church and about 100 people attended the service. Lois said: "He meant a lot to everyone. On Monday, a lot of people turned up and we were surprised with how many people there were there. Philip said: "We are a strong couple and we have received support from family and friends and a lot of professionals." Stephen's parents now aim to write a book about their experiences as a tribute to their son and to help other parents who might be going through a similar tragedy. Phillip said: "It is our way of expressing our feelings. It's a very hard thing to go through, and if we can help other parents who have been in a similar position." The couple are looking for help to publish the book and will donate half the money raised to the special care baby unit at Oxford Hospital.

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