

FOCUS



Picture: NICOLE GARMSTON

them to do it, thinking there's moments to go and I'm still terrified," she says.

"I couldn't relax until I heard him cry — and that was a special moment."

She fondly remembers the tender rituals of her first birth — the first cuddle, the first bath, dressing her tiny body in the first outfit — all loving acts they performed with Hope in the first and last 24 hours they had with her.

"But this time with Angus it was everything it was supposed to be with her.

"Some people found it morbid that we did those things with her, but it's not like we had a plan, it just felt the right thing to do."

Her second birth went to plan and 15 months after Hope's passing, Angus was born two weeks early on November 17, 2009 weighing 3.94kg.

Sally says talking and educating mothers-to-be about the one in 140 pregnancies that end in a stillbirth will help families be prepared.

"You don't want to burst people's bubble because it's a happy, exciting time, but it will never be like that again for me because I've seen the other side of it," she says.

"People think something went wrong in my pregnancy, that it wasn't healthy, but it was a lightning strike at the last minute.

"Most think it's best just swept under the carpet."

She wants the topic given a proper airing in pre-natal

classes, discussed openly by midwives and doctors and written about it in books for expectant mothers.

But most of all, Sally wants women to take charge and demand the care they believe they deserve.

"Don't let midwives and doctors palm you off as being an

over-anxious first-time mother. I think that happens a lot," she says.

that stillbirths are so common I probably would have insisted on staying in hospital."

Sally is conscious of preserving Hope's place in the family, even if outsiders are not always comfortable about it.

Her daughter's name sits in silver curvature script around her neck.

**“I was still a mother last year. It was just an invisible motherhood that not a lot of people recognise. Hope still has a mother and that's me. It's just that she's not here any more**

SALLY HEPPLESTON

Professional portrait photos of the perfectly-formed baby hang on the living room walls.

"A lot of people see Angus as our first baby, but he is our first living baby," she says.

"If someone asks I generally tell them.

"People get put off when I say I've got two kids — I explain if I'm pushed further — but that's their issue.

"My story is my story. If it upsets people... well, it's upsetting for me to live with it every day."

SALLY's mother made donations to Oxfam and the Stillbirth Foundation in lieu of a Christmas present for Hope.

"I certainly remember the nine months of carrying her, and so do our family," Sally says. "I feel like if I don't mention, don't include her, it's doing her a disservice."

"I felt a lot of shame and horrible guilt that I couldn't bring this baby into the world alive; as a woman you have this role to do."

Life has lightened and is slowly getting easier for the trio.

The cheeky, giggling Angus is keeping life busy, while also being a constant reminder of their loss.

"It's all those joys you missed out on, but now we're here we realise how hard it really is," Sally says.

"We've been so busy, so it's

known the right thing to say, saying the wrong thing or saying nothing at all has severed many of the couple's friendships.

"I was really hard to be around for a time because I was so grief stricken.

"It took about five months before I was ready for people

been hard to include Hope more. It's similar with a second baby — it's hard to give the toddler as much attention."

Mother's Day will be forever bittersweet for Sally and Simon, a constant reminder of having some children here and one not.

"We spent last Mother's Day at the cemetery — it was pretty horrific," she remembers.

"There were a lot of people there visiting their mothers.

But I think there's probably a lot of mothers there who have lost babies and children.

"You feel that pull to spend the day with all your children.

"We're moving on, but we're not over it. I'm pretty guarded these days. I sort of had to

rebuild myself from the ground up. She died and the person I was died with her.

"All the hopes and dreams we had for Hope in terms of what she would do, where we would take her to school, what we would do with her, they all carry on for Angus, they weren't specific for her.

"I hope that it's a natural thing where he grows up learning about her, seeing pictures and it just evolves.

"I want him to know there was someone who came before him, who was equally loved.

"My two babies are still the biggest thing in my life. It's just that one's here and one's not."

THE SAD FACTS

**STILLBIRTH** Foundation Australia is a parent-driven charity, which aims to increase awareness about stillbirth and raise money for medical research into the condition.

**A STILLBIRTH** occurs when a baby dies while still in its mother's womb and can occur between 20 weeks and just before birth.

**THERE** are more than 2000 stillbirths in Australia each year, with the rate of unexplained stillbirth 10 times more common than SIDS deaths.

**AUSTRALIAN** Institute of Health and Welfare Figures show one baby is stillborn for every 134 live births.

**THE** rate of stillbirth in Australia has remained steady for the past decade.

**THE** cause of up to half of all stillbirths remains unknown.

**ACCORDING** to research, obesity, a maternal age 35 and above and smoking are risk factors for stillbirth.

**Source:** Stillbirth Foundation Australia, [www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au](http://www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au)