

## Finding Hope After Miscarriage

### Interview with Meagan and Nick

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**Tania:** Today I'm talking to Meagan and Nick about what, for many people, is a very tough topic: the loss of a child through miscarriage. Megan and Nick bravely share about their experience of pain and grief, but also how they found support and hope through it all.

**Meagan:** Nick and I met almost 10 years ago, and we then got married a year after that, nine years ago. And then Victoria came along 18 months after we got married.

**Tania:** So, you had a lovely daughter, Victoria, but then you wanted to have another child. Can you tell us about your second pregnancy?

**Meagan:** The pregnancy seemed to be going well, until we had our first ultrasound at 8 weeks, because we wanted to make sure there was a single pregnancy – that we didn't have twins or anything like that. And at 8 weeks, Little One was measuring just a bit small, which could have just been me getting my dates wrong. So, we came back two weeks later and in that two weeks, our Little One had died. So, they did detect a heartbeat at the first ultrasound and so we knew that Little One had actually been a live baby. And then at ten weeks, there'd been no heartbeats, so we were then advised to just wait.

And so then that was rather a very confusing time, of how to respond and what to do and all the different options available to us. And so we decided to do what they call 'expectant management', which means you just wait, basically, and let the body do what the body does.

And so, a couple of weeks after that, I had, what they call a classic miscarriage of heavy bleeding, and your body just basically goes into labour.

And then, normally, you bleed for a few weeks and then you stop. I actually bled for three months. So in that time after the miscarriage, dealing with sort of the physical sides of it, as well as the emotional sides of it. And just working through all of that unknown and dealing with the grief. And then we started trying again, and we weren't successful after three years. Nick kind of drew the line and said, "I don't want to be 70 and with a child still in high school." So we made the difficult decision to stop trying and acknowledge that Victoria would be an only living child. She knows that she has a sibling and, she knows that she'll get to see little one in heaven.

**Tania:** It must have been hard, too, knowing that at one stage you knew there was a child, and then, you know, hearing there was no heartbeat and then still waiting until the body, went through sort of the natural processes. That grief time, how did you handle that?

**Meagan:** Some of the things that were difficult was I was having quite bad morning sickness and I continued to have morning sickness until after Christmas.

So, you know, a good two or three weeks where I still felt pregnant, I knew I wasn't, and I was bleeding. And so your brain just kind of goes into a bit of a protective mode of sort of slightly shutting down, and functioning while just having things on hold, basically, until you get to a point where you can actually process what you've been through, and find words to describe it. And that sometimes was the hardest thing – of talking to people who haven't been through a miscarriage, of what you're actually going through.

**Nick:** The thing is it's not that uncommon. I think the stats are something like one in four women have had a miscarriage, so you probably won't have to look too far to find someone who can talk to you.

**Meagan:** But often they haven't told you. So I found, I knew a couple of women who'd had a miscarriage before I had mine. And then after I started talking about mine, more and more friends saying, "I had one," "I had one." And they had just never said.

**Tania:** Often in society, the death of a loved one, including a baby, is something that we don't talk about or we hide, or we avoid the difficult conversation. But the conversations are so important because well, death is a part of life.

**Nick:** The process of grieving and coming to terms with a loss like this, can be long. And each couple's situation is slightly different.

**Meagan:** I've learnt the differences, in a couple, between a husband and wife, but also between different personalities of how we deal with grief. And learning that as much as Nick is my rock, he can't provide everything I need because we are different and we have different needs and so finding ways to seek that out. But then also allowing him to support me in the ways that he is gifted in supporting me.

**Nick:** I think my main job was to be there with Meagan. I tried to support her in a number of different ways. One was just simply to be present with her at the times of difficult ultrasounds and receiving hard news, being with her in the hospital when she was in the process of miscarrying. We prayed together. I discovered my limitations to respond in the ways that Meagan really needed.

Another way I guess I tried to respond in a helpful way was just to do the usual things to keep our household going: cooking and cleaning and doing laundry and all those things.

I did my best, not always very successfully, to try and understand the depth and the complexity of Meagan's feelings – feelings like grief and guilt and failure. And tried to understand in the months that followed the miscarriage, Megan's feelings were a complex mix things like feeling sorry for herself, especially when she saw other women with their own new babies. This just brought up all those difficult feelings again; on the one hand feeling happy and joyful for the wonderful gift of new life, but at the same time feeling angry or jealous.

What I appreciated was Megan's initiative in seeking bereavement support from the ladies at SANDS, which is Stillbirth and Neonatal Hospital Death Support group. The ladies there who themselves had been through miscarriage or stillbirth, who really understood, and were able to be wonderful supports.

**Tania:** And what advice would you give to those around you who are grieving?

**Meagan:** Don't be afraid to ask for the support, whether that be through an organisation like SANDS or through family and friends. Reach out; it's not a weakness. You're not weak because you need support.

Accept the offers of meals, accept the offers of people offering to take care of other children.

If you're a talker, talk. And listen to other people talk about their grief. And that's where I found the SANDS support group meetings really helpful because the first one I went to, I think I said 10 words and I just cried because I couldn't actually put into words what I'd gone through. And so I just listened to them. They just shared their stories. And there were moments where I would start to say a sentence and wouldn't be able to finish it, and they'd respectfully pause, and then one of them would offer a few words: "Is this what it's like?" Or "Is this how you're feeling?" I'd say "Yes."

And then I'd be able to practice those words. And then I'd be able to come home and say to Nick, "This is how I'm feeling." He had never been in that situation, so he couldn't even imagine those words.

Nick's not so much of a talker. And so I had to respect the fact that he would think a long time. And then he would eventually tell me.

**Nick:** Process things internally.

**Meagan:** So it's understanding that they're a different griefs. And it's tempting often for the woman to think that the man's not grieving because he's not crying, he's not talking. but they are grieving, they're just grieving in their own way.

I realised that friends who had lost spouses or parents or children beforehand, I had actually avoided talking to them about it. While thinking that I was being a very supportive friend, I realised I hadn't been. And so I've certainly grown in that area of that ability to not be afraid of other people's tears. But really saying to other people, you know, "I'm here, if you just want to sit and cry, I'll cry with you."

**Tania:** Where did you find hope in your grief, in that loss?

**Meagan:** The night we came home from the hospital after the miscarriage, Nick expressed the hope that we would see little one in heaven in his prayers that night. And I think that was the hope that carried me through a lot of those early days. And still the hope six years later. And knowing other women who'd gone through a miscarriage. And some whom then had had successful pregnancies, others hadn't. But seeing them functioning, laughing, existing joyfully in the world helped me know that even though at that point in time, I felt like a bit of a hollow shell, I could look at them and think "I too can get through this."

One of the hard things with miscarriages is there isn't exactly a lot of stuff to remember someone by. I've got a positive pregnancy strip, I've got an ultrasound report saying "heartbeat detected, query six weeks." That's not a lot. So, we create the memories ourselves.

Give your baby a name. We chose Little One. We have a friend who called their baby Pax. If you knew if it was a boy or a girl, the government now will actually give people a certificate for children in sort of middle to late pregnancy as well.

I come from Anglican background, and so just little things like lighting a candle, those little rituals that the church provides us; the reassurance that we will one day see all of our loved ones in heaven. They were really the sources of hope that got me through.

Obviously, the support of a loving, of a loving family, but in those early days, other women who'd also gone through miscarriages.

**Nick:** One thing that's becoming apparent to me is how much of the pain for the woman comes from the loneliness; the feeling like everybody else is forgotten or moved on, and they're left with this little hole. And so I guess that's one thing we've done is not to forget. To establish a little memorial. And Meagan now marks occasions, like what would have been the expected time of birth of our baby.

**Meagan:** And there's actually a beautiful rite within the Lutheran Church's liturgy. There's also one in the Anglican liturgy and I suspect there's one in the Catholic liturgy, to have a little service at home around the loss. It involves the lighting of a candle, the reading of scripture and prayer. And if you're a pastor listening to this, hold a church service in remembrance of the babies that have been lost through miscarriage and stillbirth and neonatal death.

We also have a little angel that sits on a rock on our table that was given to us by Nick's mum soon after the miscarriage. And the words on the rock are just "in memory of someone special." So that's Little One, but it's also a lot of other people now. Anytime anyone within our family or friend circle dies, then that little angel is then also in memory of them.

**Tania:** I think it's an important message, even just to be talking about this openly – a subject that once upon a time was almost a taboo subject.

**Meagan:** I think the thing that motivated me to speak about it so much and to be so open about my miscarriage, to the point that when I'm meeting someone new and they say, "how many children do you have?" I say, "I have two children. I have one at home and I have one in heaven."

And it took me a while before I could say confidently and without a, "Oh my gosh, am I going to cry when I say this?" was because when I first started speaking about my miscarriage, the fact that so many women came out and said, "oh, I had a miscarriage," it's like, "I didn't know!" Like, these were women I knew at the time that they had the miscarriage and they didn't tell me. And I thought, that's wrong. So that's what really motivated me. I don't want to be another person that then doesn't tell someone else. So, I'm quite open with it.

There's the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Week in October. There's now a bereaved Fathers' Day and a bereaved Mothers' Day, which is the Sunday before Mothers' and Fathers' Day, to acknowledge that for some parents, that's a difficult time.

I use social media, I put things on Facebook, I reach out to friends who I know who've had miscarriages and say, "thinking of you at this time." And just being the change I wanted to see.

**Tania:** Does the pain go away?

**Meagan:** No, the way that it was explained to me someone said pain doesn't go away, we just grow around it.

I still have moments where the pain is as sharp it was six years ago. But those moments become fewer and there's more time between them. And I have grown around that pain. I hope that I've grown into a more empathetic and a better person as a result of it. And more aware of the pain that other people have also grown around in terms of their own grief. And much more able to hold grief and pain, and be able to just be present with it.

So often in society, we want to push away discomfort, but I believe that I now can sit with that pain, because I have for six years. I've grown around it. And to have it make me a better person, not make me a bitter person.

The grief is always there, but it becomes less painful. And so it becomes the scar as opposed to the wound.

**Nick:** When we invest our love, then we expose ourselves to the risk of pain. But God's calling us to love and put ourselves at this risk. So, the grief and the pain is a good thing, because it shows the degree to which we love.

### **Further resources and more information on this topic can be found at:**

- [Miscarriage Australia](#): a collaboration between university researchers and clinicians who aim to help all affected by miscarriage.
- [Red Nose Australia](#): an organisation dedicated to saving little lives during pregnancy, infancy and early childhood, and supporting anyone impacted by the death of a baby or child.
- [The Pink Elephants Support Network](#): an organisation that provides resources, information and peer support for anyone impacted by early pregnancy loss.
- [Stillbirth Foundation Australia](#)
- [Abortion Grief Australia](#)

**Please note that SANDS (referred to in this episode) is now [Red Nose Grief and Loss](#). The Red Nose Grief and Loss Support Line is available 24/7 for anyone affected by the loss of a pregnancy, stillbirth or death of a baby or child on 1300 308 307.**

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