

Search for a lost soul: a discovery in the family tree



**Kate Taylor SRN,
SCM (retired)**
Bereavement volunteer
Cruse.pboro.kate@gmail.com

Family trees open the door to greater understanding of the part played by deaths and births within our families. Neonatal deaths often have a profound effect upon the parents and upon succeeding generations. In this case Kate Taylor's researches not only solved a mystery but may well explain why the subsequent survival of a second girl was so important and contributed to a close relationship between Kate and her father.

Colin Murray Parkes

Storytelling is how we find out about who we are; it has long been how information has been passed from one generation to another. This is part of my story.

I have known for a very long time that my mother had a pregnancy loss before the birth of my elder brother. My father told me about this baby when I was in my early twenties. My mother never, ever mentioned it. I am sad now that I never raised the subject with my mother.

Why am I 'unpacking' this now? Well, I have been researching my family tree and as I constructed the past I wondered about this child who might have been. My father, who was a Funeral Director, described to me how he buried 'this tiny scrap of humanity' (his words). I think I assumed that it was a late miscarriage, which in those days would have been any time up to twenty eight weeks.

While I was researching my family tree it occurred to me that if the baby was stillborn, there may be a record of him or her. So I started to search the births and deaths. My parents married in September 1926 and I searched within the window of opportunity 1927 to early 1928, looking for births and deaths in the same month. In those days sometimes stillbirths were not registered at all, so I knew that the possibility was slim.

While researching I noticed some babies were given the name of the month in which they were born and died. I found an entry for the birth of a child called Jane; the entry also had the correct surname and maiden name as my mother. My heart skipped a beat. Then I found a death within the same three months, but the name was June. Was there a possibility that one of the names was misspelled and they were in fact the same child? I agonised over it for a few days before deciding to send for the birth and death certificates.

The certificates arrived about a week later and I was profoundly moved by what I found. I find my eyes misting with tears even now as I write about it. The birth certificate told me that my mother had given birth to a baby girl, called June in June 1927. The death certificate told me that baby June had lived for

half an hour and died because she was premature. I shed a tear for this tiny child who I never met and really until now I was not sure she had even existed. My heart went out to my parents who had been married for less than a year; my mother was 22 and my father was 26. My father registered both the birth and death on the same day at the same time, I recognised his writing.

I have often thought that if this child had lived I might not have been born. A daughter followed by two sons and the family may have been complete. I myself had the feeling of being a special girl, particularly from my father (I was a Daddy's girl). I knew I was a wanted baby and maybe because my parents lost a baby girl they were pleased that I turned out to be a girl.

Shall I put this baby girl into my family tree where she belongs? I do not have an answer at the moment. I have talked to my elder brother about our sister. Sadly my other brother has died so I cannot share this with him. I do wonder if my mother would want this child acknowledged, as when she drew our family tree she did not include her. I think she would be pleased that I have raked up the past. She lived in a different era when if babies died they were never mentioned again. Now in this day and age these babies have a proper funeral and are mourned as they should be. I do believe my father did give the baby a little funeral as this was within his power, but I don't think anyone else was there. Both my parents died long ago, so there is no opportunity to talk to them now but I wish I could.

I will always remember this little baby girl called June and if she is in the family tree others in the future will know about her too. She is part of who I am. She was born and died and the future was set in motion. ■



Kate Taylor's Parents