

# Losing a loved one to meningitis

## The story of Spencer Dayman



Steve and Gloria Dayman's son Spencer died of meningitis and septicaemia in 1982 when he was only 14 months old. Here they talk about how this has changed their lives forever.



### Steve explains the impact of Spencer's sudden death:

"It was 1st November 1982 when in the early afternoon, Gloria called me at the office of the road haulage business that we used to run, to say our 14 month old little boy Spencer was not very well. He had woken from his mid-day sleep and was not his usual self. Normally Spencer would stand in his cot and shake it in an effort to get out. This time he was lying still and although awake, he could not lift himself into a standing position.

Gloria explained to me that she had called our local doctor, who suggested she give him Calpol, although he did not have a temperature. She called the doctor again at 4pm, by this time I had decided to come home early. When the doctor came out to examine Spencer at about 5pm, he explained that Spencer should go to hospital just as a precaution. He gave us a letter to hand in at the hospital. Gloria wrapped Spencer in a blanket and sat in the back of the car with him while I drove.

We arrived at the hospital in Bristol at 6pm. It was about an hour before Spencer was examined by a doctor. We then noticed a small 'pin-prick' rash developing on his stomach. We were told that Spencer was suffering from suspected meningitis, I remember thinking 'Thank God they know what's wrong with him'. Spencer was eventually moved to ICU at 12.30 that night. During the following hours his heart stopped, the doctors managed to get it going again, but his fight for life had only just begun. All the next day we were praying he was going to be all right, but by 7pm, just 24 hours after being admitted to hospital, his body was so overwhelmed by meningococcal septicaemia, his heart could not take any more and his breathing stopped. I held Spencer in my arms, the devastation and the emptiness is something that I can never forget. Only parents who have been through a similar experience can imagine the pain this terrible disease causes.

In 1982 there were no organisations to represent the disease and there was not one leaflet available to explain about the many aspects of meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia. Straight away, together with my wife Gloria, family and friends we started fundraising. In 1999 Spencer Dayman Meningitis UK was established.

Spencer's death completely changed my life. Since that time, I have met thousands of families who have experienced a similar tragedy. I encourage them all to help create a better knowledge of bacterial meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia. Most families who have suffered the devastation this terrible disease causes find it helpful, like me, to do something positive. If we all do what we can, we will make a difference. My life is now spent as the Chief Executive of Meningitis UK, which has already made a significant contribution in the development of a vaccine to prevent against meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia".

Gloria tells her story overleaf

**Meningitis can KILL in under 4 hours**

## Gloria explains:

“ When Spencer died I just felt numb and shocked, it was just like a nightmare really, all I wanted to do was stay in bed, bury my head, go away and never come back.

This went on for weeks and weeks and my family became quite worried about me. They would all go off to their jobs in the morning and come back in the evening to find that I was still in bed. I didn't go out or do anything and I was almost in a zombie state. I just didn't know what to do with myself. All I did know was that I wanted to go to church a lot and sit there and remember Spencer.

Before the funeral, when the Funeral Director brought Spencer back to our house, I spent a short time with him on my own. I always thought somehow that a miracle would happen and that Spencer would come back, although I was scared to be in the room with him. I didn't hold him or give him a cuddle and looking back now that is something I regret.

The funeral was terrible for me. I almost drifted along and everyone made the decisions for me, they wouldn't let me think for myself. I know they thought they were doing the right thing by wrapping me up in cotton wool, but it probably wasn't for the best. To this day I wish it had been done differently. I wish I had knelt with Spencer in the church, I wish that I had more involvement with the organisation of the funeral. I don't blame anyone for it, but if I had been more involved in the arrangements it might have somehow helped me with my grieving.

Sebastian, our other son, didn't come to the funeral and now I know that it was a big mistake. There was never any question of him attending and we didn't ask him what he wanted. It just didn't seem acceptable back then for a nine year old boy to go to a funeral. This is one of my greatest regrets. The only thing I did insist on was that I told him myself that we had lost Spencer. When I told him all he said was 'oh no'. From then on he was frightened to come near me, I had nothing to offer him and I felt I couldn't support him. My two daughters also took a back-seat because I was so absorbed in my own grief. I should have sat them down and talked to them about how they felt and Spencer's death, but I wasn't capable of that at the time.

Four months after Spencer's death I became pregnant again and I felt very guilty. Everyone else was happy about it because I think they felt it was a sign that I was getting back to normal again. But I felt I had almost betrayed Spencer, looking back I know I hadn't, but that is how I felt then.

As time went on I found myself doing things and going out again with Steve and my family. But when we did go out we would try and go to places that we hadn't been to before, where people wouldn't know us and there wouldn't be anything to remind us of our times before Spencer's death.

On the first anniversary of Spencer's death I went to church in the morning and in the afternoon we went to the Isle of Wight. We walked around and did our praying and remembering. Now we always go out and do something together on the anniversary of his death to make sure the day doesn't just go by. On Christmas Day every year, before everyone wakes up, I make the first hour of the day Spencer's time and spend time thinking about him. I do the same on his birthday too.

Today I still spend a lot of time thinking about Spencer. In my memory he has grown up with me so now I think of him as a young man and not as a child. But I would still like to know what he would have looked like now. I feel robbed that I don't know. All sorts of things have happened in my life but they can never take away the intense pain I had when Spencer died. I will remember it for the rest of my life. As time goes on it has eased, but it never goes away completely. Now I feel I have 'levelled out' and I know that there is no magic cure for the way I feel. I will always remember the happy times we had with Spencer and that helps, and together with my work for Meningitis UK, my life is somewhat normal again”.



Meningitis UK  
25 Cleeve Wood Road  
Downend  
Bristol  
BS16 2SF

Tel 01179 373 73 73

Fax 01179 373 73 73

Email [information@meningitisUK.org](mailto:information@meningitisUK.org)

[www.meningitisUK.org](http://www.meningitisUK.org)

**Meningitis can KILL in under 4 hours**