



A Day to Remember!

AT this time of remembrance, it's important to remember how precious life is and how fragile it can be. Sometimes, it is good to look back.

Here is a piece I wrote 22 years ago about a traumatic event.

I am glad to say that the subject in question, my big tall son, Mark, is full of life and is currently studying in Brussels as part of his Business Studies degree.

Thankfully, he can't remember any of the events of that cold, cold day.

Born in the front seat of a Saab, on 18th November 1996, Mark David Arthur Jack made such a dramatic entrance into this world that he is bound to be either an actor or a politician.

It was a crazy day with so many unfortunate potentially tragic options taken by us which unfolded over the course of a few hours.

Sharon was due to be induced in Antrim Hospital the next day but she started getting labour pains at about 7.20am.

So, we arranged for Hannah to be picked up and taken to School and we then set off with the intention of leaving three year old Patrick at his Granny's house in Broughshane.

Trust our luck, it was frosty, but sunny in Limavady, so we decided to drive to Coleraine rather than Altnagelvin – first wrong option!

On the other side of the mountain etc the pains started to worsen (mine as well as the mother-to-be) and we got stuck in some horrendous traffic. "What about Coleraine Hospital dear?" – "We've booked into Antrim and that's where we're going!" – second wrong option!

The car slid at a roundabout, the car thermometer was showing minus four.

We got to Ballymoney – everything

was accelerating, the labour as well as the car.

Pea soup fog and ice on the road brought our progress to practically zero. "What about Ballymoney Hospital dear?" "My Gynaecologist is in Antrim – that's where we're going!" – this time at a slightly higher pitch. – third wrong option!

We came across a road traffic accident, probably caused by the ice.

The traffic, if you could see it through the frosted window, was at a standstill.

The noises in the car were getting primeval – the car thermometer temperature plunged even lower.

We battled on an I tried my mobile phone (which had just been invented and which I could barely use) and got through to 999.

I decided from the roars in the car that we were not going to make Antrim Hospital.

I decided to really test the Saab's road handling as well as the turbo – we were doing 70mph on the ice with my hand on the horn, blasting at other hapless road-users to get off-side. "Mummy, stop all that shouting!" from Patrick in the back seat.

I then heard the four words that any father to be does not want to hear when we were about to aquaplane, "My waters have broken!" I felt mine were about to break, too.

I pulled into the side of the road where I thought the ambulance was due to meet us.

No sign of it so I decided to get to the Health Centre in Ballymena, come hell or high water.

By this stage, Sharon's legs had gone into spasm. Patrick, in the back, was now at the "Mummy stop all that old screaming" stage and my knuckles were gripping the steering wheel so tightly, I

thought it was going to disintegrate.

Cars were disappearing off the road like snow off a ditch as I roared up behind them.

I must have slowed to take a right turn onto the dual carriageway but I can't remember it.

We were now into the 30mph area and I was still doing twice the speed limit.

A car in front decided to stop, indicate and think about turning right.

I decided I wasn't going to slow down – he was either going to turn right or he was going to get a little persuasion from me.

Thankfully, he turned just in time.

By this stage, Sharon had thrown off her seatbelt as well as most other things to get some relief.

We came to a mini roundabout at the Chapel. I didn't even slow down but just went over the top of it.

We screeched into the Health Centre Car Park where I immediately took a wrong turn.

I eventually found what I believed was the right building and went straight up a one-way system the wrong way.

The car leapt into the air twice – oops, I had forgotten about the speed bumps.

I sprinted into the Reception area where I couldn't believe how ragged and hoarse my own voice was.

"My wife's outside this building in the car, having a baby in the front seat."

I gasped.

As cool as you like she replied, "Are you registered here?" silly me, I'll put the baby back in and drive back to Limavady. "No, but I could have a heart attack here if you like", I felt like replying.

What do you do in a situation like

this?

I remember something from the movies about hot water and towels.

What was the other thing? Ah yes, a midwife.

Pat Lewis is a Community Midwife and she was about to go out on her day's calls.

She just happened to have her black box of tricks with her.

She appeared like a guardian angel out of nowhere, after being summoned by one of the more slightly perceptive members of staff.

By this stage, a crowd had gathered round the car.

Patrick was still in the back with his hands firmly clasped over his ears. I could have sold tickets to the crowd.

I got back into the car and a stranger thrust his hand into the car through the car window. "Here, hold onto my hand, dear" "Thanks very much", I murmured. "No, not you – for your wife!" I did the only thing a man could do in such circumstances.

I got offside as quickly as possible by dashing into the pharmacy to get some water for Sharon's fevered brow.

First of all, I reversed the car to a quieter stop in the car park – it was like a circus by this stage. However, I forgot about the speed bumps again – not a popular move.

The next time I appeared out from the building, the car wasn't there! That's all I needed, a disappearing car and mother-to-be – "Mulder and Scully come in, you're not going to believe this one."

A doctor then suggested that Sharon be moved inside and upstairs.

Midwife Pat said: "No way" as the head of the about to be born child was about to join us near the gearstick.

The seat was put back – I sat on the driver's seat with my legs practically sticking out the window.

Pat Lewis made her best ever delivery – she could play cricket for Ireland, she dropped nothing!

The next thing you know, there's a healthy baby boy in a piece of paper towel placed on Sharon's chest.

Laugh?

I could have died. The baby was then whisked inside – there was one or two other little bits of stuff to be done but I know the male readers can be a bit squeamish so we won't digress.

A stretcher was passed over the roof

of the car into the side door and two ambulance personnel were able to lift Sharon into the building and place some screens around her.

I was in a mixture of post traumatic stress disorder and a catatonic trance.

I kept thinking this was somebody else's nightmare that I had wandered into.

I couldn't believe the way things had worked out so well.

I had very nearly killed two thirds of my family with my driving and yet we had a saviour, a damsel in a dress of midwife blue who had miraculously come to our rescue.

She was the only one to tell us that it could be done – and it was.

I got a coffee with sugar and I kept shuttling between my wife on a stretcher and my baby upstairs, now being held over a radiator – it beats an incubator any day.

The entire Health Centre had come to a stop as this drama (which turned into a crisis) unfolded before their eyes.

I drove up the road at about 10mph to a garage where I spoke to a bewildered attendant and said "Son, I don't know what you're paid to valet a car but you're going to earn your money today."

I drove to Antrim Hospital following the path of the ambulance, which was conveying my extended family, to their scheduled stop.

I allowed myself the odd neathandral scream in the car where I pinched myself to see if this really had happened.

Sharon had undergone the most painful thing known to woman (or man) without a hint of pain relief or jot of medication.

When I'm getting it tight during my next endurance race, I will just remind myself of the events on November 18 1996 to force me to go that extra mile.

Sharon was sitting up having a cup of tea, looking incredible.

I was suffused with equal measures of joy and relief.

I wandered like a lonely cloud downstairs in the Hospital.

I saw a sign for a chapel and I heard some singing.

There was a choir in full flow. I went in and stood at the back, supporting myself on the wall. I closed my eyes.

There was only one song which they could be singing and they were; Immanuel.



Sharon and Mark.