

PORT PHILLIP

MAMA MAG

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MEMORIES MADE TODAY

There really is nothing quite like the news that you are expecting a baby, with that mixture of excitement and a little trepidation as you approach this most life-altering journey, whether for the first time or even the fifth time.

Parents-to-be generally fill the months waiting for the 'big arrival' with contemplations of what life will be like, what kind of parents they will be, what baby might look like, what gender baby will be; and for those who have already entered the parental rodeo, thoughts on how they might alter the original game plan with the arrival of another child.

But what if life bursts that bubble of excitement and replaces that sheer happiness with devastating shock, fear and the desperate need to find answers as to 'why'?

In late July of 2013, I met my niece at the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (Butterfly Ward) at the Royal Children's Hospital. I met sweet Abby for the first, and sadly, for the last time that night.

Abby was a beautiful healthy looking baby, despite her breathing tubes it was hard for me to comprehend that this innocent child only had days left in this world.

As her two sisters and my two daughters as her big cousins all clambered onto a chair together to hold Abby for some photos seemingly unaware of what the future held, my heart began to sink as I realised I was not just there to meet Abby but to capture as many tangible memories for her parents as I possibly could to last their lifetime.

I had been in contact with Belly Art and their modern keepsake business over a number of years prior in a professional sense as the editor of a Melbourne based lifestyle magazine. I was always on the lookout for innovative and interesting Australian owned and designed products to feature up and coming contemporary and quality brands. With older children of my own, I never actually thought I would need to use their services, but life is often peculiar.

I called Belly Art out of hours on a wintry Saturday afternoon with a last minute plea for one of their now award-winning Inkless Print Kits. Within the hour Ilana, their Creative Director, was at my front door with the keepsake kit and clear instructions as to how to take the prints and how the prints could be stored for later use for different keepsake applications should her parents want to use them in the future.

Abby passed on two days later, but her permanent hand and footprints while she was here continue to bring solace to her parents, Loni and Shane. As Loni explained, *"the grieving process has been so long, yet the time with Abby was so brief. Sometimes I question whether Abby was actually ever here and then I walk into what would have been her bedroom and I see her footprints in a frame and I feel reassured and blessed that 'yes, she really was here,' and it means everything to me"*.



While the story of Abby is a personal story, I have no doubt that most MamaMag readers would be familiar with the very public story of Michelle Buchholtz and partner Alexander Ansalone's continuing fight against Michelle's terminal cancer diagnosis and their decision to forgo her treatment after finding out they were expecting a baby, which resulted in the subsequent delivery of baby Ava three months premature, who is now home and doing well.

While at first Michelle and Alex's story strikes as one of tragic misfortune, it is actually also one of a mother's pure and self-sacrificing love for her child. It is also a lesson about positivity and courage in the face of adversity.

Despite Michelle's current chemotherapy treatment, I am extremely thankful for her insights via her sister Janine, into having her belly cast done at Belly Art's studio in North Caulfield the day before being admitted to hospital to deliver Ava, and why she originally wanted a belly cast prior to the knowledge of her terminal prognosis.

"I wanted to capture that special moment in my life and to have it for my little girl. I wanted to have it on my wall and one day give it to Ava. The belly casting was an opportunity to express how I was feeling about my pregnancy and child through an art form, I am very creative and found this type of expression to be very familiar to me" says Michelle.

I asked Michelle whether the meaning and value of having her pregnant belly cast had changed for her emotionally after learning of her prognosis. *"Yes, it has made it much more special, it will show Ava what her mother looked like when she was having her. It will also more than likely be my only pregnancy, so that makes that time in my life extra special."*

Sometimes, life doesn't live up to our expectations and certainly isn't always fair; sometimes we are just simply unable to control the powers that be.

This article is intended to draw light on the times in life when those special baby book mementos, belly casts and precious items we collect of our child's earliest years can be the everlasting keepsakes for tomorrow and provide life lasting tangible memories, especially when that may be all we have to hold on to and cherish.

By Lisa Quittner from Belly Art
To find out more visit www.bellyart.com.au

