

Members Story

The Machinery Yard



THE MACHINERY YARD

November 28th 1974 was a day we as a family will never forget and would be reminded of every year. Events leading up to the big day actually started around 10pm on November 26th with labour pains that have a habit of getting worse as the hours pass. 3am on the 27th with the case packed and petrol in the car, my husband Tom and I set out for Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda. We had left our 15 month old daughter with good friends for safe keeping. Having made this trip in this condition once before it was with some trepidation that I set out for the second time, especially as this time I was expecting twins. The journey had its fair share of potholes but I suppose in hindsight it at least had the benefit of progressing labour without medication. I always thought it was such a long journey, but when we got to “the machinery yard” in Drogheda I knew no matter what, we were near and would get there in time. This important landmark in our lives has since been replaced with new housing developments.

I spent the day in labour and at 8.30pm that evening visitors to the ward were sent home, my husband included. Not that he was complaining as it was not the done thing in those days for partners to be around during the delivery. At 9pm my obstetrician was concerned enough to decide I needed an emergency section and my husband was informed. So back he had to come, but as 1974 was also the year of the strike and we hadn't factored in a return trip, he had planned to get petrol in the morning. But he needed it now! A call to the Gardai in Navan had some success as they drove him to Slane where a Louth Garda car escorted him to the hospital. Thank God I was unaware of all this or I would have killed him!

I was brought to theatre at 9.30pm bearing in mind that there was no lift and that patients had to be carried up and down the stairs by 2 porters! I was anaesthetised but I remember two things, firstly I was so glad to get to sleep, and secondly there was a line of medical and nursing students lined up around the operating theatre. It would be nice for them to witness the delivery of twins by caesarean section. We would be entered into their little report books, and would become a case in question and statistics.

Next thing I remember on waking from a deep sleep to somebody saying “police escorted husband”, “does she know?” What exactly was I supposed to know?

Eventually at around 4am my husband told me that we had twin boys delivered at around 10pm the night before, but one of them, Kieran, had Spina Bifida. He had been baptised and luckily we had picked two boys names. I hate to think what they would have been called had it been 2 girls! His twin Brendan was fine even though he was the smaller of the two, and they were both in the special baby unit. Neither of us had any idea about Spina Bifida as things were not as advanced then as they are now. There were no scans, pre natal classes etc. I had to have an x-ray at 7 months to confirm I was having twins.

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That morning (it was not the 29th) we both decided that whatever the problems were, he was our baby, and we would do all we could for him. We were not told much except that Kieran would have to go to Our Lady's Hospital in Crumlin for surgery on his back early that morning. So at 8.30am he was brought in, in his incubator so I could have a look. He was a beautiful baby – pink and cute. So off he went to Dublin by ambulance for his operation. Nerve supply to his bladder and bowel were damaged but we would have to wait to see how things developed. Meantime back in the Lourdes Hospital Brendan and I progressed and we were allowed home. Kieran joined us four days later. In the meantime we had also picked up our daughter from our friends house. Lucky we had left her there or she could have been in police custody!!

Once home with 3 babies under 15 months it was all go. Weekly visits to Crumlin with Kieran, then every fortnight, monthly and as everything was going according to plan it stretched to yearly visits. As things go, the outlook was good. Kieran was ambulant but had some “hidden disabilities” that only we were aware of. He always wanted to be like the other children with Spina Bifida and really wanted a wheelchair. His wish was granted some years later for a short period when he had surgery to his Achilles tendons. He was at last like everybody else or so he thought!

School brought its own issues and problems. As teachers were told he had Spina Bifida there was the feeling that he should go to a special needs school. But we felt he was able for mainstream school. To get him into Primary School the Principal had to have a meeting with the board of Management, and all without anybody meeting the child in question! But in he got and continued in mainstream and took his Leaving Certificate in 1992.

Kieran needed appliances for his everyday needs and when I could no longer buy them in the shops due to his age I had to go to the Health Board. It felt they were paying for things personally, and it could even be classed as having to beg for the basics that he needed on a daily basis. I am glad I persisted though, as it may have helped others who were coming behind in the same position.

We were members (and still are) of the Louth/Meath branch of the Association and it was a great support for the families of the children concerned – a problem shared is a problem halved! There were great social outings and we all remember the great Christmas parties when all the brothers and sisters came along, and of course there was the chance of meeting Santy! There were also the holidays to Clogherhead which everybody looked forward to. Our Association is still strong and we still meet frequently. Now we have talks and seminars and they are a great help to raise awareness of Spina Bifida. Never again should anybody not know what Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus is or have to beg for basic needs.

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The Association has increased awareness, and changes in education have improved greatly over the 30 plus years that we have been members. Services, although too late for Kieran and others of his age group, are now available for others. We must applaud those who have brought both children's and adults needs to the fore, and things to where they stand today. However I feel that there is still a need to further support and educate some of our adult members, who lost out during the early days of the Association.

As a family we all have our own memories, but SBHI and in particular our Louth/Meath Branch, has been a great resource and support to us and long may it continue.

Incidentally, my experiences in 1974 did not deter me from making another trip via "the machinery yard", when our second daughter was born. Four little angels, all under three and a half years. It was only then we got sense!!

Mother from Meath