

◀ to move on with his life. I felt anger towards my parents for not listening to me and telling me what was best for me. I had this intense feeling of missing my baby and was consumed by thoughts of where I'd be in my pregnancy, wondering how it would be progressing, how everyone would be reacting to me, what mine and James' relationship would be like ...

No matter what anyone said to me, I couldn't view my baby as 'just a ball of cells' – he was a lot more than that to me. When I'd first found out I was pregnant I had a feeling I was carrying a boy, and in those few weeks I began referring to him as Jayden Scott. That carried on after my abortion – being able to give my lost baby a name made me feel better. Jayden Scott was never 'it'.

Things started to get worse. My usual happy-go-lucky personality turned into the total opposite. I didn't want to see my friends, I didn't want to go out, I lost my motivation to go to teachers' college and my grades started slipping. I turned to alcohol for mental and emotional numbness. Anger became who I was; anger was all that I felt. I was so moody. At a time in my life when I should've been having fun, I was having the worst time ever, feeling so many unfamiliar emotions and harbouring a lot of unsafe thoughts.

»» LOSING IT

In the months after my abortion, when I was feeling really bad, I only had one person to talk to – my best friend and flatmate Amy. She was wonderful to me; if it hadn't been for her, I doubt I'd still be here. Some nights I'd think about ways to end my life – I felt as though I had no right to live when Jayden Scott wasn't given the chance. A few times I cut myself to try and feel some of the pain I felt I 'deserved'. My friends didn't know about any of this.

Nobody warned me that the 'anniversaries' would be so hard. When my 'due date' arrived, I lost the plot. I seriously considered inflicting bodily harm on James and I had a lot of anger towards my parents – I couldn't talk to them, couldn't stand it when they gave me advice and I got angry when I heard them mention someone else's baby. I felt guilty about my anger, which in turn, made me angry at myself. It was a vicious cycle.

Around this time, I began going out more with my friends – only because I was starting to feel bad about drinking by myself – and pretend I was having a wonderful time. We'd go out clubbing and I'd take random

"I FELT INTENSE REGRET FOR NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT I REALLY WANTED."

men home. One-night stands seemed like a great idea at the time – a bit of attention, a bit of intimacy – until the next morning with the inevitable hangover, the awkward conversations and seeing the guys leaving as soon as they could. Then waiting for them to call and feeling rejected when they didn't.

»» A CRY FOR HELP

My friends finally said I needed to get help; they were worried about my mental state. While doing a Google search on the internet, I came across a site called afterabortion.com, and after only a few minutes reading, so much made sense to me. I read about something called post abortion syndrome (PAS), the symptoms of which all rang true. Suddenly I didn't feel so alone – the feelings I'd been experiencing were common!

At the abortion clinic, I wasn't told I might feel depressed; I was told I might feel a bit sad for a couple of days, but that it won't last, and that most women feel relief. But that certainly wasn't true in my case and, according to the website, thousands of other women too. I joined the message boards on the web-site and, almost three years later, I'm a moderator. I've gone from being the one who needs a lot of support to one who gives support.

»» MOVING ON

In March 2003, my younger sister announced she was pregnant. She was 16. It brought up a lot of repressed anger towards my parents, who allowed my sister to make up her own mind about the pregnancy. During the time my sister was pregnant, I went through a lot of emotional turmoil, but when my nephew

arrived, it was one of the happiest days of my life. I adored him; he taught me a lot about life through his little gazes, his cute giggles and his apparent trust in me. Sadly, four months later, he passed away due to SIDS.

After spending a lot of time thinking, suffering and soul-searching, things are finally getting better. I still suffer from symptoms of PAS, especially when I see pregnant women, babies, baby equipment or young children. I think 'what if' or 'if only', but those phases don't last long any more. The hardest times for me now are the couple of weeks leading up to my anniversaries – my conception date, the positive pregnancy test and my abortion date. They all make me think about what life would be like if had I kept Jayden Scott.

Every day I regret the fact that I had an abortion. I regret that I wasn't stronger and not a day goes past when I don't think of Jayden Scott. But I'm also a strong believer in things happening for a reason and I'm slowly beginning to see the more positive effects this experience has had on my life. It has made me a better woman and I have learnt a lot about life. But if I could turn back time and keep Jayden Scott – and stay the same ignorant, small-minded woman – I would." **COSMO**

WHAT IS PAS?

In 1992, *The British Journal of Psychiatry* found that psychiatric and psychological disturbance affect around 10 per cent of women who've had an abortion, and many believe the present rate is far higher. While there are debates whether Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS) actually exists, it's said that a type of post-traumatic stress disorder is sometimes experienced by women after they've had an abortion.

Often, a woman will feel a sense of relief immediately after her abortion, but with repression, she'll ignore her true feelings until they emerge years later. The stress arises in women when the reality of the responsibility hits them; it's similar to unprocessed grief surrounding a death.

Symptoms include depression, frequent weeping, loss of concentration, extreme anger and low self-esteem. For more info, go to afterabortion.com and abortionfacts.com/PAS/PAS.asp.