

THE SHORT LIFE OF ANTHONY NOLAN



'We have a long hard road ahead but I look to the day when no child dies like my son, waiting for a donor to save him.'
Shirley Nolan

Anthony Nolan was born on the morning of Thursday 2 December, 1971 in Adelaide's Memorial Hospital, in South Australia.

His mother, Shirley, originally from Leeds in West Yorkshire, had travelled to Australia at the end of the 1960s with her future husband, Ted.

After a long labour and difficult birth, Shirley was only able to hold her newborn baby boy for a brief time before he was transferred to a special unit. There was nothing particularly unusual in this; the baby of another woman on Shirley's ward was also moved to the unit following a complicated delivery.

However, that night, doctors woke Shirley from her sleep. She knew instantly that something was wrong. The doctors broke the news that her newborn baby - not even 24-hours old - had suffered a severe brain haemorrhage.

The doctors told Shirley that her son had already been transferred to the Children's Hospital and warned her there was little chance he would survive.

The night sister held Shirley's hand and quietly asked 'What do you wish him to be christened, my dear?' Shirley said, in the quietest of whispers, 'Anthony'.

During the operation to treat the haemorrhage Anthony died but the doctors managed to resuscitate him.

Anthony, like his mother, was a fighter.

However, Anthony's condition was so severe that he was not allowed to leave hospital. He had an abnormally low blood platelet count. Platelets cause the blood to clot and, because he had so few of them, Anthony lived under the constant threat of death from further haemorrhaging.

It was shortly before Anthony was six months old that his complex condition was finally diagnosed. He had Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome, a rare genetic deficiency of the immune system. The syndrome can cause severe bleeding problems, such as haemorrhaging, eczema, infections and auto-immune disease.

'ANTHONY'S WAS A SHORT, TOUGH LIFE BUT NONE OF US KNEW WHAT A FAR-REACHING LEGACY THAT CHILD WOULD LEAVE.'
PAULINE COLLINS

Shirley was told by Anthony's consultant that the condition was incurable and that children with the syndrome rarely lived beyond two years of age.

Shirley and Ted decided to have Anthony discharged. They wanted him to experience as much love and happiness as possible, in their own home, in the time he had left.

The next 18 months were incredibly challenging as Anthony continued to suffer from regular haemorrhaging. Shirley did everything within her power to make her son as comfortable as possible, knowing that he may not have much more time left.

Then, one morning, Shirley read a report in the local newspaper about a little boy of Anthony's age who had a condition which sounded very similar to Anthony's. The boy, called Simon Bostic, had undergone a bone marrow transplant at Westminster Hospital in London, England. It was the first time anyone had successfully received bone marrow from an unrelated donor.



Shirley Nolan hugs her son Anthony