Couple getting ready to take on epic 100-mile cycle challenge for charity in son's memory

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A couple from Suffolk whose baby boy tragically passed away at just seven weeks old in 2014 are training hard in preparation for the 100-mile long PrudentialLondon-Surrey cycle challenge to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust in his memory.

Lauren Braithwaite, 38 and her husband Andrew, 37, were shocked to discover they were expecting identical triplets at their 12 week scan. The couple, from Little Thurlow, were referred to The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge for specialist consultant led care where Lauren was closely monitored over the following weeks. However, at 29 weeks pregnant, Lauren was told there was a problem with the flow of blood between the placenta and one of the triplets, Ralphy, and she was admitted to hospital.

The decision was made to deliver the triplets by emergency caesarean at just 30 weeks and so Ted, Tom and Ralphy arrived weighing 3lb 6oz, 3lb 2oz and 1lb 10oz respectively. All three babies required urgent attention and were immediately intubated by doctors and transferred to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). At just hours old, Ted and Tom were transferred by ambulance to the Lister Hospital, 30 miles away, because there were not enough cots for the three brothers at The Rosie Hospital. It was at this point that the couple were offered support from The Sick Children's Trust, a charity that runs free 'Home from Home' accommodation supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Lauren and Andrew were given a room at the charity's Chestnut House, just minutes from where Ralphy was being treated on NICU. **Mum, Lauren, who trains horses that compete in point to point racing competitions, says:**

"The Sick Children's Trust helped us in so many ways that it is difficult to explain in words. We had heard about Chestnut House before the boys were delivered, but hadn't been guaranteed a room and didn't know what to expect. Over the next seven weeks the house became our lifeline, keeping me away from the edge of a dark void I felt I was moving so close to. The utter devastation of my reality was inexplicable to anyone but my husband. Having a base at Chestnut House, therefore, at least meant we just had to be in two places and not three, as would have been the case had we needed to go home every evening.

"Looking back, the trauma of having my boys in different hospitals was on a par with the suffering of losing Ralph. I didn't realise it then, but for five and a half weeks I was never in the right place because my babies weren't together. Chestnut House, which was just a few minutes away from Ralphy's side, allowed me to spend time with him every morning and evening, whilst during the day I could go and see his brothers in another hospital."

Whilst Ted and Tom went from strength to strength Ralphy was incredibly poorly. At just five days old, he underwent the first of two major operations he was to have during his short life. Ralphy was given a stoma, an opening in the stomach to divert the flow of faeces, but the procedure did not go to plan and the tiny baby needed multiple chest drains when one of his lungs collapsed. However, over the weeks that followed Ralphy seemed to grow more resilient and gained weight, and his brothers Ted and Tom were discharged home at five and a half weeks old. **Mum, Lauren, continues:**

"After Ted and Tom were discharged it was amazing to be able to spend the next week introducing the boys to each other. We would take Ted and Tom over to be with Ralphy every day, and he continued to make progress. We even left Chestnut House and went home for a week, making the journey to and from the hospital each morning and night. We thought we were through the worst of it.

"Then all of a sudden, when he was six and a half weeks old, Ralphy became extremely ill with necrotising enterocolitis (NEC). NEC is a serious illness in which tissues in the intestine become inflamed and can cause a perforation in the tissue allowing the contents of the intestine to leak into the abdomen. Despite the amazing efforts of all the medical staff to save his life, Ralphy went downhill very quickly and our beautiful son died in our arms seven weeks to the day after being born.

"The pain of losing Ralphy will never go away, but Andrew and I are now ready to fundraise for The Sick Children's Trust. We know it costs the charity £30 to support a family for one night and so we are taking on the Prudential RideLondon-Surrey 100 miles cycle challenge in the hope of raising £1,470, £30 for every night we stayed at The Sick Children's Trust's Chestnut House while Ralphy was in hospital."

The Sick Children's Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations to run its ten 'Homes from Home'

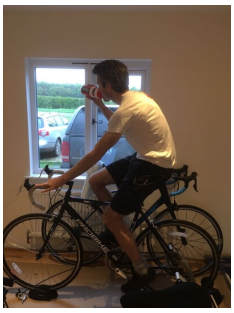
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across the country, supporting families like the Braithwaites with free accommodation whilst their child is being treated in specialist paediatric hospitals. **Chestnut House Manager, Abi Abdel-aal, says:**

“The whole experience of having a baby on NICU is incredibly traumatic and to know that during this time we could be there for Lauren and Andrew, helping ease some of the stresses, is really comforting.

“Lauren, Andrew, Ted and Tom had somewhere to rest and get away from the hospital, whilst still being just moments from Ralphy. It was a very difficult time for the family and it was important that we could make their lives a little easier during such a traumatic time.

“We are honoured to hear that Lauren and Andrew are fundraising for us in Ralphy's memory. We will definitely be watching the race and wishing them the best of luck!”

To find out more about Prudential RideLondon and sponsor Lauren and Andrew, please visit:

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/

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