

## STEPHEN CHARLES RUDD 2<sup>ND</sup> - 4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1951

My elder brother Stephen Charles Rudd was born on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1951 in Rugby, Warwickshire. He was my parent's first child and he was delivered from my mother by high cavity forceps because he was stuck in the birth canal. He had the potential to lead a normal and healthy life but was irreparably brain damaged by the forceps delivery. He lived for three days and died on September 4<sup>th</sup> of that year.



My mother saw him only once, in an incubator, was not allowed to hold him and was told not to cry. She also sustained severe pelvic floor and urethral injuries and needed surgery to repair the damage. The obstetrician who delivered the baby resigned from her post the following day. Stephen was taken away and buried in a communal plot in a graveyard in Rugby.

My parents were newly married and young, full of hope for their new baby. It was an unbelievable tragedy for them both, and Stephen, and irrevocably changed the course of our family history. I was born the following year, in November 1952 as a replacement for the longed for new baby. Fortunately, my birth was straightforward and my parents had the new baby they so desperately needed. I know that I would not be here if Stephen had lived, and quite possibly, the order of the births of my other siblings, Claire, Tony and Sarah might have been quite different too. For these reasons, I owe it to Stephen to write his story and to make him a visible part of our family history.

I knew nothing of this tragedy until I was a young adult myself. When my mother eventually told me, I marvelled at the strength of these two dear people, Ron and Frankie, to carry the burden of this sorrow buried deep within them and never once expressed remorse, bitterness, anger or regret at the events of that fateful September. Of course, this was

what was expected at that time – ‘least said, soonest mended’ was the maxim of the time that the post war generation believed to be the right way to do things. How wrong they all were!

My mother told me on a journey home one night as we were driving over the top of the Quantock Hills in Somerset (we’d moved to Somerset in 1957). I was sitting in the back seat and she was in the front. As I heard the story, I began to feel rage, horror and grief as though it was my own personal tragedy. I remember sitting in the back seat weeping for the pain that my parents must have experienced but never shared with us. I found it difficult to understand how they could have lived with this all the time we were growing up but never burdened us with it. Even after she told me, my parents rarely if ever mentioned it again and certainly didn’t shed any tears, at least not in our presence.

Fast forward to July 2016. My mother had died in 1998, but my father was still alive, and at the time, in 2016, was a fit and vigorous 88 year old. My husband Ken and I were staying in a friend’s house in Warwickshire, and Ken, being very interested in family history, decided to try tracing my brother, Stephen’s grave site. He found the “Brief Lives - Remembered” website, posted the question and almost instantly got an answer from Paula, one of the moderators. She was able to tell us where in Rugby he was buried (Clifton Road Cemetery) and approximately where in the cemetery the communal site was in which he was buried.



We visited the next day and found the area of the graveyard where Stephen was buried. Quite without knowing why, I found myself stomping round the graveyard weeping and declaring that it wasn’t right, that he should have lived, that he shouldn’t have been born by high forceps. (I was a midwife, so know that high forceps would never, ever be attempted nowadays as it’s too dangerous. He would have been safely delivered by caesarean section instead). I surprised myself at the strength of my emotions for a long dead brother I had never met. I determined that I must therefore do something to honour his memory

and to keep him alive in the family history. I have learned that these things are more important than we often give them credit for.

However, other life events got in the way and I didn't get around to it at the time. Now, in 2018, I have time and energy to revisit this desire to make a memorial to his life. Also, my father's health is failing and I would like him to know that Stephen's name is now firmly a part of the family history before he finally dies.

Julie Williams (nee Rudd)

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