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MIRACLE
BABY AT 54**



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My RAINBOW

After the devastating loss of her daughter, Carolyn Mayling was sent a ray of light

Watching my daughter up on stage, my heart swelled with pride. At just 10 years old, Rosie had written, produced and starred in her very own musical, *Forever and a Day*, along with her sister Ellie, then 13, and two of their best friends. Rosie was a star in the making, and, for her, the sky was the limit. But within eight months, my beautiful, talented daughter was gone, and I knew that without Rosie, life would never be the same.

I'd always loved the theatre. My own mother, June, had founded a school for the performing arts in 1947, now called Redroofs, and as an adult, I too became passionate about coaching young performers. So when my daughter Ellie was born in 1988, followed by Rosie in 1991, it was no surprise that they shared my love of the arts.

As they grew up, Ellie loved ballet, dancing gracefully in her pink tutu, while Rosie was always so full of colour. She loved wearing stripes and rainbows, and standing out from the crowd.

After putting on her own show in September 2002, Rosie was looking forward to appearing in *Puss in Boots*, the pantomime

at the Novello Theatre in Ascot that Christmas.

But, in December 2002, as the frosty weather settled in, Rosie developed a cough that wouldn't clear up. The GP prescribed antibiotics for a chest infection, but the cough got worse and she became short of breath. Rosie was given an inhaler, but it did little to help, and by Christmas, she was too unwell to perform in the

pantomime. Utterly devastated, she watched from the side of the stage as an understudy took her part.

In February 2003, Rosie was still no better, so she was referred to a consultant who agreed to perform a CT scan, and within 20 minutes, Rosie was blue-lighted to John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

Diagnosis at last

The scan showed multiple pulmonary embolisms, which were clots on the main arteries going into Rosie's lungs. Doctors tried to work out what had caused them, but despite multiple tests, they couldn't

'Without Rosie, life would never be same'



Son Dominic brought Carolyn renewed hope

be sure. Eventually, Rosie underwent a terrifying six-hour operation, in which the embolisms were removed and a biopsy was taken.

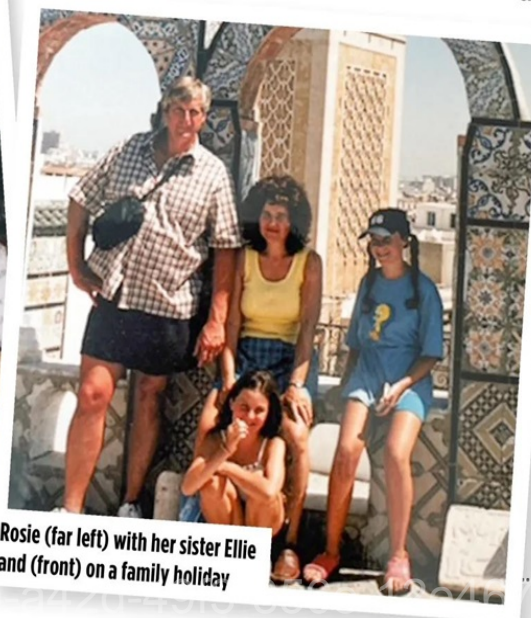
With the clots removed, we hoped Rosie would soon be discharged. Days had now turned into weeks. Rosie was a bubbly, fun, creative person, but with nothing to do apart from lie in her hospital bed, she became incredibly bored. But her mind was, as always, buzzing with ideas.

She told us that when she was better she wanted to put on shows to raise money for children in hospital. And I didn't doubt that she would. She was so determined, and so caring.

But within two days of having the clots removed, a scan revealed they had come back. Rosie had been desperate to go home, and it was a devastating setback. Doctors diagnosed vasculitis, an autoimmune disease affecting the blood vessels. Although it couldn't be cured, we were told it was treatable.

By the time Rosie was discharged in April 2003, she was thin and weak, and dark circles had formed around her eyes, but she couldn't wait to go back to school and see all her friends. Yet my poor, sweet Rosie never got the chance.

Just six days later, I heard coughing from downstairs. I rushed down to find Rosie coughing up blood, struggling to breathe. We hurried back to hospital



Rosie (far left) with her sister Ellie and (front) on a family holiday

BABY at 54



and doctors found a massive pulmonary haemorrhage. As she was placed on a ventilator, she suffered a cardiac arrest. All hope was fading – my little girl was slipping away.

On 14 May 2003, Rosie died.

I couldn't understand why it had happened, why she'd suddenly developed this condition, and why an 11-year-old girl with such a bright future had so cruelly had her life cut short. But there were no answers, and there never would be.

On the day of Rosie's funeral, on 23 May 2003, hundreds of people came to celebrate her life. We all wore bright colours – a tribute to the girl who loved rainbows. I told myself that if we were to drag ourselves out of this darkness, something positive had to

happen. Rosie's wish of wanting to entertain children in hospital stood out in my mind, and I silently promised to help fulfil that dream. Just then, the biggest, brightest, double rainbow appeared in the sky, and I knew Rosie was still with me.

Positive moves

Rosie's Rainbow Fund was founded in 2004, supporting sick children with music therapy sessions, offering a source of entertainment, play and an escape from the silence and boredom of a long stay in hospital. We also introduced parental support, with dedicated therapists to help parents cope while their child is battling a serious illness, and bereavement support for parents who have lost a child.



After the storm:
Newborn Dominic with
Carolyn and David

Over the next few years, the charity grew and I knew Rosie would be proud. But although we were making noise within the hospital walls, at home, the silence was deafening. Ellie missed her sister dearly, and without Rosie's singing, the house was so quiet. There was a void in our lives, and I began to think having another baby would give us a renewed sense of hope. Ellie worried I was trying to replace Rosie, but I explained to her that wasn't the case. She was irreplaceable.

It was a long process, but after two failed attempts at IVF, in April 2008, I visited a clinic in Cyprus, and two weeks later, I had a positive pregnancy test. In December 2008, aged 54, I gave birth to Dominic, five years after his big sister had passed away. For the first time in years, I felt excited about the future.

Ellie was besotted with her baby brother, and as he grew, we told him all about Rosie. He knew he was special, and he helped mend a part of our broken hearts. As though he was a gift from Rosie herself, he was our rainbow baby, born after the storm.

Despite the happiness Dominic brought our family, in 2013, after 26 years, I split with my husband David, and although we remain close, the grief of losing a child was just too much for our relationship to bear.

Now, Dominic is 14 and Ellie is 34. Rosie's Rainbow Fund is going strong, and I'm proud of the legacy my daughter left behind. We all are. Rosie was born to be a star, and she continues to shine.

★ *The Future is Rosie* by Carolyn Mayling (Alliance Publishing Press, £11.99) is out on 1 February 2023

