Bundle of joy
We adored our Christmas baby
Laura Beck, 39

As we cuddled him close, our boy was perfect

As the surgeon made his first incision along my tummy, I let out an ear-splitting scream. The local anaesthetic wasn’t working.

‘We’ll have to put you under,’ the surgeon said.

The world became a blur and as I came round, they wheeled me back to our room.

‘Do you want to meet your little boy?’ the nurse smiled, and there was Aaron, cradling our bundle.

As we cuddled him close, our baby boy was perfect.

On Christmas Day, baby Anderson and I were still in hospital.

I dressed him in a Santa outfit for his newborn photos. ‘He’s beautiful,’ Aaron’s mum Brenda said when she came to visit.

The next morning, I was discharged.

Just in time, as we’d arranged for a marriage officiant to come round on 29 December.

Standing on our back porch, we exchanged vows, with Aaron’s parents videotaping it and holding Anderson.

It really was the best family Christmas. Watching Anderson grow was a gift. Aaron was totally obsessed with our boy. ‘Bath time is the best time,’ we sang, bathing him as he splashed happily.

On his first birthday, in December 2021, we hung balloons and invited family and friends.

‘Happy birthday, Anderson!’ our guests sang, as he sat in his high chair, dipping his fingers in the cake icing.

Days later, we had his first Christmas at home.

As we helped him to unwrap his presents, he giggled, grabbing his new toy hockey sticks.

Winter turned to spring and Anderson loved playing outdoors, especially being pulled around the driveway in his little red cart.

He started nursery, and Aaron and I took turns to drop him off and pick him up around our work hours.

In June 2022, we were plunged into a heatwave, with temperatures in the high 20s.

‘I’ll take Anderson this morning,’ said Aaron, giving me a kiss.

Anderson had been off poorly the day before, but had woken this morning seeming brighter.

‘Love you,’ I called to them from the porch.

Moments later, Aaron dashed back in.

‘Forgot my phone,’ he said, grabbing it before returning to his car.

As I opened my laptop to start my work shift at home, I hoped Anderson was feeling better.

A couple of hours later, I texted the nursery receptionist from my desk.

‘How’s Anderson doing?’ I asked.

She called me, and as she spoke, I went cold.

‘Anderson isn’t here today,’ she said.

Turn over for more
One awful mistake

I was confused.

Of course Anderson was at nursery. Aaron had put him in the car.

There must be a mistake, I told the receptionist, listening to her walk to the classroom.

"I'm really sorry," she said. "He's not here."

Panic tore through me.

Had they been in a car accident?

Hanging up, I rang Aaron.

"Where's Anderson?"

"I don't know," I said. "He's not at nursery. What do you mean?"

I responded, confused.

A pause, then.

"Oh my God," Aaron said, frantic, "They hung up."

I kept dialling, and Aaron answered his phone.

"Please, I have to go!" he said.

I dished out in the blazing heat to my car, sped to Aaron's work.

With my phone on a speaker, I called the police.

I think my voice was hoarse, but I was sure it was not.

I told him I was in the back seat. I pulled up to Aaron's office as police arrived.

I prayed we'd arrived in time, that Anderson would be OK.

But Aaron's car was nowhere to be seen and he wasn't answering his phone. We had shared locations on our phones, and I could see that Aaron was back at our house.

The police dispatched officers to go round there.

Then my phone rang. It was Aaron, and he sounded completely broken. He told me his son, I'm sorry, I love you, he said, before the phone went dead.

I lay on the grass, unable to take in what I heard.

Ten minutes later, an officer walked over to me.

"Mrs Beck," we're sorry, they said softly, "Anderson and Aaron are no longer with us."

They'd found Anderson inside the house. He'd been there hours before.

Then they had found Aaron in the woods behind our house.

He'd taken his own life. Grief hit instantly and was crushing.

Just that morning, Anderson and I had been watching cartoons in the kitchen, with him eating bananas, while Aaron had been in the shower.

Our perfect little family.

In an instant, my whole world had been ripped apart.

The next few days were a blur as I desperately searched for answers.

It turned out that when Aaron popped back to the house to get his phone that morning, it'd been a change of routine.

Together with us getting a new puppy, he'd been stressed at work too.

Instead of driving to Anderson's nursery, he forgot he was in the back of the car, and went straight to work.

Meanwhile, in the car with the windows up, temperature soared.

Anderson overheated.

By the time Aaron found his body, it was too late.

So devastated, Aaron couldn't go on. After driving Anderson home and placing him gently inside, Aaron went out to the woods.

Facing the prospect of life without Aaron and Anderson was unbearable. I didn't want to keep going.

I replayed the day over in my head, torturing myself with what if.

In July 2022, Aaron and Anderson had a joint funeral, surrounded by our family and friends.

Loved ones planted trees in their honour, too.

It still didn't feel real.

How could something like this happen?

Aaron adored Anderson, he was his world.

I knew he'd never do anything to hurt our boy, and thinking of how devastated he felt when he realised what had happened was agony.

I found myself researching hot-car deaths, discovered that, tragically, it happened often and was a real danger, especially in hot climates like our home, Virginia, USA.

As I scrolled through articles, I asked for all the families that'd been torn apart like mine.

Too many innocent children, like Anderson, from loving homes, were being lost to heat stroke in hot cars.

All it took was an awful mistake that anyone could make.

Almost a year on from the accident, in May 2023, I woke up one morning feeling ready to bring something good out of this terrible tragedy.

I found an organisation called Kids and Car Safety, and spoke to its founders, Amber and Joanne.

They explained that detection technology exists to alert drivers to a child in their back seat, but not every car is fitted with it.

"I want to start a campaign for Anderson's Law," I told them.

Requiring manufacturers to include tech to keep kids safe.

With their help, I started sharing my story.

Since then, I've worked to spread the word about preventable hot-car deaths, and tell the world about my wonderful husband and son.

I had to move out of our house, so full of memories.

I'm still close with Aaron's family — we go on trips and spend the holidays together.

I live alone, but surround myself with reminders of my amazing family.

Aaron's name hangs by my bathroom mirror, his slippers sit on the floor.

I sleep with one of Anderson's t-shirts every night, and use his toddler tablet and chairs as plants stand in my living room.

Facing life without my family is unbearably painful.

We should be preparing to celebrate Anderson's third birthday, and Christmas, together.

The fact that we aren't is so bitterly unfair.