

'I changed the law and got a baby'

A normal day for Suzanne Hobbs, 35, turned into a life-changing drama

As a journalist, my day doesn't end when the clock says it's time to go home. Late-night shifts and after-hours phone calls are all part of the job. And you always have to keep your feelings separate from the facts.

I've always known this, but of the 12 years that I've been reporting, one assignment will always be close to my heart.

It was an October morning in 2000 when the phone rang. It was the police with a tip-off – a baby had been found dead in a skip. Looking back, I didn't have time to think about what I'd be reporting on. But the reality sunk in as my cameraman and I pulled up to the scene, already crowded by nosy onlookers, yellow tape and police.

We'd arrived just in time to see a tiny bundle, wrapped in a pretty pink blanket,



being sadly carried away to the morgue.

I felt incredibly sad. How could anyone, no matter how young, old, destitute, scared or alone, throw away another life like it was rubbish? I tried to remain objective but being there brought home how much I longed to be a mother myself.

My then husband, Brandon, and I, living

in Idaho in the US, had been trying for three years to have a baby. We'd had all the tests done but still we couldn't conceive.

That day at the scene, we shot the story, as the police went about door-knocking in the local area. A few hours later, a 17 year-old girl, Leslie Browning, confessed to hiding the pregnancy from her family and abandoning her stillborn baby.

Leslie told the police she'd seen no other option but to get rid of the dead child, as if it had never happened – just like the pregnancy itself. She was later convicted of unlawful disposal of a body because the post mortem couldn't disprove her claim that the baby was stillborn.

I didn't get to speak to Leslie, but I did speak to her dad. He mentioned a law that allowed women to give their newborn babies to the state, no questions asked. I'd never heard of this law, and wondered if it existed in Idaho. If so, I felt it was my job to let expectant mothers out there know that they had a choice, unlike Leslie.

I discovered that 22 states in the US allowed women to leave their unwanted baby at a hospital, police or fire station under a Safe Haven Law – Idaho was not one of them. I knew I was in a perfect

The options for desperate mothers

UK It's a criminal offence to abandon a child, but currently no similar Safe Haven Law exists in the UK. Abandoned babies are taken into hospital, placed in foster care and eventually adopted.

Japan Japan's first baby drop-off point, the 'Stork Cradle', was recently introduced outside a hospital. Once a baby is placed inside the capsule and the lid closed, a buzzer alerts staff. But once the hatch is closed, only they can re-open it.

Germany Similar devices called 'Baby Klappe' have been in use since 2000. There are now more than 90 where mothers can drop-off their baby. Even so, at least 23 babies have been killed, the majority of them dumped, this year alone.





Happy ending

Lillie, now nearly four, knows that Suzanne isn't her 'tummy mummy'

position as a TV reporter to raise awareness about the lack of protection out there for mothers in such dire straits. From that moment on, I made it my number one priority to get a Safe Haven Law passed in Idaho.

In some ways, I guess my mission had become personal. I was still trying for a child of my own and knowing that another might be abandoned gave me the drive to succeed.

I contacted my state senator the next day and put pressure on him for six months until the law was passed in April 2001. I never expected things to happen so quickly! As reports came in over the next year or so of babies left at safe havens throughout Idaho, Brandon and I were still trying for a baby. But by January 2003, we'd just about given up.

That's when we decided to sign up to adopt a child. Brandon was a little apprehensive at first but we were both more than ready to be parents and I was desperate for a family.

In July 2003, a 5lb 3oz baby girl was born at our local hospital. But soon after

the birth, her mum went out for a cigarette and never came back. The following Tuesday morning, our phone rang. It was the same police officer who'd called me with the tip-off in 2000. He had another tip-off, but this time it wasn't about work.

He'd called to say the baby abandoned at the hospital was ours to adopt if we wanted it. We said yes straightaway – we didn't think twice.

I was excited and nervous but more than anything, I was happy. My life was about to

change entirely. I was going to be a mum. It was everything we'd always wanted. With tears of happiness, Brandon and I made our way to the hospital where our beautiful baby girl awaited.

I didn't really know what to expect. It all felt so surreal. I remember stopping in my tracks just metres away from what was just a tiny bundle cradled in the arms of a nurse. She too had been all wrapped up in a pretty pink blanket – just like the baby they found in the skip.

From the moment I saw her gorgeous brown eyes and olive skin, I fell in love with

her. There was no doubt in my mind that this abandoned baby girl was destined to be ours. It was frightening to think that without the Safe Haven Law, she might have made the six o'clock news, instead of into our arms.

We decided to name her Lillie Love, after my grandmother. She became our everything and always will be. She knows that I'm not her 'tummy mummy' and as she gets older she'll probably ask more questions but we wouldn't have it any other way. We're proud of where she's come from and we want her to be too.

Since the law was passed back in 2001, at least 13 babies have been handed in. I hate to think where Lillie would be right now had I not got that phone call. I don't think there will ever be a justifiable reason why babies are still abandoned. But I know I've done my part in giving mothers the choice to do otherwise.

'My mission had become personal'

What do you think? Should there be a Safe Haven Law in the UK? Write to **woman** at the address on page 69 or you can email us at woman@ipcmedia.com