

“Why are we not in a hospital, why are we not in a hospital, oh why are we not in a hospital.”

My husband told me he kept thinking these words over and over as I was in the depths of labour.

It all started about nine months beforehand when we found out we were going to have our first child. I am an avid researcher, so even then, I was planning on how I was going to deliver our baby. It took a lot of dedication, including continual mental and physical exercise, and even more research. I would spend about two hours a day completing a meditation routine combined with walking, attended weekly prenatal classes, and read every positive home birth story I could get my hands on.

Nine months later, I was ready, or as ready as I could have been. My Midwife gave me one piece of critical information that I couldn't have found in any book. When early contractions start, do not push it along, try to have a nap instead. She told me many women get up and walk around to help it progress, eager to meet their baby. Your body just isn't ready at that moment, it's prepping itself, and you will need the precious little energy you're expending as you walk up and down stairs, trying to hurry things up, later. Most dearly, you will need it later.

I was ten days past my due date when it started. In those ten days, I went on two outings, a wedding and a trip to the farmers market. The rest of the time, I rested. Feelings of tightening had started happening on the eighth day past due. For two days, I warded off labour with regular naps and gravol. On the tenth day, I told my husband we needed to go into the city, to his Mom's house, as I was now in labour.

In the car on the way there, I had two contractions. They weren't bad at all, totally manageable, so when my husband wanted to stop for McDonalds, I had no issues. He, on the other hand, regretted it entirely as we sat in a lengthy lineup. I recall him saying one thing to me that was just audible through the constant motion of wiping his face in anxiety, “God, I hope our baby isn't ugly.” I burst out laughing.

At his Mom's, which was vacant at the time, labour pressures increased. I recall crawling on my hands and knees and leaning on things during contractions. To those women I'd seen walking through contractions, I'll never live up to you. These were hard. My husband kept bringing me ice creams and water. Ice cream, meditation, and breathing exercises were what I used, and they worked wonderfully. We called our Midwife twice. She talked on the phone with me and from my jokes and laughter, said it was still too early. Apparently all love of the world is lost when you're really in labour, and as far as she could tell, I wasn't in enough pain to stop making jokes. So we waited.

I asked my husband to pour the bath. It was pleasant being in there. I had a small tablet and watched my favourite funny show in the dark from the safety of the warm water. As contractions came, I would wake from my reverie, but otherwise, I was able to meditate myself into a shallow sleep between them. This went on for a few more hours.

My husband came to check on me a few times and, when I was in enough pain to start crying, he called the midwife (with a little too much ferocity in his voice). She came rather quickly and once there, moved with lightening speed. She had never been to the house before but seemed to know her way around. I could hear her stripping the bed, laying down towels, preparing her equipment, and even moving small furniture.

She came to see me a few times between her prepping. She checked the baby's heartbeat and happily told me that my baby didn't even seem to know it was time to be born, that he was as comfortable to go

through labour as I was uncomfortable with it. She told me I had to lay on my right side for a few contractions, so that I would be effaced on both sides (I had been labouring on my left side only). She told me I had to try to use the toilet. I tried twice with no success. The second time, I had the strongest, most painful contraction I'd ever experienced (both labours combined). It caused my water to break.

My husband quickly helped me back into the tub. He has a very good poker face as he looked at me with the utmost calming expression before telling me he would be right back. On the other side of the door, I heard him tell the Midwife that he could feel the baby's head. She came back into the room hurriedly to check. Indeed, our baby was right there, and I felt like pushing. Every time I did though, I would instinctively slam my legs together to prevent the pain, pushing my baby back up. My Midwife would encourage me to try again, and each time, I forced my legs to slam shut, repeating the whole process that my baby and I were enduring together. After these failed attempts at willfully birthing my baby on my own, she eventually told my husband to hold my legs open. Out popped our baby's head, under the water. I couldn't see him, but my Midwife told me he was there. I recall greeting him, "Hello Baby."

One more contraction and he was out and on my chest. He was quiet at first, so my Midwife kind of poked him with her finger, making sure his mouth was clear and he let out a wail. We all rejoiced!

The entire (and new) family moved to one of the bedrooms, the one that had been stripped and prepped. We called our families to announce the baby had arrived in the wee hours of the morning. My Midwife did a quick check of our son's vitals, after which, she gave me no warning before she plopped the baby on to my chest to nurse. What an odd sensation.

Our families arrived and my husband brought the baby to see them so I could have a bit of privacy to get fixed up. Yes indeed, labour takes a toll on the body and I felt a little like Frankenstein as I was patched up. I was a new woman, my Midwife told me. I didn't feel very new, but was happy all the same.

Our families then came to join me as we watched what I call the Baby Proceedings. The Midwife weighed and measured our baby, checked his muscles, joints, mouth, eyes, and tested his blood. He weighed 8 lbs 5 oz. and was 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ " in length. I recall looking over to my Mom and seeing her eyes bulge at the news. She later told me that as far as she new, no woman in our family had ever birthed a baby that big.

The baby was laid to sleep in a crib beside my bed. My Midwife congratulated me and told me I was one of the fastest first timers she'd ever had. She also told me that in these next few hours, I would need to sleep. That many women feel the desire to watch their sleeping baby rather than sleep themselves. She left, promising to return in a few days to check us all again.

As my husband laid down next to me, both of us trying to get some sleep, we both found ourselves turning towards our son, watching him snooze peacefully beside us. It was wonderful to fall in love so quickly. At the time, he was the most beautiful child we had ever seen. He was bald and wrinkled, with splotches of pink on his skin. Indeed, he was a little ugly.