Dylan's Birth: From His Mother's and Grandmother's Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In this column, an adolescent mother demonstrates how preparation, Lamaze education, supportive caregivers, and an inner wisdom about the normalcy of birth enabled her to have a safe and satisfying birth. The grandmother, an experienced Lamaze educator and doula, also tells of her transformational experience as she watched her daughter give birth with strength and wisdom.

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DYLAN'S BIRTH: HIS MOTHER CLAIRE'S STORY

Being a young, 18-year-old, expectant mother, I was fortunate to have wonderful doctors, an experienced doula, and exceptional overall care throughout my pregnancy. I read *The Pregnancy Book* by William and Martha Sears and *Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Newborn* by Penny Simkin, Janet Whalley, and Ann Keppler. The information in both of these books taught me how to take care of myself during my pregnancy and prepared me for labor and the postpartum period. Additionally, the baby's father, Justin, and I attended Lamaze childbirth education classes. Although we were unable to complete the entire course before the birth, the classes helped prepare both of us for labor by teaching the basics and demonstrating how to manage pain with visualization, breathing, and massage techniques. Our doula also prepared us with "labor rehearsals," in which we practiced contractions and positions. We also discussed how long I would stay

home before leaving for the hospital. Furthermore, I developed a birth plan, which included my wishes (not demands) for the labor, and I shared the plan with my physician prior to the birth (see Box). Knowing the importance of prenatal care, I stayed healthy by walking the dog, eating right, and taking prenatal vitamins. I also gave my unborn baby, Dylan, special attention by playing the piano for him, reading to him, talking to him, and playing Mozart CDs for him. Despite a trip to the emergency room early in my pregnancy because of some bleeding, my pregnancy was a healthy and smooth one.

On a Saturday five and a half weeks before my due date, I was working all day when I began to feel what seemed like premenstrual cramps. I decided to ignore them. That evening, I noticed in the mirror that my pregnant belly seemed much larger. I ignored that, too, in order to work on what would be Dylan's nursery. I decided to go shopping to get some nursery accessories and, just as a lunar eclipse was occurring, my water

BOX

Claire's Birth Plan

I understand that in many situations certain options I have chosen for my birth plan cannot be considered, and the alternative becomes medically necessary when events that were unexpected may occur. The following is simply an outline of my wishes for the birth should it run the way that is hoped for, not requiring much medical assistance.

- Please do not induce the labor.
- I would like the freedom to move around during my labor, including walking and changing positions as well as using a birth ball, and also to be able to deliver in a squatting, side-lying, or upright position.
- I would prefer vaginal exams only when they are necessary.
- I would like to be able to eat and drink freely throughout the labor.
- Please do not offer pain medication or epidurals.
- Please allow 15 minutes of private discussion for any new intervention or situation.
- I prefer spontaneous bearing down to directed pushing when the time comes to push.
- I would like to be able to be in a birthing tub as a comfort measure during the labor, if one is available.
- I would like to let my perineum tear rather than having an episiotomy.
- Please leave a cesarean as a last option to any complications that may arise.
- I would like for the cord to be cut by the doctor after it has stopped pulsating.
- I want the baby only to be breastfed and not to be offered a pacifier or bottle in the days after the birth, on his own schedule.
- I would like the baby to remain with me (or Justin) for the entire hospital stay. No separation of mother and baby for at least the first two hours of life.
- I would like Vitamin K to be given by oral doses rather than injection, and for the baby's eye care to be at the end of the first hour of life using a nonirritating antibiotic agent.

Thank you for reading over and understanding my preferences.

broke in the store around 8:30 p.m. Nervously, I called my mother and drove home. Then, I telephoned Justin and our doula while my mom called the physician. I went outside to view the lunar eclipse, as everyone thought “we should’ve known” (meaning, the potential influence of the moon on the timing of Dylan’s birth). Labor was off to a calm but invigorating start.

When I arrived at the hospital, my spirits were high despite the unexpected earliness of my labor. By 10:30 p.m., I was 3 cm dilated and 100% effaced.

My physician informed me that if my labor didn’t progress on its own throughout the evening, they would induce me in the morning. I wasn’t worried; I had a strong feeling that baby Dylan would be born by then. Justin, our doula, my mom, and I all joked around as I got the giggles—I felt more excited than nervous. I trusted my body’s ability to give birth and I ignored all the horrendous birth stories of pain and cesareans. I reminded myself of all the women in the past who had gone through this life-changing and thrilling event. Soon, contractions began.

Justin and I had learned in our Lamaze classes that, every hour, it was important for me to change positions and use the bathroom. These procedures really helped with the growing strength of the contractions. I found lying on my back uncomfortable, and I mostly labored on my sides while leaning against Justin. Sitting down in the shower was another comfortable option. Around 2:00 a.m., everyone felt fatigued, so we all slept off and on until 4:00 a.m. As my contractions became stronger, Justin’s and our doula’s massaging hands and my own visualizations of being at the ocean—with waves of contractions washing over me—helped keep the pain manageable. (We had already chosen the name Dylan, which means “of the sea.”) Justin and I moved to the bathroom when I decided it would feel good to take a shower. For about 45 minutes, Justin massaged me with the showerhead and encouraged me, telling me I was doing a fantastic job and was such a wonderful woman. I was relieved at how smoothly my labor was progressing, and I never once thought of a need for any pain-relief medication, even when the nurse asked if I wanted any.

I first noticed the signs of transition around 4:45 a.m. My contractions were “double-peaking,” and I started vomiting and developed a nosebleed. I was excited to know that I was getting closer and closer to meeting my son in person. Throughout my pregnancy, I could tell Dylan was a calm little boy, and I was curious as to what he would look like. The pain was uncomfortable, but I knew this was my body working to get this baby safely out

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and remembered that this stage of labor would not last very long. I overcame the contractions thinking, “After this one, it will be one less that I have to conquer.”

Around 7:00 a.m., I started feeling the urge to push. I remembered answering the question posed in Lamaze class, “How do you define labor and birth?” My response was that it is a natural process a woman goes through to bring her baby into the world. So, I let my body tell me what to do and began to push. I decided sitting on the toilet would allow a more comfortable position. Justin and our doula joined me in the bathroom. Justin massaged my hands and comforted me, encouraging me just as he had been doing throughout the labor. Our doula held my visual attention, telling me to look into her eyes as I moaned out the pain, vocally releasing it from my body. At 7:30 a.m., my physician arrived. He said I could start pushing, not realizing that I had been doing so for half an hour already. Immediately, I rolled onto my hands and knees, just when Justin’s mother joined the group to witness the birth. With more encouragement, strong but relieving pushing, and rocking on my hands and knees, Dylan Alan came into the world at 7:42 a.m. He weighed 5 pounds, 4 ounces and measured 18 inches long. He was so beautiful, with amazing cries, a head of hair, and a beautiful, tiny face. Because of his prematurity, I was only able to hold him for what seemed like a few seconds before he was taken to the special-care nursery, despite his Apgar scores of 9 and 9.

A few moments later, I delivered the placenta and received two stitches. My physician said it was actually a good thing Dylan decided to come early because his cord was imbedded in my membranes. We later found out this was a rare condition called “velamentous insertion of the umbilical cord,” which meant that, if labor had not started when it did, Dylan and I both might have been exposed to a high risk of bleeding to death. This was scary to hear, but to this day I am relieved to realize my body is able to take care of itself, knowing what to do when something isn’t right. From a mother’s perspective, I also picture Dylan as an amazingly

smart little boy, perhaps saving his own and my life before he was even born!

Dylan remained in the hospital for a week rather than the usual two days, while I stayed as a “boarder mom” after my discharge. With a lot of encouragement, he slowly but surely learned to breastfeed. Dylan needed extra time to learn because he was born a little early and did not have the chance to breastfeed immediately after his birth. However, Dylan thrived on my breast milk and, at 2 months old, weighed 10 pounds, 5 ounces. He remains an intelligent, amazing, beautiful little boy and, just like his birth, is calm and flexible.

I feel that, by giving birth naturally rather than using pain medications, I have developed a deeper connection with my body and more respect for it. The process was also an empowering experience. Feeling that I did such a great job at giving birth helps me put several situations in perspective, whether they are related to health, or school, or any other area in life. “I gave birth naturally; I can do this!” has become my personal mantra.

This journey deepened my connection with my son, creating an attachment that has allowed us to bond to this day. I feel pride and gladness, knowing my body experienced all of the wonderful sensations of my son entering this world.

DYLAN’S BIRTH: HIS GRANDMOTHER BARBARA’S STORY

No matter how many years and how many births I’ve attended, I can still be amazed and awed by the spirituality of birth. Dylan’s birth was just such an occasion. Dylan was born out of strength and wisdom that was supported by and shared by all those who cared for his mother, Claire, as she gave birth.

On the day her labor began, Claire worked all day while feeling contractions, premenstrual symptoms, and sciatic pain. After dinner, she worked feverishly to clean her bedroom where she planned to live with her baby in about 5 weeks. She headed off to the store around 8:30 p.m. to buy some last-minute organizing things and, before she could purchase anything, her bag of waters broke. She returned home, called her physician, and headed for the hospital. Luckily, I already had my labor bag packed even though we thought we still had a month to go. Oddly, minutes before Claire called from the store with the news of the waters, a friend called to let us know that a lunar eclipse would be complete in a few minutes. Regardless

Velamentous insertion of the umbilical cord: Insertion of the umbilical cord on the chorioamniotic membranes rather than on the placental mass. For more information, log on to <http://www.thefetus.net/page.php?id=167>

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of the moon, we should have suspected something when Claire started working hard to complete Christmas shopping and building her nest.

When we arrived at the hospital, a mother-friendly admissions nurse explained procedures to Claire with compassion and understanding of the kind of birth Claire wanted. Claire's doula arrived to help Claire and Justin with their birth. Like the admissions nurse, our assigned nurse for the shift was compassionate and mother-friendly. She let Claire rest, no matter that the contraction monitor wasn't consistently picking up contractions efficiently. Claire ate crackers, drank Gatorade, and visited the other babies in the nursery with Justin and their doula. I calmly sat in the corner and knitted. The ambiance of the room was powerful, joyous, and positive.

Around 2:00 a.m., we all decided to get some rest during this early phase of labor. All four of us slept on and off while Claire continued to have contractions. The contractions became more painful around 4:00 a.m. Justin was a strong center of focus for Claire, and their doula knew just how to manage the back pain and intensifying contractions. Claire preferred Justin's hands to the turtle-shaped massage roller, and the hot water bottle provided warmth and pressure to her aching lower back. Time for the shower! Justin and Claire stayed in the shower for about 45 minutes, and beautiful birth music (Claire's vocalization) warmed the hearts of doula and grandma.

Around 4:45 a.m., Claire was vomiting and had a nosebleed. Her doula used ice for the nosebleed, but we were happy to see labor signs emerging. Claire and Justin moved together rhythmically with the contractions, and Claire moved deeper and deeper into that special place all mothers go to deal with the intense feelings of birth.

Progress was happening! Claire's strength never wavered. She relied on her inner wisdom, rhythmic rocking, and powerful support with every contraction as she moved Dylan closer to birth.

By 7:00 a.m., Claire felt "pushy." She sat on the toilet and gave in to the powerful urges with confidence and beautiful birth music. Justin

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reported bloody show, and we were ecstatic with the progress she had made. Justin's mother made it in time for the last of the pushing and the birth.

At 7:30 a.m., Claire's physician checked her. She was 10 cm, and the physician could see the baby's head! Claire climbed into a position that was comfortable for her—on her hands and knees—and Dylan's head emerged very quickly at 7:42 a.m. His Apgar scores were 9 and 9. He was an active little boy as he grabbed the oxygen tubing, preferring to administer it himself.

Because of his prematurity, Dylan was sent for observation to the special-care nursery after a brief visit with his parents. Justin stayed with his son while I joined their doula in helping Claire, who required only two stitches. Claire dealt with the sadness of not having her baby in her arms. However, a caring nurse kept Claire updated with Dylan's progress and gave her encouragement about his condition.

It is certainly awe-inspiring to see anyone give birth normally. Add that aspect to the fact that the mother is young and the circumstances are early, and you can imagine the depth of feeling this grandma has for the power of birth she witnessed. If we could just understand where Claire got her special strength and we could tap into it and reproduce it...imagine the wonderful world it would help create.

CLAIRE HOTELLING, Dylan's mother, is a student at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. She and Dylan live in Rochester Hills, Michigan. BARBARA HOTELLING, Dylan's grandmother, is a regular columnist for The Journal of Perinatal Education and an independent childbirth educator and doula in Rochester Hills, Michigan. She has served as president of Lamaze International, president of Doulas of North America (DONA), and chair of the Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS).