Your Birth Story: To Dexter Michael O'Brien—Born October 5, 2006, at 1:35 A.M.

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ABSTRACT

In this column, a mother offers her son a poignant description of his home birth, surrounded by family, friends, and two midwives.

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YOUR BIRTH STORY: TO DEXTER MICHAEL O'BRIEN

My pregnancy with you was a busy one. I was working a lot, and Lucy, your sister, was becoming a very active and inquisitive 2-year-old. I finished two big projects for work about a week before your due date, and then settled in for some long-awaited nesting time. Grandma came to stay with us on October 1, 8 days before you were due. She was a wonderful help: cooking for the whole family, taking Lucy to the museum and the park, and cleaning our house as we waited for your arrival. But on October 4—the day everyone predicted you would arrive—I wondered how long we would all be together under one roof, waiting for labor to begin.

October 4 was unseasonably warm. I woke up and put on a tank top under a t-shirt. Just two days before, these tops had fit comfortably. All of a sudden, it seemed, they barely stretched over my belly. For the first time, I really knew you were coming soon. I couldn't imagine getting much bigger. I had a prenatal visit with Karen,

my midwife, that morning. In the afternoon, Grandma and I took Lucy to a nearby orchard to feed chickens, pick a pumpkin, and enjoy the playground. A woman with 5-month-old twins stopped me to ask when I was due. She said, "I had these twins naturally, with no drugs. And I breastfed them, too!" I loved how eager this woman was to share her story, and I welcomed a positive birth story so close to my due date.

That night, Grandma went to bed early. Daddy and I settled in and watched some TV. At 11:00 p.m., we decided to head to bed, too. I knew for sure then that I wouldn't have a baby on October 4, but I also intuitively knew that I would be in labor very soon. As I listened to Daddy drift to sleep, I envisioned myself going into labor, trying to remember what a contraction felt like. The moon was one day shy of full, and a storm was coming in. It began to rain and, all of a sudden, I felt a gentle release from deep inside and warm fluid begin to leak out of me. My water had broken! It was 11:32 p.m.

I woke Daddy up. He brought me a towel, and I headed to the bathroom. The fluid was clear, and there was plenty of it—much more than with Lucy. Daddy asked, “What should we do?” I thought about it and realized it made sense to go back to bed. I wasn’t having any contractions or other signs of active labor. We might have a long night ahead of us, and I wanted to get some rest. After cleaning up, I lay down on my side and closed my eyes. Within 10 or so minutes, I felt the first cramp deep in my low belly. A few more cramps came irregularly after that. By 12:30 a.m., I was moaning through them and realized they were about 4 minutes apart. I told Dad to call the midwives, Karen and Christy, and I went down the hall to wake up Grandma. “Are you ready to meet your next grandchild?” I asked her. I returned to the bedroom and sat on the birth ball, leaning on the edge of the bed. Grandma called Alisa and Skye, the two friends I had invited to the birth. Alisa was another midwife at the birth center, and she had great energy around births. Skye was my closest friend in Wilmington, Delaware. We invited her to be there to look after Lucy. I knew that if Lucy wanted to be present at the birth, Skye’s calm presence would help her feel safe and secure in the midst of it.

Karen was the first to arrive, and she quietly set up her supplies. Alisa arrived right after Karen and went straight to my side, telling me I was doing great. Grandma was busy during this time getting the house ready for the birth and preparing my postpartum meal. Daddy was by my side, pressing on my back when I needed it and quietly just being there and supporting my instincts.

I stayed on the birth ball through my entire labor, first sitting on it at the edge of the bed and, when the deep cramps began to feel too intense in that position, I moved to my hands and knees on the bed, hugging the ball in front of me. Each contraction began to feel more intense than the last one, and I felt an opening sensation deep in my pelvis. Grandma asked Karen if she wanted a cup of coffee, and Karen said she’d go and get it herself. I said, “Karen, don’t go too far.” It had only been about 1½ hours since my water broke, but I was already feeling the beginnings of an urge to push. Part of me was sure I was imagining it because, although I expected my labor to be fast, it was hard to believe it could be less than 2 hours. And things had only been intense for about 30 minutes. But with the next contraction, I felt this deep, guttural grunt rise out of my chest. Everyone in the

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room knew immediately that I was in transition. I don’t remember who was doing or saying what, but I recall a general sense of a circle forming around me, supporting and containing the incredible energy of my labor.

Throughout the active labor, I instinctively repeated a mantra, “OK baby, OK baby, OK baby.” As things got more intense, I drew out the O, “Ohhh-K baby.” It morphed into the word “open.” “Ohhh-pen, Ohhh-pen.” I was on my hands and knees on the bed with my arms wrapped around the birth ball in a big “O.” I remember trying to envision my arms in an “O” and my mouth in an “O” and releasing every muscle to form a big “O” to let you through.

All of a sudden, I felt a popping sensation, and there was another gush of fluid. Immediately, I felt the most intense urge to push. It felt like a freight train was inside of me, pushing you out. I couldn’t control any of it, and it took a contraction or two for me to realize I shouldn’t try to control it. With every push, I felt you move down. Christy, the other midwife, arrived while I was pushing and came right to my side to support me. At one point, Karen examined me. It was the first and only exam in my labor—in fact, in my whole pregnancy! I was grateful because my labor hurt like hell. All of the sensations were so intense, and having Karen’s hand there burned like crazy. But it was over in no time. Karen confirmed what everyone in the room was absolutely sure of—you were going to be born any minute.

With a few more pushes, you were born. Skye walked in right as your head began to emerge. My birth team was complete, just in time! I felt an intense burning sensation when you were born because you had your hand up right next to your cheek. I birthed you into Karen’s hands, and I was facing forward so everyone else saw you before I had a chance to. Grandma yelled, “It’s a boy!” It was the only thing I wasn’t grateful to her for. I always envisioned discovering all your little parts—including whether

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you were a boy or a girl—together with Daddy before anyone else chimed in. But Grandma was so excited and couldn't contain herself. That woman loves her grandkids more than you can imagine! You're a lucky boy.

We untangled you from your umbilical cord, and I turned around and got my first look at you. You were calm and peaceful at first, and then gave out a hearty cry. Daddy was already down the hall getting Lucy out of her crib. I will absolutely never forget the pure delight and enormous smile she had that first time she saw you in my arms. What an amazing feeling it was for all of us to finally have our whole family together in one bed.

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ing scrumptious homemade quiche that Grandma had brought. Christy gave me a fantastic foot rub, and we all hung out into the wee hours of the morning talking about what an amazing birth it was. Lucy came in a few times to check out her new baby brother and help the midwives with your newborn exam. It felt like this little bubble of ecstatic energy in the middle of a city that was fast asleep.

Eventually, everyone went home, and we all settled in for some needed rest as a family of four. I was so grateful to be able to snuggle up in my own bed and get to know you. Later, the house would be full of visitors again, and then, of course, there was plenty to do to prepare for our move to Connecticut less than 4 weeks later. But that first day was all about us, and it was pure bliss.

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