Each One Unique

Elaine Boehme

ABSTRACT

A young mother shares the stories of her two sons' births. Her first birth experience was complicated by muscle spasms and changes in her baby's heart rate during labor and, later, by medical problems with her baby in the days after birth. The mother's strength and commitment shine through at every twist and turn during labor and the days after her son's birth. Two years later, in contrast to her first son's birth, the mother's second son was born so quickly that labor presented a different set of challenges. The mother's confidence in birth and in herself are essential facets of the stories of the births of her two sons.

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Do you have a birth story that illustrates the power of normal childbirth and encourages women to give birth with confidence? We invite you to submit your story for possible publication in The Journal of Perinatal Education. Please send your story or query to Judith Lothian, Associate Editor (Jalothian@aol.com). Also, check out the "Giving Birth with Confidence Blog" and "Normal Birth Forum" links at Lamaze International's Web site (www.lamaze.org).

GABRIEL GORDON BOEHME

On the morning of Gabriel's birth, I woke up around 5:00 with a contraction. I'd had no Braxton Hicks contractions, and it was the day after my due date, so I thought this was probably it. The next contraction hit just under an hour later. I slept between contractions until around 8:00 a.m., when I got up and told my husband, Gerard, and my mom what was going on. We figured we had some time; nevertheless, we packed the car and got ready to be gone for a while.

Gerard and I had Bradley class that morning at 10:00, so we went to that. It happened to be labor-practice week; so, instead of practicing, I actually labored through the centers that Julie, our instructor, had set up. When we completed the class, my contractions were around 5 minutes apart, and I thought some fluid might be leaking. We called our midwifery service and found Gloria on duty. She asked what I wanted to do, and I said I would go to my in-laws' house (near the medical center where I

planned to give birth) and eat lunch and then call her back. I had a big bowl of macaroni and cheese and, by the time I was done, I really had to concentrate during contractions. We called to tell Gloria we were on our way to the hospital.

As soon as we got in the car, my contractions came so hard and fast that I had to moan through them. Walking into the hospital took forever because I had to stop constantly to lean on Gerard. Contractions were about 2 minutes apart. When I got to triage, I was 100% effaced and 7cm–8cm dilated. This was around 2:00 p.m. Everything in my Stage 1 period was according to textbook progression. We were betting on a baby by 5:00 p.m. (ha! were we ever wrong. . .).

Working Through Muscle Spasms

At this stage, I was most comfortable sitting on the birthing ball, leaning against Gerard, and relaxing. I didn't "get" that I was in transition, but looking back, I say to myself, "Ah, that must have been

when I was thinking that maybe having just one child would be good enough.” I felt the urge to push and told Gloria. She checked me, and I was fully dilated. I tried several positions, but I kept getting a sharp, shooting pain in my right hip. It felt like the world’s worst charley horse (cramp) in my upper thigh. About this time, my sister arrived, so she and my mom massaged my hip area constantly, while Gerard sat at my head and did our hypnobirthing talk.

I remained relaxed, except when the crampy pain came. The pain started to come at the beginning of each contraction. It broke through my concentration, and I cried out with each stab of pain, which interfered with the contractions. After a while of my going through contractions and enduring the terrible crampy pain, Gloria told me that, because the contractions were not complete, I was making no progress. “I know you don’t want to hear the ‘e’ word,” she said, “but maybe it would help with this muscle spasm.” I *really* didn’t want an epidural or medication, but I also wasn’t able to push well because of the muscle spasm. I said that I’d like to try a little while longer before considering any medications.

At this point, the nurse told me that if I really wanted to “do this,” I would have to push through the crampy pain and not let it stop my contractions. She had never attended a natural birth before, but I could tell she was pulling for me. I guess this is what I needed. I managed to push enough to change the baby’s position a little, and the muscle spasms (for lack of a better word) started coming after the contractions. I was finally able to push effectively. At this point, the contractions were a relief from the crampy pain, if you can imagine!

Drawing on Stores of Energy

During this time, Gabriel’s heart rate started dropping. Gloria had to call in her back-up medical doctor. While waiting for the doctor’s arrival, I was told not to push, which was difficult for me to do. Fighting my body’s natural urges was horrible, so I pushed anyway. The doctor arrived and put a heart-rate monitor on Gabriel’s head. His heart rate was stable. The doctor then asked me if I wanted to keep going. I said, “Yes!” He told me that, providing there were no signs of distress, I could go as long as I felt I had the energy. “Just save some energy for when the baby is ready to come out,” he said. “I don’t want to see the baby’s head and have you too tired to finish!” I knew this would not happen. Although I was working harder

than I ever had in my life, I felt a relaxed calm from the hypnobirthing and knew I had huge stores of energy.

Finally, after I don’t know how long, the muscle spasms stopped. By this time, Gabriel’s head was almost out. Gloria guided my hand to touch his head. Out he came! I had no concept of time through all this, but Gabriel was born at 9:38 p.m., after 5½ hours of pushing. He was sunny side up, which we had not expected, so we suspect that he had turned in the birth canal. His forehead was as long as the rest of his body! Gloria put Gabriel on me, but he was blue and not breathing. The staff from the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) was there and took him to get him breathing. The placenta birth was uneventful, and Gloria stitched up my third-degree perineal tear. My dad had come in sometime during all the chaos, and he held my hand the whole time I was being stitched.

Because the NICU staff was worried about Gabriel’s breathing, they took him for observation. Gerard went with them and called to tell me they wanted to keep Gabriel overnight. I was disappointed, but not worried. I believed that everything was fine and felt so elated that my baby was born.

Our Miracle Baby

Although the following events are not part of the actual birth story, they are part of Gabriel’s story and occurred so soon after his birth that I’ll include the details here. The day after Gabriel’s birth, we had him in our room for a brief time. He nursed like a champ. At one point, while the nurse was taking my vitals, Gabriel started shaking his fist near his head. The nurse didn’t say anything to us, but she told a NICU nurse what she had seen. The NICU nurse came in and told us to let her know if it happened again. A little while later, it happened and I called for her. Gabriel was still shaking his fist when the NICU nurse arrived. She said she needed to take him to the NICU to show the doctor. From there, the days run together.

The doctor told us that Gabriel was having seizures and needed to be medicated. He was put on Phenobarbital, which knocked him out for over a week. Partway through the week, Gabriel started breaking through the Phenobarbital with more seizures and was put on a second medication, Dilantin. The hospital staff immediately conducted tests to see what was causing the seizures. That first day, they did a CT scan and told us that Gabriel had “abnormal results.” That night, he was low on

platelets, so he received a transfusion. Then came a spinal tap, two MRIs, and endless blood tests. We were told that the MRI showed that Gabriel had had four strokes in utero. The strokes occurred in four different areas of his brain—two were small and two were large. The strokes would likely have killed an adult, but the newborn brain is flexible enough to tolerate them. We mentally prepared ourselves for a child with substantial brain damage.

We spent hours and hours in the NICU, holding and talking to Gabriel. We were lucky that the NICU at our chosen hospital is very open to parental involvement. We had no idea how long we would be there. I pumped as much breastmilk as I could, but it was not enough, so we signed the forms to get stores from the local milk bank. Nine days after Gabriel's birth, the doctor announced we could stay overnight with Gabriel and take him home the next day. Although the hospital staff still didn't know what had caused the blood clots that had caused the strokes, they felt Gabriel was strong enough to go home and be seen as an outpatient for any other procedures. They had the blood they needed to run more tests and would let us know when results came in. As it turns out, the blood test results were in before we left the next day. They showed that Gabriel had two blood-clotting disorders: Factor V Leiden and abnormalities in the methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (or MTHFR) gene. The treatment is a lifelong regimen of folic acid and vitamins B6 and B12.

At 2 months, we weaned Gabriel from the Dilantin. At 6 months, he was weaned from the Phenytoin. At 1 year, he had a follow-up MRI. It showed that three of the four strokes had disappeared completely, something only a newborn brain can do. The fourth area was still apparent, but the other side of his brain had clearly taken over the functioning of the damaged part. At 3½ years old, Gabriel is now our walking, talking miracle!

DANIEL WILLIAM BOEHME

Almost 2 years after Gabriel's birth, I was pregnant with Daniel. On the morning of Daniel's birth, I woke at 5:50 with my first contraction. I went to the restroom and then tried to go back to sleep. Five minutes later, I had another contraction. With Gabriel, I had experienced an hour between the first two contractions. This was my first hint that this would be a *very* different labor! The con-

tractions kept coming 5–8 minutes apart, but they were fairly mild. I told Gerard to go on to work and I would call him to meet me at his parents' house when it felt close to the time to go to the hospital. I called my mom, who was planning to make the 3-plus-hour drive down from her home to be with us the next day. Instead, she decided to book a morning flight on this day.

I was restless, but not really uncomfortable. Gabriel woke and wanted to nurse. I tried, but breastfeeding him was painful. For the first and only time, he accepted a bottle of cow's milk as a substitute; I couldn't believe he went for it! The contractions were still coming frequently and were getting a bit harder. I told Gerard to stay with me instead of going to work. We decided we'd both take showers and then head for his parents' house so we would be close to the hospital.

Traffic Jam

After we were on the road and driving in morning rush-hour traffic on the local Interstate highway, we called our midwifery service to give a report and found Gloria on duty again. It was before 8:00 a.m., so she was not at work yet. She asked if I'd like to meet her at the midwifery office or the hospital. I said we'd call her when we got to my in-laws' house.

Traffic got worse and the contractions were getting really strong and 2 minutes apart. Gerard started to get concerned. There were few breaks between contractions, and I was moaning through them. He asked if he should take the next exit off the Interstate and wind his way around the traffic. I couldn't even think to answer. At one point, my mom called to check in. Gerard answered, and I was in the middle of a contraction. She heard me. "Is that *her*?" she asked Gerard. "If the baby comes, catch it, don't cut the umbilical cord, and take them both on to the hospital!"

As we continued driving, I told Gerard to skip his parents' house and tell them to meet us at the hospital so they could look after Gabriel. As we rounded a curve and saw that the Interstate traffic was moving, my water broke. I thought this might offer some relief from the pressure, but it didn't. I couldn't even sit on the seat. Instead, I had to hold myself up on the armrests! Gerard asked if I wanted him to talk me through some of our hypnobirthing, and I said no. I just wanted to work through things on my own. I began concentrating full time on the birth. No break between contractions. I would not

admit to myself that it was time to push! Traffic was stopped, so Gerard moved into the turn lane. Unfortunately, no one would let us back over, and we ended up in a worse line of cars than before. Finally, someone let us over (we found out later that it was his parents!). Gerard says Gabriel started crying about this time, but I didn't hear him at all.

Urge to Push

We zoomed to the hospital and pulled into the circle drive. A nurse came with a wheelchair and convinced me that I didn't want to have the baby in the car. Gerard's parents pulled up right behind us and took Gabriel. I was whisked into the birthing unit. All I wanted was the bed! It felt *so* good to lie down.

Then the hospital staff told me Gloria was stuck in traffic, so I shouldn't push until after she arrived. With all the nurses around, I figured any of them could catch a baby, so I ignored them and pushed anyway. One nurse tried putting the fetal monitor around me, and I said I didn't want constant monitoring. "We need an initial reading," the nurse

said. With a smile, she continued, "You're not going to be pregnant much longer!" I realized that "constant monitoring" would not last long. When another nurse arrived with the intravenous line, Gerard sent her away. The staff realized that I was ignoring their instructions not to push, so they grabbed a doctor from the hall. She introduced herself and tried to position my legs so she could evaluate my progression. I nearly kicked her, and I told her I didn't want my legs like that! Finally, Gloria walked in the room, and everything became really calm and peaceful.

Daniel was born at 8:45 a.m., 15 minutes after our arrival at the hospital and less than 3 hours after the first contraction. My mom was just boarding her plane! Daniel was perfect, and we all roomed in that night. I slept with Daniel latched on one side and Gabriel latched on the other.

ELAINE BOEHME is a stay-at-home mom to her two wonderful boys. Her family expects a third amazing birth experience at a local birth center in October.

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