The Most *Amazing* 24 Hours

Tracy Posner

ABSTRACT

In this column, a mother shares the story of her son's birth with her prenatal yoga instructor. The mother was able to work with her labor, was well supported by her husband and doula, and negotiated successfully with the hospital staff to have a safe, healthy birth. She describes how difficult labor is and the ways in which comfort and support strategies help women manage contractions.

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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).

Lamaze International offers a Prenatal Yoga Workshop for childbirth educators and yoga instructors. The workshop integrates evidence-based information about healthy birth practices that empower women to prepare for birth with yoga. For more information, visit the workshop's link at the Lamaze Web site (www.lamaze.org/Default.aspx?TabId=779).

EDITOR'S NOTE

Less than 24 hours after giving birth to her son Jonah in June 2009, Tracy Posner, the author of this birth story, sent the following e-mail message from her hospital room to her prenatal yoga instructor, Ann Israel, E-RYT, LCCE, FACCE. During her pregnancy, Posner attended Israel's "Comfort Measures" workshop. Beth, Posner's doula and a college classmate of Israel's, has subsequently attended births by four women from Israel's yoga class, all of which were without medication.

A DISTINCTIVE POP

Well, I'm all alone with baby, and the hospital has free wireless, so I have some time to update you. I want to come and do a show-and-tell in your "Yoga for Moms" class, so feel free to read this to your class participants, but I would love to come and tell it, too.

Last night, I started having some annoying menstrual-like cramps, front and back. I have had them before, but this time they didn't stop and were annoying enough to not let me go to sleep. I called Beth, my doula, just to warn her

so the first call wouldn't be in the middle of the night. I honestly thought the cramps would die down and go away.

Because I wasn't comfortable lying down, I decided to lie propped up on my side on the couch and watch movies, which was comfortable. I figured the cramps would die down or I would get tired enough to sleep through them. They were pretty frequent, about 2 minutes apart, but mild enough that I wasn't really sure if I was measuring them correctly or if they could really be measured.

At 1:00 a.m., I felt a distinctive *pop* and a rush of liquid. I made it to the bathroom to see my underwear was soaked, and the liquid seemed to be clear. I made it back to my room, changed underwear, and put on a pad. Position changes made more liquid gush out, so I was doubly sure it was my water breaking. Also, the contractions got noticeably stronger—not awful, but a noticeable difference. I called the late-night number for my doctor's office. As I anticipated, they told me I should head to the hospital. I called Beth. She said she would meet my husband Jon and me at the hospital.

WORKING THROUGH THE CONTRACTIONS

Jon and I got to the hospital at about 1:30 a.m. and were put into a room. Beth showed up about 20 minutes later. I changed into the hospital gown. The hospital staff asked me a bunch of questions and checked my condition. I was 4 cm dilated and 100% effaced, and the baby was at 0 station (yippee!). I told the hospital staff that I wanted to give birth drug-free, so they let me be and just monitored me every hour.

At this stage, my contractions were about 2 minutes apart and lasted about 60 seconds. We only timed them in the beginning, but it seemed to last that way the entire time. About 2 hours later, the hospital staff checked me again, and I was 6 cm dilated. So I was progressing, thankfully. I used the birth ball, the shower, and swaying. Beth and Jon took turns giving me the double-hip squeeze or counterpressure because almost all of my pain was in my lower back.

I really tried to concentrate on relaxing, having a focal point, and breathing through the contractions, which all made a big difference. Unfortunately, when they tried to monitor me, all my moving messed up the readings, so they made me lie in bed to get a better reading (which was awful to have contractions while lying down). This went on for about an hour, and it was really tough on me. They also started an IV.

The nurse came in and checked me again. I was about 7–8 cm. I asked if I could get up again. She said I could; however, the doctor would need to look at my readings, and if it didn't look good, they would want me to return to bed. At that point, the contractions had gotten quite difficult. I told Jon and Beth there was no way I could do it if I had to lie in the bed the rest of the time. Lying in that bed made the contractions ridiculous.

After checking with the doctor, the nurse came back in and said they wanted me back in bed. I told her I would need an epidural if I had to stay in bed. She said she really wanted me to do it the way I wanted (natural). With Jon and Beth's help, we were able to get the nurse to compromise. She let me stand and waited for two contractions to see if the monitors were picking up good readings. They were, so I was able to stand, but I just couldn't do the major swaying that I wanted to. However, I was able to lean on Jon, sway a little, and have Beth put counterpressure on my lower back while I sort of held onto the monitor transducer to try to keep a constant reading.

After two contractions, I basically told Jon and Beth that I was done and wanted an epidural. Beth told me what would be involved (full bag of IV, time waiting for the anesthesiologist, time for the drug to work). She suggested that the doctor check me first to see if I was farther along than the 7–8 cm. I think Beth was just trying to get me calmed down and knew I was close and I would make it. I definitely didn't know it at that point!

By now, it was about 7:00 a.m., and the nurses were changing shifts. The new nurse, Tracy, came in and checked me and said I was about 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ cm dilated. The doctor double-checked and thought I still had a little "lip" and wasn't quite ready to push. The doctor said nothing about the monitors (thank God), and I was able to keep doing what I wanted, which was standing and doing the crazy figure-8 dance that really helped. Beth said at this point I had my second wind.

Around this time, I also had major rectal pressure and was bearing down with most contractions, regardless of whether I wanted to or not. What a *crazy* feeling. The feeling was so strong and I had so little control of the urge that I thought I might push the baby out while standing. And, wow, the sounds coming out of me didn't seem to belong to me at all. Beth told me to let my body do what it wanted but not to add anything extra because I wasn't quite 10 cm, and they didn't want me to push down and have the cervix swell up and not make it past the "lip." I had to bear down with the urges, but I tried not to do any extra. The contractions were really powerful, especially with the pushing urge, and I was really hoping I was close to 10 cm and they would check me soon.

After a couple of contractions, I told Beth that I felt some slight burning. She said that the next time the nurse came in, she would tell her and have her check me, and that the baby was probably lower and stretching me out a bit. They came in a little before 8:00 a.m., and I climbed onto the bed. While they were getting ready to check me, I had a contraction and had to bear down. They said they could already see the baby's head! So the doctor came in, got set up, and everyone took their positions. They brought a mirror, which was actually very helpful for me. I was trying not to

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hold my breath, but they wanted me to hold it and push down for a count of 10 and then release it. All I kept thinking is what we talked about in class: I envisioned my blood vessels bursting. It was crazy to see the baby's little head trying to make its way out. Although I didn't want an episiotomy, the doctor ended up snipping me a tiny bit. After 25 minutes of pushing, Jonah came out! I can't believe it only took that long. They aren't kidding when they say when you need to push it feels good to push. My desire to push came about every 60–90 seconds (maybe less), so maybe that helped the time frame. I remember saying, "This is a crazy abdominal workout!" When Jonah popped out, the doctor was busy and Jon couldn't see with all the arms in the way. But I was front and center, so I was the one that saw the "package" and said, "It's a boy!" It was great.

Beth and Jon were great during the pushing. I was convinced Jon wouldn't want to look, but he was right there being super supportive and watched the whole thing. He later said he was absolutely riveted, it was the most amazing thing he had ever seen, and he couldn't imagine anyone being able not to look.

So, Jonah was born and he was put on my chest and was gorgeous! He was very alert and stayed with me for about 10 minutes. Then, they asked if they could move him right next to me to the warmer to do the Apgar and check him. Jon was crying, and I was a "Chatty Cathy" with the doctor and the nurses (imagine that!). The placenta was delivered and I was stitched up. Then Jonah was back with me, and I got to breastfeed him right away.

INVALUABLE COMFORT AND SUPPORT MEASURES

It was just the craziest experience. Of course, after it's all said and done, it didn't seem so bad. . .but, man, during it and especially when I hit transition and had given up, I wouldn't have said that. I remember you guys talking about panicking during

contractions. During that 8- to 10-cm change, I really had to take deep breaths and mentally talk myself down from freaking out. It was tough. Beth made me feel better by saying, basically, every laboring woman gives up when she hits transition because that's the worst of it and you're just over it at that point.

Beth said she didn't do much, but, man, I made her work. She did a ton of lower back counterpressure, and I know that's exhausting. Plus, she knew how to keep me calm and helped to refocus me. The best was the double-hip squeeze. I loved the shower and the birth ball, but what really worked for me was standing and swaying back and forth. When it was really bad, just standing there and doing really exaggerated figure-8s and focusing on a point on the floor and concentrating on breathing worked the best for me. Man, all that stripper-music dancing made a huge difference. The more it hurt, the harder I swayed. If I hadn't been in a hospital gown and you had added some music, I'm sure I would've looked like I was boogying down like a crazy lady.

I can't tell you how grateful I am I found your class. Without all the things I learned and having Beth there, I know there is no way I could have done that. I had all the things you told us in my head and was able to use them to help me manage the pain—it was absolutely *invaluable*. It really makes a huge difference when you have "tools" to work with. Jon even said at the end that having Beth there was absolutely the best idea ever.

Another funny thing: When it was all over, apparently "word got out" among the nurses that I had done it naturally. I had a bunch of them comment on it and say what a great job I did and that they don't really see many of them anymore. The nurse Tracy said most women come in saying they want it naturally but don't do any preparation for it and just can't handle it. I can totally understand that. So again, thank you for your wonderful class and all your support and suggestions. I just can't put into words how glad I am that I was able to do it naturally and not have to worry about any side effects from drugs or any side effects on Jonah. But one thing I will say: I can also totally appreciate why people do take the epidural, because, wow, it's not easy!

Thanks, Ann! I hope to see you soon. Please tell the girls that are close that no matter how their labors go, having that baby is the most wonderful thing imaginable, and they will instantly be in love.

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Jonah is the most perfect person I have ever seen, and you wouldn't believe how much hair he has! I feel good, and my baby is doing well and is even doing great with breastfeeding. I just really couldn't be happier. I will definitely miss your class. So, I'll just have to start coming again when baby #2 is on the way!

TRACY POSNER works full time as an application coordinator at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab in Laurel, Maryland. Besides spending time with her family, she is an avid cyclist and enjoys mountain biking, hiking in the woods with her husband, Jonah, and their two Rhodesian Ridgeback dogs, and balancing it all with yoga when she can.

A black and white photograph of the White House in Washington, D.C., partially obscured by a large, dark, curved shape on the left side. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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