My Lovely C-Section

Katherine Taylor

ABSTRACT

Katherine and Andrew Taylor chose to have a planned home birth. With the support of her husband, Andrew, and her midwife and doula, Katherine labored at home for 48 hours before transferring to the hospital. Baby Luke was born by cesarean about 20 hours later. Confident and supported, the Taylors were able to make informed decisions and have a positive birth experience, although it was not what they had planned.

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Do you have a birth story that illustrates the power of 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*. Send your story or query to Judith Lothian, Associate Editor (Jalothian@aol.com).

Amy Romano, the author's sister, is host of Lamaze International's research blog, *Science & Sensibility* (www.scienceandsensibility.org), and author of JPE's column with the same title (see pages 50–54).

EDITOR'S NOTE

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BIRTH CHOICE

When I first started thinking of what I wanted from my birth experience, my number one priority was to avoid surgery. I've had traumatic surgeries in the past, including one where the anesthesia didn't work. I laid there powerless and yelled at the surgeon's touch like something from a cheap horror flick.

That said, it was not a completely simple choice to go with home birth as a means of avoiding unnecessary intervention. My own birth was a very medical experience. I was born at 28 weeks gestation, with a twin who passed away after a day outside the womb. Doctors had saved my life. I felt a sort of reverence for doctors and was uncertain about birthing without them and their drugs.

Like most Americans, I simply thought you needed medication in the birthing process, even though my sister, Amy, is a nurse midwife who specialized in home birth and is now working to change this misperception and to empower women to give birth naturally (check out her blog at scienceandsensibility.org). But after reading *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth* that she sent me, I was convinced that home birth was safe and that there were other methods to relieve pain that give the woman more options.

I knew that I wanted to be able to move freely, to make noise, and to not feel rushed or under any pressure to perform. And so, with the hesitant faith of my husband, Andrew, we jumped in. And the more we learned, the happier and more comfortable we were with the decision. Meeting our midwife, Maria, put us at ease and fortified our choice because she seemed the right mix of no-nonsense confidence and strength with warmth and compassion. Also, Jane Austin, the local childbirth educator, really helped us along in her classes with good, clean

Katherine and Andrew share their first moments together with their son, Luke.

information and the additional support of like-minded couples. Her yoga classes kept me from worrying in my last weeks of pregnancy and helped me enjoy my big body! I felt ready and psyched for the upcoming event.

A couple of days after our baby's due date, my water broke. I squatted on the kitchen floor and let it drip while my dog, Jasper, looked at me like, "What? You're not supposed to do that!" and proceeded to lick my face and console me. Labor came on that night and we tried to sleep through the contractions, which were steadily about 7–8 minutes apart. Our doula, Nova, came over for several hours and gave me advice on positions to help get things going and suggested ways Andrew could support me. We sent her home because it was getting late, things weren't picking up, and Maria had told us to keep trying until 10:00 p.m. or 11:00 p.m. and then to try to sleep.

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That night was the worst. Andrew, Jasper, and I camped out in the living room on the floor and futon with the birth ball nearby, since that was a good form of support for intensifying the contractions. Andrew had set up a little shrine with candles and something my sister had given me: a picture of a woman's vagina opening in a bathtub. He knew I liked it because it showed how natural it looked for the body to open and allow birth to happen. During the contractions, he was so sweet and helped me to stay positive, chanting with me "open" and "Yes!" to embrace the contractions as our doula had recommended.

When morning came, we were sure that this day we'd have our baby at home. I took a shower to let the night's pain drain. Maria came over and did some acupuncture and gave me castor oil to help get things going. She said to go outside and take a walk. It was raining hard and it was nice to moan in the rain with no one around. I felt so big and was excited to meet the baby and not be pregnant! On the way home, we saw a rainbow over our apartment—a good sign!

Toward the evening, it started to pick up. Sitting on the toilet was extremely intense, so if a contraction started to come, I'd sit there and really let it come. Soon, they were about 4–5 minutes apart and Maria came to stay. She checked me and I was at 5 cm. She let me go in the birth tub, hoping I'd relax and give my body a rest while the contractions were strong enough to keep things moving. It was wonderful to float. My body felt no tension in between the contractions and it felt light and mobile. As soon as I stood up to get out, things got more intense, and I worked for several more hours, primarily on the toilet. Andrew was so tired that he fell asleep, and Maria too, so I was alone. I took a shower to regroup, and it was a good break. We had decided Maria would check me after this, and in my head I thought, "OK, I think it's still looking good. If I'm at 8 or 9, I can do it. Otherwise, I'm going to the hospital!" I was hoping it wouldn't be a 7 or 8 and that I'd have an easy choice. And it was! Still only 5 cm after 48 hours of contractions! My heart sank.

It was about midnight and I couldn't imagine another night of this. Maria said that if I was going to get through the contractions to get to 10 cm and then push a baby out, I'd need rest, which only an epidural could provide. It was also getting risky because my water broke and had been leaking for 60 hours! So we decided to transfer to our backup hospital. Once there, the epidural was successful at

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For more information on the benefits of prenatal yoga, see Ann Israel's "Letter to the Editor" on pages 3 and 15.

Andrew's presence was equally forceful. He stroked my hand and chest and then rested his forehead against mine, blocking out the lights so that all I could see was love.

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taking away the pain of the contractions, but I still felt strong pain in my back, probably from the baby's position. They thought maybe the baby's head was tilted. Also, it was clear that my uterus was swollen and tired. I developed a 102 fever, so we took care of that and gave the Pitocin some time to work.

RETURNING A LOST JEWEL

My only job was to sleep. I felt comfortable with Maria and my husband taking care of things, so I just let myself drift. I got to 6 cm and stayed there. Maria warned my husband that this waiting period would not go on forever and that they would start talking to me about a cesarean. And that's what happened, though the OB doctor presented it as a choice since the baby seemed to be doing just fine. She said it was likely that my cervix wouldn't respond to the increasing Pitocin. Andrew, too, told me that he could see the waves of contractions being printed out from the machines and he had been excited at one point to see them so close together, but then saw them peter out. I began to see clearly what I needed to do. We talked with Maria who said that a cesarean was totally reasonable at this point and that it would be better to act while the baby was still strong because once the baby shows signs of distress, choice is gone. My desire for a vaginal birth was still strong, and I didn't like the idea of having to recover from major abdominal surgery in the postpartum days to follow. But I didn't want to risk the baby's health and I didn't think or feel intuitively that the Pitocin was going to work (and if it had, I wasn't sure I had the strength to push!). With truly no misgivings, I said let's go for it.

Within a half an hour, they had me ready for it. My body was numbed and I was led through the

process of what would happen. Andrew was finally allowed to come to my side in the surgery room (Maria, or any second person, was not allowed), and as things got more intense—as the sensations of the surgery could be felt, but not in a painful way—his presence was equally forceful. He stroked my hand and chest and then rested his forehead against mine, blocking out the lights so that all I could see was love. We were so excited, and I was teetering between nausea and bliss. They finally said, "You'll meet your baby in a few minutes!" There was a respectful silence in the air and we heard him cry. His voice was awesome and is burned into my brain.

They knew we didn't want the gender announced, that we wanted to see the baby together. Andrew went to cut the cord and they hid the gender from him still. He came back over to me in awe and said, "He's beautiful, but I don't know if it's a he." One of the doctors said, "I'm impressed!" (I guess by Andrew's ability to wait!). They came over and I got to lay my eyes on my baby's face, and they unwrapped him so we both could see that he was definitely Luke. I kissed him hello and felt his soft skin and basically fell in love right there.

After the surgery, Andrew and Maria met up and she gave him advice on how to get the baby to me as soon as possible. She gave him the confidence that it was possible despite the hospital's usual policies. The hospital staff said, "Well, we don't really allow the baby to go right away." But Andrew said repeatedly, "I understand, but how about we just take him." And it worked. Andrew remembers pushing Luke down the hall in the little rolling crib feeling as if he'd just committed a felony—crazed and exhilarated. When he delivered him to my breast, with Maria's encouragement all the way, he felt he was returning a lost jewel to a crown! And that's how it felt, as if a piece of me had returned. Luke latched on right away, and I felt a new joy on my baby's birthday.

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