Naomi's Birth

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ABSTRACT

A first-time mother, who is also a nurse, tells the story of her drug-free birth at a free-standing birth center.

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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).

Years ago as a nursing student, I witnessed four births during one of my clinical days. Each birth was very different, and I saw firsthand the differences between having a physician or a midwife, an epidural versus natural birth, and what it was like for a woman to undergo cesarean surgery. It is my strong conviction that pregnant women are not sick and childbirth is not a medical procedure. When I found out that I was pregnant, I already knew that I would want a midwife to attend my birth; but, beyond that, I did not have specific birth plans. As a nurse, I know too much of all the things that can possibly go wrong, and as a first-time mom, I had my doubts regarding birthing without resources provided in a hospital.

It was during a conversation with my midwife at my 16-week appointment when I knew a birth center was the right choice for me. As a health-care professional, I know that when medical complications occur, most times there are signs and symptoms that indicate something is not right. My midwife reassured me that emergency hospital transfer is extremely rare, and that at the first sign of any fetal or

maternal distress, I would be taken to the hospital. At this time, I decided that as long as I was healthy and low risk, I would have my baby at the birth center.

During my pregnancy, I prepared with hypnobirthing classes, as recommended by a friend. My husband Adam and I both attended the classes and began listening to relaxation exercises every night starting around 25 weeks. Being an avid Bikram yoga student, I continued this practice throughout the second and third trimesters of my pregnancy. I also started seeing a chiropractor during the third trimester to facilitate the best baby positioning and help with my pelvic alignment.

What I did not prepare for, nor could I avoid, was the criticism and skepticism that I faced from my coworkers and most anyone else who learned of my “alternative birthing” decision. For my own peace of mind, I eventually started to simply agree with anyone who felt the need to press his or her opinions on me for what is best. “Oh, so you are going to have an epidural, right?” “Make sure you let us know when you go to the hospital.” Like many women who work with the public, by the final weeks of my pregnancy, I was ready for the end of unsolicited comments, suggestions, and shared birthing stories.

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On Monday, June 14, at 10:30 p.m., I started to have my first intense Braxton Hicks contractions. At this point, it felt mostly like moderate to severe menstrual cramps. Hoping to sleep through these minor contractions, I was asleep by 11:30 p.m.; unfortunately, at 2:00 a.m., I was up again. I was excited and hoping that maybe this “was it,” so I started tracking the frequency of each surge. All night my contractions came with some regularity, but they were too inconsistent. On Tuesday morning around 8:00, I spoke with my midwife who suggested I try to rest and keep my appointment for that afternoon.

At my appointment around 2:00 p.m., I found out that I was only 1 cm dilated, which was a little discouraging at the time. My midwife was concerned that I was so exhausted and suggested I try to get some sleep that night because true labor could be weeks away. With her convincing, I accepted some prescription sleeping pills, knowing that I needed the rest. Unfortunately, I had a reaction to the sleeping pills, which caused me to be incoherent, in and out of sleep all night. I found myself back in the bathtub around 5:30 a.m., listening to my iPod and breathing through each surge.

As time passed Wednesday morning, I was feeling more tired and the contractions were getting stronger. I called my hypnobirthing instructor to discuss how I was feeling and to brainstorm how I should spend my day. We discussed the frequency and intensity of my surges, and she asked questions regarding my overall state of mind. It was very reassuring to have her as a resource and someone who could empower me to make the best decisions during labor. Following our conversation, I made appointments with both the chiropractor and acupuncturist, hoping to get things moving. While at

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home, I just sat on my exercise ball, bouncing around, or tried to relax in the bathtub. Around 2:00 p.m., I checked back in with my midwife and requested to be assessed prior to my acupuncture appointment. My contractions were about every 5 minutes, and I was just plain curious about whether things were progressing.

At the birth center, the midwife told me I would not be making my appointment for acupuncture because I was 7 cm dilated, and she wanted to admit me! I was relieved that I really was in labor and excited to have the baby. Adam and I went upstairs and chose our birthing room—a large room with a private Jacuzzi tub and a comfy, queen-sized bed. Adam unpacked the car and brought my exercise ball in for me to use. After a little while, I asked my nurse, Ann, to get the Jacuzzi ready so I could relax in there for a bit. I labored in the tub for a couple hours, Adam rubbing my shoulders and my mom massaging my lower back during each contraction. My iPod speakers were set up with relaxing music and a series of birth affirmations provided by our birthing class.

Around 7:00 p.m., I was presented with the option to have my membranes ruptured. I was really exhausted from not sleeping for two nights and knew that I was going to need a lot of energy in the last stage of labor, so Adam and I decided this was a good intervention. As soon as my membranes were broken, the contractions became increasingly intense and I changed position from the tub to the

Naomi skin-to-skin on Lauren's chest, immediately after birth.

Skin-to-skin with Daddy.

She nursed for the first time, only being 25 minutes old!

birthing stool. After pushing for about an hour, I moved onto the bed so I could be better supported. At 9:50 p.m., our daughter Naomi Christine was born after about 1.5 hours of pushing. I gave birth in the side-lying position while resting in my husband's arms. My labor was calm and relaxed until I had to push. Although I wouldn't say that it was painful, pushing required every ounce of my being, partially because I had been sleep-deprived and unfortunately had not eaten enough that day. Naomi's initial Apgar score was 9; after 5 minutes, she was a 10—a very alert, healthy newborn!

While I received some sutures, Adam was directed to take off his shirt so Naomi could be “skin-to-skin” with him. Then, she went right

to my chest and stayed there for 2 hours. She nursed for the first time, only being 25 minutes old! She had absolutely no problems with jaundice, having passed two meconium stools in the first 4 hours of life, and my milk was in at 48 hours. I attribute these things to the uninterrupted skin-to-skin time of bonding and nursing in those first hours of Naomi's life. I'm thankful that my first birthing experience was what I envisioned. I felt empowered, in control, and had minimal medical interventions.

LAUREN A. MUELLER is a nurse and now a full-time mom living in Maryland. She firmly believes that women should be empowered to approach childbirth with excitement and joy instead of fear and anxiety.

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