The Birth of Miles Henry DeVries

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ABSTRACT

In this birth story, a second-time mother relates her experience of birthing her son at home after her daughter was born via cesarean surgery. Support from the International Cesarean Awareness Network, as well as a home birth midwife specializing in vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC), made the dream of a vaginal birth a reality for this mom. This story highlights the importance of having a supportive care provider and laboring in a safe and comfortable environment when pursuing a VBAC.

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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*. Please send your story or query to Judith Lothian, Associate Editor (Jalothian@aol.com).

Miles's birth story began 3 years ago with the birth of his sister, Elsa. My husband, Peter, and I were hoping for a water birth at a freestanding birth center. But after 3 days there and despite all of my efforts and all of the time we gave to labor, I would not progress past 9 cm dilation, even after Pitocin augmentation after transferring to the hospital. It was a joy to finally meet our beautiful daughter who was delivered via cesarean surgery and weighed 9 lbs, 4 oz. But as the excitement of her birth faded, I was left feeling broken, with doubts and depression. I had failed, and my body had failed me. I had trusted my body to birth normally, and it did not.

I began attending International Cesarean Awareness Network (ICAN) meetings to address these feelings when Elsa was about 3 months old. There I met many women who understood my experience, and with their encouragement, I began to heal emotionally. I heard others share triumphant vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) stories, many of which took place at home. Although we'd never before considered a home birth, when we became pregnant again,

the choice became clear: My best chance of avoiding another cesarean section was to give birth at home.

The key to a successful VBAC is finding a truly supportive birth attendant. I'm fortunate to live in a city where there is reasonable access to in-hospital VBAC, but I wanted an attendant who *specialized* in VBAC. This meant hiring a home birth midwife, Ellie Legare, who is a VBAC mom herself. Planning a home birth with an expert like Ellie meant that I knew exactly who would attend me during labor and birth. I could be confident that my care would not be left to someone who did not support my birth plan or a nursing staff that came and went with shift changes. Because I was not in the hospital, I would not have to endure routine interventions that would disrupt the flow of physiological birth (IVs, electronic fetal monitoring, restrictions on food). We felt confident about our plans, even while understanding that our baby might have other ideas about how to make his entrance into the world.

My labor began early on Monday—the Fourth of July—the day before my due date, at least a week before I expected to go into labor. I was awakened

To learn more about the International Cesarean Awareness Network (ICAN), visit the organization's Web site at <http://www.ICAN-online.org/>

by short, intense contractions at 6 a.m. but reasoned that if I relaxed and rested, the contractions would eventually stop and I could go back to sleep. I put on my headphones to listen to my Hypnobabies tracks, fully expecting to drift off. By 7:30 a.m., I was starting to get restless but was determined to stay in bed as long as possible, in case this wasn't "it." And if this *was* "it" and if this labor was anything like my first, I knew I was in for a long day and night.

I was actually relieved when Elsa awoke at 8:30 a.m. and climbed in bed with us; but before long, we headed downstairs for breakfast (black bean soup with cheese and goldfish crackers, she insisted!). I tried to ignore the continuing contractions over my bowl of cereal, but I couldn't manage cleaning up our dishes. Elsa and I headed for the couch to read her a book. It was now 9:30 a.m. and my next contraction couldn't be ignored, so I called up the stairs to wake Peter up for him to take over the care of Elsa. I explained to her that I was having some "tummy squeezes"—not that I thought the baby was coming, because I still didn't believe I was in active labor.

The contractions remained short but intense and required some breathing and leaning against a wall to get through them. Peter wisely called my mom to come take care of Elsa—I remember thinking it was too soon to do that—and then he persuaded me to text our midwife, Ellie. She called right back; while we talked, the contractions continued. I remember feeling disappointed that they were so short, and we agreed it likely was still early and that I should shower and just go about my day.

Peter popped in a movie for Elsa and scurried around putting away laundry, cleaning up, trying to find sheets, and preparing for a birth. Upstairs in the shower, I washed my hair in between contractions. Things were intensifying, and I held on to either side of the shower, got into a half squat and vocalized through contractions with long, low "ooohhhhs" and "aaaahhhhhhs" and chanted "open, open, open." Soon after, I felt myself leaning into pressure as I continued the half squat and hip circle movements. I was really working with each contraction instead of against it. Peter came into the bathroom and convinced me that we should call Ellie back. While she made her way to our house, Peter helped me out of the shower and into a nightgown as I continued moaning through contractions. I discovered that the side of the armoire was perfect to hold onto during each wave and then to lean against it in between.

Ellie arrived by 10:30 a.m. Between contractions she checked me, found I was 6 cm with lots

of bloody show, and proclaimed, "This is definitely active labor!" As I lay there, a strong contraction hit; although it was terrible to be lying down, it was too late to get up. So as soon as the pain ebbed, I got up off the bed as fast as I could and resumed my position hanging off the side of the armoire.

Time grew fuzzy as I worked through the contractions, and Ellie and Peter got ready for the birth, retrieving and unpacking our birth kit. They set up the birth tub and began filling it. I was really glad to know it was there and ready for me if I wanted to use it. Peter and Ellie kept me hydrated with sips of a commercial energy drink that my mom had picked up on her way to our house.

Then Ellie suggested that I hang on to Peter instead of the armoire. It felt great for a couple of good contractions, helping to keep my bottom loose and to open up for the baby; but Peter was having a hard time holding me up, especially when I went limp with all my weight against him. He needed a break, so Ellie took over for him through one contraction. Then I asked for the birth ball to lean on (it wouldn't grow tired from my weight), and slowly I sank to the floor. I felt like I could push a little, as Ellie checked me and announced I was 8 cm. A few contractions later, my water broke; I felt all that warmth come pouring out like a waterfall, right onto our bedroom floor that had already been safely covered with disposable underpads. I could hear the voices of the other midwives who'd arrived. Ellie encouraged me to listen to my body and do what I needed to do—which was to push and roar as I felt the baby move down. After a bit of pushing on hands and knees, I turned over to lean on the ball and see if the change in position would help me get him under my pubic bone more easily. But the ball felt unstable, and I ended up lying on the floor between the bed and armoire, flat on my back. I'd never planned to be on my back for pushing, given all that I knew about the benefits of vertical birth, but my legs and my whole body were too tired to hold me up any longer. Things had gotten too intense to consider any other position at the moment. So with the other midwives holding one leg each and Peter sitting at my head, I began the hard work of pushing. Ellie was in catching position, and I felt encouraged by my team as I made good progress with each contraction.

As I pushed, I could feel my tailbone moving out of the way, and although it was painful, it also felt awesome in a way I can't describe. All I'd wanted for so long was to push a baby out, and it felt great to be actually doing it. It helped while I pushed to

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lift my bum up off the floor, and I think that helped my pelvis open up completely and not be impeded by my horizontal position. Ellie encouraged me to reach down and feel the baby’s head emerging—just a sliver of wrinkly, squishy skin—and I gave a guttural, “Yeah!” because it felt so awesome and I knew he was coming soon. With no one telling me to “Push!”, no counting, no breath holding, my body found its own way to work. The hardest push was to get the baby’s head out, through that infamous “ring of fire,” and soon he was born. It was the most amazing feeling ever as Ellie put the baby’s wet, wriggling, warm, little body on my stomach. I was so overcome

with emotion—I couldn’t stop laughing and crying all at once.

Mom told us later that while I was laboring, she and Elsa had come upstairs to get something, and Elsa said, “Mama was moaning before and now she’s grrrrrr-ing!” She was right—I roared my baby into this world.

Miles Henry was born on my bedroom floor at 1:55 p.m. after a short 8-hour labor, weighing 9 lbs, 2 oz, and measuring 21 in. long. His head was 14.5 in. around. This time, Peter got to announce his baby’s name and cut the cord, all while Miles stayed right on my stomach in the familiar comfort of our bedroom. It was so different from our first birth experience. I couldn’t have planned it better if I had tried.

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