The Birth of Joseph Gabriel

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ABSTRACT

In this column, a mother shares the story of the birth of her first child. With confidence in the process of birth and in her ability to give birth, and with the support, confidence, and encouragement of her mother and sisters, Anne manages to cope with strong contractions through a busy day. Finally, her husband realizes how fast labor is progressing. Baby Joseph was born less than 2 hours after arrival at the hospital.

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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).

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to be born.

—Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

As I sit down to write the story of the birth of my first child, little Joey, I must do so with a grateful heart first of all to God for his faithfulness in coordinating every last detail for a peaceful (as much as a birth can be), healthy, and safe birth. Secondly, to my devoted husband Mark who is my “rock.” Thirdly, to my courageous mother Judy (mother of 10!) who is my role model. And lastly, to all of you who have inspired, taught, revealed, challenged, and empowered me to become a mom.

I was first exposed to the idea of natural childbirth when I was in nursing school by the inspiring Dr. Judith Lothian, who taught me maternal child nursing, saying that labor and birth should be “delicious.” I remember being intrigued by the research that she unveiled to us. Years later, I was blessed to assist my sister Mary in the home birth of my godson Christian. In the meantime, between nursing school

and work, I had witnessed several other births. When I found out I was pregnant, I immediately decided to look into the options of what kind of birth I wanted to have. I think the greatest thing I did was attend a childbirth education class with Laura DePasquale, founder of Holistic Beginnings. She took away the fear of labor and empowered, equipped, and excited both Mark and me for the (at the time “dreaded”) process of labor and birth.

To set the “backdrop” of Joseph’s birth, Mark was away for 10 days in Minnesota for business, coming home late Monday night. My mom was away until Wednesday. Mark and I were supposed to be in a wedding on Friday. I was under strict orders to keep my fingers (and legs) crossed.

Thursday morning around 2 a.m., I awoke to go to the bathroom (an hourly routine when 38 weeks pregnant) and felt a sharp pain. “Hmm, I wonder what that was” I thought. Making a decision not to be alarmed, I went back asleep until I awoke at 3 a.m. with the same sensation. “Annie, it’s nothing, go back to sleep” I thought. Finally, when it was a decent hour to make phone calls, I called my mom

to update her. “Mom, I’ve been having this pressure and pain, irregular, but it hurts!” “Annie Fran,” she assured me “it must be false labor. You’re in a wedding tomorrow. Just go about your day, and don’t pay attention to it.” Out of habitual obedience to my mom (even though I am married and 24 years old), I did what she said. “This doesn’t hurt” I told myself, and plunged into the day.

Thursday consisted of signing bank statements (we had just bought a new car the night before), going to Staples to print out wedding programs, hosting bridesmaids, carpooling to the wine store and nail salon, and making platters of food for the wedding party. I opted out of getting my nails done because after all I missed a lot of sleep that night and needed a nap. All the while, I would have moments of “discomfort” (to put it lightly) but told myself to ignore it. After all, I was just doing what my mom said! I even went over to my mom’s house to reinforce what I was going through, and stopped in at my sister Suzanne’s house (mother of 6). Both these women assured me that contractions are a normal process and could be off and on for weeks! Surely, I wasn’t in labor. I wasn’t even due for another 9 days! Who goes early with their first baby? Surely, it’s not in our genes. Hmm, famous last words.

Fast forward to the rehearsal. We arrived to Seton Hall where the bride and groom offered the option of Eucharistic adoration and confession before the rehearsal itself began. I decided to go and talk to the priest. The “discomfort” had not let up, in fact if I was truly honest, it was getting worse and the contractions were more frequent. I got into the confessional and to sum it up, burst into tears admitting to Father Alex that I was in pain, anxiously fearful of what was going to happen. Bless his heart, this man prayed with me and spoke words of tremendous peace and empowerment. I composed myself and completed the rehearsal.

On our way to the restaurant, I decided to just try and time the contractions, wondering if there was any pattern. Between navigating and driving, Mark wrote them down. Analyzing our data, they were about 5 minutes apart ranging from 45–60 seconds. Actually, they were closer but I didn’t want to admit it! Surely, this wasn’t happening. I was in denial. So I called my mother who said, “Annie, just go and eat something, have a glass of wine. You just need to relax.” So what did I do? Listened to my mom. We arrived at the restaurant and no sooner had I ordered my glass of wine, when I experienced some

real winner contractions that forced me into tears. Talk about embarrassing. Along with my dear friend Meg, Mark ushered me out of the restaurant, as I assured the bride that I was just overtired and needed to rest, but I would see her in the morning! Mark was shaking his head and mouthed, “We won’t be seeing you in the morning.”

We drove home, and I called my mom again. “Mom, I think this might be the real deal. The contractions are about 3 minutes apart now. Please meet me at home.” We got home at 8:45 p.m. Mark called the midwife and updated her on the situation. “Try taking a shower,” she suggested. As we were on the phone with her, the contractions started to stack. Mark made the decision: “We’re going to the hospital, *now*.” We left at 9:15 p.m. “Do you think I am really having the baby?” I asked Mark. “Yes, this is it” he said. For those of you who’ve experienced the pangs of labor, the last place you want to be is confined in the car when in the throes of hard labor! “Go faster!” I screamed. After a 90-miles-per-hour ride, we arrived at the hospital at 9:45 p.m. My nurse, Karen, was an angel. She brought a new, calm energy to the situation as she brought us into a room. She got me set up and checked my dilation. I will never forget the words she said: “*you’re 9 cm. Good work. Let’s get you ready for delivery!*” Yikes! When she finally validated what I had been experiencing since 2 a.m. that morning, I allowed myself to admit that I was actually in labor all day long. I *was* in pain, despite my mental denial.

I used the power of prayer and imagery to bring the pain of each contraction to Jesus, and offer it up for various people and situations that I wanted to pray for. We put on peaceful music, and I finished laboring in the birthing tub—very relaxing. When it was time to push, I vividly remembered the instructions of Laura, my childbirth educator, and within a few minutes and only a few pushes, our little angel, Joseph Gabriel, was born. At 11:14 p.m.! Granted, I do believe I firmly requested to have a cesarean surgery at one point because I didn’t think I could handle another ounce of pain. Not sure how one measures the intensity of pain, but on the classic numeric scale of 1–10, I’d say it was a trillion.

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I did have a few words with my mom, who couldn't believe her eyes. Also, special thanks to my Dad who patiently sat in the waiting room and managed the communication of this whole process to my shocked siblings.

Ultimately, I am very grateful that my mom managed to keep me going all day because by the time I was admitted, I was in pain, there was no turning back, no time for an epidural; no time for the bag of treats, massages, and oils that Mark had meticulously packed; and no time for looking back. It was time for me to become a mom. My life has been forever changed, my heart opened to a new capacity

of love, and the core of my being has been awakened to a new purpose, thanks to this little guy sitting right next to me.

ANNE TOUHILL CANTINE is a wife to her husband Mark and mother to Joseph. She met her husband at Seton Hall University, while involved with mission trips to Haiti and El Salvador. She currently works as a passionate registered nurse in intensive care. She comes from a wonderful family, rooted in faith, love, and humor. She, along with her husband Mark and son Joseph, love to travel—most recently embarking to Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, and Tennessee. She is enjoying motherhood, and looks forward to having more children!