Elizabeth Belle's Birth Story

Jessica Boro, MEd

Samuel Boro, JD

ABSTRACT

In this article, Jessica and Samuel Boro share the story of the birth of their daughter, Elizabeth Belle. With the physical and emotional support of her husband and her doula, this mother was able to cope with a long labor and have the natural birth she wanted. Her husband describes how important the doula was for him.

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JESSICA'S STORY

My contractions began when I was at work before lunch on Friday, January 24, 2014. I texted my husband, Sam, throughout the day to tell him about every contraction. He started timing the contractions and saw a pattern forming. Roughly 7 minutes apart, the contractions were short and easy. I touched base with our doula, Alison, around 2 p.m. to let her know how I was doing. She assured me that everything was normal, and I was “just warming up.”

After cleaning my classroom and saying goodbye to my coworkers, I felt certain I would not be coming back to school on Monday. Upon returning home, the contractions became a lot stronger. Because my contractions had become more irregularly spaced, we decided to take my parents up on their invitation to dinner. Once I had a glass of wine in me, the contractions calmed down for a bit.

After dinner, the contractions got stronger and stronger, but they were still irregular. Because they were not coming at regular intervals, I thought that I could go to bed. I went to bed at about 10:30 p.m. I definitely could not sleep because the contractions kept coming. By 11 p.m., the contractions started

to get into more of a pattern, happening between 4 and 7 minutes apart. It wasn't the most even pattern, but because the contractions were painful, we called the on-duty midwife, Tara, to tell her to get ready just in case. We also contacted Alison so she knew that things might be getting real.

The contractions continued to get stronger and longer, but they still were no more regular. After a particularly strong contraction at 12:30 a.m., my water broke as I was lying in bed. I seriously could not believe it. I really thought that my water breaking would just be a trickle, but this was a gush. So much so, that I yelled out, “I'm gushing! I'm gushing!” We immediately called Tara and Alison. Alison began her drive over to our house. Meanwhile, I went and sat in the bathroom as Sam rushed back and forth between helping me through contractions and changing the sheets. Sam put down a chucks pad in case my water continued to leak, and I headed back to the bed at 1:20 a.m. Right before I stepped into bed, I had another contraction and then immediately threw up.

Apart from the throwing up, I had spent the past hour and a half practically climbing the bathroom

walls in pain. It had already been a long night, and Sam was out of ideas for how to make me feel better. Fortunately, Alison, our doula, made it over just after 2 a.m. She quickly got me out of the bathroom and onto the birth ball in our living room. She massaged me and helped me work through my contractions. This was hugely important because the contractions were coming every 3–4 minutes and never seemed to give me any break in between. The contractions would come on strong but then would only dissipate a bit. The pain was strong throughout the contraction. I was moaning so loud and could not get a break. By 4 a.m., Alison and Sam were sure that I must be nearing transition given all of the outward signs. Sam packed up the car as Alison helped me get ready and manage the contractions.

We got into the car and drove the 20 minutes to the hospital. I had many contractions on the way, and when we finally pulled up to the entrance to the hospital, Alison helped me out of the car and pushed me in a wheelchair up to the labor and delivery floor. There was no way that I was going to be able to walk as my contractions were coming so quickly. The labor and delivery floor was very busy that night, and we received the last room available.

Our midwife and nurses began getting the room ready for the birth because it seemed like I was about to have this baby. They took my blood pressure and temperature and put on the initial fetal monitor. Little did we know that we were about to receive the greatest disappointment of the night.

Up to this point, everyone was sure that I was going to be close to transition. We even said that I would have this baby by breakfast! Our midwife checked my cervix and that's when we learned the news. It was difficult to figure out how dilated I was because my cervix was paper-thin. Judging from the thinness of the cervix, we were expecting a lot of dilation, but Tara said I was only 1 cm! If I had not been making so much noise, you could have heard our hearts hit the floor. I begged Tara not to send me home, and because every other sign pointed to active labor, she allowed me to stay. These were minutes of confusion and frustration. We all could have sworn that I would have been further along judging

from the outward signs, the intensity and duration of contractions, the throwing up, and the amount of time I had been in labor.

We were all exhausted. Sam and I had taken classes, read books, and prepared our hearts and minds for labor, but nothing could quite prepare us for this. Our birth plan said that we wanted to have this baby naturally and without medication, but we felt like we had reached our breaking point. Ever since reaching the hospital, I had the word *epidural* flashing before my eyes with each contraction. We called Tara over, and she crouched down on the floor with us. After asking what our options were for pain management, she told us that we could have an epidural or we could have a medication similar to morphine. Sam and Alison discussed these options together. We knew what the epidural would do, but with only being 1 cm dilated, I could be on an epidural for another 12 hours or so, and the epidural might even slow labor down. The other drug might provide an opportunity for me to rest, but would make me loopy. Sam and I wanted to avoid exposing the baby to drugs, and I wanted to be fully present for the birth. It was so hard to feel like we were about to let go of what we had wanted the whole time.

Fortunately, we took some time to think about the options as contractions continued to wrack my body. It was amazing how my mindset changed after we had this discussion. It was as if I just needed to hear myself say it and then all thoughts of getting an epidural were out of mind. This did not mean that the contractions were subsiding, but I was not thinking about getting drugs anymore.

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Alison used this moment to get me to change positions. I had been lying over the birth ball for a couple hours at this point, and she wanted me to try to get onto my feet. Alison brought me into the bathroom and I got into the shower. Because we were put into the last available room, we did not have a tub, but I hoped the shower would provide some relief. I looked forward to the shower, but the water would not heat up. Still, I remained in the shower for a long time with my face pressed against the wall, lukewarm water streaming over my back.

Eventually, I became cold in the shower and got out. I wrapped up in a robe and Sam helped hold me up as we performed the world's most painful slow dance. I don't remember much of this time, but apparently, I was making a lot of noise and writhing around a lot. Both Alison and Sam realized I was really letting this labor get away from me. Sam tried to get me to regain some focus by opening my eyes and making eye contact, but I couldn't.

I still wasn't getting a real break in between contractions, and the midwife checked my cervix again. Tara said that I was two or three centimeters dilated. About 5 minutes later, however, Sam noticed that I was staring right at him. Something was clearly different. I hadn't opened my eyes in what felt like hours and suddenly I could.

After going to the bathroom, I started having really strong contractions. Although the contractions before felt strong, they were actually just really painful contractions. These had a totally different quality to them, and I was getting breaks for the first time! For the next 3 hours, between 7 and 10 a.m., I stood over the toilet and had minute-long contractions with 3- to 5-minute-gaps in between. Having the breaks allowed me to handle these exceptionally strong contractions.

Alison and Sam took turns helping to hold me upright so I could work through the contractions. Sam would stand behind me and form a seat with his legs to support me as I dipped with each contraction. Sometimes Alison would stand behind Sam to help support him so I didn't push him over. Although I was not fully aware of what they were doing, Sam and Alison worked so well in tandem. Alison would provide counterpressure and give Sam a break when he was tired, and she would guide Sam as he worked to support me. Alison's guidance helped Sam to fully participate in labor and gives us confidence that we were going to be successful.

To everyone's amazement, I had gone from 2 cm to 9 cm in only 3 hours! We had missed breakfast, but maybe we would have a baby by brunch!

I began to feel the overwhelming urge to push. We were all concerned about this because at last check, I was only 2 cm. Still, I couldn't help it and had to hold back every few contractions when the urge to push came on. The contractions hurt worse than before, and I even threw up again. This last sign—throwing up in the toilet—surprised my support team. I was not thinking about it, but everyone else began to wonder if I was in transition.

When Tara returned from attending to another patient, she checked my cervix again. We wanted to make sure that I would not push too early, and nobody really believed I could have progressed so quickly to be dilated enough to push. We all waited with baited breath as Tara checked. To everyone's amazement, I had gone from 2 cm to 9 cm in only 3 hours! We had missed breakfast, but maybe we would have a baby by brunch!

When Tara had checked me, she felt a cervical lip; so to help me get past it, I was put on my side with a raised table supporting my leg. I got over the lip very quickly, and I returned to a reclined, seated position as the urge to push got stronger. I had learned that pushing on your back is often not the most effective position; however, I had been standing for nearly 8 hours and I seemed to be making progress in this modified reclining position. Alison and Sam each held a leg to support me through the pushes.

The pushes felt incredible! It was the first time I really felt in control of the labor. When a contraction came on, I listened to Tara and Alison. The first few pushes were weak, but after a bit, I was able to figure out what to do. My pushes became stronger and worked to bring our daughter out. As she began to crown, I reached down and felt her head. It gave me so much motivation! I pushed for about an hour. As she was about to be born, I tried to hold back so that Tara could help prevent tearing. The urge to get her out was too strong and I quickly pushed out the rest of her head and body.

Despite the long, difficult labor and complications after the birth, nothing could overcome the joy we felt at every blink, flail, and snort baby Betsy sent our way. Every minute spent learning about birth was worth it.

Without a doula, I would have been hard pressed to muster the strength to continue to engage in our long and arduous labor. Alison was my doula as well as Jess's!

I was elated to hold my baby girl in my arms. She was the slimiest, bloodiest, most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I held her to my bare chest, and Sam and I looked at her in awe. At that moment, the pain I had endured was the furthest thing from my mind.

While holding Betsy, Tara helped me push again to deliver the placenta. Alison guided me through getting Betsy to latch on to nurse for the first time as Tara began the process of repairing what she thought was a small tear. I ended up needing surgery for the repair. We had the natural, unmedicated birth we had hoped for, and now I was going to surgery! It was difficult to leave Betsy so soon—it had only been about an hour—but I knew that it was best.

Sam held Betsy skin to skin the entire time I was away from her. I returned to our mother and baby room, and Sam and I were finally together with our daughter, Betsy. We passed the evening hours with bleary feedings as nurses came in and out asking questions and administering medicine. Because of the complications, I stayed in the hospital an extra day. It felt so good to bring our little girl home. Despite the long, difficult labor and complications after the birth, nothing could overcome the joy we felt at every blink, flail, and snort baby Betsy sent our way. Every minute spent learning about birth was worth it. We had labored as a couple to bring Betsy into this world. As we stare in awe at our daughter,

we will never forget to be grateful for our support team who worked tirelessly from the beginning of pregnancy to the birth of our healthy baby girl.

SAM'S STORY

The day of your child's birth comes faster than you think. Preparing for this experience helped me to better love my wife, Jessica, and my daughter, Elizabeth. Through the pregnancy, I read books, participated in childbirth education classes with Jess, attended prenatal appointments at the midwife's office, and hired a doula. I could not recommend these activities more highly to future dads.

All of these things provided me with crucial information, confidence, and an emotional connection to the pregnancy. You will need an incredible amount of patience and endurance to be fully immersed in this experience. Bear in mind that you could be involved in labor for longer than it would take you to run three marathons!

Childbirth education classes and our doula, Alison, were integral to Jess and I having the birth we wanted. The discomfort of labor could at times overwhelm her, and we would try many positions we learned in class to help alleviate the pain. We swayed, walked, and used our birth ball. There came a time, however, when we had labored for a few hours and I had run out of ideas. Fortunately, Alison arrived and immediately helped Jess to attain a level of comfort that I could not achieve on my own. This also allowed me to finish packing our bags in the car.

At the hospital, Jess's contractions would not let up. Even though we had committed to not using pain medication for the birth, we both felt that our dedication had met its match. We asked what our pain management options were, and after the explanation, our doula talked through our birth goals and what the medication would change about the labor. Because Alison knew us before labor, she could provide the calm perspective we needed to maintain our commitment and have the baby naturally.

After we had been on our feet for more than 8 hours, we were exhausted. I stood behind Jess to hold her up as she worked through contractions, and Alison would stand behind me to keep me from falling. When I needed to sit or go to the restroom, or I felt overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, and smells of labor, our doula would be Jess's support. Without a doula, I would have been hard pressed to muster the strength to continue to engage in our long and arduous labor. Alison was my doula as well as Jess's!

As limited a labor support as you may think you are going to be, know that your partner needs you there. You will be better at being a partner in labor than you can imagine because you love her and she loves you. Furthermore, the knowledge you have gained in your childbirth education classes and the support of your caregivers such as your midwife or doula create a firm foundation to bring the new baby into this world.

JESSICA BORO grew up in Montgomery County, MD. After graduating with a major in Elementary Education from Elon University in North Carolina, she began teaching kindergarten in her home county. She has now taught

for seven years and currently teaches first grade. She also helps develop curriculum for the state of Maryland and has taught emerging technologies to teachers throughout the county. She recently completed her master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Towson University. Jessica lives in Rockville, MD, with her husband Sam and daughter Betsy. SAM BORO grew up in Anne Arundel County, MD. He graduated from Elon University in North Carolina with a degree in Philosophy and International Relations. He taught middle school and high school in Baltimore City before attending law school at American University Washington College of Law. He served as the Senior Articles Editor on the American University Law Review. He is currently studying for the Maryland Bar and in between study sessions he still makes sure to spend time with his wife, Jess, and daughter, Betsy.