Who Knew Life Could Be This Good?

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ABSTRACT

This birth story describes the challenges of a fast first labor. The mother's determination and the support of her husband, midwife, and mother-in-law, and prayer, helped her manage a roller-coaster labor that lasted only 5 hours. She describes labor as the most painful and challenging experience of her life. She describes her joy as "who knew life could be this good."

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My husband and I were married on July 31, 2015. I can still vividly recall his eyes welling with tears when we saw each other as my veil was gently lifted over my head. I remember thinking if I squeezed his hands hard enough mine would stop shaking. I can still feel how fast my heart raced as we said our vows. This was the day we committed to forever sacrifice for the good of the other. This was the day when we decided to be open to the blessing of children. This was the day when we conceived our daughter, our gem, our love beyond love. This was the day her story started.

On September 4, I woke up at 5:15 a.m. and my assumption was confirmed, I was pregnant! I ran into our bedroom, jumped on my husband to wake him up, and excitedly whispered, "I'm pregnant!" A later ultrasound confirmed the gift inside of me as well as our conception date, July 31.

My pregnancy was smooth overall. I actually really enjoyed being pregnant. The thought of contractions, labor, and how every woman says that delivering a baby is the hardest, most painful experience of her life intrigued me. Despite the excitement

of the unknown, I was internally petrified. I confided these deep feelings to only a select few, although the one who heard me above all others was our Lord. I prayed constantly throughout my pregnancy knowing He was the one in control.

April 19 came and went. I went to sleep as usual thinking of what I had to do at work the next day, feeling excited that my last day was approaching. After falling asleep, I was quickly awoken with the feeling that I was going to wet the bed. Sounds pleasant right? In realizing it was only my mucus plug, I remained calm in knowing labor could be a week or two away. As I slept, tiny contractions began to gently wake me up. I continued to play into the naivens of this being my first pregnancy and convinced myself that these were Braxton Hicks contractions, especially since I wasn't due for at least another 2 weeks! Reality hit me at 4 a.m. as I lay cringing in the pain of my first "real" contraction. From 4:00 to 4:30 a.m., I laid in bed looking up at the ceiling with a stopwatch in hand . . . silently waiting, anticipating, and contemplating that this could be the day.

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Those 30 minutes were the last 30 minutes that my life was my own. We were on the brink of the beautiful storm called labor. After having three contractions, that were 7–10 minutes apart and 35–45 seconds long I realized, “This is it . . . this is happening, we are now on the one-way road and there is no turning back.” I recalled what our childbirth educator adamantly said, “Labor is exhausting and it is sometimes helpful in the long run if the wife can let her husband rest longer in these initial stages.” My husband was all in favor of this plan, naturally. I agreed too, but all I wanted to do in that moment was wake him up saying, “This is *it*, our baby is coming!” My willpower was stronger. He is my rock, my support, and I couldn’t risk the chance of us both wearing out.

As I walked out of our room, thoughts began to cross my mind of how unprepared we were. The car seat was still in the box, the hospital bag had yet to be packed, the baby clothes were not washed, and to top it off, I still had a report to complete for work. I continued to push any worry out of my mind. My water hadn’t broken, and I knew that I could be in labor for another 12 to 24 to 30 hours. No calculations were required to know that I had enough time to complete my checklist.

One thing to know about me is that I am a doer. I always get the job done, and labor was not going to stop me from completing this list. I put the baby clothes in the washer and packed the hospital bag. Two things off! I then spread my notes out on our coffee table and proceeded to write the report for work. My mind kept confirming my actions, despite the reality that every contraction was becoming more frequent and less tolerable. As I got up to move the laundry to the dryer, I became paralyzed with pain. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t think. My question was answered. I now knew a contraction was the worst pain I had ever experienced and this was only the beginning. I caught my breath and looked at the clock. It read 5:45 a.m. I convinced myself that the best decision was to wait until 6:00 a.m. to wake up my husband. Those 15 minutes

were pure agony, but I mentally committed to it and I wasn’t changing my mind.

I stared at the clock . . . 5:58 a.m., 5:59 a.m., 6:00 a.m. Finally! I woke my husband up by saying as calmly as I could, “Tom, I think you should put the car seat in the car.” He didn’t think twice. He jumped out of bed, timed my contractions (which were now 6–7 minutes apart), and raced to put the car seat in the car. The next hour came and went and the contractions were progressing. Tom held me as I squeezed the life out of him during each one. A call to my midwife calmed us down as she advised us to wait to leave for the hospital until the contractions were 3 minutes apart. My husband insisted we leave despite her advice. After some time, I reluctantly gave in. He pulled the car around to the closest exit and came back up to help me walk down from the apartment. A 3-minute walk turned into 15 minutes as second contractions would start before the first had ended. On the brink of tears and against my body’s inclination, I sat in the car.

As my husband turned around the first corner, he was immediately stopped by a garbage truck. The man put up his finger to ask us to wait before Tom yelled, “My wife is in labor!” The man took one look at me and quickly changed his mind. Phew! “Morristown here we come,” I thought. I leaned back in the seat as I felt my insides being ripped apart. Every bodily sense wanted stillness. All I could think was please don’t talk, please don’t touch me, turn off the radio, and why in the world did I wait so long to leave! I somehow mustered up enough strength to

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sit up and turn off the radio. I refused to let Tom rub my arm. The only word I could muster was “Shhhh.” I was in complete distress. Unfortunately, the journey to Morristown took longer than expected. We left at 7:30 a.m. and had to travel on a major highway to get to the hospital. Avoiding rush hour never crossed my mind. Tom remained calm as usual. He continued to encourage me, which I loved and hated all at the same time. Despite the pain, I remained calm in knowing my water still had to break before the baby could come. Parking somewhat illegally, we entered the hospital at 8:15 a.m. The staff was ready with a wheelchair and my midwife was on her way. I remember every bump we hit as the nurse wheeled me to my room. The doctor immediately came in and examined me. She said, “You are 8 cm dilated and when did your water break?” I was shocked. First, I couldn’t believe I was 8 cm dilated, and second she was wrong, my water didn’t break, which I obviously told her. It turns out we were both right. My water didn’t “break,” it leaked.

A second later, a silent prayer of mine was answered, and her name was Kim. Kim was my midwife. She walked in saying, “Alright Megan let’s have this baby.” I initially labored standing by the side of

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the bed. After my legs gave out, I transitioned to a kneeling position with my head buried in the mattress hoping it would muffle my screams. My husband never left my side. A familiar voice then came into the room. I couldn’t lift my head, but when I connected the dots, my heart relaxed knowing it was my mother-in-law. With my head still buried in the mattress, I gave her a thumbs-up to acknowledge her presence and to request without words for her to stay.

My next thought was to push. This internal feeling was quickly trumped by the embarrassing thought that I had to use the bathroom. Kim encouraged me to try. As I squatted my body went into full pushing. Kim quickly grabbed a birthing stool; however, there was one problem. I couldn’t walk. I was standing above the toilet thinking my child is going to fall in. The birthing stool was moved into the bathroom and somehow I got on it. After pushing three or four times, our little bundle of joy was born. Zelig Anne Pagano, 6 lb 11 oz, born at 9:16 a.m. I held her as tears of joy ran down my face. Our baby was finally here.

Labor took the lead with the most painful and challenging experience of my life. Prayer is what I clung to. God blessed us with a quick 5-hour labor, a delivery that was 16 days early, and a happy, healthy baby. Motherhood is a bit of a roller coaster, but I finally feel like my vocation is complete. I finally feel like I am living the life that I am called to live. Zelig has been with us since we said “I do,” and she is bringing me and my husband closer each day. Who knew life could be this good?

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