The Birth of Hazel Belle Wishart

Jillian Wishart

ABSTRACT

In this column, Jillian shares the story of the birth of her daughter, Hazel Belle. Jillian and her husband Aaron worked with labor all day at home, walking, swaying, moving, and checking in frequently with her doula. Jillian managed to cope with increasingly strong contractions and when she arrived at the hospital was 7 cm dilated. Hazel Belle was born 2 hours later! Jillian eloquently describes the intensity of her contractions and the importance of the support she received from her husband, her midwives, her doula, and her mother and sister.

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September 17th, 2016

Born at 10:35 p.m.

8 lb, 15 oz, 21 in

Our due date passed on Sunday, September 11, and we went into the week knowing the more time that passed, the closer we got to “induction day” which we really wanted to avoid. We had planned and prepared throughout pregnancy to have a natural, intervention-free birth and knew induction could start the “runaway train” effect of interventions and a more difficult labor and birth. With that said, I had my 40-week midwife appointment on Tuesday where I got my membranes swept, which can function as a natural way to induce labor. I was 3 cm dilated at the appointment and left feeling encouraged labor would begin in the next day or so. Once Thursday came around, the discouragement crept in because there were not yet any signs of labor beginning. Up until this point, we were told that the baby was posterior, which meant the possibility of back

labor, so I had one last chiropractor appointment on Friday in an effort to get her to turn to the ideal position. My chiro also gave me some essential oils and recommended using them in conjunction with acupressure to help naturally induce labor.

On Friday, Aaron and I met for a date in DC and did some of the acupressure before we went to bed. After a few hours of restful sleep, I woke up at 3 a.m. to my first contraction. One of my prayers throughout the final weeks of pregnancy was for it to be clear when labor began. I’d heard so many stories of people thinking this was it, or having contractions for days on end, and so I prayed for a very clear start to the process. I laid in bed for an hour and a half having easy and manageable contractions before I decided to wake Aaron and tell him I thought things

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had begun. We were both cautiously excited and tried to get as much rest as possible knowing we had a long day ahead of us. As time went on, the contractions got more uncomfortable, but I continued to lay in bed throughout the morning and really tried to rest between each one. These hours felt like they passed so quickly, and although the contractions were uncomfortable, labor was still very manageable. I eventually got up and made my way to the bathtub to help ease some of the discomfort. Prior to this, my contractions were about 45–60 seconds long, coming every 5–6 minutes, and once I got in the bath, I didn't have another contraction for 20 minutes—things seemed to completely stall. We spoke with our doula, and she recommended saving any time in the bath for later on in labor because it can slow the progress if you get in too soon, which we were experiencing firsthand. Part of me at this point was really uncomfortable and was scared to let the labor process get harder or more intense. I mentally wanted to just hang out in this early stage and not have things get any harder. Around 4 p.m., we spoke with our doula again, and she strongly recommended getting outside for a walk to help things move along. That sounded like the hardest thing to me, but she said I could either decide to do that and likely have our baby tonight or I could wait in this early stage for another day and be exhausted by the time the baby would come. This little pep talk helped me move past my fear, and so we made our way outside for a *very* slow walk through our neighborhood. I would hang on Aaron's neck for each contraction, and we got many funny looks as we would sway along the side of the street together. Things quickly picked up during the walk, and my contractions started coming every 2–3 minutes and lasting for about a minute. Thankfully, this pattern continued even after the walk, and around 7 p.m. when I could no longer vocalize during contractions

or get comfortable during the breaks, we decided it was time to head to the hospital.

The process of getting into the car and driving to the hospital was absolute torture. Not only was I approaching transition, but I was in an uncomfortable space where I couldn't sway or move like I had at home. Once we finally arrived around 8:30 p.m., my mom and sister met us at the entrance, and I immediately sobbed seeing them. I think the first thing that came out of my mouth was "I don't want to do this anymore!" and they held me up as I worked through some of the hardest contractions yet. I was put in a wheelchair and taken to triage where they checked my progress, and I was 7 cm dilated and 90% effaced. Our midwife said we had come at the perfect time—another prayer answered! We were quickly moved to the labor room where my water broke while getting the 20 minutes of fetal monitoring, and shortly after, I got into the Jacuzzi tub where I thought I'd spend the next few hours. I can't even explain how *hard* this part was. I was in the midst of transition, and all parts of me wanted this to be over and done—it was just so, so painful. After about 15 minutes in the tub, I kind of got up, squatted, and felt the most intense urge to push. I bore down and literally heard myself *roar* through the contraction. I will never forget this moment because it was entirely instinctual, and I couldn't have stopped myself from pushing if I had tried. Everyone in the room looked at each other, and the midwife quickly came in and said "Ok! Time to get out of the tub!" They ushered me out of the tub and positioned me near the bed so I could squat through the pushes and hang onto the bed through each one. Once again, this was the hardest, most painful thing I've ever experienced. I had expected for

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it to feel *good* to push after reading so many birth stories where that was said, but this was absolutely the hardest part for me. My legs started to get really weak, so I moved into the bed and got on all fours and pushed in this position for a while. After exhausting myself further, they moved me into the side-lying position to finish the work. This position is great for pelvic opening and is more comfortable because you're lying in between each contraction. It also gives you a bit more time between contractions which I desperately needed at this point. I'll never forget the support and cheers around me through each push, meanwhile so desperately wanting it all to be over and being so scared of the next contraction. My mom and doula were holding up

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one of my legs, Aaron was holding the other, and at 10:35 p.m., I finally pushed out our daughter. It was the weirdest, slipperiest sensation, and SO much relief immediately washed over me. They placed her wet little body on my chest, and I honestly cannot even remember what I was feeling at this moment other than so happy it was done and instant love seeing her for the first time. The next hour or so was spent repairing some tearing that had happened during the pushing (super ouch), but despite the discomfort of that process, I mentally felt *so good* and just like myself. We were all chatting as I was getting stitched, and those were some of the sweetest moments of life—I had really, really done it!

I think one of the most important parts of this story is the unwavering support and comfort Aaron brought to me through it all. Never once did I feel alone in the pain, and his nearness and attention were absolutely what enabled me to do this as we planned. He was the perfect partner for me in this experience, and I feel so proud of how we worked together to bring Hazel into this world. The other integral parts of our birth team were our amazing midwives, specifically Tara who was the one on call to deliver that night. In super sweet life details, she is the same midwife who delivered our niece and is also our neighbor! There are pictures that were taken of her down on her hands and knees working to safely deliver our girl. Our doula, Mary, was so helpful and calming and gave me confidence and comfort when I was at some of the lowest points. She also brought twinkly lights, and they made such a beautiful and calming space in a setting that can be sterile and uncomfortable. My mom and sister were the best cheer squad a girl could have, and I felt so loved having them in the room with us.

JILLIAN WISHART lives in Garrett Park, Maryland, with her husband and daughter. She is the sales director for a start-up company based in New York.