Miriam's Beautiful Birth

Basha Mindell

ABSTRACT

A mother describes the beautiful birth of her fifth child. Under the care of a midwife, she feels free, for the first time, to dream of a birth without interventions. During pregnancy, she visualizes, over and over again, the kind of birth she wants. Labor moves quickly, and she gives birth in her van on the way to the hospital. She encourages women to remember that their bodies know just what to do in labor.

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Miriam is the baby of our family. Her birth story is her own, but also the culmination of all her siblings' births as well.

This labor seemed to surrender to the power of my will. Although I wanted to try for a home birth for this birth, for various reasons it was not to be. My previous birth went rather quickly, so we chose a hospital closer to home for this one. Although I wasn't going to be having a home birth, it was hard for me to let go of this ideal. I hoped I would stay home as long as possible.

During my pregnancy, as a busy mom of four children ages 1, 3, 7, and 9 years, one of the only quiet times I managed to find for myself was often in the bath tub. I have a large tub in my master bathroom, and when I soaked in the tub, my mind would

float away with dreams and visions of my upcoming birth. I would visualize everything going smoothly, having a natural birth with no interventions. I would fortify my knowledge that I was strong and my body was perfectly capable of birthing this baby. As I was enveloped in the warm soothing waters, I moved my body feeling beautiful, sensual, and oh so powerful.

You see, I hoped that if I prayed for the birth that I wanted, I might actually have it. And if I could control nothing else, I had control over my thoughts. I could fill myself with positivity. No one could take that away from me. Not that anyone who cared for me in my previous pregnancies and births wanted to take anything away from me. I don't think anyone believed that I *wanted* anything, except a healthy baby, of course. But I understood that the health of my baby was never solely in my doctor's hands to begin with; I understood that my caregiver was but a messenger.

But I did have wants. I wanted to be present at my births, I wanted to be supported through my births, and I wanted to choose to surrender to my birth. But no one ever asked me what I wanted.

So, during this fifth pregnancy, because I was in the care of a wonderful midwife who I felt was completely there to support me both physically and emotionally, I gave myself permission to dream.

Miriam's birth was my first birth in many ways. This was the first birth where I didn't feel I had to fight for what felt right to me or what I felt was best for me and my baby. This was the first birth where I felt truly empowered and totally nurtured. This was the first pregnancy and birth where I was in a midwife's care.

You see my first two beautiful girls were born via cesarean birth; the first was most probably warranted, the second was most probably not. My next two births, another beautiful girl and then a sweet boy, were both vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) babies. Whoever is familiar with VBAC understands that those vaginal births were fought for. In fact, my first VBAC was delivered on the table in the operating room as I was being prepped for my third cesarean! And although my fourth was a natural birth with minimal interventions, in my last weeks, I was still threatened that if anything didn't look great on the monitor, I was having a cesarean.

So, during this fifth pregnancy, because I was in the care of a wonderful midwife who I felt was completely there to support me both physically and emotionally, I gave myself permission to dream. To dream of a birth with no interventions—a birth where I, the pregnant woman herself led the way. Slowly, here and there, when I had quiet moments, I began to really visualize what that would look like for me. That is how I found myself daydreaming in my tub, and it was in that tub that Miriam's birth was created.

My labor began late one summer night, as my husband was driving home from a wedding a far distance away. I was glad he was already on his way back and settled in to try to get some rest, because I knew there was a long haul ahead. I was able to sleep fairly well, occasionally waking from contractions and also from excitement that the time was now.

By the morning, labor seemed to pick up mildly as I shuffled around sending off my children to camp. My doula, Monet, who is also my sister-in-law, stopped in to check on me, arriving around lunch time. We had a bite together as she observed me. The contractions seemed very manageable. She left for the beach and we said we would be in touch.

I was feeling tired from all of the excitement and tucked myself into bed for a nap. This was around 2 p.m. I slept quite well for about 2 hours, simply waking and moaning through each contraction and going right back to sleep in between each one. This turns out to have been my active labor.

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When I awoke from my nap, I decided to call my mom to let her know that within the next day or two, we would probably have the baby. I still didn't realize I was truly "in labor." I knew I was having contractions but figured that I had a while to go because they weren't demanding all of my attention. However, while on the phone with mom, she mentioned that we were only on the phone for 5 minutes and I had to stop talking to breathe through two contractions. It hit me that my mother was very much onto something. I realized it was time to call my midwife, Susan, to give her an update.

While I was on the phone with Susan, I started running that bath that I had dreamed I would take in labor. I had always thought water would be a wonderful tool to manage labor; now I would finally get the chance! But alas, this was also not to be. As the bath was filling, I lost my mucus plug and leaned on the tub rocking through a few contractions. That was as close to the bathtub as I got. Susan, who was still on the phone, instructed me to forgo the bath and start heading to the hospital where she would soon meet us.

I began gathering ice chips, my ball, and my bag while my husband quickly drove our kids to their nearby grandparent's house. (Remember, I had just woken from a nap a half hour before this.)

Before we left for the hospital, I prepared our van by folding all of the seats down so that I could labor more comfortably with the ball for support. I had strong memories of my previous birth in which much of transition was spent driving to the hospital. Preparing my van in this way was also a vision that I had dreamed of during pregnancy, which I chose to actualize during labor. Well, the position I assumed in the van worked surprisingly well, and about a half an hour after we started driving, Miriam was born in my home-birth van.

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Thankfully, we had picked up Monet along the way, who had raced home from the beach, so she was able to assist me and catch the baby. We actually met up with Susan at the next red light. Everybody smiled and waved. We were very close to the hospital; had it not been rush hour, we would probably have made it to the hospital in time. We met in the parking lot where Susan took some pictures of us and then escorted me into the hospital to birth my placenta. What a wonderful feeling for me to be wheeled into the hospital holding my baby already. Victory at last!

Right away, I felt my car birth was the fulfillment of the home birth that I so badly desired. Although many people might be concerned, for me, birthing in my van was perfectly fine. I certainly didn't plan it, but it worked. From when I awoke from my nap until Miriam was born was about an hour and 45 minutes total!

It was only many years later, while presenting on the benefits of visualization as a coping method at a Lamaze training (yes, I am now an LCCE educator!), that I realized the power of visualization that had assisted me so well in Miriam's birth. When I turned that water on, all of the thoughts and beliefs that I had been telling myself all along were affirmed and my body moved full speed ahead, uninhibited in my own master bathroom.

How powerful are our minds and the messages that we tell ourselves! Let's all tell ourselves that we

are wonderful, beautiful, strong women. And, if we are blessed to be pregnant, let's tell ourselves that our bodies know exactly what to do in labor, whether in a hospital, at home, or in our home-birth minivan.

BASHA MINDELL is a mother of five and a childbirth educator. She offers a unique array of classes that empower women with spiritual and practical tools to carry them through marriage and family life. Basha offers women in her community premarriage counseling, childbirth education, and a musical mommy and me class. She lives with her husband and children in Lawrence, New York.