

# A daddy's perspective

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It is 17:44 on Thursday, 15 March 2007 and I am sitting at the window of the Leiden University Medische Centrum looking at the sun setting over Leiden with my wife, Taryn, connected to all sorts of wires lying next to me on a bed.

We are waiting for the induction to kick in which will hopefully speed up the contractions that will enable Taryn to give birth to our first child, Sebastian. It has been a long 9 months waiting for the new breath in our home. Discovering we are pregnant coincided with us relocating to the Netherlands in late July 2006 for purposes of Taryn's work. The initial adaptation to the medical system, and specifically, the neonatal dos and taboos of the Dutch came as a shock to us and more so to Taryn. Coming from a pro-drug and pro-Caesarean Section society in South Africa to the more traditional midwifery system where home births, midwives and no Gynaecologists are the rule rather than the exception has been quite a mind-blowing and scary experience for us. Being a fairly laid-back person myself the different system did not bother me nearly as much as it did Taryn. Then again I am the man and do not need to go through the process of giving birth in a foreign country far from my family and friends and where the comfort of a C-section is no option. It is simply not an option at all in Holland. Nevertheless, we were lucky enough that we managed to have various scans and appointments with Taryn's South African Gynaecologist as well as our local midwives in Oegstgeest where we currently live.

At this point I need to question why women in general lend their ears out to all the horror stories on giving birth but the initial scary stories about the Dutch system were just ridiculous causing unnecessary tension between Taryn and myself. Without exception, the stories are about a woman somewhere in the world that was the unlucky survivor or victim of an occurrence during pregnancy that would in all probability only happen once in a blue moon. No one has ever met this woman – ever – but the stories are used willy-nilly by every soon-to-be mom, magazine, nurse, friend, family member etc etc. Being pregnant and giving birth is a traumatic experience in itself. There is simply no need for all the horror stories at a time when the mother should relax and treasure the arrival of her child.

Nevertheless, we did all the scans, tests, examinations, prenatal classes and Taryn read probably every book on the subject and are now in hospital waiting for our son. Labour started more or less at 15:00 yesterday with minor contractions. This continued through the night with Taryn not getting much sleep and really battling with the pain. After a phone call to the hospital early morning, we were instructed to come in for a check up. The initial examination at 09:33 confirmed that Taryn was dilated 3cm. Four hours later, she was still only 3cm and really suffering from pain. After consulting the Obstetrician we elected to have the epidural administered followed by the induction. It has been nearly 24 hours now. My eyes are hurting. Taryn is finally dozing off to get some much-needed rest. Now we wait for the miracle. After the induction took effect, Taryn dilated to 10cm within 4 hours and the epidural was

removed to enable Taryn to feel the contractions and be able to give normal birth with the help of the midwife off course. It was over all so quick. From the time, the life came back in to Taryn's body and she could feel the contractions until Sebastian was born were no more than 10 minutes. Being able to see the actual birth was so special. One can simply not describe it too any one. Every father and mother out there who were privileged enough to witness their child come in to this world will understand what I am trying to saying. The actual miracle of the child finding its way through the birth canal is awesome. Sebastian was born at 01:30 on Friday 16 March 2007. What happened after this is a total blur. The first thought that went through my head was how incredibly amazing it is to love somebody so much in such a short time. Nothing can describe that feeling and every now and then, I still have to pinch myself to know it is real.

Having so much time on your hands one tends to think about so many things. I cannot help but feel that giving birth is NOT normal. Unfortunately, for all women, there was a woman called Eve who just could not keep her hands off the forbidden fruit and the result is that every woman shall bare children with effort and pain. Prior to arriving in hospital this morning and seeing Taryn going through the pain, I was a true believer in the natural birth process. I get so annoyed with women who are so pro C-sections or who simply give up before even trying just because they are afraid. Hell, if my mother could deliver six children the old fashion way then why can't they. God has created the process of natural childbirth for a reason. There are so many positive things to be said in favour of natural childbirth. God's design is truly amazing. Having said that, I have also seen a Vet inserting his arm up a cows behind and can not help but think that woman go through the exact same thing with hands and fingers constantly invading their privacy with regular intervals over a period of at least 9 months. The difference is that women can at least talk back or scream while the cow can only look back and let go of a protesting MOOOO! Being helpless and seeing someone you love in so much pain is very difficult. As I looked back at Taryn, where she was lying on the bed in blissful sleep with no pain, all be it for a short period, it seemed so much better and easier. Did it change my perception of childbirth? Yes! The fact that it is a miracle and a blessing is not debatable. Should woman "suffer" through the agony of Birth without drugs? I am not so sure. Make no mistake; I do not think that Caesar City a.k.a Sandton Clinic is the answer. Not only is it a money making scheme but it is just too easy and negatives of C-section births outweigh the positives by far – for me in any case. Due to the development of medical science Caesarean Sections has become the order of the day and now negates all of this and giving birth is now per the Gynaecologists schedule. Why would any Gynaecologist in any case spend anything from 3 hours to 36 hours with 1 patient when he or she can schedule a C- section every 5 hours or so. Only the Gynaecologists win! Everything has become so easy, so instant. It is like going to the auto teller, inserting your card and walking away with a baby. Surely, that is not healthy. Wait before you say :It isn't you that have to go through the experience of giving birth, think of it this way: maybe I would have if I was given the choice. Unfortunately (or fortunately), God did not intend it that way and as a result I will never have the privilege or blessing of feeling a life growing inside of me for 9 months before giving birth. Then on the other hand, I have not slept for 36 hours so who cares what I think on the subject.

Eyes tired, emotions on a rollercoaster. The sun has set over Leiden but not over my family. Thank God for big mercies.

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