

Natural birth, a tough and unexpected journey, but so worthwhile

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After a battle with infertility and one IVF baby (Joshua is now 2 years old), our second miracle baby Lea was born 9 September 2014. She was conceived the natural way and born the natural way. When I was told in January 2014 that we will be having a second baby I was in absolute shock. How was it possible? But I learned (once again) that nothing is impossible and that if things are meant to be they will be.

Absolutely everything about this pregnancy was different, it was easier the second time around. Or so I thought until week 37. Firstly, I experienced very intense *Braxton Higgs contractions*, leaving me to believe that I was certainly in labour. To my embarrassment the nursing staff at the hospital informed me that I was experiencing false contractions and sent me home. Three days later I was admitted to hospital with gallstones. Seeing that I was pregnant they could only treat the inflammation and not remove the gallbladder, this made me very emotional as my fever kept on spiking and could cause the onset of labour. I was not ready for this, I was admitted to a different hospital than where I had planned to have my baby, and my gynaecologist was on leave! I was already emotional before all of this, and the emotions just escalated. After a lot of prayer I went home that Sunday with my baby still tightly nested inside my womb.

Braxton Hicks contractions, also known as prodromal labour or practice contractions, or incorrectly as false labour, are sporadic uterine contractions that sometimes start around six weeks into a pregnancy. However, they are not usually felt until the second trimester or third trimester of pregnancy.

On the Monday, marking my 39th week of pregnancy, I started to experience contractions from around 20:00 the night. With the false contractions still fresh in my mind I was hesitant to tell anybody about them, not even my husband. When we went to bed around 22:00 I told him that I think I might be in labour, but that I wanted to make 100% sure. I was keeping track of how far the contractions were apart. At 23:20 I told him "This is definitely it, I think we should go to the hospital." My first baby was born with an epidural and I was planning the same with Lea. On our way to the hospital I asked my husband whether he thought that an anaesthetist would be available at this time of night, and maybe to calm my own nerves I answered my own question with "There must be someone on call". When we got to the hospital and the nurse examined me she indicated that I was definitely in labour, I was dilated 4 to 4 1/2 centimetres. When I presented her with my birth plan she shared the shocking news that there wasn't an anaesthetist available. My heart skipped a beat; this was not what I had planned! But I realized that there was no turning back, this baby was going to be delivered with or without an epidural.

My water did not break so they ruptured the membrane in an attempt to speed up the labour process, and I got into the hot spa to help control the pain. I always thought I had a high pain tolerance but I started to question that very soon, because nothing prepares you for labour. I was in active labour for 6 hours with my first born, and I was certain that I would not be able to bear the pain for another 5 to 6 hours without any pain relief. I was in a great deal of pain so my husband went to fetch the nurse for help, shame he felt so sorry for me, and yet he was powerless. They helped me out of the bath and onto the delivery bed (in a sitting position) and measured how far I had dilated.

The nurse was worried about the intensity of the contractions and told me to relax because I was too tense, she said I had to focus on my breathing otherwise it would turn into a long night. At this stage I thought to myself “this woman doesn’t know what she is talking about” because I was getting the urge to push... and very soon after that she gave me a look and yelled that they should call the doctor, I was fully dilated! Nothing was even ready yet; the tray with the gloves and other medical equipment was still on the other side of the delivery room.

Lea was delivered without a gynaecologist and without ANY pain control. She was born 2 hours after we were admitted to hospital. She is a healthy baby girl who weighed 3.6kg and started to breastfeed soon after birth without any problems. What made this journey worthwhile was that I was able to immediately tend to my baby’s needs and to hold her skin on skin for very long without any discomfort or pain.

If today, I had the opportunity to experience the birth all over again, I wouldn’t have it any other way. Aside from the obvious advantages that natural birth (without an epidural) has for your baby, the sense of satisfaction is something that every mom should experience. It tests you beyond what you thought you were capable of and leaves you with the greatest sense of fulfilment you will ever experience in your life. I have never seen such great admiration in anybody’s eyes, as I did in my husband’s, that day. When looking down into the eyes my new-born baby I felt exhausted, blessed, happy and empowered, all at the same time. If somebody now asks me what method of birth I would recommend I do not hesitate to say that the natural way is the best way for both mom and baby.

Wow, what a journey it has been!

