



Pregnancy  
By  
Design<sup>®</sup>

*Birth Stories*

# Birth Stories

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# Daniel's Birth Story

Lindsey had spent the night with interrupted sleep, waking every 25 minutes or so. Looking back, she surmised that she might have been wakened each time by a contraction, and then fallen back to sleep. She didn't make a fuss about it, but continued with the morning routine of getting the girls up and ready. As the morning progressed, she noted some progression and began to think perhaps this was labor. She still downplayed her sensations, as Jeff was out of town for a unique conference opportunity that neither of them had wanted him to miss. Lindsey knew he would be gone during the week of baby's due date, but hoped she could will baby to stay inside until Jeff's return. In the back of her mind, she hoped this was a false alarm.

So Lindsey took a bath to help ease her discomfort and generally tried to relax. At 11:14, she emailed her doula, Katie, to let her know something was up, and that she planned to eat breakfast and then time some contractions to discern a pattern. By the time Katie texted back shortly after noon, Lindsey confirmed that her contractions were about five minutes apart, and that her sister was coming to drive her to the hospital. Katie flew into gear and was soon en route to the hospital as well.

At Morristown, around 1:30, Lindsey was quickly shown to a labor and delivery room and connected to the fetal monitor. When Katie arrived shortly after, Lindsey appeared calm and relaxed. Without the monitor showing contractions, Katie would have seriously doubted that Lindsey was even in labor. She was chatting pleasantly with the nurses, her sister, and doula between contractions, and at times it was even difficult for those around her to be sure when a contraction was occurring. In fact, at one point she was almost apologetic about her belief that this might not be the real deal. The biggest indication of the work that was going on was Lindsey's acceptance of counter pressure from Katie, on her low back to help alleviate discomfort.

Lindsey's midwife, Kim, arrived on the scene for an internal exam shortly after 2:00pm. She announced that Lindsey was dilated to 8cm already, and with this news, a wave of emotion washed over the room. Lindsey wept with disappointment that Jeff was not there, and processed her feelings with her incredibly supportive team of women. What a blessing that she was surrounded by people who understood the significance of Jeff's absence, and the birth of this baby. Her sadness gave way to acceptance that this was the plan for her baby, and at this point, labor clicked into intense progression. It was as if Lindsey's emotional release allowed her body to embrace and settle into her labor.



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Contractions became noticeably more intense then, and required great effort and focus from Lindsey. Kim had begun filling the birth tub shortly after the internal exam, and around 2:30, Lindsey made her way to the bathroom before getting into the tub. This short walk was excruciating with frequent contractions, and Lindsey expressed her certainty that the baby was coming SOON. By 2:35, Lindsey was in the tub and her water broke with a pop. Kim confirmed that baby was still healthy and strong in there, and Lindsey continued to labor with her quiet, incredible strength.

Lindsey's sister suggested getting Jeff on the phone so that he could participate in what was clearly the baby's imminent birth. Hearing his voice expressing love and support seemed to be just the encouragement Lindsey needed as her body started to bear down. After one push, Kim observed the baby's head; the second push, and his head was born! Lindsey later said that she didn't think it was possible for her to give the third and final push, but with Jeff's virtual presence, her doula's physical support holding her up, and Kim urging her to birth her baby, Lindsey gathered everything she had and pushed him into the world.

As before, the emotion in the room was palpable as Lindsey gathered her baby boy into her arms and held him close. Jeff expressed his emphatic love and admiration for her strong work, and soon ended the phone call so that Lindsey could be attended to (and, most likely, so that he could process his own wave of emotion at baby's arrival!). Their "little guy", as Lindsey called him, was born at 2:41pm. The honor of naming their son would be saved for Jeff's arrival that evening.

Lindsey carefully stepped from the tub onto the bed, as her helpers dried her and covered her and baby in warm blankets. She delivered the placenta smoothly at 3:00, and by 3:05 midwife Kim declared that Lindsey had no tearing and was in great condition. "Little guy" latched on in the midst of the afterbirth process and feasted easily on his first meal. Lindsey and those around her marveled at how perfect he appeared in health, temperament, and appetite.

Kim helped Lindsey to the bathroom around 3:45 and assisted her with getting dressed while lucky doula Katie held a peaceful, quiet baby. Lindsey settled into a chair, munching on a snack, to await her mother in law's arrival with their twin girls. Their first glimpse of their baby brother was a sweet one, recorded on video, and soon the girls delighted in pushing their little guy's bassinet through the halls to their mom's maternity room for overnight. Katie said her goodbyes and left the family to visit and fall in love with their newest addition.



# Lucas' Birth Story

At 6:23 a.m. on the morning of September 20, Rachel texted Kate, her doula, to let her know that she suspected her water had just broken. Kate noticed the text about an hour later (she wasn't to be on call for Lucas's birth for another two weeks!), and immediately checked in to find out how Rachel was doing. Rachel and Kate messaged on Facebook about next steps, and after Rachel checked in with her midwives, she learned they would like her to go to the office to be evaluated. She felt this was wise, considering she was not quite full-term and her strep B status was unknown. Kate was in complete support of following the midwives' recommendations, and assured Rachel she would come as soon as she and Scott decided they needed her.

By 11:53, Rachel was being admitted to the hospital, having been sent over from the midwives' office nearby. A check revealed she was 2cm dilated. Her medical team planned to administer a round of antibiotics, to be safe regarding the unknown status of strep B. About twenty minutes later, Scott texted Kate to say the midwife wanted to induce Rachel as soon as possible because of the higher risk of infection, due to Lucas being premature. They were willing to wait for the doula to arrive. Kate dropped everything and headed to the Medical Center to help!

Arriving in room 429 shortly after 1:00, Kate greeted Scott and Rachel, who was trying to get in a small meal of hospital pizza before starting the induction process. About this time, the nurse started Rachel's IV (after several attempts!) for fluids and antibiotics, which were needed before Pitocin. Around 2:00, Rachel was reporting occasional mild contractions, but the induction medication would still be needed to bring Lucas earthside.

Pitocin was started at 2:35pm at 2 IU/hour, a low dose to be turned up incrementally each hour or so until active labor was achieved. Rachel and Scott enjoyed watching HGTV on the big screen while the medication began to work, bringing manageable contractions that those around Rachel could barely even notice. She was so calm and strong!

Rachel's mom and good friend arrived about 3:30 with enough supplies to feed a small army, and Rachel seemed happy for the distraction. They sorted through the many groceries and toiletries they had brought, more than making up for Rachel and Scott's short packing list - they had not quite expected to go into labor already at 36 weeks! Throughout their visit, contractions were about 3 minutes apart, with Rachel becoming noticeably more uncomfortable and intense during the peak. She reported that contractions were getting harder but seemed very short, only about 10-15s of noticeable pain with each one. Another hour later, around 4:35, the Pitocin level had increased to 5.33 IU/hour, where it would remain for the rest of labor.

Active labor was in gear! Rachel's medical team requested that she get in bed for monitoring at this point, as her excellent moving and swaying was making it difficult to keep the monitor in place. She spent a challenging 50 minutes in bed, using a peanut ball to keep her pelvis open and to rock back and forth over contractions. Scott leaned in so closely, holding her hands and whispering private encouragement that only she could hear. He was so confident in his incredible wife, and never left her side.

At 5:25, Rachel was having no more of the bed, and got up to move with her contractions again. What a display of strength and feminine power! She stood near the bed with the birth ball on top of the bed, leaning on it while Scott squeezed her hips and encouraged her. Kate rotated

with Scott, squeezing Rachel's hips so that Scott could stand in front of Rachel, helping to bear her weight while she swayed and vocalized through the peak of each contraction.

By 6:40, the waves of contractions were incredibly intense, requiring Rachel to vocalize loudly through them. Kate and Scott maintained their routine of swaying and squeezing, a physically demanding task for the entire team, but for Rachel more than anyone else could imagine. She bravely held onto her rhythm as contractions grew to their most intense. She trembled and reported more downward pressure, sure signs that Lucas was moving into position for her to push soon! Rachel turned down a cervix check during this time, preferring to wait until the urge to push was undeniable.

Another hour later, about 7:25, the pressure was so great that Rachel agreed it would be good to find out if her cervix was out of the way enough to push. The doctor filling in between midwife shifts gave her an exam, and reported she was 9+cm dilated with just a lip of cervix in the way. She was 100% effaced, and baby had descended to 0 station. The doctor encouraged Rachel to labor down just a bit longer to see if the cervix would disappear altogether.

Rachel was checked again around 7:50pm, and the doctor again noticed the tiny rim of cervix. She offered to move it aside while Rachel pushed, to allow Lucas to come down. Rachel agreed, and after just a few pushes with the doctor moving the cervix, her cervix was completely gone and she was given the green light to push freely! Rachel's nurse, newly on shift for the evening, began to give instructions for pushing. Kate checked with Rachel to see what her preference was for pushing, and Rachel asked for no instructions, but to push with her urges.

Mothers often need some time to learn how to push effectively, but Rachel's instincts guided her perfectly! She pushed powerfully from the start, and brought Lucas down so quickly! With every push, Scott continued to speak softly but strongly to his beloved wife. His encouragement appeared to power her through. As Lucas was crowning, with Rachel pushing with all her might, the doctor prepared an injection of medication to take away the pain of crowning, to speed delivery. Kate paused the doctor to see if this was something Rachel desired. Rachel, ever choosing to minimize interventions and experience all of labor, turned down the medication. She had made it this far, and she knew she could deliver her child in the next push!

This Rachel accomplished with all her strength, and at 8:23pm, Lucas Gray Miranda was born with a near-perfect Apgar score of 9 (measuring breathing, heart rate, color, muscle tone, and reflexes). Rachel held Lucas close for several minutes, savoring this amazing gift and the relief of being finished with labor! The pediatric team then took Lucas across the room for assessment; the doctor explained to Scott some of the characteristics that made Lucas look even younger than 36 weeks, including short foot creases and breathing retractions, but overall, Lucas looked very healthy for such a little peanut!

The next days were spent in the hospital for Lucas to be monitored due to his young age at birth. Rachel persisted in initiating breastfeeding despite the challenges of pumping to feed, and waiting to get Lucas to the breast until he was ready to do so. God blessed Rachel and Scott greatly, not only with a healthy baby, but also the endurance and wisdom to navigate the many decisions of care in the hospital and after they were home.

Sweet Lucas was born fast and furious on Wednesday, September 20, 2017 at 8:23pm. He weighed 4 lb 9.6 oz, and measured 18 1/4 inches long. Lucas arrived four weeks early - he just couldn't wait to meet his amazing mama and daddy!

# Isaac's Birth Story

I was awakened at 4:33 in the morning by the first contraction. While it was more intense than the hundreds of Braxton-Hicks I had been experiencing over the past week or so, I wasn't completely convinced that it was the real thing. I breathed and relaxed and refrained from getting too excited. One contraction does not a labor make, particularly when the due date is still two weeks away. At 4:43, another contraction rushed over my body – still not sharp or painful enough to be truly persuasive, but certainly enough to make me take notice. I continued to relax and make myself as comfortable as possible in bed, and decided it wasn't worth waking Joel just yet.

The next hour and a half consisted of contractions every 10-15 minutes, perhaps skipping one here and there, alternating with me telling myself, "Nah, probably not labor...if I have one more contraction, THEN I'll wake Joel up." They became closer together and more regular as the time progressed, so that they were really every ten minutes toward the end of that time. While I was intently focused on evaluating what was going on with my body, it was a very peaceful time of experiencing and relaxing through contractions, resting as much as possible in the quiet as the sun began to peek through the windows.

Joel's alarm was set to go off at 6:00 a.m. At 5:45, I told myself that if I had one more contraction, then I was going to wake him up, no seriously this time because it just might be labor. So I relaxed through a contraction and slipped my hand into his, squeezing it gently. He squeezed back, and I softly told him that I had been having contractions for about an hour and a half. He got out of bed, and hopped in the shower at 6:00 a.m. By 6:10 when he was hopping out, there was no doubt that I was in serious labor.

Contractions were becoming deeper and more painful, with less than ten minutes between. We texted our on-call babysitters around 6:30, "Stand by, this might be it!" and called the midwife. We agreed to meet at the birth center at 7:45, to give our babysitters time to arrive.

Joel gathered miscellaneous last-minute items for the birth bag, brought some clothes for me, and helped me get my socks on (for some reason this is a job that sticks out in my memory from our first labor too – him putting my socks on my feet between contractions). Things were getting intense for me as I remained on the toilet, but overall it was still a pretty peaceful labor with successful relaxation through each rush. I knew Joel was taking care of details, and my confidence in him allowed me to focus on what I was doing without becoming tense or stressed. Our baby-sitter arrived soon, and my mind was at ease as Joel helped me to the car.

It was a gorgeous morning. The sun was just risen, the sky clear as we drove. Joel asked me how fast I wanted him to drive. I responded with something like, don't be dangerous, but get there.

We arrived at the birth center at 8:05 a.m. and were welcomed by Jen, the same midwife who delivered Mikayla. She had the birth tub set up and partially filled with water. A quick check revealed that I was already 7-8 centimeters dilated and fully effaced (!!). I took a bathroom break, undressed, and hopped (well...figuratively) into the birth tub to labor. At this point, labor really...all but stopped. Jen assured me that this was normal when transitioning to a new location, and that I was definitely in labor, and it would pick up again soon. We hung out and

talked, joked, relaxed for about half an hour with me in the tub. I may have had a contraction or two during that time, but it was really low-key and enjoyable at that point. I remember Jen telling the nurse that we would be needing her almost for sure within the next three hours, and I remembered being surprised and SO happy that she thought it would go that quickly!

Around 8:30, things began to pick up. With each contraction, Joel rubbed my shoulders and back, and poured warm water from the tub over my belly with a pitcher. He also began to breathe with me through each contraction. At times, I used a focal point of one of the plugs in the inflatable birth tub, and at other times I closed my eyes to concentrate. Different from my first labor, I also tried to keep my arms and hands totally relaxed. With Mikayla, I squeezed Joel's hands through the really intense contractions. This time around, keeping my arms relaxed was really difficult but I think paid off in helping to manage the pain more successfully and allowing the contractions to pass more peacefully. I know it sounds weird, but it continued to be a peaceful labor even as contractions ramped way up and even double-peaked several times.

Joel says it was probably around 9:00 a.m. that I first said I might be ready to push soon. He also says his internal reaction, which he did not voice, was "Already?!? Shouldn't we wait?" I wasn't having a true urge, but could tell the baby was getting low, and the intensity from the contractions was getting super low as well. With the next few contractions, it didn't feel as low or intense, so I waited, but my midwife gave me her blessing to push when I felt like it. At this point, my water had not broken, in case you were wondering.

But I was willing to be patient. I started to push once or twice with contractions and felt that it wasn't right just yet, that my body wasn't quite working with me. So I relaxed and waited to have the feeling again. It was just after 9:30 that I really started to feel that it was time – those low, incredibly intense contractions that felt like the baby was ready to come out. I was also feeling like I couldn't take much more intensity, so that let me know that I must be just about there!

At this point, I told Jen again that I was really feeling like I should push. She checked me and said there was just a small edge of my cervix in the way, but that she would help while I pushed to let the baby's head pass through. She also asked if I'd like her to break my water. I agreed to the amniotomy, to relieve some pressure and help the pushing to go perhaps a bit more easily and quickly. She broke my water and reported that it was clear, no meconium, and so I was free to have this baby in the tub!

Water broken and with Jen helping, I pushed hard through the next several contractions. Jen was so encouraging, telling me that I was pushing perfectly, and having me shift slightly to improve the angle for the baby. He must have appreciated that, because then he came fast! It was incredibly intense for me, feeling him descend, and feeling as though I must continue to push to get this baby out or I would, I don't know, die or something. He crowned within a few minutes, and I only allowed him to hang out long enough for me to take a deep breath and push again.

At 9:47, after five hours of labor and just eleven minutes of pushing, Isaac Victor was born in the warm water of the birth tub, and was in my arms within moments. It took some wrangling, but Jen helped deliver his broad shoulders while I pushed one more time. While Joel wasn't able to catch him, he said he loved being behind me while Isaac was born. He was able to see Isaac wiggle in my belly just before he emerged, and witnessed the magic moment of Isaac's head and shoulders appearing in the water below me. I was overwhelmed with emotion as Jen placed Isaac in my arms. He was quiet and peaceful, eyes closed as he moved and tested his new-found



freedom. I held him close to my chest and whispered (cried? proclaimed?), “My baby boy, my sweet boy. I’m so glad you’re here!”

The most marked part of the experience for me was sweet relief at having Isaac delivered. I’m sure this was because of the sheer speed and intensity of labor and birth, but getting him out of me and into the water felt so good. And then I marveled that it was over already! The feeling of relief continued as the midwife and Joel helped me out of the tub and onto the bed to deliver the placenta. Joel got a sweet picture of the placenta for a good friend who had expressed curiosity (yes, really). He also cut the cord, and proudly named his son.

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The post-delivery process continued smoothly, and Jen reported that I had sustained no tearing or injury despite the velocity of the birth. (Another perk of laboring in the water, I’m sure!) Isaac settled in to nurse, and Jen took some first family photos. She also captured some great shots during labor, and immediately after delivery. I’m not sure how; she must have actually been in two places at once, as far as I can figure. But we are so thankful for her and our nurse, Bev, for helping us to have a second fantastic birth-center experience. We were heading out by 1:30 p.m., planning to stop by our pediatrician’s office for a quick check on the way home. We are so thankful for Isaac’s fast, safe arrival.

# Mikayla's Birth Story

Our birth experience began quietly and unexpectedly at 11:00 p.m. on 1/11/11. I was dozing, having gone to bed a short time before, when I experienced my first contraction. Now, I had been pre-laboring for about a week – lots of random, relatively painless contractions, sometimes happening regularly for a few hours, but always spacing out and subsiding eventually. So when this one woke me up and took my breath away, I didn't immediately suspect that I was starting into labor. But, since it felt different than previous contractions, and I continued to feel somewhat crampy even after the contraction ended, I decided to make a note of it.

Despite the ongoing discomfort following this first contraction, I was able to go back to sleep for a bit. The next contraction woke me at 11:29 p.m. and felt similar to the first one. I abdominal-breathed through it just as our birth class instructor had taught us, and again made a mental note that it had come about 30 minutes after the first one. So far, Joel was still sleeping soundly with nary a clue that anything might be happening. I decided not to sound the alarm just yet, and settled in for (hopefully) some more sleep myself.

The next contraction didn't hit until 12:30 a.m., so I'm not sure whether I slept through one. I still wasn't getting TOO excited because they were pretty far apart, but the contractions were definitely intense enough that I needed my deep breathing and relaxation skills to feel ok. At this point I got up to walk around a little and use the bathroom, to see if that would help the crampy feeling to go away (it didn't).

At 12:54 I had another contraction, and the next followed swiftly on its heels at 1:03. We went from spaced out, almost half an hour apart contractions to 9 minutes apart after only three contractions. At this point I was definitely considering waking Joel to provide some coaching! He actually woke on his own and asked if everything was alright. I told him I was considering waking him in a few minutes, that I was having painful contractions.

I should mention at this point that Joel can, and often does, sleep through anything. He is not easy to rouse. So I confess to several minutes of bitterness as another contraction rolled through at 1:11 and he was still, apparently, sleeping soundly. If he wasn't going to wake up, then I was going to need to get comfortable. I headed for the bathroom. And may I say, laboring while sitting on the toilet is amazing! I was able to use all my breathing to completely relax through each contraction. Contractions kept coming at 8 minutes, then 7 minutes, then 6 minutes apart. It seemed that each one came closer upon the previous one, rush upon rush.

In all fairness, Joel got up quickly as soon as he realized what was happening. But naturally he requested to go to the bathroom – what!?! Give up my precious laboring position?? But there weren't a lot of options, so I stood for the next one. Yup, I definitely preferred sitting on the toilet. I labored until about 2 a.m. in the bathroom. We lit a scented candle, wrote down the timing of contractions on a little note pad, and generally talked about what in the world should we do?? Our area had a winter weather advisory in effect, and our driveway (not to mention the roads) was covered in 4-5 inches of snow. At 2:00, my contractions were 6-7 minutes apart (we only had a few contractions that were 8-9 minutes apart before they ramped up). We decided

that with how quickly things seemed to be moving along, we had better call the midwife to give her a heads up and talk about when to head to the birth center. While Joel was on the phone with her, my contractions went from 6 minutes to 3 minutes apart. Holy smokes! Our midwife on call, Jen, asked to speak with me. I told her everything was going fine, and had a contraction while we were on the phone. She observed that I had to stop talking and breathe through it, and we decided to meet at the birth center at 3:30 a.m.

This was good news to me – all I wanted was to get up there and into the birth tub! But between us and the birth tub stood a 25-minute drive over snow-covered roads. Joel left me in the bathroom to go investigate our driveway situation and get the “last-minute” items together for our birth bag. Thankfully we had a list on the fridge of things to grab on our way out the door, so we didn’t have to worry about forgetting something in the moment.

The driveway was full of snow, and the roads weren’t looking too good either. After debating whether to call a friend with 4-wheel drive, we opted to at least attempt the drive in my car. All our bags and the car seat were in my car, and we had brand new tires, so it seemed worth a try. Joel helped me put some clothes on, and put my socks and shoes on my feet between contractions while I leaned on the dresser. I was starting to vocalize a little during the contractions, which were still 3 minutes apart, and I wondered what our neighbors were thinking!

The next minutes involved lots of strategy. Contractions were three minutes apart, so as soon as one passed, we hurried down the stairs. The next one rushed upon me in the kitchen so we waited, and then Joel helped me with my coat and gloves. We paused through another contraction, then tried to make it out to the car before the next one. The ice and snow said otherwise, so I hung onto Joel through a contraction before making it into the car.

The 25 minute drive took us nearly an hour, in second gear until we made it to the relatively clear highway. My contractions mercifully spaced out to 4 minutes during the ride. I focused on the snowy road in front of us and breathed through each one; I thought I was handling the whole car labor thing pretty darn well! At one point I realized I REALLY had to go to the bathroom, so where else would we stop at 3 a.m. but at the Turkey Hill gas station? The guy at the counter went white as he realized what was probably going on right there in his store. We avoided eye contact and hurried through the bathroom process – somehow, I didn’t have any contractions while we were in there! I did have one on the way back out to the car and clung to Joel for support. I got the impression that because we were in public, he wanted to “act natural” as much as possible, but that wasn’t exactly the priority for me!

Soon enough we hit the highway and clearer roads, so we were able to pick up speed. We reached the birth center around 4 a.m., hoping Jen (our midwife) wouldn’t judge us too harshly for being late. Quite the opposite – she welcomed us quickly, helped me through a contraction just outside the door, and took us inside where she had the birth tub set up and was ready to do an initial check.

At 4 a.m. I was 5 centimeters dilated. At this point my water had not broken, nor had I come “uncorked” yet. Jen asked me what I wanted to do, and without hesitating I said, “Get in the tub!” She quickly began to fill it with nice warm water. I labored on the toilet while we waited for the tub to be ready.

If laboring on the toilet was good, getting into a hot birth tub was AMAZING!! Not that it was particularly fun throwing a leg over the side of the tub at that point, but sinking down into the water and feeling the soft, inflatable tub all around me was as close to heavenly as one

can feel during labor. I wasn't sure what position to be in, so I just sat down initially, but as the contractions rolled over me, I realized that the baby had turned posterior and was causing a LOT of pain!

At this point I need to consult Joel for the sequence of events. I remember distinct positions, feelings, and thoughts from the labor process, but really had no sense of time whatsoever. According to Joel, I got onto my hands and knees for awhile to open some space, and encourage the baby to turn. For some reason it was comfortable for me to lean my forehead against the edge of the tub, but I learned quickly to just do what came naturally to my body! When my arms (and head) grew tired, I sat and leaned back against the side of the tub, with Joel behind me. The back pain continued, but our midwife was super brilliant and knew how to push straight back on my knees, toward my back, to help open my pelvis. That relieved some of the back pain, and we went on like that for a while. The deep, abdominal breathing and relaxation we had learned in our Bradley class continued to serve me well.

Eventually I ended up back on hands and knees, probably because the back labor was continuing and becoming too much in the seated position. It sounds scary, but in between contractions I was able to rest, and Jen's pushing on my knees did bring quite a bit of relief. But it just wasn't working to help things change or progress. So back onto hands and knees, and this time Joel and Jen took positions on either side of the birth tub in order to push on my hips. Jackpot! The contractions were getting stronger and stronger, and I found that I had to vocalize in order to manage the pain. I also became very focused on what my body needed, barking at my attendants to push on my hips – now harder! Now stop!

Around 6:00 a.m., Jen checked me again. I honestly don't remember where this fits into the sequence of events in the labor tub (and neither does Joel), but I do remember how difficult it was to get out of the tub with the baby moving ever further down in my pelvis. I waddled the two steps to the bed, up onto the little stool and onto the bed. Jen checked me – 7 cm dilated – and I promptly threw up ALL over the place. Repeatedly. How humiliating! Jen continuously encouraged me, told me it was normal and perfectly fine, and grabbed something for me to be sick into. At this point I also lost the mucous plug with a little blood. I remember feeling completely at the mercy of my body as I threw up, and a contraction hit – my sensation was of being out of control, watching from a distance as my body just freaked out and convulsed. But, it only lasted a VERY short time, and then I stopped being sick and things came back under control, mentally and physically. I think it must have just been my body's reaction to the internal check, and contact with my cervix, as well as the beginning of transition.

Back into the tub! Again, the sequence of events is a little fuzzy but as I went into transition things really clicked. I was leaning back in the tub, with Joel behind me outside of the tub with his arms around me. The contractions became incredibly intense. Jen tried to push on my knees again but this time, it was NOT what I needed. I locked into a mental place wherein each time a contraction came, I focused visually on the rubber duck thermometer – some intense eye contact with its one beady little eye! – and mentally clicked into a mantra: Send all the pain to my hands, and blow it away. The deep breathing wasn't working at that point, since a deep inhale sent my lower body into a frantic attempt to push/convulse. So it became five short, intense exhales and then a nice sharp inhale, repeated throughout the contraction. Mentally sending the pain to my hands enabled me to keep my lower body as relaxed as it needed to be. On a few contractions, I lost focus and felt my body tense up, which made it sort of try to push, and this increased the pain. My advise for transition is this: find what works for you! For me it was the focal point, and having a repetitive breathing and thought pattern, continuously telling



myself what to do and focusing intensely on the present moment only. Doing those things really made it bearable, and decreased the pain!

At one point, Jen asked me how I was feeling, and my response was, "I'm in the zone!" And she said, "I can tell you are!" Only twice did I verbalize complaints about the pain. Once I told Joel that I couldn't do it anymore, and he was quick to remind me that that feeling meant I was almost finished! And once when Joel went to call off work for the day, I sneaked a request to the midwife for pain meds. She told me I could have a series of injections that would "burn like crazy" but reduce some of the pain, or the medication that would not take away pain but would make me not care. Even in my condition, I knew that not caring was not an option, and that something that would "burn like crazy" and merely reduce the pain was also not worth it. Onward and upward, medication free! Joel was surprised when I told him later that I had asked. But I'm glad I asked, and decided against it. I feel stronger for it.

While transition was the most intense, it was also one of my favorite parts of labor. I was in my zone, feeling totally in control of my mind and body, and Joel was behind me with his arms around me, kissing my neck and continuously telling me how much he loved me, how amazing I was, and what a great job I was doing. I was certain that he would have broken hands from my squeezing (that's how I sent all the pain to my hands – I squeezed the life out of his, and occasionally squeezed his shoulders instead. After all that, I can't believe he was able to hold our baby after she was born!)

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*While transition was the most intense, it was also one of my favorite parts of labor. I was in my zone, feeling totally in control of my mind and body, and Joel was behind me with his arms around me, kissing my neck and continuously telling me how much he loved me, how amazing I was, and what a great job I was doing.*

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For me, transition lasted from 6 a.m. until around 9, when my water finally broke. Just before that, Jen started talking to me about an amniotomy, which would make things more intense but then probably allow me to get to pushing more quickly. She had also presented the idea of having a shot of pitocin just after delivery, to help reduce the odds of hemorrhaging. She explained that since I had had prodromal labor for about a week, my uterus might be fatigued by the time of delivery, which could cause a lot of bleeding. Unfortunately for Jen, but fortunately for us, transition was not the time to be explaining anything more complex than "focus, blow it away". We were unable to provide a response at the time, and delivery passed with no pitocin shot and no hemorrhaging.

Back to the issue of the amniotomy – I heard Jen talking to the nurse about breaking my water. They knew we had hoped to avoid this, but as transition was taking awhile (though again I had no sense of time, and didn't actually feel like it was taking a long time), she did make the suggestion. Just as with the pitocin idea, I wasn't really able to render consent as contractions kept sweeping over me. Then, just after 9 a.m., my water broke spontaneously! We're so thankful that we put the decision long enough to make it a moot point. For us, it was a clear testimony that waiting and allowing my labor to progress naturally was the best thing for both mama and baby.

So at 9:08, Jen confirmed that my water had broken and told me that I was free to push whenever I felt the urge. That was all I needed to hear! The last several contractions during

transition had been the most intense yet, with my body wanting to push if I let up my focus for one instant. So, on the next contraction I curled up, chin to chest, and gave it all I had! Joel tells me that on each contraction I gave 3-4 good pushes; and on a few contractions, I gave it 5! Jen was so encouraging, coaching me to curl into it and focus the push down at the bottom. At first I wanted to vocalize while pushing, but she told me to keep the air inside my lungs to help give stronger pushes. I remember her constantly telling me how perfectly I was pushing, that I was really moving the baby.

Jen called the nurse in as I began to push. They took turns listening to the baby's heartbeat between each contraction; a few times the heart rate dropped a little, but always stayed above 100, which they said was what they wanted. Also, the baby was helping me all the way – even though she turned and gave me some back labor, she also kept wiggling and turning throughout pushing in order to find the best way to come out. We could see her kicking and wiggling from the outside – it was so cool to think of her in there working with me to birth her!

Jen encouraged me to turn onto my side in the tub, that it might make the pushing a little easier. Joel gently held my head above the water as I leaned to the side. For me, starting to push at the beginning of a contraction was painful as I tensed and curled up rather than relaxing, but the pushing itself felt fantastic! I think that's why I gave it so many pushes each time, and didn't rest during any contractions from there on out. I was almost reluctant to stop pushing as each contraction subsided. I literally felt no pain as I pushed; instead it felt like a huge relief!

Unfortunately, Jen noticed a little meconium when my water broke so she told me I would have to get out of the tub for the actual delivery. She said this gently but with some humor, and asked me not to kill her for making me get up and walk in the middle of pushing. If I thought getting out was tough during labor, it was just awful during pushing! I had pushed the baby down far enough to be able to easily feel her head when I reached down, so to get up, climb out, and waddle the two steps to the bed was really not ideal. Wow.

My terrific attendants took care of quickly drying me and helping me onto the bed. I got onto my side again to continue pushing. Again, I had no sense of time, it felt like I had only been pushing for a few minutes when Jen and Bev, the nurse, told me that I was getting really close to meeting my baby! They took turns holding a small mirror so that I could see her head. We all touched it and enjoyed the full head of hair that our baby was apparently to be born with. Jen called for oil, and applied it as the baby started to crown, helping me to accommodate her head. She coached me wisely through this part, telling me when to relax and allow the baby's head to stay where it was for a few moments. It was a very controlled process that allowed my body to adjust and stretch; it was intense, and I felt very full, but it didn't burn until the baby's head was actually in the middle of crowning and I was pushing her out. So the "ring of fire" for me was very brief, and a great motivator to get the job done!

Checking the heart rate again just after a contraction that helped the baby to crown, Jen told me that the heart rate had dropped to about 80 or 90. She said it wasn't an immediate problem, but that the baby needed to come quickly now. She said she would prefer for me to deliver the baby on the next contraction or else she would like to do an episiotomy to help speed it along.

Again, that was all I needed to hear! On the next contraction I gave four of the strongest pushes I could possibly muster. I let out a yell on one, then held the energy inside for two more pushes as I brought my daughter into the world. I watched in the mirror as much as I could, but had to close my eyes to focus. Joel said it was the most amazing thing he had ever seen, to watch his

daughter be born before his very eyes. She was a sturdy baby with broad shoulders, and Jen helped as I delivered the rest of her body on the next push.

The next few moments are a blur in my memory. Jen suctioned her quickly, and there were no issues from the meconium staining. She told me to take my baby, and then we checked to find out that she was, indeed, a she! I held her close to my chest, and Joel announced through tears, "Her name is Mikayla Grace." Jen clamped the cord, and offered Joel the scissors to cut it. I could tell he was nervous, but in awe of being able to do this himself. I just looked at my baby, completely smitten at her wide-eyed wonder as she looked back up at me. She was so alert, and so incredibly gorgeous with her dark hair and eyes! All I could say was, "My baby! You're so beautiful!" (etc.)

Jen told me that I had not torn at all, but could possibly use a stitch on one side to speed the recovery and lessen my discomfort, to which I readily agreed. The placenta was delivered within a few minutes, and Jen showed us how healthy and big it was. What an incredible organ, to have sustained and grown our daughter for the past nine and a half months!

They allowed us to just hold and love Mikayla, without doing any of the newborn checks aside from making sure she was breathing well on her own. The nurse, Bev, told us that someone's sister was there to visit. Brittany, my sister, was there already! Joel went up to get her from the waiting room at the front of the birth center, and she walked in less than twenty minutes after Mikayla's birth, with tears in her eyes. It was such a vivid reminder of when a similar scene played out at her daughter, Khloe's, birth. How special to have her there right away! Not long after, Joel's parents arrived from New Jersey, and we invited them in after Mikayla had nursed for the first time, and still within the first hour of her life. It was a joyous time, and I was so thrilled to be awake and unmedicated, and to enjoy the same qualities in our newborn daughter as she met her family.

Brittany's husband, Kory, arrived a short time later with food from Chick Fil A (what better first post-partum meal?). We talked to my parents on the phone and shared the joyous news. They were so thrilled to hear about Mikayla's birth, and how healthy and perfect her delivery had been. They just couldn't wait to come visit and meet her for themselves! My parents were in Florida visiting my dad's family, and they were able to share the news with my dad's sister almost immediately. What a great time of celebration they had, even from a distance!

Things had gone so well during Mikayla's birth that the midwife and nurse had no qualms about us going home early in the afternoon. We took care of the necessary paperwork and newborn procedures, got me up and out of bed, and generally assessed our readiness to leave. We were packed up and on the road by 2:30 p.m., about four hours after the birth! Granted, I was walking gingerly and eager to get home to my own bed, but we were ready to go. After one last birth center photo of Mikayla in her car seat, the nurse escorted us out, gave me a big hug, and sent us on our way. With plenty of phone calls to make and visits from family and friends to enjoy, this happy new family of three set out for home!

# Joseph's Birth Story

The first sign of anything out of the ordinary was Ella's water breaking around 3:00 a.m. on Sunday, March 13. She had made a trip to the bathroom and noticed the extra fluid, which continued in small gushes on and off. Despite all of the prenatal education that predicted labor to begin with easy, regular contractions occurring perhaps fifteen minutes apart or so, Ella's contractions immediately clocked in at anywhere from two to five minutes apart but very irregular. She and Steve remained in bed for as long as they could, trying to rest in preparation for what seemed more and more imminent - the birth of their sweet boy.

Around 6:00 a.m., they got up for the day, with contractions continuing close together, irregular, but bearable. Steve assisted with counter-pressure on Ella's lower back as she breathed and relaxed through each contraction. They contacted their midwives and awaited feedback on what to expect and whether to consider going to the hospital; the 8:00 shift change made things a little more complicated, so Ella and Steve continued to labor at home while they awaited the call back.

Just before 8:00, they decided to contact their doula, Katie, to let her know of the changes and early labor progress. Katie shared in their excitement and agreed with their plan to eat breakfast, shower, and wait to hear back from the midwives. She assured Steve that she would come whenever Ella felt the additional support was needed. Around 9:00 a.m., Katie phoned back to check in, and talked to Steve about the ways to use the shower for pain relief as well as labor stimulation. He and Ella still felt they were laboring effectively, and Steve again agreed to contact Katie when needed. That phone call came at 10:03 a.m., when Steve called to ask Katie to come. He had spoken with Ilona, their midwife, who agreed they should meet at the hospital soon.

Katie arrived at Ella and Steve's home around 10:30 a.m. and joined their labor support right away. Ella was laboring on their bed, on hands and knees and supported by a stack of soft pillows in front of her. Steve had been rubbing her lower back continuously, and suggested that Katie take over there while he finished packing and preparing to leave for the hospital. The Tals' dog, Emmie, was quite aware that something was happening, and protectively guarded Ella even from Katie when she first came in. (Baby Tal is going to have a wonderful friend and protector one day soon!)

Katie helped Ella to time contractions and adjust her position as she continued with contractions 2-3.5 minutes apart. She rubbed Ella's lower back continuously and offered encouragement while Ella labored on the bed, and then on the birth ball leaning forward onto the bed. Ella maintained such excellent focus during contractions, relaxing in between and voicing her surprise that contractions had been so close together already. Katie agreed that this was a lot of work right off the bat, but that so many contractions were doing lots of work to bring her baby soon!

Ella stayed in the driver's seat even as Steve capably managed packing and corralling Emmie. Ella reminded Steve of items to be packed, puttered to the closet and bathroom between contractions to gather her own things, and spent a few minutes even double checking the light switches before finally leaving the house. Ella breathed through one last contraction in her



bedroom before hustling down the stairs. Final preparations (and light switches) were checked in the kitchen, and Ella used the bathroom one last time. She noticed more bloody show and expressed concern, and Katie agreed that heading to the hospital for Ilona to assess her was the right thing to do. One more contraction leaning over the washing machine, and then Ella headed down through the garage with Katie and Steve behind her.

Katie told Steve that she would follow behind them to the hospital, and to let her know if anything significantly changed on the drive. Steve agreed, and then fairly flew out of the driveway and down the road. So much for following! Katie phoned Steve briefly to double check his intended route, and zoomed along route 80 glancing into each black SUV that she passed, wondering if it might be the Tals. They left home around 11:15 and arrived at the hospital by noon. As they got into the car, Ella's contractions were clocking in at around two minutes apart!

Ella and Steve arrived at Morristown Medical Center and were shown in to Labor and Delivery Room 5. Katie wasn't far behind, and came in with her bag and peanut ball. Ella was in bed for initial monitoring and admission paperwork. She expressed discomfort, and was able to turn sideways with the peanut ball for awhile. Around 12:30, Ilona checked Ella and determined that she was already almost fully dilated at 9cm. All those contractions had definitely been doing some hard work all morning!

Soon after being released from the monitor and completing admission bloodwork, Ella asked to go into the shower for hydrotherapy. A stool was placed in the shower with an absorbent pad on it, and Steve took up the post which would be his for the next hour and a half or so. He sat on a low stool, directing the warm spray at Ella's low back, and rubbed her lower back in the water through each contraction. Katie supplied coconut water between every few contractions and checked in occasionally to be sure they felt comfortable with temperature, lighting, and position.

But Ella and Steve were working together so flawlessly as a team that Katie's work was pretty minimal for this segment of labor. Ella's contractions were requiring incredible focus, and she vocalized gently through them. Eventually, she mentioned that she had felt just slightly like pushing during the last couple of contractions. The nurse, Wendy, encouraged Ella to begin bearing down a little bit to see if it felt good to relieve pressure. Ella felt that it wasn't quite time to start pushing, and continued to labor intently.

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*But Ella and Steve were working together so flawlessly as a team that Katie's work was pretty minimal for this segment of labor.*

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A short time later, Ella asked to come out from the shower. Wrapped in several towels, she continued to labor on the stool, this time in the delivery room at the foot of the bed. Steve continued to rub her low back with grapeseed oil through each contraction. Katie snapped a few photos of the couple working together in this peaceful but intense laboring process. Each position that Ella used for labor involved Steve close by, rubbing her back, stroking her hair, murmuring encouragement and love. Katie kept up the supply of coconut water for both partners, and frequent praise and feedback to both Ella and Steve. She also hopped into the

back-rubbing rotation whenever Steve needed a short break to change into his bathing suit, use the restroom, touch base with their mothers, or just stretch his arms for a quick moment.

Shortly after 2:00, Ella felt properly “pushy”. Ilona asked her to recline on the bed with Steve behind her, to allow Ilona to help get a small part of the amniotic sac and cervix lip out of the baby’s way. She encouraged Ella to stay in this position to allow the baby to move beneath her pubic bone as she pushed. This was also a helpful position to monitor some bleeding that had occurred due to a marginally low-lying placenta. Ella settled into pushing in this way, leaning back on Steve, until Ilona gave her full clearance to push hard and directed Ella to move back in the bed, with Steve and Katie on either side.

Ella summoned all of her strength for each push. The effort was clearly visible on her face as she brought her baby down with incredible power. Steve and Katie supported her legs as Ella focused all of her energy on pushing and breathing for her baby. Ilona did most of the coaching, with Steve and Katie adding praise and encouragement as well. Ella melted back into the pillow between contractions, silently resting and gathering strength for the next opportunity to push. With encouragement from her entire birth team, Ella brought her baby boy down and into the world at 3:26pm, met with great emotion and exclamation from all, but especially from his proud papa. There were cries of happiness and joyful tears! He was called Joseph, and placed on his mama’s chest to snuggle quietly and contentedly through the rest of third stage labor and the beginning of postpartum recovery. What a peaceful baby!

When the baby’s cord had stopped pulsing, Ilona clamped it and invited Steve to make the cut to separate mama and baby. The room was full of joy and relief as Ella and Steve admired their baby for the first time. A short time later, Ilona talked Ella through the delivery of the placenta, and then began the process of examining Ella and applying a local anesthetic for a few small stitches. An injection of Pitocin was administered to help Ella’s uterus to contract properly and slow her postpartum bleeding. Eventually, Ilona ordered an IV of Pitocin to ensure that Ella would not continue to bleed too much - she referred to Ella’s “boggy uterus”. Everyone agreed, though, that Ella’s body - and particularly that powerful uterus - had done incredible work and accomplished a perfect, natural delivery for baby Joseph.

When the room had quieted down, Joseph began to stir, and Ella decided to initiate breastfeeding. She worked with Katie and the nurse to introduce Joseph to the process of latching and eating for the first time. Joseph had a hard time deciding whether he was properly hungry yet, but he did latch off and on. Each time he latched, Ella’s face showed it! Mama and son worked together to become familiar with each other; Ella persevered through some initial uncertainty about how best to position Joseph, but before very long he was nursing contentedly. It was a picture of so much love - and exhaustion :). Steve was so proud of his beautiful wife, the mother of their son, and assured her of the incredible work she had done. Katie eventually slipped out, realizing how tired this new family was and that her role was coming to a close.

# Taylor's Birth Story

About one in ten labors begin with water breaking (Premature Rupture of Membranes/PROM), and Monica was one of the special few. Although in retrospect, she thought she had been experiencing some cramping and contracting since the previous Saturday evening, a good two days before her membranes rupturing. In any case, Monica texted Katie around 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, February 7 to say that she thought her water had broken as she sat on the couch. She was having some signs of cramping, but not in labor yet. Katie recommended that Monica do her best to rest, have a good meal when she could, and let her midwife know her water had broken since she was right at 37 weeks of pregnancy.

A few hours later, around 1:30 p.m., Monica thought a shower sounded like a good idea, and checked with Katie that she could safely do this with ruptured membranes. It was a go-ahead, and Monica appreciated the opportunity to wash her hair and freshen up, with labor right around the corner. She reported contractions that were irregular, varying from 5-10 minutes apart at this point. They had been progressing at one point, but returned to this irregular pattern. She was able to cope well through the discomfort.

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*...Monica appreciated the opportunity to wash her hair and freshen up, with labor right around the corner.*

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Around 3:00, Monica and Brad had been in touch with their midwives and were on their way to the Madison office for a midwife to check Monica's progress. This visit did not result in a cervical check, but because of the irregular nature of contractions, midwife Megan recommended castor oil to encourage labor to pick up. She gave Monica castor oil to take home and mix with a beverage, perhaps wine to help her rest a bit.

After more rest, Monica drank her castor oil cocktail with orange juice around 5:30 p.m. A few hours later, she felt the effects and worked through the intense cramping brought on by the oil. Brad checked in with Katie around 8:50, saying Monica was having belly pain and nausea. She was finding that standing, moving, and using heat and cool water were helpful to cope with the surprising amount of discomfort she was in. Katie also suggested that Brad help with counter pressure on Monica's lower back, if she was amenable to it. Monica later stated that she believe her labor contractions began about 8:15 p.m., though at the time it was difficult to distinguish contractions from castor oil cramping.

Midwife Megan was in touch with Monica and Brad around 9:00 as well, and suggested that they have Katie come out to provide support and get a feel for how things were progressing. Megan texted Katie directly between 9 and 9:30 to suggest this as well, so Katie got her things together and headed over.

Katie arrived with Monica close to 10:30 and quietly joined the laboring mama and her partner. Monica was laboring beautifully on her birth ball, a blanket draped around her, with Brad

applying heat and counter pressure on her low back. Katie immediately moved to assist with comfort measures, heating up additional rice bags, and starting peppermint oil in her diffuser to help with Monica's remaining nausea. Monica was breathing and moaning, swaying on her birth ball, through each contraction, coping so beautifully and demonstrating such strength. She demonstrated perfectly the ability to accept her labor and allow it to surge through her body with each contraction.

Mom, dad, and baby fell in love with each other while the midwives tended to Monica. All went smoothly with delivering the placenta. Taylor was fed colostrum at first on a spoon, and then latched on beautifully about 3:25 a.m. for a lengthy feeding before his first blood sugar check. Midwife Christina was instrumental in getting this meal into his belly quickly to help boost his blood sugar level. He nursed hungrily at both breasts, and Monica appeared tired, relieved, and radiant at the accomplishment of her amazing VBAC birth! Brad was close to her side, save his quick run out to the truck for their bags containing snacks for Monica to replenish her energy. Katie slipped out around 4:00 a.m. after one last congratulations to the happy parents and making sure they were well settled in the midwives' care.





# Madison's Birth Story

Tara's due date was Saturday, March 11, and a major snowstorm was forecast for the following Tuesday. At her Thursday prenatal appointment that week, Tara had been told she was 1.5cm dilated and baby was low. She was determined to have her baby before the blizzard! So, on Saturday, her due date, Tara sat down with her breast pump and used it for 5-10 minutes, bringing on some cramping and contracting which stopped when she turned off the pump. She pumped again later in the evening with about the same results. That night, however, starting around 1:00am, Tara began to have real contractions!

Tara tracked contractions in the early hours of the morning, finding them to be uncomfortable but still irregular in their timing. She texted Kate around 5:30am Sunday morning with a list of contractions from her timing app; they appeared to be anywhere from three and a half minutes to more than six minutes apart. Contractions continued in this manner for several more hours. At 7:00am, Tara's in-laws came to pick up the dogs, Ruger and Paige. Tara checked in with Kate again a short time after that, still with somewhat inconsistent contractions from around three minutes apart to eight minutes apart. They exchanged thoughts about positions and getting something to eat in preparation for labor.

Tara asked Kate to leave for their house around 9:00am. Kate checked in as she got on the road, learning that Tara was having some intense contractions, and giving some suggestions for using heat and counter pressure, as well as encouragement that everything was going perfectly so far. Kate got to them about 9:50am and found Tara and Seth laboring together in the living room, using heat on Tara's back and kneeling over the end of the couch during contractions. Kate joined into the flow of heating rice socks, timing contractions, and squeezing Tara's hips. About 10:30am, Seth phoned their doctor to alert her to Tara's labor.

At this point, contractions were under three minutes apart pretty consistently, and intensifying. Tara voiced her sensation of downward pressure into her pelvis. She was conversing and laughing between contractions, but focusing intently with each rush, breathing and relying on her team for heat and hip squeeze. Standing felt best, though she tried sitting on the birth ball and a stool periodically. Around 11:00am the three made preparations to head to the hospital. Tara managed the packing in between contractions, giving polite instructions to both Seth and Kate to take bags to the car, cover the car seat with a towel and garbage bag, and reheat rice socks for the ride. During contractions, she vocalized and breathed deeply. Seth and Kate took turns running to squeeze her hips in between packing and loading; whoever was close by was "on" for the next contraction.

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*She was conversing and laughing between contractions, but focusing intently with each rush, breathing and relying on her team for heat and hip squeeze.*

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Tara, Seth, and Kate caravanned to the hospital, arriving just about 12:00pm. Tara's nurse, Gerilynn, checked and found Tara to be 5-6cm dilated. Tara was a strong self-advocate, voicing her feelings about having her water broken (no!) and asking for wireless monitoring so that she could move around. It took two nurses and an anesthesiologist to start an IV, and then Tara received a bag of fluids to help keep her energy and hydration up.

By 1:00pm, Tara was up and out of bed to move and sway. The best position and rhythm that she found, by far, was to stand near the bed and lean on the birth ball, which was perched on the bed, while Seth or Kate squeezed her hips from behind. Seth rotated from hip squeeze to leaning close to speak encouragement into Tara's ear. Kate filled in the gaps, reheating rice socks, refilling Tara's ice water, squeezing hips, and massaging her lower back with coconut oil.

After a short while, Tara asked if the monitor could be removed so that she could use the shower, so the nurse came to check her cervix. She was 8cm dilated already! Tara was laboring with such focus and effort; her body was doing so much work in a short period of time. So by 2:00pm, Tara was laboring in the shower, with Seth close by her side, enjoying the darkness and privacy of the small bathroom.

At 2:20pm, Tara emerged from the shower and returned to the birth ball-leaning position near the bed. At 2:35pm, Tara voiced her first feeling of wanting to push, so nurse Geri went to summon Dr. Lewis to check Tara's dilation. Dr. Lewis arrived to the room around 3:00pm and found Tara to be 7-8cm dilated. She requested permission to break Tara's water, to which Tara consented, considering that she was far enough into labor for this to be ok. This intensified contractions, but Tara labored on like a true champion, swaying, moaning, and directing her birth team to continue with hip squeeze and back massage. She showed such determination, even as she expressed the incredible intensity of labor. At 3:30pm, Geri checked again and found Tara's cervix to be 9cm dilated with a thin lip of cervix around the right side of baby's head. She encouraged Tara to lie on her right side with the peanut ball under her leg; this made contractions VERY intense, but would hopefully encourage dilation to complete.

At 4:15pm, Dr. Lewis checked again and found the lip of cervix remaining, so she directed Tara to bear down while Dr. Lewis helped to push the cervix aside. This worked, and Tara was fully dilated by 4:27 with green light to push with each contraction. Dr. Lewis directed Tara to use a few different pushing positions, and instructed her, counting loudly through each push.

Tara summoned every ounce of power and courage to push through the intensity of second stage labor. She breathed oxygen between contractions to help reinvigorate her, and in part to help slow and deepen her breathing. Dr. Lewis kept a close eye on baby via the monitor; at one point, she attached an internal monitor to baby's scalp to get more accurate information about baby's heart rate. About 6:30, Tara had moved her baby down to crowning position, with baby's head clearly visible as she pushed. She was so close to meeting her baby! At 6:38pm, with a mighty push, Tara delivered baby's head and then at last, Madison was born!

At 7:00, so shortly after birth, Madison latched to her mother's breast with great ease, and began her first meal. She latched deeply and perfectly on the first try! Tara was amazed and in love with her beautiful girl. Seth stood close by Tara's side, encouraging and admiring her strength and now her ease of breastfeeding. Kate said goodbye and wished the new family of three well as they settled in for well-earned rest.

# Maria Leticia's Birth Story

Maria felt pre-labor contractions for several days off and on before the actual labor process clicked into gear. Her doula, Kate, came by for their prenatal visit Friday evening, January 5, and Maria had infrequent contractions throughout that meeting. It was wonderful timing to connect on coping and relaxing techniques, and Kate helped John and Maria create the perfect soothing environment with dim lights, the scent of mint diffusing, and peaceful music filling the air. Maria settled into bed with her peanut ball and rocked gently while she rested. It was the perfect practice for labor! Kate chatted with Maria and John about final preparations and what to do in early labor, and then departed to let the couple rest.

Contractions continued intermittently overnight, 2-3 per hour, until about 6:00 a.m. Saturday morning. They faded away then, and Maria had breakfast and a shower before texting Kate with an update with suspicion that she had lost part of her mucous plug. Maria was experiencing lots of downward pressure, helped by spending some time in child's pose. She continued to feel cramping off and on, and contractions intensified that evening into a noticeable pattern. Around midnight, John texted Kate that contractions were getting much closer. After timing for awhile, he reported that they were about 6-10 minutes apart. Kate and John agreed to try to sleep as long as Maria was able to rest, and when things got much more intense, Kate would head down to help.

The summons came at 1:30 a.m. when contractions had increased to 40 seconds long, every two minutes for about half an hour. They varied in different positions, but were increasing enough that Kate suggested notifying the midwives, and agreed it was time to come.

*Kate arrived about 2:15 a.m., finding Maria leaning over the foot of her bed, coping with contractions. Very soon Maria was in the tub and relaxing beautifully, even falling asleep between contractions, which ranged from 3-6 minutes apart at that point.*

Midwife Chrisy arrived about 3:00 a.m. She checked baby's heartbeat and said it sounded good and strong. A cervical check revealed that Maria was 5cm dilated, and completely effaced (cervix softened and thinned all the way). Just about into active labor!

At 3:30, Maria got out of the tub to walk, and John commenced inflating the birth pool. The change in position seemed to help encourage labor along, and Maria was obviously working hard to relax, breathe, and move through intensifying contractions.

By about 4:00 a.m., Maria went back into the bathtub with hard contractions, but managed somehow to fall completely asleep between each one. Her ability to relax was impressive! She would rock onto her side and breathe deeply, holding onto the tub handle, as each contraction passed through her body.

Nearly an hour later, Maria reported feeling enough pressure that she felt a bit like pushing. Chrisy checked her cervix again and, while there had been a good amount of change, up to 7cm, it wasn't quite time to push. Still, good news that baby was moving further and further down into the pelvis! Maria got out of the tub around 5:30 a.m. to walk around more and use the bathroom. Kate followed her, squeezing her hips through contractions and encouraging bites of food and hydration. John had finished inflating the birth pool was inflated and had started to fill it from the shower.

At 6:00 a.m., Maria climbed into the birth pool. This larger, deeper pool allowed her greater variety in her positions, and she moved around from leaning forward over the side to reclining back on the inflated seat. She seemed for awhile to find the greatest comfort from leaning on the side and having Kate and midwife assistant Ashley do a joint hip squeeze from either side. Contractions were very strong by this point and coming frequently. And yet, Maria still managed to relax completely and even doze in between! John was always close by, providing anything that Maria asked for and offering his calm, quiet presence as he admired Maria's incredible work in laboring for their baby.

Maria reported strong urge to push shortly after 7:00 a.m., and Chrisy found at 7:20 that she was almost fully dilated with just a small lip of cervix on one side of the baby's head. During this cervical check, Chrisy noted that she could feel the amniotic membrane still intact - until Maria's water spontaneously broke just then! Chrisy offered to move the lip of cervix so that Maria could begin to bear down, and this successfully cleared the way for full dilation and the green light to push at will.

Maria pushed from 7:30 a.m. in several positions. She didn't find a position that she loved in the birthing pool, but she knew what she needed, and kept asking for other ideas. Midwife Lisa suggested pushing on the toilet for a bit, which would open her pelvis and allow her to push perhaps more comfortably. This she did, and eventually moved to the bed to finish the job. Maria pushed lying back semi-reclined, and in a more upright squatting position, and even forward on all fours at times. She listened to her midwives' wise suggestions to move around and help baby make the turn beneath her pubic bone. At one point, Maria and Ashley used a tug-of-war with the Rebozo to give Maria greater leverage, while Chrisy and Kate supported her legs on either side. *John never left Maria's side, encouraging her and assuring her that she was able to birth her baby. Indeed, Maria's entire team gave unwavering support through the lengthy process of pushing.*

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The reason for the two and a half hours of pushing became evident when Maria finally, powerfully, delivered her baby's head. Sunny side up! Beautiful baby was born looking right up at everyone! Maria's stamina and determination to deliver her baby were so evident as she worked to get her posterior baby that last little distance before birth. (The baby was crowning, with the head visible/partway delivered, for about 23 minutes!) Maria battled fatigue and doubt, but would not give up on this amazing birth effort.

With a final push, Maria delivered her baby at 10:06 a.m. on Sunday, January 7! Such relief and joy swept over mama and the entire room, that nobody actually checked the baby's sex for a minute or two. Maria checked, and announced amidst great emotion that it was a girl! There were cheers and tears all around at the news.

Baby Maria Leticia was born healthy and strong, needing just a bit of massage and suctioning to give that first lusty cry. What hard work it is to be born! Maria's mother was nearby and very soon came in to meet her gorgeous granddaughter. Sweet Leticia weighed in at 7lb 6 oz and captured the hearts of her parents with her first little wide-eyed look.

# Asher's Birth Story

These are details of your labor as noted by your doula, and so there may be aspects of this account that differ from what you recall. This story is not intended to correct or replace your own memories, but to help expand on the details and timeline of your labor. It simply reflects a third-person observation of your strength, perseverance, and connection with each other as you delivered your sweet Asher. Congratulations, Rebekah and Matthew! You did an amazing job!

Early in the morning on January 11, 2018, Rebekah awoke to contractions around 4:00 a.m.

They were noticeable but not too intense, and came every 12 minutes or so (about ten contractions over the next two hours). She texted Kate at 6:00 a.m. with this information, and also let her doula know that she had a midwife appointment scheduled for 9:00 a.m. and hoped to keep it, to get some insight into her progress. In the meantime, Rebekah took a shower around 8:00 a.m. with contractions coming 4-5 minutes apart, and about 30 seconds long. The intensity and duration of contractions was consistent with early labor, but they were coming close enough together to make for a lot of work for Rebekah from the very start!

At Rebekah's appointment, the midwife found her cervix to be 4-5cm dilated, and contractions consistent enough to suggest going ahead over to the hospital. Rebekah and Matthew agreed, and made their way over for admission. They let Kate know to meet them there.

Kate arrived at about 12:20 p.m. to meet midwife Christina and nurse Laura as they cared for Rebekah. *Rebekah was focused and working beautifully through contractions on a birth ball with Matthew close by her side, encouraging her. They reported that strong contractions were coming every 5 minutes, with a smaller one usually coming in between each time. Kate pulled out some comfort tools and heated up a rice wrap for Rebekah's low back. A cervical check about 1:00 p.m. showed that Rebekah had dilated to 6-7cm already!*

Rebekah spent the next hour standing and swaying on the birth ball, occasionally sitting on a rocking chair to rest between contractions. Matthew never left her side, offering encouragement, holding the rice wrap in place, and providing water and tissues as needed. Kate completed the support picture by rubbing Rebekah's back and squeezing her hips tightly through each contraction. Shortly after 2:00 p.m., Rebekah sat on the peanut ball, still leaning close to Matthew while Kate pressed on her back. Rebekah soon asked for more hip squeeze, which Kate quickly implemented. Contractions had increased by now to 3-4 minutes apart and consistently intense.

Nurse Laura listened to the baby and reported strong heartbeat with hiccups, in addition to strong kicks and somersaults. Baby was so vigorous, and participating in labor by making his way down into Rebekah's pelvis as she moved and rocked. Rebekah requested to use the birth tub next, and midwife Christina came to help and monitor mother and baby's wellbeing. Laura topped off the tub with hot water, and Rebekah climbed in. Matthew stayed close by to Rebekah as she settled in with a pillow, and Kate created a more relaxing atmosphere with some flameless candles around the tub, and lavender and soft worship music diffusing into the air nearby.

Rebekah spent a soothing hour in the birth tub, enjoying the warmth and pain relief as contractions continued to strengthen. She got out at 3:45 p.m., and her movement seemed to



encourage contractions to become even stronger and closer together than they had been in the tub. Now she was working in earnest to breathe and relax through strong, frequent contractions coming every two minutes. Kate kept up strong hip squeezes each time as Matthew held and comforted Rebekah. Rebekah connected so beautifully with her birth team throughout, requesting and leaning into their reassurance and encouragement.

About 4:30 p.m., Christina checked back in and judged from the intensity of contractions that Rebekah might be close to pushing soon. However, contractions had slowed a bit just recently, and Rebekah seemed exhausted and hungry. Kate suggested that Rebekah have a bite to eat, and try some different (more restful) positions to encourage progress to pick back up. The boost in energy and blood sugar from eating a wrap, as well as moving to hands and knees on the bed, seemed to do the trick! By 5:30 p.m., Rebekah was nearly 9cm dilated, 100% effaced, with baby nice and low. Contractions were soon back to 2-3 minutes apart, and Rebekah was feeling cold and shaking, sure signs that she was in transition!

*Rebekah's position on the bed served her well. She followed her body's leading to sit upright through contractions and then lean back to relax between contractions. She looked so restful when she wasn't working through a contraction!* The next hour took Rebekah through hard, frequent contractions that dilated her cervix the final centimeter.

At 6:50 p.m., Rebekah's voice changed with contractions so that she sounded as if she were starting to push. Christina encouraged her to push gently to release pressure, to help the last anterior lip of cervix slip past baby's head. She said that Rebekah's bag of waters had not yet broken, and it was helping baby's head to come down through the cervix with each contraction and push.

At 7:30 p.m., Christina checked Rebekah's cervix and found her very nearly dilated, still with that tiny anterior lip of cervix. Rebekah's waters spontaneously broke during the exam, and Christina encouraged her to turn to hands and knees to push and move the cervix completely out of the way. Rebekah turned and was fully pushing with all her strength! She communicated with her birth team feelings of uncertainty at times, but quickly internalized the reassurances they offered and demonstrated a powerful ability to re-focus and direct her energy to pushing.

A short while later, about 7:50 p.m., Rebekah turned to use the squat bar on the bed. Using it upright didn't quite feel right to her, but when she lay back and braced her feet on the sides of the bar, she found her perfect pushing zone. She pushed like an absolute champion then, moving her baby down with incredible power and focus on each contraction. At 8:20 p.m., Christina laughingly announced that the baby's hair had been born, and being so near to the finish line encouraged Rebekah to power through the next few contractions.

At 8:42 p.m. on Thursday, January 11, Rebekah and Matthew welcomed their sweet Asher into the world, healthy and strong! Rebekah gave all of herself in the work of delivering their son. She laid in exhausted bliss as she held her new baby, amidst the joy and relief that swept over all in the room. Asher snuggled his mama, and before long made his way to the breast and enjoyed his first little meal.

Throughout labor, Rebekah and Matthew were a beautiful, unified team; their love for each other made their birth experience so sweet. Each partner needed and trusted the other so completely. And Rebekah's efforts were truly heroic; she battled both doubt and fatigue along the way, and never gave up! Surely she knows now that you are capable of anything!

# Avery's Birth Story

Dear Avery, our labor began on the day of your due date, Monday, May 16, 2017 and finished 28 hours later. In the end it was a natural water birth and a healthy, happy, baby girl!

And like so many birth stories, this one has its twists and turns. It began around 9:00 p.m. when I started to feel cramps similar to when my period begins. I wasn't too tired and did not want to believe that things were actually starting to happen in the event that it was false labor -- so I hung out in bed and watched TV. Around midnight the cramps began to get stronger and turned into what I would say were small contractions. At this point I figured it would be good idea to get some sleep and I dozed off and on, waking when a particularly strong contraction would occur and then taking forever to fall back asleep because my mind was racing! I knew this was really it and the monumental event that I had been obsessing over and wishing to occur for weeks now was starting.

At around 3:00 a.m. I decided to get up and do some last minute things around the house as I couldn't stop my mind from racing. Sleep was elusive, and the midwives had said that sometimes doing stuff made the contractions stop. So in order to make sure that this was actually the real thing and because I could NOT sleep I got up to make our guest beds and do all the final packing. Around 5:00 a.m. I laid down on the couch and watched the show, "Friends" and managed to doze off. Around 6:00 a.m. I moved to the bed with the hope that since I had managed to sleep on the couch I could actually get some real shut eye. I was obviously kidding myself. When I got back into bed Dad's alarm was going off so I told him that things were happening today and he shouldn't plan on going to work. Lucky for him that meant he got a couple more hours of sleep while I just tossed and turned!

At 7:00 a.m. I was done pretending that I was going to get any sleep and tried to find different ways to distract myself. I watched "Friends," bounced on the ball, walked around -- anything to keep my mind off of the contractions which were coming every three to five minutes. I made my first call to the midwives at 9:00 a.m. and was instructed to drink lots of water, try to eat, and try to nap.

At 11:00 a.m. I called again and I was told the same thing, and was told yet again the same thing at 1:00 p.m! But by the time we hit the 3:00 p.m. call I was starting to get very tired of everything, even though the midwife told me I should just keep going at home, she suggested that I could come into the office and get checked so that we could see where everything stood. I was very frustrated at this point so I opted for the office visit since we had to head to my in-laws to drop off our dog Taylor, anyway. We figured we could hang there just as well as hanging at home.

Contractions started to intensify in the car and by the time we reached the midwives' offices I was having to internalize during the contractions and focus on breathing to work through them. While waiting to see the midwife I tried very hard to not quantify where I would stand after the check in order to ward off disappointment. Unfortunately, an internal check revealed that I was only one centimeter dilated, though spongy, so probably pretty effaced. This was demoralizing in a very great way as the number one is so very far from 10! I was hooked up to a fetal monitor for 20 or so minutes to make sure that you, baby girl, was doing okay and then sent home with a

sedative and directions to eat some dinner, drink water, and take the sedative. Hopefully I could sleep then and I'd either wake up when things were further along and ready to go or everything would stop.

We returned to my in-laws, picking up a pizza on the way. Once there I tried to eat a bit and took a bath, anything to distract me from the pain which felt horrible despite my efforts to dispel it. I had been enduring contractions every three to four minutes for the entire day at that point, and just wanted some relief. Since the food was hard to get down and the bath wasn't helping, I decided to just take the sedative and attempt some sleep as at this point I hadn't slept in over 24 hours and knew I would need a lot more strength as we moved forward. While eating dinner I had been feeling nauseous but just assumed that was because I didn't really want to eat, so I swallowed the sedative down, not thinking things through. Not even five minutes after that I was running to the bathroom, which I did not make. Thank god for my amazing husband, your dad, who picked me up and placed me in the shower and cleaned up the humongous mess!

After that we called the midwives and they suggested taking tylenol PM since I had thrown up the other drugs. I did that and suffered through another hour of these "early labor" contractions without sleep. And by 8:00 p.m. I was done and ready for drugs! I know now, looking back, that I had an extremely long early labor and I think my biggest failure in my prep had been that I had not expected early labor to be so painful, so long and downright relentless. Not to mention I had the one centimeter stuck in my head and was very scared that I wouldn't be able to make it through the rest.

We called the midwives to say it was time for the hospital or something else and they convinced us to come to their office first. Once there it was just nice to have another person around who really knew what was happening and who could help us work through things, despite how great Dad had been. I got another internal exam where I was dilated 3.5 centimeters, not far at all but at least there was some progress! At this point I was most comfortable on the toilet where I didn't have to worry about anything coming out, I could just relax and suffer through the pain! [I found that if I just went inside myself and focused on breathing through the pain that I could get through the contraction one at a time.](#) Just after 9:00 p.m. or so I got a shot of the sedative (Fenergren I believe it was) and after waiting for it to kick in was able to doze fitfully from about 10:00-12:00 a.m.

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*He took one look at me and said: "That DOES NOT mean another c section...you can do this."*

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I don't recall much of this time except for being on the bed and grabbing Dad's hand to squeeze whenever a contraction woke me up. At midnight or so we checked again and I was finally dilated enough to move to the hospital! I had never been so happy to hear those words!

Dad and I headed off with the midwife following. Now of course we got LOST on the way, it was almost such a typical movie scene where we were driving through big empty parking lots of this huge medical complex but could not find the maternity ward which we had visited and planned out and knew exactly what it looked like! But we finally made it and even beat the midwife there! We officially got checked in at 12:30 a.m. on the day you would be born, one day after

your due date! Once we got there things moved pretty quickly, I'd have to say. In the delivery room I got hooked up to the fetal monitor and spent an agonizing 20 minutes laying in the bed. Really the only memory I have of this time is grabbing Dad's hand whenever a contraction came and just focusing on that point of connection. I also remembering trying to squeeze very VERY hard so that he would suffer some pain too! My labor pains came in the form of one very sharp line of pain right at my pelvic area and pain radiating down the front of my thighs. I have no idea how fast they were coming at this point but all I could do was breathe minute to minute. I know there was a lot of bustling around in the room at this point of everyone, my L&D nurse was named Erika and she was very nice, I had to get blood taken, I think there were some questions in there, who knows! Anyway after the exceedingly long 20 minutes of fetal monitoring I was disconnected and able to get off the bed. I went promptly to the bathroom and sat facing the back of the toilet so I could rest my head, still one of the best positions I had found during my labor. Somewhere in there I had also changed into the hospital gown which I remember being very happy about because I was done with my clothes! After what felt like no time I felt an increase in pressure and then this sudden explosion! My water had broke! This was a very satisfying feeling but it meant that I had to get back on the fetal monitor for another 20 minutes. I remember having very dark thoughts about how I shouldn't have told anybody my water broke!

So back to the bed I found myself and this process went on for what felt like forever! I could tell that they were having trouble keeping a steady read on your heartbeat and sometimes it dipped when I was having a contraction and then sometimes they were getting my heartrate, not yours. This was an issue because before I could get into the tub they had to have 20 straight minutes of good baby heartbeat and they just weren't getting it. We had to wait so long that the initial tubful of water they had put in cooled and they had to refill it! As I worked through the contractions, at this point I really felt the need to move and couldn't handle the bed anymore so I got up and sat on the birthing ball for a bit while we tried other ways to monitor you, baby girl. The belly band kept slipping, a finger monitor was put on me, this heartbeat reading was not going well. The pain was getting incredibly overwhelming by now and I had to start vocalizing to let out the pain and pressure as they occurred. Finally I felt like I wanted to push and said so very strongly! Lots of talking followed that statement about how they hadn't really gotten what they needed from the monitor. It was decided that what they had by then was enough and I could get into the tub! I somehow slowly climbed into the tub and agonized through a few more contractions before it was time to start pushing! [As I started pushing we moved through a couple positions in the tub and the best for me was on my back with my knees bent. This position allowed me to rest and float between contractions. I pushed for awhile and determined that the best way to do it was to wait for a contraction to come and get in as many pushes while that contraction was going and than rest in between.](#) I was very nervous for this stage, from reading so many birth stories it sounded like a woman either loved pushing or absolutely hated it and I had no idea how I would feel! I did manage to get the hang of it but it hurt alot and felt very uncomfortable once your head started popping out. For me I think this final step was very mental, I could actually feel my body and was very scared of tearing and I believe that held back my pushing at the beginning. At some point the midwives brought over a mirror so I could see your head coming out -- which was cool and creepy all at the same time! Finally I realized that I couldn't be afraid of pushing you out anymore, the water was getting cold, my body was shaking and if I wanted to get this damn baby out (sorry, baby girl) I needed to just push through everything! I think three or four pushes later your head finally made it out and everything after was immediate! The midwife reached down and twisted you to get the shoulders through and the rest just slipped out. Time was 4:21 a.m. on May 17, 2017.

I reached down and grabbed you and pulled you up on my chest! I had never seen such a purple gross little alien thing! You were so amazing and wonderful and finally here! The midwives started moving your limbs in an attempt to get you to cry, which they said would help to pink you up! I stayed in the tub clutching you to my chest until the placenta came out, which happened pretty immediately. Dad cut the cord, then it was time for us to get out. They took you to check you out and I somehow made it to the bed and impatiently waited until they brought you back to me!

Once on my chest you immediately started rooting around so I moved you to my breast and you quickly latched on! [From then on everything seemed to happen as it should and I couldn't believe we were finished, and there you were, baby girl Avery!](#)

As soon as we were left alone dad promptly put his feet up on the bed and asked if I would mind if he went to sleep! I said no, and appreciated the lull, with adrenaline still coursing through my body, I just stared at you -- this little human being who had just come out of me! You were so perfect and cute, and okay, maybe still kind of gross, but most importantly, you were here!





# Victoria's Birth Story

When I got pregnant again I was so excited to tell my doctor. He knew of my previous woes from having a c section. He knew it ate away at me for more than a year. I scheduled my first appointment and almost immediately after walking into the room he said: "So we're gonna go for a VBAC right?" I was ecstatic. I felt so confident in my birth plan this time around, all thanks to him and every doctor at the practice.

On November 28 (my actual due date!) I went into labor. We headed to the hospital and were checked in at around 6 am. By 11 am baby girl was rearing to go and couldn't wait to enter this world. Dr. Bissinger checked me out and told me her head was turned, just like my firstborn. I immediately broke down into tears, here we go, time for another c section. **He took one look at me and said: "That DOES NOT mean another c section...you can do this."** I started pushing at 12 pm. By 12:30 Dr. Bissinger told the nurse to call the OR and cancel my cesarian. As soon as I heard those words all I could picture was her coming out. I felt so driven, so focused, and knew I was gonna do it. At 1:25 pm Dr. Bissinger said: "Are you ready to catch her?" With a very confused look on my face, he pulled her out and placed her right into my arms. She was here. She was beyond perfect. And she didn't need to be cut out!

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*He took one look at me and said: "That DOES NOT mean another c section...you can do this."*

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The story is long, but I cry every time I think of that day. I hope my story gives every woman the power to believe she can have a vaginal delivery after cesarian. It takes a lot of confidence and focus, but it is so worth it in the end. (And don't even get me started on how much easier recovery is!)

**We hope you have enjoyed these birth stories!  
If you would like to share your story, email us at  
[info@pregnancybydesign.com](mailto:info@pregnancybydesign.com).**