

Fourteen months after the fact, I am writing Emilia's birth story. Lessee...

The Thursday before Emilia arrived, I finished all of my grad school course work and breathed a big sigh of relief. *That* three-year project had finally come to an end, just in time. The next day, Friday, I went to the memorial service for Jeddy Bennell, the grandmother of my old beloved friend, Ben Harvey. There I made contact with a lovely, lovely bunch of old friends and acquaintances, all of whom were shocked when, in response to the inevitable, "When are you due?" I answered, "On Tuesday." I think they were all wondering what the hell I was doing out and about four days before my due date...what else was I going to do??

I don't remember the weekend, except that I had no interest in tackling anything on my "things-to-do-before-the-baby-arrives/after-the-school-work-ends" list. Of course not! I needed a break!

On Monday, I felt like I was coming down with a cold. Alex made chicken and dumplings with whole wheat dumplings that kind of melted into the stew in this delicious way. By bedtime, I was starting to feel contractions. I went to bed, but kept trying to time the contractions and write down the times. I think I was trying pretty hard to see a pattern that was sort of emerging, but not in a super clear way. Alex went to sleep. By 11pm, I was pretty sure this was labor. I went downstairs to have a snack. While I was sitting at the dining room table, I felt a warm gush come out of me all at once. Oh dear, my water broke! That did not happen the first time around, so it was a whole new sensation. I went up to the bathroom and a murky fluid came out of me into the toilet. Hm, I did not expect it to be murky, but ok. I went and woke up Alex and he got up and called the midwives.

I was surprised that Robin came over so soon. I expected they would give us a few hours and see how things progressed. I later figured out that the "murky" in my amniotic fluid was meconium and that's probably why Robin came so soon. I remember Robin settling herself in the armchair in our living room and thinking how nice it was that she was just making herself at home. And we were all just hanging out. Alex was in and out of the kitchen, probably making tea or heating up food or something. I went upstairs and got a needle and thread and the yellow waterproof cloth diaper sack that had a hole in the seam that I'd been meaning to mend. Alex was like, "What are you doing??" and I said, "Sewing." You need a "birth project," right? But when the contractions would come, I'd get annoyed because I couldn't sew through the contractions! Someone finally convinced me to stop sewing. And Robin finally convinced me to take my bottoms off and just hang out over a towel, since there was still fluid and some meconium coming out with the contractions.

At one point, I went upstairs to use the bathroom and Robin and Deirdre (who, along with Hannah, had arrived at some point) were talking in low voices in the small bathroom. A little while later, back downstairs, they told me that if the meconium continued, we would have to think about going to the hospital. My response was, "Let's just skip the hospital." And the meconium cleared up.

I remember being in the kitchen and asking Deirdre what time it was. It was after 5 a.m. and I said, “I wanted to be done by now!”

I remember holding onto the dishwasher, kind of leaning on it through a contraction, and then saying to Alex, “This means we can go to graduation!” (Graduation was in two weeks; if the baby had come much later, I don’t think we would have wanted to make the trip to Boston with a 3-year-old and a newborn.) Everyone laughed, including me.

At some point, I got into the tub, which Deirdre and Alex had set up and filled earlier in the night. It felt *so good* to get into that tub! Robin was right there with a cool washcloth for my face, or would just gently run her fingers along my forehead during contractions. Deirdre kept saying, “Enjoy your break,” a mantra I remind myself of to this day, whenever I have a “break” of any kind.

While I was in the tub, Eliza woke up and came downstairs. She appeared in the doorway of the dining room where the tub was set up. She stood there and made short little snorting noises while she looked on the scene. She didn’t know what to say or how to react, but she knew exactly what was going on. She had met all the midwives before. We all tried to act as calm and normal as possible. I think this brought me out of labor a little bit because I didn’t want to alarm her and I wanted her to see that I was ok. I think Hannah got her a bowl of cheerios. Alex called Liz, who came over with her daughter, Margaret, and got Eliza dressed for preschool. According to Liz, Eliza was lively and happy while getting ready. Liz took her to the grocery store to get things for her lunch and Eliza spent the rest of the day at preschool, just like any other day.

The midwives told me I was getting too comfortable in the tub and it was time to get out. I wasn’t too happy about this. They told me the baby was in “a funny position,” so I had to do some contractions lying on one side (on the living room floor) and then turn over and do a few on the other side. This was really, really hard. They told me I could get back in the tub, but first I had to “do the stairs.” It’s a good thing I could no longer speak by this point because I was not thinking kind words when I heard this! There was *no way* I was walking up and down those stairs! Instead, I started pushing! I pushed mostly leaning on the birth ball.

I don’t remember much about the pushing, except that when Emilia first came out, she was not breathing and her face was blue (which I learned later, looking at some pictures that Hannah took.) The midwives told me and Alex, “Just keep talking to her” while they resuscitated her. Alex said some encouraging words to her, but, looking back through my legs at her (I was on all-fours by this point), I couldn’t speak. For a second or two, I was preparing myself for the fact that we might lose her. But quickly she started breathing and crying and everything was kind of a blur for a while. I remember that Hannah had taken several pictures during this time (and throughout labor) and when we tried to determine the time of birth (no one was really paying attention to the clock when she first came out), Hannah thought to look at the meta-data in the camera to see what time the photo was taken, and we all thought this was totally brilliant!

I got snuggled in on the couch with Emilia. I had a little tear and was not allowed to go up stairs the first night, so the midwives set up a little potty for me with the birth stool and a stock pot. (It worked great!) Deirdre stayed with me while Alex went to pick up Eliza at school. She was ready with the camera to capture Eliza's expression as she laid eyes on her sister for the first time.