

Iris, A Water Birth Story

My baby is almost nine months old. As I think about how she was inside me for nine months and has been outside of me for almost nine months, I think about the transition, our birth.

Iris was born on a sunny Friday morning in May. On Thursday, May 20th, 2004 I had gotten fed up with going to school. I was tired of my medical student classmates coming up to me in between each hour of lecture and asking me when I was going to be induced. I was five days past my due date at that point. I dreaded going to school in the morning because I knew as soon as people saw me they would say, "You're still here!?!?" And I would have to smile and be polite and say, "Yes, I'm still here." Then they would ask me about being induced because 1. they didn't know I was planning a homebirth, or 2. they didn't know anything about homebirth, or 3. they didn't understand that the idea of having to be induced in the hospital and subjected to the whole cascade of invasive events that follows induction was heartbreaking for me to think about or 4. medical students like invasive procedures, it is exciting to them. So I went home that afternoon, and went on a long walk and decided that I would skip class and just study at home. Then I had a good cry about it when my midwives came for a visit. Then I called my massage therapist and asked if I could come over. While I was peeing just before getting on her table I noticed some spotting. I called my midwife and got excited because she was excited. I had a great massage from Peggy with two or three contractions during the session and drove home even more excited because the contractions were continuing.

After I arrived home Troy started filling up the tub, I ate some supper and we tried to sleep but the contractions just kept coming. Around ten or eleven we called the midwives and they arrived shortly thereafter. When I think back on the process of our birth my memories are a little fuzzy. Laboring women really do enter into a world of their own. I remember laboring on the couch for a while. I had always thought that I would walk a lot in labor but I didn't need to because the contractions were coming frequent enough that I just wanted to rest in between. I remember going to the bathroom a few times and leaning on the dryer during contractions, then back to the couch. I asked my midwife when I should get in the tub and she said "when you feel like it." I guess I felt like it and that was why I had asked her. I remember being in the tub for a long time, mostly kneeling and leaning forward on the side, and squatting some. The warm tub water was essential for me. I felt at home in the water, safe and ready for my baby to come. I remember hearing the muffled, soft voices of the three midwives sitting at the kitchen table. Occasionally I would hear them stoke the fire in the woodstove or heat water for the tub. That is one of my favorite memories of our birth. I liked that the midwives were sitting at my kitchen table quietly talking while Troy and I labored in the living room. I knew that they were nearby and listening to me but they were also giving us space to experience the birth. In between contractions Troy would hold up a glass of water or juice for me and rub my shoulders. (Ever since the birth I have been addicted to using straws for my cold drinks.)

Taking sips of water in between contractions was pretty automatic. I didn't need to be disturbed out of my in-between-contraction world to sip water. I'm not sure where I went during those times but I know they were not part of my conscious everyday world. I only remember one thought that I had during one of those in-between times and it was "now I finally get to have a baby," something I had wanted for a really long time.

Like the last question I had asked of my midwife, my next question was answered similarly. "How do I know when to start pushing?"

"When you feel like it."

Something had changed and my body was starting to push. I definitely felt when I needed to push. I guess after this the midwives started hanging around closer. They started listening to Iris's heartbeat more frequently and suggested changing positions now and then. It was morning now. The sun was shining and I had pushed for nearly two hours. One of my midwives suggested I think "down and out." That worked for me. Someone brought me the birthing stool and put it in the water. And that was how I pushed my baby out into the water. When Iris's head came out the pain was drastically reduced. I remember feeling a surge of energy from the decline in pain and for the first time I wanted the next contraction to come sooner. Iris's head was really slippery feeling I think because her membranes were still intact. They broke when I pushed her body out. My midwives caught her and lifted her up out of the water to me. I remember what her gray, rounded neck and back looked like. We turned her over and the midwives dried her, suctioned her and put a hat on her. And I greeted my baby for the first time face to face. I said "Hi Baby." Troy stood over my shoulder and took everything in, trying not to be overwhelmed.

Sometime after that I got out of the tub, delivered our placenta and got ready for the next part of my life that I am so lucky to have.