

Elania's story (Dylan's birth 4/17/08) *A fifth time mom has her first home birth after four hospital inductions.*

I think I woke up cranky. But those days, when didn't I wake up cranky? Regularly getting up every couple hours to empty your bladder isn't what anyone would call a restful night's sleep. I was beginning to feel tired of being pregnant as well. I was feeling very uncomfortable- pinches, twinges and jabs in my body no matter what I was doing. It made me dolorous, sluggish...and cranky.

After afternoon errands and food shopping we came home to unload the van, make dinner and settle in for the night. Jonathan, my husband, came home late and we put the kids to bed then played "versus" Dr. Mario and Tetris on the 64 until bedtime. I had been feeling the rushes intermittently throughout the evening and they were strong enough at 10pm that I decided to call one of my midwives, Deirdre, to give her a heads up in case I was really in labor. She told me that the important thing was to get rest, and if I couldn't sleep through them I would know it was the real thing.

Jonathan and I went to bed and I drifted off quickly, but I kept waking up with the little surges that were gradually gaining strength. In a semi-conscious state I assumed that they were at least ten minutes apart since I was falling completely asleep between them. As my mind came to with each one, I played a little mental tug of war. *Do I get up and time them or try to ignore them in favor of more rest?* And each time I would begin to count, but the counting would turn into internal singing:

One, two, three, four
Tell me that you love me more
Sleepless long nights
That is what my youth was for

Or, through stronger rushes,

One, two, three, four, five, six, nine or ten
Money can't buy you back the love that you had then
One, two, three, four, five, six, nine or ten
Money can't buy you back the love that you had then

Oh, you're changing your heart
Oh, you know who you are
Oh, you're changing your heart
Oh oh oh you know who you are
Who you are!

...and I would wonder, *Does this little baby know who he is?* Then I would drop back to sleep.

When I didn't have time to fall asleep between the rushes, I got up to time them. It was 1:30 am. I called my mom about an hour later to discuss whether I should call Deirdre again. The contractions were between 30 seconds and two minutes long, around four to seven minutes apart, but I still wasn't sure I was in *real* labor. The previous Saturday we had had a "false alarm," and though Ina May unequivocally states at the end

of her Guide to Childbirth that “your body is not a lemon,” I had my doubts. Four inductions with epidurals can do that to a person. Besides my induction history, I was 41 weeks and six days into my pregnancy and I really did not feel like I would ever give birth to our baby!

Mom pressed that I call my midwife (“because it could happen really fast Elania”), and I demurred. Then I had two gripping contractions right on top of each other. So I immediately hung up and made the call. Deirdre was great on the other end. While I apologized for maybe not being in labor, she told me it was good that I had called and reminded me that even if I didn’t have the baby in the next 12 hours it was *still* okay that I called.

Shortly after I hung up the phone Jonathan woke up and prepped for action even though I urged him to rest a little longer. Once he was up with his contacts in, I felt the energy in the room pick up. It was good that he was awake.

Any vestige of crankiness I had felt during the day had melted into my willingness to have the baby. I knew there was going to be hard work ahead and had no desire to be snowed under by a defeated attitude. My demeanor would set the tone for the night, and I preferred a happy, positive tone.

Deirdre and Robin arrived at our apartment at about three, while I did dishes. Jonathan took over while I chatted with them about my progress. I had Jonathan show them the video of my in-laws arriving at the airport, and they continued to observe me through contractions. A little later they suggested that Jonathan and I go for a walk.

So at about four Jonathan and I, bundled in coats, hats, scarves and mittens, went for a moonlit stroll through our neighborhood. We talked about the movie *Arachnophobia*, birth songs and our friend DaJuan’s totally unnecessary use of a bat to defend his family from intruders (the man is gigantic, he need only to stand to instill fear). We decided to call Jamie, Jonathan’s sister, to let her know that we thought the baby would be born sometime soon once we got back to the house. As the rushes came at this point, I had to stop walking and lean against Jonathan.



After we came inside I went to the bathroom. The whole night I had been using the restroom reluctantly because I had some conflicting physical reactions. I had great urges to pee but each time I went---a little trickle---I would have a stronger surge, and feeling that discomfort while in a sitting position literally took my breath away (and not in a good way). The midwives encouraged me to pee even though it was so uncomfortable because it would move my bladder out of the way and the baby would move down the birth canal.

At about 5:45, I went to the bathroom and felt like I was pushing the baby’s head out, without a lot of pain. So when the contraction ended, I got up and quickly waddled to the midwives.

“I think I was about to push the baby’s head out! Can you check me?” I asked looking at Robin. I lay down on the couch and Robin whipped on a glove. She checked me, and though I was soft, it was apparent to me that my cervix was still too far back because Robin really had to reach for it. Later she told me that she felt I was only about 4 or 5 centimeters at that point.

I put my underwear back on and the midwives had me sit on the birth stool. As I sat there, a rush came on and I felt the same desire to push out something round pressing against my cervix. Panicked, I said, "I really feel like I'm going to push the baby's head out!" There was some confusion, I don't remember who said what, but I began to feel a burning pushing on my perineum.

"Something's coming out! Don't you see that bulging?" I reached down and felt something hot literally pushing my underwear taut. Robin leaned over and said, "I think it's your bag of waters!"

The contractions were hard enough that I could not change positions once one started and they were coming much closer together at times. I sat on the birth stool holding that bag of waters in while my body strained to push it out and my perineum stretched to accommodate. Though it panicked and burned me, it was but a foreshadowing of the Ring of Fire. I could not stand up to take my underwear off. Deirdre came back into the room with the kitchen shears. She cut through the side seams during the short interim between the contractions.

Off came the underwear. Out came the bag of waters. It was a huge yellow colored bag, ballooning before everyone's eyes, and then POP! A splash of clear water hit the blue chux pad below, and then just as suddenly the water stopped flowing. The baby's head was engaged. That was at 5:50 am.

I had a lot of thoughts during all of this, but I just didn't feel like verbalizing them. Jamie had arrived a little bit before I delivered the sac, but I barely acknowledged her. I wasn't feeling unsocial, just inwardly focused and preoccupied. Even though I didn't want to talk as much as I had been, I tried to smile a lot. I thought of my dad a couple times saying a familiar phrase to me, "Just smile it." Smiles are very powerful!

After the contraction subsided I told Jonathan, "Okay, tell Olivia to come out now." Olivia (our oldest daughter) had awoken, randomly, around 5:45 am and we had her go to our room to read with Milky, her stuffed sheep. Our main concern had been crowd control and Olivia's comfort. We didn't want her either getting in the way or becoming bored or frightened.

Olivia's not an early riser and she insists that nothing "woke her up" but that she just wasn't tired and she heard people talking, so she got out of bed to see if we were having Life Group. Well, it was certainly some kind of life group assembled in the living room. Robin and Deirdre were at the ready; Jonathan was somewhere in the background swooping in to assist when called for; Jamie fluttered around with the camera taking photos; all of us awaiting the new life inside me.

As Jonathan headed to get Olivia, Deirdre cautioned that it might not happen all that soon. In retrospect, I don't know why I felt birth would be happening soon enough for it to be appropriate for Olivia to come out and observe, but I did. I hadn't asked anyone's opinion, I had simply commanded.

It was at that point that I would say transition began. I stood up and walked around, stopping every time the contractions came. My rushes gradually became even stronger and were now paired with an electric pain shooting down my right leg. It was the pain in my leg that was making these rushes really, really difficult to integrate. It's hard to say now what it felt like then. I can hardly remember. The closest description of transitional labor pain that I can imagine is that it feels like being a thick rubber band stretched taut, and tauter, and tauter and never snapping. (Thank God! Because I don't

think snapping would be a good thing.) However, this simile is all kinds of imperfect. There aren't words to describe it.

I used Jonathan as a support, the two of us gripping each other's arms as I leaned toward him and rocked on my feet to get through the rush. Robin stepped in to help during a couple rushes. Deirdre pushed the tops of my pelvic bones together at some point, to relieve the sciatica. It was mildly alleviated with her help. Between the rushes I tried to remember to relax and to enjoy what little reprieve I had. I felt emotionally and physically overwhelmed but at the same time fully "with it." The greatest aid besides Jonathan and the midwives physical presence was being reminded and repeating out loud that I wanted the contractions to get stronger. Remembering that it had to "get worse" before I would finally see the miracle of my baby was the most freeing thought. In a nanosecond I would go from feeling like I was being pulled down into quicksand to feeling like the captain of a vessel going full stern ahead! Mentally, that is.

There finally came a point when I didn't feel like I could support myself standing and I got onto my hands and knees. I told the room I needed a stool or something to lean on, because my arms and shoulders were trembling with the effort to hold me up through the contractions. Jonathan placed the ottoman in front of me and I rested my weight on it. It helped.

It was hot in the room. We had jacked up the heat so the room would be warm enough for the baby. Jamie and Jonathan held cool hand towels on my neck and shoulders. It was a sweet relief. I have no idea if anyone else felt as hot as I did.

At 6:08, according to Deirdre's notes, I felt the urge to push. I remember asking if it was okay if I pushed. I remember more, telling them over and over again that I felt like I had to poop (I never did). I didn't feel the baby's head ready to come out, but I knew I wanted to push *something* out. I didn't care what it was. It was the only way I could get over these overwhelming sensations.

I began pushing, and after a few minutes of not feeling the baby's head come through, I asked exasperatedly, "What's wrong? Why isn't the baby coming out?" In a split second I literally wondered if I should get on my back and pull my knees up like they do it in the hospital. This was not happening fast enough.

Robin said to me, "You'll feel the baby's head come down and then go back up a little." I had forgotten that one of the primary differences between this experience and my induced births was that the pitocin was allowed to do all the work of pushing the baby through the birth canal, whereas I would have to do that in natural childbirth. As soon as I readjusted my expectation, which took but a moment, I was in business.

Still feeling the shooting pains in my leg with each contraction and, strangely, my feet feeling like leaden weights of fire, I was overwhelmed (Did you think it was possible to be to overwhelmed so many times in such a short amount of time?) when I finally felt the baby's head hit my perineum. Wow. There is no distinguishing all the physical feelings. Yet, near the end, I felt like I was staring into the Eye of Mordor, or sitting on it. Seriously.



I certainly had the thought, *I don't care if he's never born, push him back in! Push him back in!* That thought was immediately followed by, *Can't push him back in! Only one way out! Push!* He was born at 6:21 am. From the first urge to

push to birth, it took 13 minutes. I could not get him out of there fast enough.

Jonathan caught him and after a wonder-filled chuckle, yelled out, “Elania, it’s a boy!” But I already knew. Of course he was.

He was born with his cord over his shoulders behind his neck. It’s not surprising with all the flipping around he did! It wasn’t dangerous, but Robin did have to pull it over his head to get enough slack to work with him. He scored an 8 and 9 on his APGAR. Healthy as anything and sweetly calm, he weighed 8 pounds and 4 ounces and was 21 inches long.

After Robin cut his cord, while Jonathan cradled him, I lay on the couch and we called Owen out of his room to see his new little brother. Owen had woken up at about 6, as is his custom. Auntie Jamie had told him to go back to his room, and as he tells it, he went back and “did nothing.” As I tried to nurse the baby for the first time, Saveia and Summer trickled out of their rooms. I can still see Summer’s bright smile over the arm of the couch as the morning sun lit up the room and birds twittered outside.

‘Twas a grand morning.

Epilogue



Drano was right. It’s a boy.

The experience on the whole was actually *a lot* like running a race and giving your best effort. You have a “tough” goal, say, a sub 20 minute 5k. As you run it each leg gets harder and you have to exert more effort to achieve the same if not better results.

You’re tempted to give up, but it’s a mental race as well as physical. At the end you feel completely spent and have gone through a lot of pain. You may even say, “*I never want to do that again!*” like I

thought the moment Dylan slipped through into the world outside. But, like post-race physiology/psychology, I was thrilled that I had “achieved” my goal, and I definitely experienced a high. If I could have, I would have been dancing in the living room to Daft Punk with Jonathan and the kids instead of sipping juice on my bed.

Later, I told Robin and Deirdre that I had no idea how a woman could go through that intensity for a prolonged period. They both expressed surprise at how fast I went through transition and told me that it wouldn’t hurt as much in a slower birth.

I was very, very pleased with my experience. I would want all of my friends, who have healthy pregnancies, to be able to have this kind of birth experience as opposed to a birth in a hospital. When you are under the misconception that a hospital birth is the only avenue available to you, you just deal with all the inconveniences and discomforts and small humiliations. Compared to my four previous births (all healthy, uncomplicated, induced and medicated in three different hospitals), Dylan’s birth was warm and intimate.

It *was* empowering. It was happy. It was comfortable. It was hard work. But now I know my body is not a lemon! I am capable of giving birth without drugs! And I am very capable of being buoyed by the natural high that follows! I felt so wonderful after Dylan’s birth, rather than simply relieved.

Clean up was essentially easy for those cleaning up. There was no big mess. For those wondering about that aspect of a homebirth, I would say that unless a woman has a mental breakdown and starts running around the room (which seems unlikely in a such a setting and physically impossible once your contractions become difficult) the mess is pretty contained. Robin and Deirdre were very prepared and good at anticipating where to set up the chux pads. After all, we didn't get bodily fluids on anything!