AIMS For a better birth...

Birth stories before

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Birth stories before

Before what? Before things are as they are? Before we knew better? Or when things were better? Here





It was 52 years ago and I was pregnant with my first child. I was 18 years old, of slight build, weighing around 7 stone. Maybe I should have been concerned - I wasn't, I was excited. I loved babies and couldn't wait for my baby to be born. I had no idea what sex it was as we didn't have scans in those days. If anyone knitted anything it was usually white or lemon (boys were mainly in blue and girls in pink). I didn't have much for the baby other than a second hand 1950s carriage pram, an old cot and a carrycot. I had what they used to call a layette which was a collection of baby essentials, clothes etc. This consisted of a crocheted blanket, a dozen terry towelling nappies, a dozen muslin nappies, a couple of vests and flannelette nighties, (worn by both sexes as babygros weren't around then), and some booties. I remember taking them out regularly and looking at them, impatient for my now overdue baby to be born.

The morning of the birth was calm, I was on my own as Bill, my husband, was at work. I had little idea of

what to expect, but I felt different and I knew that the baby was almost a fortnight overdue. Luckily my mother-in-law was visiting that day and she soon put me right. The baby was indeed on its way. My waters hadn't broken, I remember, as my brother-in-law was more concerned that they didn't break in his car as he drove us to the hospital.

The hospital was a small cottage hospital in Market Harborough and was run by a most formidable matron called Sister Cobb. I was whisked into bed and checks were done regularly in a very military fashion. She was strict and ruled the ward with a rod of iron. You didn't ask questions, you just complied with her instructions, as did all the nurses. I don't remember my waters breaking or any of the details, only that time was moving on and not a lot was happening. Eventually it was decided that I should be moved to either Leicester Infirmary or St Mary's Maternity Hospital in Kettering. I was whisked off to Kettering - I had no idea why, other than the cottage hospital was not equipped for any complications!!!

I arrived at a bigger hospital with more staff and trusted them all to do the job in hand. I was checked regularly but this reassured me - I needed to hear my baby's heartbeat. Bill had been informed of the change of hospital and needed to make his way over - remember no car and no mobile phones! After nearly 14 hours I was tired; I had been offered gas and air but was reluctant to use it as it made me feel sick. I heard the doctor say that if the baby wasn't born by 2 am then it would have to be a c-section. I had no idea what he was talking about but they were the doctors; it was their job to know what was best for me and the baby. As long as my baby was going to be safe, that was all I was concerned about.

The baby had turned over they said, not round as in breech, but over. The baby was distressed and they needed to deliver. They told me I was going to have a high forceps delivery. No time for explanations, just get on with it please. I was asked if I minded student doctors watching the birth. I didn't care, I just wanted my baby to be born. If some of them learnt from watching, that was great. I remember thinking, what were they doing there at that time of the morning, why weren't they out clubbing? I also thought, come to think of it, I'm younger than most of them, why aren't*I* out clubbing?

The forcep delivery was done. Again I don't remember much about it, just relieved that the pain had subsided and my baby cried. I was given a quick look - he was a bouncing baby boy with a mop of dark hair and he had the Price family dimple in his chin. He was quickly taken down to the baby unit in an incubator. For a moment I thought I was having another and it was the afterbirth, then the catgut stitches then sleep. Bill had turned up on a Honda 50. The baby had already been born but they wouldn't let him in to see him or me then. He had to return later that day.

I woke up in a ward, my little boy at the bottom of my bed in a crib. I was given him to feed. He was wrapped up tightly in a shawl and he had his hair combed up in a quiff. The nurses told me that he had caused quite a stir. They said he looked so mature with streaks in his dark hair, broad shoulders and the dimple in his chin. It was good to spend a little time with him. They let him stay as he was thriving.

After a day I was transferred back to Harborough Cottage Hospital. I was now back in the hands of Sister Cobb. I was wheeled into the 4-bed ward and told to rest. Darren, as he was now called, was carried into

the creche. He was never to be seen again unless he needed feeding, when he was brought to me. I stayed in that hospital for another 9 days, me resting, even when I didn't need to, and Darren doing what babies do in the creche. I was so grateful that I had spent some time with him at St Mary's and I wasn't afraid to be with him on my own.

Ann Price, Leicestershire

What my mother talked about



Image source

I'm not sure I can write much about my mother's first pregnancy in 1958. My mother would have been 26 and my father 29. She had a terrible headache in the evening, but it was the time when you called out the GP from his home so they both decided to wait. During the night my mother started fitting with eclampsia and was unconscious so was then taken by ambulance to Amersham hospital.

As things like that were never talked about, I am not sure whether my mother ever saw her baby. I know my father did as the baby boy lived for a day or two, but at 34 weeks there was limited neonatal care. He did have a birth certificate, but I only saw it once briefly after my mother had died.

It was really something that was never talked about, but my mother would have very little involvement with my older sister or me when we were pregnant or with her grandchildren until they were over 6 months old . She told us she was worried she would bring us bad luck but now, looking back, it was probably too painful for her. Even once I was a nurse and midwife she would not discuss things.

My mother would have talked about her experience of having me by elective caesarean in 1964 at Billericay hospital. She tried to reduce her hospital stay but was not successful and spent a lot of the 10 days on enforced bed rest. She did have success in letting me stay with her, rather than be whisked away to the nursery all the time apart from the scheduled breastfeeding. I was born in July and she would talk about this positive memory of being able to listen to the proms with me as a new baby.

Fiona Cann, Cheshire

My sister didn't make it - but I did



Stock image

My mum was in labour with her second child having the baby at home. The midwife felt there were problems, so she was taken to hospital. Once there, she was left in a delivery room.

She was in a lot of pain, so went to look for a nurse to help her. When she found one and asked for assistance, the nurse said, 'The baby's dead, you know the baby's dead, now go back to your room'. Mum didn't know she had lost her child. She then had to go back and give birth to her dead baby.

This story still makes me feel angry towards the person who could be so cruel to an expectant mother.

When my mother was having me. some time later, my blood levels dropped. I needed to have three transfusions after I was born. The last one was with Mum's blood. It turned out that she had a rare condition, which meant that although she had a positive blood group, when she was pregnant she reacted as if negative.

I was a fighter and survived but the baby girl she had before me didn't make it. So, so sad, but if her other baby girl had made it, I probably wouldn't have been here because she only wanted two children, a boy and a girl.

Sue Primrose, Cheshire