AIMS For a better birth...

# Experiences of third stage

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*Jill compares the differences between a managed third stage and a normal one*

Expecting my first baby twenty three years ago I realise that I gave no thought at all to or the third stage of labour. I remember that I dutifully read what the books said and dimly registered the idea that that would be an injection and 'controlled cord traction', whatever that was, but my mind couldn't move beyond the amazing possibility of the birth of a baby. It didn't seem very important.

In the event after a very unhappy birth the removal of the placenta felt like an assault. The normal birth I had so much wanted disappeared when the waters broke at term on a Monday morning and huge pressure was put on me to go into hospital and have the birth induced. I resisted as long as I could but on Tuesday morning after threats from a GP that the amniotic fluid could turn into a 'bag of pus' I gave in and tried to make the best of it. By the evening the induction was deemed to be a failure and I was told a section was now the only answer. Feeling wretched I asked everyone to leave the room, cried a lot and decided that as long as the baby was not distressed I would try to labour. Finally on Wednesday at 5pm my baby was pulled out of me with high forceps. It was gruesome and very painful and the only comfort was that it was all over. But I had forgotten about the third stage.

I felt that I had reached the end of my endurance and agreed to an injection to help the contractions which had not been effective up till that point but I was not prepared for the violence of the 'controlled traction'. It felt as if whoever it was, simply wanted to punish me by yanking out the placenta. I was afraid that the cord would snap or that my womb would be damaged. Luckily neither of those things happened and my body recovered but I felt deeply damaged. It was as if every shred of privacy and humanity had been stripped away in these processes which I had allowed.

I recovered. There were nightmares for a few months and the memory of the birth can still make me cry. While still in the hospital I behaved like a wounded animal refusing to let my baby be taken away even into a cot or to be washed. Having failed to protect myself I became fiercely determined to protect him. I waited five years to have another baby and was nervous, but with the help of some brilliant midwives my birth was good and I lost my fear. I had a daughter this time and my first thought was to reflect with relief that I need never go through childbirth again.

Five years later again at 44 and no baby in the house I decided to try again. This time after my two experiences I felt that I knew enough to be able to arrange circumstances that would give me the best chance of the kind of birth that most women want. The first thing to arrange was to be at home. My GP

hesitated for only a second and then declaimed 'Let's go for it!'

After a third very enjoyable pregnancy my main task was to book the best midwife I could. I got hold of the on call rota for the month, waited more than two weeks for the day my very senior and busy midwife would be on call and duly went into labour. I was at the end of first stage by the time she arrived but as soon as she slipped her arm under my shoulder a huge shift happened. The pain became manageable, I felt I could lean on her, I knew that she would stay with me and that I had nothing to worry about. After that it is no exaggeration to say that the whole experience was wonderful.

After my baby was born I felt I could happily have done it all over again tomorrow. The house was full of celebration, my two children and their baby sitter had come up to join my husband and the two midwives, a friend had come dashing in with flowers and champagne and the atmosphere in my bedroom was marvellous, people laughing, toasting, my daughter fascinated by the cutting of the cord