AIMS For a better birth...

Zara's birth

AIMS Journal, 2015, Vol 27 No 4

Sandar Warshal tells the story of the birth of her grandson Raphael

What could be more important than one's own birth - perhaps the birth experience of one's daughter? This came home to me as I watched my daughter, Zara, make decisions about the birth of her first child.

I had worked for AIMS for 15 years in the 1980s and had seen women undermined by their birth experience. The dream of a supportive and drug-free labour seemed almost impossible to achieve. It might have been mentioned as a possibility, but when women entered the hospital their confidence was eroded and their births became highly medicalised events.

Thus, I was keen for my daughter to have an independent midwife and had offered her the choice. She felt very comfortable going to University College Hospital (UCHL) in London and birthing in the birth centre. I was extremely dubious that a natural birth would materialise but several of her friends had achieved this there. I offered her a doula which she was happy to have and this person taught her good coping mechanisms for birth as well as general information and support.



Zara and Raphael

Her midwife care was the usual; pleasant but anonymous. She never saw the same person twice. Zara is a healthy 34 year old woman so had no problems with her pregnancy besides the usual discomfort near the end. At nine days past 40 weeks, Zara's labour began one evening.

As it happened, Zara could be our poster girl for natural birth. She went through three days of labour completely relaxed and in control. It never occurred to her to do it any other way. She used 'hypnobirthing' which gave her confidence and coping mechanisms. She went in to UCHL after 24 hours of slow labour but they found she was only two centimetres dilated and sent her home. We had another

24 hours of increasing contractions at home so we went in again. This time they found she was four centimetres dilated so 'qualified' for the birth centre.

Zara was welcomed in a pleasant, unhurried way and shown her room. It was like a bland hotel except it had a big birthing pool, a low bed, a birth ball and various places to hang from. The midwife was easy going and nobody seemed unduly flapped by the previous 48 hours of labour. The baby's heartbeat was taken frequently and was strong.

Zara used the pool beautifully; flipping, bouncing, stretching, moaning and going with her body. The midwife murmured discreet encouragement and occasionally suggested ways to keep comfortable. After a long night, Zara reached full dilation.

She then had a very long second stage, by which time I was a little uptight but the midwife kept checking the heartbeat and remained calm.

Eventually, out came Raphael and his parents were overjoyed and proud. Zara felt triumphant and I felt my 15 years of working for AIMS had been more than worth it. I have despaired as Zara's contemporaries, who were all healthy women who chose a hospital birth, wound up with caesarean sections, unwanted drugs and inductions. Our birth was a perfect antidote.

Zara had absorbed faith and respect for her body as she grew up with a mother who was discussing and campaigning for natural childbirth. When it came time for my daughter to choose her way of birthing, I am so pleased she could go to a birth centre and find what she wanted.

I thank AIMS for its foresight and give masses of credit to UCHL who had the strength to set up a midwife unit and then let the midwives do their job. Our experience was textbook AIMS and I will always be grateful to you all for continuing the campaign.