AIMS For a better birth...

Considering a home birth

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Belinda Ambrose shares her story

After two very 'medicalised' hospital births following regrettable decisions made on limited information, the thought of experiencing a third birth in a hospital environment marred by interference and intervention, filled me with dread.

Attending a course in Natal Hypnotherapy led by NHS head midwife Sue Turner proved to be a pivotal point in my birth preparation plans. It was after being somewhat enlightened; finally really understanding why things went so wrong that I became determined to have my third baby at home.

After getting my husband 'on board' with my decision following our workshops with the 'hippies and hippos' as he affectionately called us, at 35 weeks into my pregnancy I casually mentioned to community midwife Judy Freeman we were planning to have the baby at home. I was expecting to be met with resistance and prepared for an argument, only to be met with positivity and enthusiasm for my birth choice: my previous obstetric history and age (I was 43 when I eventually had my third baby) didn't appear to be obstacles to achieving what I so desperately desired - a drug-free, non-medicalised and 'hands off ' birthing experience.

Of course I researched as much as I could the history and safety of childbirth at home. Since birth has been 'taken over' by modern medicine, doctors and the risk of litigation, everything has changed, and now fear is a major contributing factor preventing more women from choosing home birth. These anxieties are often further reinforced by the people that make up your circle of influence. I can't tell you how many women I have encountered who have been put off the idea of a home birth by partners/husbands who even flatly refuse to discuss the option.

I was astonished to find out that in our area of Northumberland (at that time) only around 12 babies out of 170 were born at home annually, I was told that it was owing to a lack of awareness that home birth is a safer option for the great majority of women. If you do fall outside the 'low risk' category you can still plan for a home birth in many situations, as I did.

Planning our home birth was like a military operation: it was imperative for me to put in substantial physical and mental preparation. I visualised the birth and the outcome on a daily basis, there was no place for focusing on negativities or outcomes other than the perfect birth. Of course, I had considered all emergency situations but having been fully informed and reassured, I put it all out of my mind and concentrated on achieving a successful home birth.

Planning our birth also required considerable team effort, from Charles (hubby) assembling the birth pool, 'learning his lines' and supportive procedures from Natal Hypnotherapy; to Mum knowing how to administer herbal tinctures, to my other young children being adequately prepped on how 'birth looks and sounds'. Even the midwives were given a birth plan including everything from candlelight and gentle music to how long I wanted the cord to remain attached and what I wanted to do with the placenta after a physiological third stage of labour.

As my 'due date' came and went, I declined a membrane sweep and community midwife, Charlie Pickney reassured me that the alternative option of daily monitoring was available and to simply wait until she was ready to be born providing baby was thriving. She even told me she started dreaming (in her sleep) about defending my decision not to have labour induced going up against opposing views of the hospital obstetricians!

According to scan dates I was 10 days 'overdue' when my baby arrived - my LMP date calculated by NHS midwife, Ingrid was exact and B was born on that date. As my labour began, I quietly went about waking the children, feeding them and getting the household generally organised. With 'all the ducks in a row' I sat on my birthing ball, in the dark, breathing through the contractions going over my affirmations and looking forward to the journey ahead. The contractions started increasing in frequency and intensity and I felt it was time to step into the birthing pool, inhaling essential oil Clary Sage which had been dabbed onto a cotton ball.

As part of my birth plan, I was adamant I wanted to keep internal examinations to a minimum and would prefer none at all - at the end of the day, the baby was going to come out, and I didn't want to have any distractions that would break my focus. After what seemed to be a very short and stress-free labour with my wonderful birth team supporting me, I literally breathed the baby out and little B arrived wide eyed and lying beautifully at the bottom of the pool. I was mesmerised and it only occurred to me to pick her up after being prompted by Judy to do so! As I held our little baby in my arms with my family around me, I felt completely elated. To be able to crawl into my own bed with my newborn baby and my family close by in familiar surroundings was magical. It was without doubt the best decision I made: the right birth choice, the best home birth team.

Belinda Ambrose