AIMS For a better birth...

Neri Winterstein-Minnigin

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Ilana Winterstein shares her birth story of 3 April 2014

I've always had a fear of hospitals so a homebirth felt very natural, especially as my sister had an unplanned but amazing homebirth. Aaron, my husband, and I both felt we'd like some extra support throughout so hired Ly as our doula.

Neri, our daughter, arrived 12 days past her due date. Although I felt instinctively that ever ything was fine, I began to feel a mounting pressure towards medical induction as the days passed. Ly was brilliant at talking everything through and made sure I was aware that any decisions were mine and Aaron's to make.

At 1am on 2 April I woke with dull aching pains in my back. The contractions were irregular and eventually stopped, which was disappointing. However by 5pm the surges returned, lasting 45 seconds and coming 5 minutes apart. The pain was still concentrated in my lower back, which was a surprise as the baby had turned back-to-back for labour.

We let Ly know labour had started but spent the next few hours together just Aaron and I, feeling excited and filling the bir th pool. At around 9pm we asked Ly to come over as I felt things progressing. I also spoke to Selina, the community midwife on call, who was very
reassuring, advised me to take two paracetamol and said she'd speak to me again in a few hours to see how it was going.

From Ly's arrival onwards the order of events gets hazy, though at some point Selina and Hannah, a student midwife, arrived. Between 9pm and 6.55am on the 3rd, when my daughter was born, I crabbed sideways up and down stairs, lunged on chairs, squatted, rocked on all fours, shook my hips, did pelvic tilts against the wall and more to try and get the baby to turn. If I got low to the floor or held one position for more than a few contractions, labour seemed to slow, so Selina and Ly had me moving and changing position constantly to keep labour progressing.

To ease the back pain Aaron or Ly applied pressure to my sacrum during contractions. It also helped to make low sounds, though I remember wondering what the neighbours were making of all the noise. Ever yone was very respectful of our hopes for the birth and at one point I asked Aaron why I hadn't been offered gas and air. He reminded me that I'd written in my birth plan not to offer it unless I asked. This made me feel better and I carried on without.

When I got into the pool it was lovely and warm, so much so that I fell asleep between contractions.

Selina and Hannah checked my signs and felt my pulse was too high and things had slowed down. Selina was wonderful at giving information in a way that left me calm and without any sense of panic. Ly and Selina discussed what to do together and I'm grateful that at a point where fairly serious things were being discussed, I felt in safe hands and it was clear that everyone was working together with mutual respect. I resumed sideways crabbing on the stairs and took two more paracetamol to try and lower my pulse and some homeopathic pills Ly gave me, and things got going again.

Towards the end I laboured in our tiny toilet under the stairs with Aaron. Suddenly something shifted and I felt
the baby was coming. Slightly panicked I asked Aaron where everyone was and Selina appeared saying she could happily deliver the baby in the toilet, to which I said 'no way' and we returned to the living room. I remember saying it was feeling a bit intense, and Selina's response 'You're having a baby, love' reminded me it was natural and I could get through it.

I stood, leaning on Aaron during a contraction and there was a pop and my waters gushed all over the floor. Then everything slowed up at the point of crowning. I remember smiling and feeling ready to meet our daughter, exhausted but so close to the end.

Selina monitored our baby's heart rate and said it was dropping so it was time to get her out. I didn't feel instinctively like pushing at this point but, in a supported squat with Aaron holding me, I pushed with everything I had and delivered our baby. Our daughter didn't cry though both Aaron and I did. I felt such relief and awe looking at her as we waited for the cord to stop pulsing before Aaron cut it. I was on such a natural high and felt so much love from everyone around me – despite subjecting them to a world yoga CD on a loop for 13 hours as none of the music I'd planned felt right! I had quite a bad tear so Aaron held Neri as the midwives asked if I wanted gas and air before the stitches.

Having achieved a back-to-back labour with only paracetamol I refused, thinking why have gas and air now that she's out? In hindsight, after nearly breaking Ly's hand from squeezing it so tightly, I know why they got the cylinder out of the car!

Following the birth I felt so empowered and strong. Ly, Selina and Hannah worked as a great team and Aaron was a constant support throughout. I trusted everyone in the room, and I feel very lucky to have had such a positive experience and grateful for the support and love I felt throughout which helped make it happen.