AIMS For a better birth...

Are you mad?

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I lowered my hand, and my eyes. The laughter was quickly hushed. Someone muttered *'Are you mad?'*

I was 21, in my antenatal class preparing for the birth of my first child. The midwife had asked if anyone was having a home birth and, naïvely, I had admitted to the most heinous of crimes – trusting my body and knowing what I wanted.

Home birth was something I had thought of pretty much as soon as I found out I was pregnant. I've never been a huge fan of hospitals, and the thought of a car journey in the middle of birth was my idea of hell. I stumbled upon the Home Birth Reference Site (www.homebirth.org.uk) and started to do my research.

Initially my husband, Gavin, had the same reaction as everyone else – Why would I do that to myself? What if I needed an epidural? What if something went wrong? He was terrified. He didn't want to lose me or our baby.

Luckily I was prepared. I had found a book, Ina May's Guide to Childbirth. It was full of stories from women who had wonderful home births. It was written by an actual real-life midwife who was backing me up. Home births are safer for low-risk pregnancies. As the mother is relaxed, she is able to tune into her body and do what feels right. She is free to move around to get comfortable, and eat and drink when she needs energy. This all adds up to a birth which is (sadly) totally alien to a lot of women in the UK. Relaxed, without fear and without screaming.

I managed to convince Gavin. I reasoned that if anything did go wrong, the midwives would transfer me to hospital, which was about five minutes away in the car, less if I was blue-lighted. I reassured him that if they said it was necessary, I wasn't going to put my wishes of a perfect home birth before the lives of myself or my baby.

In the end I did have a perfect home birth. My contractions gradually built up from about 10am until I felt the need to call Gavin to come home. I was pacing, feeling pretty sore by this point, but as I remained upright and relaxed, baby was doing his thing. We called the midwives who suggested I take some paracetamol and wait for a bit. So I did. I drank water when I was thirsty and nibbled little cubes of cheese and grapes for some quick energy when I was flagging.

Gavin was timing contractions and wondering when to call the midwives again when his parents popped in for a visit! I was horrified! He clearly hadn't told them how we were progressing. His Mum, bless her, said '*It's time to call the midwives, Gavin.*'

The midwives arrived and I went into the shower to help me relax and feel better about my contractions. I'm not going to lie and say it was painless. I ended up taking six paracetamol over the course of the whole day, to take the edge off, but it was nowhere near as bad as people made out. I was mentally prepared. I focussed and listened to my body. It was all gentle and powerful at the same time. Meanwhile Gavin and two midwives sat in the living room, drinking tea and eating creme eggs. That was fine by me. I could cope better when it was just me and baby, working towards the moment we would meet. Admittedly, Gavin brought me some tea and toast – it's true, this is the best food in the world!

At 11.39pm my little boy, Fox Ogilvie, was born. He weighed 8lb 1oz and was a little blue. Thankfully he pinkedup, started breathing and was healthy and fine. I couldn't believe it. A little person! As the midwives stitched me up, Gavin got skin-on-skin time with our little boy. They are still very strongly bonded because of this. The midwives cleaned up, I got into pyjamas and we all snuggled up in our own bed. Bliss!

So when I next fell pregnant, it was a no-brainer. My proud husband is now a home birth advocate, completely won over. It wasn't even discussed that we'd go anywhere else. We made plans with our family that we'd call and the first ones that answered would take (our now 4-year-old) Fox away for the birth.

My due date was 10 June. Gavin's birthday, the 14th. Sure enough, at 6am on the 14th I woke up to nice strong regular contractions. I got up and paced about and took a couple of paracetamol with my breakfast. At 7am I felt that I should wake Gavin. *'We're having a baby today.*'

He got Fox dressed and breakfasted, then called our families and the midwives. My Gran came to take Fox away at 8am. I was in the bathroom and being quite loud by this point. She smiled and said, *'Each one is one less.*' I think she meant contractions.

Gavin had been opening his birthday presents in the other room and decided now would be a good time to show me his new power tools. I said, quite reasonably, *'Go away.*' Apparently it came out as a roar.

The midwives arrived at 8.30am, having just started their shift. They asked a few questions and looked over my fairly basic birth plan (it actually said 'I do best when left alone.') My waters burst and were green. The midwife told me that baby was distressed and if we didn't progress we'd need to transfer to hospital. I thought '*Oh no you don't*', and made an extra effor t after that.

Aeris Elizabeth was born at 9.19am, beating her brother's weight by 10oz. Again, the midwives cleaned up, and left us to it. I got a shower and into my dressing-gown and Gavin called everyone. Our families met our daughter when she was two hours old.

Needless to say, I am not popular with other mums when they start trotting out their birth horror stories over a bottle of wine, but I think my version sounds better.

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