AIMS For a better birth...

A normal birth story - at last

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Michelle Quashie shares the story of her postive birth

After two previous traumatic Caesarean sections, followed by a hospital VBA2C (vaginal birth after 2 caesareans), my home birth was everything I have learnt that birth can be.

It's truly wonderful to end my birthing days with the most beautiful, empowering birth.

It was instinctive, intimate, undisturbed, empowering, peaceful and I was in control at every moment.

I didn't have anyone tell me what position to be in.

I decided when it was time to get in the pool.

No one told me when I could push or not push.

No one knew the dilation of my cervix at any point.

My movements weren't limited or hindered by machines or technology.

Time did not dictate my fate...

I had chosen not to have any vaginal examinations because I didn't need someone to tell me what my body and my baby were doing. There was no medical indication to do so. Instinctively I knew that everything was OK and my body was working just fine.

In the early hours of the morning I felt my membranes rupture. I lay in bed making the most of the rest as I felt the familiar feeling of contractions waving through my abdomen every so often.

As the dawn broke I decided that we should get the pool inflated as I knew that today I would give birth to my baby.

Around 9am my midwife had arrived and was sitting across the room quietly drinking her tea.

I danced and swayed through each contraction and found my body wanting to lunge lower to the ground as labour progressed.

I wanted to be upright at all times. I couldn't image lying down and I wasn't expected to.

When my legs felt tired from dancing and the contractions felt too intense to dance through, I knew it

was time to take comfort by the warm water that was ready to take the weight of my body. I got in and floated star shaped for a while before finding comfort leaning on the edge of the pool.

I was not distracted or disturbed at any point. I remained focussed, using all my concentration and will to feel my baby inside my body moving down into my birth canal. I didn't need pain relief, I just needed peace and tranquility around me to focus solely on my breathing and my baby. The more intense the contractions were the more I found myself panting.

I felt a sense of panic for a moment but reminded myself this meant that it was highly likely that my baby was soon to enter the world. This thought kept my mind on track.

After just over an hour of being in the water, I felt my body pushing my baby out so went with it and the head was born. I rested with the head between my legs for a few minutes. My midwife asked if I was having contractions. I was but they were restful contractions and my body did not bare down with them, so I remained restful. Seven minutes later I felt my body bearing down with the contraction so I went with it. My baby was born, I did not tear, I didn't need stitches.

My midwife gently pushed my baby through my legs. I scooped my baby from the bottom of the pool into my arms to see the cord wrapped around her neck. With the help of my midwife we looped the cord twice from around the neck.

With all of my children peering over the rim of the pool I discovered our new family member was a girl. I cried with happiness saying "this is amazing."

There I sat cradling my baby and feeding her for nearly an hour. I took in her beauty, I studied her face and observed her body from head to toe, in awe of the miracle my body had grown. I knew I was flipping amazing! I knew women were flipping amazing!

Protected by the water and the safety of the surrounding inflatable pool it was just her and I. Nobody took her, nobody tried.

Eventually I felt ready to share her with the rest of our family. My husband then tied her cord and my eldest son cut the cord so she could be cuddled by her brothers whilst I watched on in euphoria.

Eventually I left the pool for more skin to skin and a sausage sandwich. I gave birth to the placenta just under 3 hours later. My labour and birth was everything I had dreamed of. My sons had witnessed first hand that birth can be beautiful. In my children's own words they describe my birth to be exciting and astonishing. I hope this positive image stays with them and prepares them for adulthood, for the time they support their partners and welcome their own children into the world.

I knew this was going to be my last pregnancy and birth. I had spent the last three years since my previous hospital VBA2C, researching and gaining as much knowledge about physiological birth as I could. I didn't fear birth but I did fear surgery.

I knew that this time I didn't want to be observed and have numerous strangers entering my birth space.

I knew that everyone in my birth space needed to be free from fear and have my very best interests at heart.

I knew that I didn't want routine examinations and various fingers inside me to check that my labour was conforming to expectations.

I knew that I needed to feel safe in the hands of those caring for me.

I knew that I needed to move, eat and drink freely.

I wanted to be certain that my individual needs were at the heart of the care I was receiving.

I put my trust in those who were caring for me, despite the warning signs and red flags, until I reached 37 weeks. It was then that the reality hit me that those responsible for my care did not trust my ability to make informed decisions regarding my birth. They were so caught up in ticking boxes, outlining risks and providing care that met the needs of the system that they failed to see or listen to the woman that was stood before them. A women whom they knew, a women who had worked alongside them to improve maternity care for all women. Yet, they failed to provide the individualised care I needed to support my birth plans and make me feel safe which in turn led to them failing me.

Once again at nearly 37 weeks pregnant, I found myself feeling vulnerable, fearing for my safety and reduced to tears.

I knew that the lasting effects of this birth had the ability to heal me, shape me or break me. I knew this birth had the power to determine who I was as a mother, as a wife and as a women in society.

I didn't want to battle again at this stage in my pregnancy. I knew I needed to remain calm during the last weeks of my pregnancy. It was then that I knew I had no choice but to privately hire the care I needed to support my plans for birth.

When I interviewed my midwife and heard her say "Michelle, I don't intend to treat you any differently than any other woman I have cared for." I could have cried, from that moment I knew Kay was the midwife for me. At last I would be cared for as woman and not as the risk labels that were part of my history.

Giving birth to my daughter has made me more determined to join all those striving to improve maternity services for women.

I want all women to not just to be heard but be listened to.

I want women to feel safe and supported during pregnancy and birth.

I want women to have real choices in pregnancy and birth and be fully aware of their options.

I want women to have continuity of carer throughout pregnancy and birth.

I want women to receive care governed by their individual needs and not care that is determined by a system.

I want women to receive care that caters for their physical and emotional needs.

I want women to feel in control and make the decisions through their pregnancy and birth.

I want women to be given the knowledge to understand pregnancy and birth and to be encouraged to use their voice and ask questions.

I want women to feel that birth is a positive experience even if it didn't go as planned.

I want women to be treated with dignity and respect.

I want women to enter the post natal period feeling whole and emotionally well knowing how to access on-going support should they need it.