AIMS For a better birth...

Grace

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Sarah Holdway shares the unassisted birth of her fourth child

Grace is my fourth child – my previous babies have all arrived before the 37 week mark so we were all prepped and ready.

The weeks ticked by with several starts to labour. I was feeling a little low in spirit, some of the starts were real enough and I was confused as to why they weren't following through. I visited the osteopath – not to induce labour but to make sure I was aligned and for some chill time.

Eventually at 41 weeks and 6 days labour became established enough that I felt confident in saying the baby is coming! I'd been to the Ina May film the night before and met some wonderful women – that oxytocin blast was clearly all we needed!

All night I twinged gently, luckily I was able to sleep through most of it waking just once or twice to pace and breathe, see the moon and enjoy that peace time.

Around 8am the kids all awoke and the clattering that fills our home began, when the contractions carried on I knew this was the real deal.

Mark sorted the breakfasts and told them that the baby was coming and they were all welcome to come up or do as they wished. Three heads peeped round the door.

We straightened the bedroom out, getting the towels and blankets and moving the quilts. I was happily breathing and busying myself upstairs – I just knew that despite my best plans and hopes (a night time birth with candles and oils and the moon reflecting on us) that I was going to have to go with the flow on this.

Mark helped me to the toilet where blood emerged – quite a lot – more than other births and no show, which I found odd, but also decided there was plenty of time for all these things.

A few hours passed and I was feeling very primal. I was crawling over two double mattresses, roaring and mooing and it felt like nothing was happening. Contractions squeezed me but no downward movements. I was feeling pretty irritated and started shouting at Mark and crying – a release of a lot of energy, I told myself off and refocused on what was needed – my quiet brain.

I began chanting open, open, open, open and began to visualise my baby moving down. I retreated within, I was passing fresh, bright red blood by this time.

I knelt up put my hand between my legs to see what I could feel. I was opening so that was reassuring. I gently pushed down to see how that felt.

The contractions were now intense, my waters still intact and not feeling much progress, I again retreated within. Having just seen the Ina May film and recalling some of her words I started rocking on all fours and hanging off the end of the mattresses.

Breathing, 'out baby, out baby,' I started to cry, I didn't really know what to make of it all.

The kids popped in and out but were mainly watching a film and playing games together. Mark was kneeling in the room quietly, respecting my space and just murmuring.

The mood changed. It had been hours with no real sign of anything progressing and a fair bit of blood, I went to the toilet again, hoping to help by sitting on it. I knew we were safe, I knew we had to just sit tight. I felt afraid but not enough to feel I needed help. Ver y deep within I knew we were safe and that calling anyone would disturb us and not be helpful.

I looked at Mark and said, 'we're OK,' then I decided I had to bear down and give her a little shift. Back on the bed, I roared and pushed down and felt her descend – that lifted everything.

Blood dripped out, red and thick, followed by a chunk of placenta.

I understood then.

I continued to gently push down – Mark took some photos, at my request.

Out of the blue her head was there – with a crown of placenta!

In the next push she flew out, breaking her waters as she came, and, despite Mark's attempt to catch her, she was like a tiny eel and plopped on the bed with a very lusty cry!

I scooped her up, so tiny, and sat on the end of the bed baby gazing – my two younger boys trooped in to examine their sister and request lunch!

The placenta began to come away in chunks, then I felt another urge to push so crouched down and birthed the rest into a bowl.

She weighed a dainty 5lb 4 oz; we left her cord intact until that evening.

We sat skin-to-skin for three days, barely parted, when we decided to call the midwife to let them know she had been born. Remarkably they were excellent and followed our desires and wishes. I didn't want screening and I do know that screening would have done very little except possibly land me with a

section and Grace in NICU owing to her size.

I don't regret my decision for a single minute, her birth was hard and in a weird way I knew something was up but didn't want anyone in there. I'm VERY glad we were at home, glad beyond anything, more than I can put into words. I suspect that if we were anywhere else I'd have been cut open quicker than I could say, 'Not tonight Josephine...'

Sarah Holdway