AIMS For a better birth...

Birth centre against the odds

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Caroline Willett shares her birth story

In 2007, towards the end of my first pregnancy, I developed high blood pressure so was closely monitored. I went to the NHS antenatal classes and thought we were prepared. When I came to give birth I was totally unprepared, confused and terrified.

After a stressful and difficult labour my son was delivered by ventouse and everyone was glad it was all over, but I was left feeling totally wiped out. After I'd been stitched up, it very quickly became clear that something was wrong, so I was whisked into theatre to fix a haematoma and I was so upset that everything seemed to be going wrong. As I'd had an epidural in theatre, I spent the night looking over at my baby through the side of the cot because I couldn't get up to see him or hold him, and I spent a very upsetting and stressful week in hospital afterwards. By the time we took our son home we were physically and emotionally exhausted. I suffered terribly with postnatal depression, which wasn't noticed by my health visitor until very late on. I didn't think I'd ever have another baby.

When my son was around three I started feeling as though I'd love him to have a little brother or sister and was starting to feel ready to face having another baby. When I became pregnant I started to panic and realised I wasn't sure if I could do it again, but I did want the baby so I had to get through it somehow. I kept panicking, having nightmares about my son's birth. Every time I went for a hospital appointment I panicked and felt ill in the waiting room. The hospital told me that because I'd had high blood pressure and a difficult birth the first time it would probably happen again this time and I'd have to be monitored very closely, so I had many many hospital appointments and felt very scared of the whole thing.

Whilst at my scan appointment I saw a poster for HypnoBirthing, advertising a way to a calmer more positive bir th and we contacted the lady straightaway. We hired a lovely doula and, through the support and education of our HypnoBirthing classes and our doula, we were determined to be more knowledgeable about pregnancy and birth and having a new baby. We began to prepare ourselves for the calm and happy journey that was ahead, instead of the terrifying and awful journey that I'd first thought I was going to have. I became confident enough to speak to the doctors and midwives and discovered that what had happened first time around wasn't necessarily going to happen again this time.

The hospital told me that because of my previous difficulties I wouldn't be able to use the birth centre or a birthing pool or be active in labour as I'd have to be closely monitored, but I didn't agree.

I was nearing the end of my second pregnancy when my husband decided we should go and look around

another hospital. We told them our history and they were lovely and supportive and welcoming to the kind of birth I wanted and were happy for me to use the birth centre (midwifery-led care unit) and showed me around. It was so lovely and peaceful with fairy lights, a birthing pool and no doctors, I was so excited.

Through the help of my doula and the HypnoBirthing skills I was learning, all my fear and panic was melting away and instead of being scared I was excited and couldn't wait to have my baby. When I went into labour I felt calm, happy and excited. We went to the birth centre and got settled in. My blood pressure was slightly high and I was bleeding heavily, but baby and I were doing great and nobody was at all worried that I couldn't continue in the birth centre.

Everything moved quite quickly and I had the most amazing water birth experience I could have wished for. There were a few moments when the panic started to set in, but everything went smoothly and my daughter was born in the birthing pool. She wasn't crying or anything, she was just so peaceful and I was so so happy that I'd actually done it. I'd gone from feeling like I couldn't have another baby to just having the best birth ever. My daughter is such a peaceful happy little girl and I put that down to the lovely pregnancy and birth she had.

Of course it wasn't without its mishaps, I was on crutches for the last few weeks of pregnancy due to having bad pelvic pain, but despite the ups and downs we got over them all and everything was amazing. For the first time in years I was truly happy. My son is amazing with his baby sister and we're all doing great.

There was no depression after my second baby and I put that down to having such a positive experience.

I can't thank my doula and my HypnoBirthing teacher enough and my husband was an amazing support throughout everything. I'm a very lucky lady.