AIMS For a better birth...

Claire's birth story: The arrival of Iris

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By Claire Pottage



As a fairly anxious person I found myself really enjoying pregnancy and embracing all that came with it. Early on I felt a home birth might be an option I wished to explore, but knew little about it and my partner knew even less and felt hesitant. We attended an information session by our local home birth team in Leeds, and listening to the options I felt this would be my preference and so did my partner. I was throughout though very open to being transferred to hospital at any point if I felt unsure and would not have been disappointed in any way with other birth options if these turned out to be the right thing- it was a very open birth plan.

I found having my antenatal care with the home birth team really personal and this helped me to enjoy my pregnancy.

My due date arrived on a Monday but with little sign of labour starting. I was a little disappointed but had really enjoyed spending my last few weeks of non-parent life catching up with the people I love and getting to know new friends made throughout pregnancy - and embraced a few more days! I decided against having any sweeps at this stage, but felt I might later in the week.

I did start getting a firmer Bump, and felt this was a sign and on Wednesday around 1:30am I felt I was getting surges. I know many people try to let their partner sleep but I was too excited and felt I needed his support with me even at this early stage. We called the home birth team at 2:30am, and had a good chat with them. They confirmed that it sounded like labour was starting and we talked about them coming to check how we were getting on in a few hours. Chris helped me put on the tens machine and we got into a routine of me standing for each surge with Chris in front of me holding my arms as I focused on my breathing whilst pressing the surge button on my tens machine.

In between each surge we were working our way through the Harry Potter box set! The books being something I always read when wanting to chill and as I know the story so well it didn't require much conversation, but got the oxytocin flowing!!

The first midwife's visit was at 5am. I had an examination and the midwife confirmed the head was in a good place and I had started dilating and was at 2cm. She really reassured me I was dealing with the contractions well and we all had a cup of tea and a lovely chat about birth but also about life and our families.

For the majority of the day I was getting a contraction every 5 minutes, but not any closer together, although they were increasing in intensity. My waters broke at 4pm and the midwife came back out to confirm this. She suggested I not have another exam as the contractions were still far apart and to carry on as we were, and again reassured me I was doing well with my breathing and this would be really helping baby progress on her journey. I took some paracetamol and we carried on with the next film!

As the night drew on, and we got to 24hrs since labour started, I was beginning to get tired, and a little frustrated that the contractions felt strong but were not becoming more frequent. The midwives had changed shift and another great midwife came over following our call to discuss this. She felt maybe the waters hadn't completely gone due to the contraction timings not shortening, so I had a second exam and this confirmed that my fore waters were intact, only my back waters had gone. We discussed some rest may be helpful for me so she suggested that I take some dihydrocodine and try and sleep. Chris and I then went upstairs and fell quickly asleep in our own bed for around an hour and a half. At half one I awoke as my waters fully went.

I had a huge wobble at this point, and now knowing how things progressed I think this would have been my transition phase. Due to the shock of waking to the waters I started to shake and felt I couldn't stop myself and became concerned something was wrong. We rang the midwife and she reassured us that I was experiencing adrenaline so this spurred me on to get back on my breathing. Within half an hour this had worked and I was back in my pattern. Due to the prior progress the midwife felt I had some time to go

yet and to continue to monitor the contraction times. At this point the contraction intensity was becoming hard, I found repeating affirmations really helpful: "The surges are being made by me so they can be handled by me".

I felt a strong urge to smell a towel that my mum had washed and which smelt comfortingly like my parents' house! I also asked Chris to fill the pool but at this point we had a bit of a comedy of errors, which didn't faze me at all as I felt in the zone! Chris was rushing to fill the pool and forgot to put in the liner- doh!! He then had to empty the first bits of water he had put in to be able to do it and in rushing missed the sink and flooded the kitchen! He was fantastic though and kept coming to me for our routine with each surge as he sorted the pool and it then got filled!

At this point I was finding the contractions intense and felt I needed the midwife with me. We called them and said I needed some support, but as they were at another birth which had become complex, we were told a team from delivery suite would be on their way to us, but, they said there was still plenty of time - little did we all know this might not be the case! I asked Chris to ring again as my up breathing was no longer working and I had a strong urge to breathe down, make a low noise and push, however at 3:45 the first midwife and a student midwife arrived. I remained fairly oblivious, repeating my affirmations through the surges and blocking everyone else out. The midwives supported my routine with the surges, and then they suggested that a position change from standing may help, so I knelt on the sofa with Chris in front of me working with me and focusing only on me. As I started to push the midwife massaged my perineum with warm water as I hadn't been able to get in the pool as I had felt I was managing the contractions better standing up (poor Chris after all his pool efforts!!). Within a few more pushes Iris was here!!

They turned me so I could sit and handed her straight to me. We all marvelled at how much hair she had! While I birthed my placenta one of the midwives set up for Chris to cut the cord and then have skin to skin with Iris. This was amazing to watch- and Iris tried to latch onto his hairy chest!!

We then spent the next two hours sitting with the midwives, (of which there were four as our home birth midwife wanted to see us herself before the end of her shift) and drank cups of tea while I was helped to latch Iris on for her first feed. I was also checked and I didn't need any stitches or have any tears, just small grazes.

Our home birth midwife discussed who we would see when over the next few days, but reassured us if we needed anything to just call them. And we called both Iris's Nannys and Grandads to lets them know she was here!

Feeling open to change and being calm helped me have a really positive birth experience and helped me start my first few days of being a mummy with a positive mind set. Without the support of my partner Chris this wouldn't have been possible - birth partners have such an important role on the big day!