AIMS For a better birth...

Jenna's Home Waterbirth Story

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AIMS Journal, 2019, Vol 31, No 2



When my partner and I were considering trying for a baby we talked about what we wanted and what scared us about the idea. One of the things which I wanted was the experience of being pregnant, while giving birth itself terrified me utterly. As it turned out, I had a horrible pregnancy, feeling nauseous and fatigued for most of it, and giving birth was actually a tremendously positive experience for me.

I knew I wanted a home birth, and started Active Birth Yoga classes locally (when I was well enough to go). Initially the response I got from the various people I encountered medically to my having a home birth was very positive, but gradually a note of caution slipped in, until I began to feel that I was just one big walking hazard, despite being 'low risk'. Towards the end of my pregnancy the tone changed dramatically to one of implying that I was putting myself and my baby at risk by not being in the hospital. Both AIMS and my yoga teacher were very supportive, first of all in warning me that this might happen so I was prepared for it, and secondly in helping me to formulate a response.

I hired a pool from my yoga teacher and set it up. One midwife tried to tell me that the floor would collapse under it once filled. I checked with the people who had built the new floor when we moved in and they said that was nonsense. I didn't appreciate being scared like that, and I used humour to help me through it. I referred to my pool as my 'pond' and threatened to have actual frogs in it. I settled for a selection of rubber ducks, which I figured I would throw at anyone who tried to scare me like that at the actual birth.

My due date came and went, and the midwife at my GP practice said 'We'll book you in for a sweep'; she

looked surprised when I said no. She then said she would book me for an induction two weeks after my due date. I said I wouldn't go, but she booked the appointment anyway. I was very scared of the induction process, and determined to avoid it. The AIMS book 'Inducing Labour: Making Informed Decisions'[1] was invaluable to me in reassuring me that I was not mad to refuse induction and giving me backup. I was sad that all this was such a fight.

The Monday of that week I had a 'show'. I was very relieved, and excited. I was also surprised by how different that was to how I imagined. I hadn't been well enough to get to any NCT classes while I was pregnant, so maybe I would have known more if I had. When I asked the midwife later about it she said that the show could vary a great deal. After that I started to have contractions on the Tuesday night, but they were quite far apart. I got my TENS machine out and tried to sleep, without much success. The Wednesday morning my partner called the hospital to ask for a midwife because the contractions were now every few minutes. They demanded to speak to me. Forewarned of this, he had to talk strongly to them before they accepted that he was just as capable of reading them my NHS number off my notes as I was. They said there weren't any midwives available; he said we wouldn't come to the hospital. A midwife was found.

She came, was lovely, and said that she thought it would be a while but that she would expect I would have had the baby by the end of the day. After she left, my contractions slowed down again, which was also a surprise to me. A quick Google revealed that this was not abnormal, and I settled on the sofa to watch films with my TENS machine. The night arrived and my contractions were now very strong, but 20 minutes apart. I tried to sleep in between them.

Early in the morning on Thursday I got up and started pacing around. I became slightly inarticulate and told my partner that I was getting in the pool now. It took him a while to realise that I meant that he needed to call another midwife. He did, had another fight with the hospital and another midwife appeared. She told me she had to do a vaginal examination to see if I was dilated enough to get in the pool. She sent my partner away, and did the exam. I was surprised how painful it was, and I can't even describe the shock, anger and sorrow I felt when after she had finished she said 'I just did a sweep while I was in there' – without my consent, and despite it saying clearly in my birth plan that I wanted minimal intervention and clear discussion (with my partner involved) before any procedure was carried out. I decided that I had to put my feelings about what she had done to one side and not let her mess up my birth, so I did. I promised myself I would complain later, and I did. The response I got from the hospital was laughable, but I didn't have the energy by that point to pursue it further than my initial letter.

I ran off to the pool and hid in the farthest corner of it away from her. I knew that other midwives were coming soon so I hadn't got to put up with her for long. I took some photos with my partner's help at this point to regain a sense of control and start enjoying myself again, and this is one of them.



Contractions in the water were a lot less painful than outside of it. I loved being in my pool. Two new midwives and a student (I had already consented to her being present) arrived, read my birth plan thoroughly and made approving noises. I felt surprisingly good considering how much it hurt. Looking back on it, what was different than all the other pain I have felt in my life is that there was no sense of injury or trauma with it, no anxiety, it just felt right, I was at peace with it not scared of it. So, it was much more bearable than other pains I have felt.

By about 2pm I was exhausted. I knew I could manage the pain, but I was so tired that my muscles were starting to cramp and my legs were shaking. I tried getting out of the pool for a bit and felt like lead. One of the midwives gave me a lovely back rub. I agreed to a second vaginal exam (which speaks of how great these midwives were that I would trust them after my earlier experience), was told I was doing well, 8 cm dilated, probably a couple more hours to go and eventually got back in the pool with some gas and air. I found that screaming out and kind of growling was really helping me, and it took me a while to work out how to do this alongside the gas and air.

They told me I could start pushing, I said I already was. I thought I was going to explode. They said the baby's head was coming, invited me to put my hand down and feel it, I did, regretted it because it felt very weird and bulgy, and apparently said 'There's no way that's coming out of there!' They laughed; I expect they had heard that before. And eventually at 4.30pm-ish, my baby was born, the student midwife caught her and brought her out of the water.

I sat back in the pool and abruptly felt amazingly calm and clear as she was put on my chest. I just cuddled her and gazed and gazed into her eyes as she gazed at me.

The midwives got excited about finding out whether she was a boy or a girl. I hadn't cared at all until they started asking to check, but then I was delighted to find out I had a daughter.

My partner and I had a moment of calm together before they asked him if he wanted to cut the cord, which had gone clear by this time. Then I had to birth the placenta, which was horrible because I was so tired, and I had got out of the pool again. This was the least dignified part of the whole affair as there were a lot of membranes; the midwife who was helping me did a great job before taking me for a shower. I

couldn't walk unsupported because I was so tired.

The three midwives who had been there with me all day had to leave as their shift finished, but two other midwives arrived, did me some very neat stitches (I had a small second-degree tear which I had barely felt) and showed me the basics of breastfeeding. Then they left me on the sofa cuddling a naked baby, who promptly pooed all over me. Welcome to parenthood – unbelievably tired, covered in someone else's bodily fluids yet unbelievably happy!



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1. www.aims.org.uk/shop/item/inducing-labour-making-informed-decisions