AIMS For a better birth...

My birth, my way

To read or download this Journal in a magazine format on ISSUU, please click here

AIMS Journal, 2020, Vol 32, No 2

By Joanna

Since becoming pregnant I always intended to have a home birth. Over the past few years I have taken an active interest in birth and have done lots of reading and research into the benefits of birthing in the comfort of my home. Through this knowledge I gained confidence in the natural birthing process.

At 38 weeks pregnant I received a phone call from my midwife telling me that due to Covid-19 my hospital was unable to provide me with a home birth midwife. My immediate reaction was that I would continue with the intention to labour at home, as I wanted an uninterrupted experience. The concept of having no medical care was a little daunting but I was certain of my choice, which was informed and also intuitive. My midwife was supportive with this choice to 'free birth', although she informed me of the possible risks involved, and she also assured me that they would be there at the hospital ready for us if at any point we might need their assistance. This is something that my partner and I stayed open to.

It was really important for me that I created a space where I felt safe and comfortable to birth, in the familiarity of my own home. Although I would have gone to hospital in an emergency, Covid-19 gave me even more reason to stay at home as I didn't want to risk contracting the virus. Also, I didn't want to be around unnecessary heightened anxiety which I felt had built up everywhere in the country, which I thought would interfere with my labour. I was also concerned that there would be a limit on how long my partner would be able to be with me during and after labour.

In preparation for our birth I originally sought out a doula who had offered me much support throughout the pregnancy and lead-up to the birth, but wasn't able to physically be present at the birth due to the restrictions of the pandemic. We did speak about 'Zooming' in during labour if I needed which was quite a weird concept but I felt perhaps this would be useful as my partner and I were going it alone and we had zero experience of what to really expect when labour started.

During the last three weeks of my pregnancy the country was in total lockdown, and still is as I write this. Although I have missed seeing my friends and family and having the freedom to leave my apartment, I am ultimately very grateful for this time alone. My partner and I have spent weeks together, nesting at home, getting ready for our new arrival, which is time that we wouldn't have had if he was going to work and we were operating our normal life. It has also given us the chance to rest, really rest.

Leading up to the birth I felt relaxed and confident, although I did have a few moments of anxiety and anticipation which I think is a natural response for a first-time mother. Contractions started at 5pm on Tuesday 21st April. I used a variety of different methods during the process such as the birthing pool, rebozo, exercise ball, massage and hypnobirthing techniques. The labour lasted much longer than I expected, and was a lot more intense than I originally anticipated, and as we didn't have anyone present with us we had a few moments of uncertainty of how we were progressing. But we stayed relaxed, grounded and focused as much as possible and I continued to follow my instincts and finally our beautiful daughter was born the following day at 7.30pm.

Given the circumstances of the pandemic, this gave my partner and me an opportunity to really test our trust and faith in the natural process and ability to birth completely unattended and uninterrupted. My intention had always been to have a natural, gentle and organic birth and this is exactly what we received. Our birth has been an experience that we may never have had under normal circumstances, and through this process we have gained even more strength, trust, resilience and sovereignty as a new family which will benefit our future and ultimately the future of my daughter.

On reflection, I am grateful that I took the time to listen to my intuition and trust my inner voice. I was focused throughout my pregnancy and labour and I am thankful to have had my partner by my side who kept the same vision and who was able to support me in my decisions throughout. I'm also grateful that free birthing is a legal right here in this country and that women have total autonomy when it comes to our choices of how and where to birth. I hope that through our beautiful and powerful story we are able to inspire others to take control of their birthing rights with confidence and knowledge in the natural process of birth.