

## Annes Birth Story

For weeks after Jordan's birth I felt really bad about it. It was the most painful birth by far but the thing that really bothered me was that I hadn't been able to film it as I'd been really looking forward to having it on video.

When Jordan was just a few months old, I discovered I was pregnant again. I got very stressed, worrying that I wouldn't be able to film this birth either and thinking about how bad I would feel after two disappointing births. I booked with independent midwife Valerie Gommon. We talked about my previous births and how I felt about them and it was obviously important to Valerie that we did what we could to make things better this time. I still spent most of the pregnancy worrying about the birth, but I felt this was preferable to being excited about it, then being disappointed again.

My friend Karoline, also a midwife, said she would do her best to be at the birth to support me and look after the children. She asked me to show her how the camcorder worked so she could have a go at filming the birth but I was afraid she'd be too busy with the children to do much filming. With the noise I make in labour, there wasn't much chance of them sleeping through it! I thought a tripod may help but wouldn't be much good if I moved around too much.

Karoline gave me a birth pool so I planned a water birth too. I'd always liked the idea of a water birth as I think it's nice for the baby to be born into a familiar environment but I also thought if I was in the pool I'd be staying in roughly the same place so filming would be easier. Later on in the pregnancy I felt I thought about how painful Jordan's birth had been and what bad SPD I had again that I felt I needed the water to help with pain and mobility. After finding the hose didn't fit on any of my taps, I finally got an adaptor that did, then realised the pool wouldn't stay up! However, at my next antenatal appointment Valerie turned up with a pool, helped me inflate it and it stayed up.

Towards the end of the pregnancy, I felt so short of breath and was so uncomfortable with SPD that although I was worried about the birth, I was hoping I'd go into labour soon. Although Chelsea was over 3 weeks late, Kalonice and Jordan both came along at 39 weeks so when I got to 42 weeks I started to feel a bit anxious and frustrated, especially as I'd already had a few episodes of strong, regular contractions and 2 stretch and sweeps. I convinced myself something was wrong. Maybe the baby was in an awkward position and that's why I hadn't gone into labour yet. If this was the case, did it also mean I couldn't have the baby vaginally? Valerie and Karoline tried to reassure me but I was still worried.

I saw Valerie on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> August when I was 42 + 3 and I had another stretch and sweep. Valerie said she felt I was more ready to give birth but I still felt it would be another week!

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> at 9.30 pm I started getting contractions every 3 - 5 minutes. I made sure the camcorder battery was charged and got some other bits and pieces ready, although I felt that if I was in labour, I still had quite a while to go. Eventually, when I started to feel really exhausted, the contractions very kindly stopped for an hour so I could get some sleep. They then started again, and continued regularly but not increasing in frequency or intensity.

I rang Valerie about 5 pm Saturday but she was out and I didn't feel it necessary to ring her mobile at that point but did ring it at 6.20. When she got back to me I said I wasn't sure whether I needed her or not, that the pains weren't that strong but that this is how they felt with Kalonice until very near the end. Val said she'd get something to eat and then call me back. At 7.10 she rang and said she'd come over and if I wasn't in labour she could do another stretch and sweep. I rang Karoline and she said she'd also get a meal and then come.

Valerie arrived about 8 pm and Karoline arrived 20 minutes later. Valerie doesn't normally do vaginal examinations in labour but we thought it was a good idea. My cervix was now central and 3 cm dilated and she did a stretch a sweep. She then suggested filling the pool. I said I didn't think there was any need as nothing much was happening but she said if that was the case we could empty it again but I could labour quickly so we may not have time. Although I'd previously managed to get the hose to fit with the new adaptor, I couldn't do it this time so we decided to give up on the idea of a water birth. I didn't mind too much. Valerie asked me if I wanted to fetch an essential oil for my burner so I went to get some lavender then realised I didn't have any matches!

I was spending most of the time kneeling on the floor and my SPD pain was bad but at least I wasn't getting the awful pain I'd had with Jordan. With him I'd been convinced I was going to end up with a fractured pelvis as I had terrible bone pain as he moved down. I had terrible backache this time though, not surprisingly as he was posterior.

On a few occasions I told Valerie things were slowing right down and she said that's OK but I felt really uncomfortable having her and Karoline there for nothing. I kept saying they should both go home but each time Valerie said "We'll stay a bit longer, it's not that late".

Although I was contracting strongly, sometimes the pains were irregular and I didn't believe I was in labour, so as I felt really cold, when Valerie asked me to take my clothes off I wouldn't. She asked if I could just take my trousers off so she wouldn't have to fish the baby out of them. I said "No, there's no need, I'm not in labour" and she said "Oh, you're not in labour, okay then!"

Although I kept asking them to go home and refusing to take my trousers off as I wasn't in labour, I still kept checking that Karoline was filming and the battery

was still okay! Eventually I agreed to take my trousers off but by this time was in too much pain to do it so Valerie had to help me. I then complained that I was cold so Karoline fetched me a jumper when all I wanted was my trousers back on. As soon as I put my jumper on I moaned about being too hot and started sweating. Valerie put the fan on for two seconds and I said I was too cold. I felt sick and shaky like I normally do at transition but knew I couldn't be at that stage.

I can't remember what stage I started to believe I was in labour but a while after I realised this, I told Val I didn't feel I was getting anywhere. I said this a few times and about 1 am Sunday morning she examined me and I was still just 4 cm dilated. She did another stretch and sweep and said she hadn't brought any entonox as she knew I didn't use it, but she could try and get me some if I wanted it but I'd never used pain relief before and I wasn't about to start now.

She also suggested breaking my waters, something she never normally does but she thought it could take a lot longer if she didn't. I was having a think about this and as Karoline agreed it may be a good idea I was about to say yes when I had an absolutely horrendous contraction so thought maybe the sweep was working so ARM wouldn't be needed.

At 1.30 the pains were much stronger and closer together and I was nauseous and shaky again. (I'm not sure if this was when Valerie said "You're getting so close now" but watching the video afterwards, there's a point where she was smiling at Karoline and pointing to the red line going up my back.

Around 2, I started to feel the baby might be getting lower but I wasn't sure. Then 20 minutes later, things seemed to slow down again.

About 3.45, despite strong contractions, I told Valerie again that I wasn't getting anywhere so she offered to examine me and break my waters. I was still 4 cm and she tried to break my waters but the membranes were really tough ; she asked if I could feel anything coming out as she didn't think she'd managed it and I said I couldn't, then a second later felt a trickle but nothing more than that. I was in too much pain to lie still for any longer so she stopped trying. As I got back on the floor I heard her say something about a deflexed head. She started talking through my options and then mentioned the dreaded H word - hospital.

I became absolutely hysterical then, I was so scared. Valerie knew I wanted a home birth so I felt sure she wouldn't have mentioned hospital unless she was really worried. I thought the baby's position meant I needed a caesarean and I was devastated. Valerie tried to comfort and reassure me and said it was fine if I didn't want to go and there was still a good chance I could have this baby naturally and Karoline hugged me and I finally calmed down.

At 5 am Valerie had another go at breaking my waters. This time she managed it (they went all over the bed and all over the carpet and when I stood up afterwards they continued so Valerie grabbed a sick bowl that was by my bed to

catch it in). I waddled back downstairs and heard Valerie and Karoline talking but couldn't properly hear what was being said so again became concerned that there was something wrong. Apparently she had been unable to feel any landmarks that time.

Two minutes later the pain was unbearable. I'd known that ARM could make it more painful but hadn't expected it to be this much more painful, it was a real shock. Karoline asked if I was sure I didn't want to try the pool; she hadn't realised we couldn't get the hose on, otherwise she'd have had a go earlier. She thought the water would really help with the pain so she had a fiddle with the tap adaptors and hooray! She managed to get the hose fitted and started to rill the pool.

By 5.15 I was saying I couldn't cope. Karoline disappeared upstairs. A minute later I said "It's no good, I can't do this, I need something for the pain this time". All I meant was TENS but didn't get a chance to say this as I suddenly started pushing. Valerie said "Okay, we'll sort that out for you now", then immediately said "You're not pushing by any chance are you?" I managed to say "Yes, where's Karoline?" as Valerie struggled to get my knickers off. She called Karoline and I just about managed to ask if she was filming as I was afraid we wouldn't get the most important bit on video. (Apparently she'd gone to look for some frankincense to calm me down; I'm glad she didn't find any as I don't like it!)

A few minutes later, Isaac was born weighing 8 lb 9 oz. He is absolutely wonderful and I feel so positive about the birth. When Karoline left, another friend came to support me and kept telling me to rest. Eventually I did go to bed for an hour but there was no chance of me sleeping as I was so high from the birth. I finally went to bed about 11 that night and slept for just 2 hours!