

Friday December 12th

Well, despite my bravest attempts this baby just isn't budging. I've saturated my capacity for pineapples, chilli, castor oil (the devils work), swept membranes, sex (a truly heroic attempt from Rob) and raspberry leaf tea, Eviction day has finally dawned.

We had planned a homebirth. The birthing pool has been on standby for over a month but, at 12 days overdue and concern about the size of this little bubba (I've had raised sugar levels during my pregnancy) I'm ready to move onto the next step

We arrived at the hospital at 11am and were admitted onto the postnatal ward. Rob and I both cast furtive glances towards the ominously empty cot at the end of the bed. By the end of the day, it would probably be occupied. Eek!

After two midwives solemnly predicting a big baby (he's been in there so long and I'm so utterly ginormous I'm almost expecting him to walk out and head towards the hospital canteen) we were taken across to the labour ward.

Luck was definitely on our side. Not only was the unit empty but we were allocated Valerie Gommon – an independent midwife who happened to be working an agency shift on the unit that afternoon. We'd heard such wonderful things about her during our hypnobirthing classes we couldn't believe our luck! We bumped into Danny who we met on the hypnobirthing course nervously waiting to go into theatre. Kerry-Anne had laboured for 24 hours without success and was being prepped for a c-section. Our little boys will share a birthday!

We were given room 4 – a huge room with a birthing pool in the corner. We started to make ourselves at home, plugged in the ipod and waited for the obstetrician to arrive (the midwife had struggled to break my waters – baby's head kept moving out of the way. He SO doesn't want to come out!)

My waters were finally broken at 2.15pm and I was given 3 hours to labour naturally before they would start the syntocin drip (no pressure then!). Contractions (sorry, "surges") began soon afterwards but were very manageable. I bounced around on the birthing ball and practised my breathing which actually really helped. When I was in labour with Abigail I fought every contraction. This time I welcomed them. I was so determined to avoid the dreaded drip.

Rob was fantastic - so supportive and we were both so much more relaxed this time. At one point I was even able to laugh during a contraction as Rob urged me to think of George (Michael who just happened to be playing on the ipod at that point). Valerie was wonderful too – she rarely left our side and took time to understand what our birth plans were.

At about 4.30pm I asked Valerie if there was anything we could do to bump things along. I was earnestly bouncing on the birthing ball and marching round

the unit but the contractions, although regular, weren't up to speed yet. We weren't quite expecting the advice we received – a little bit of lovemaking, apparently, would be just the ticket. Valerie dimmed the lights, pulled the screen across the door and promised us we wouldn't be disturbed before slipping out of the room.

Rob took in the hospital gown, pink slippers, amniotic fluid and swollen ankles - "You have got to be kidding me." Enough said.

At the 3 hour deadline point - 5.30pm Valerie did an internal – 6cm dilated. Hurrah!! The following contraction took some serious "fast breathing" – now we're cooking!

Valerie suggested getting into the shower. I sent Rob down for some supper. Valerie was keen to stay with me but, at that point, I felt OK. I guess she knew more than me because 10 minutes or so later I was IN LABOUR. My word, the breathing no longer seemed to help, the warm water from the shower head tried it's best but suddenly I reached "code epidural" point. Rob arrived back and suddenly I knew the baby was coming and pretty soon. I implored with Rob to get a midwife but I'm not sure he believed me! Finally a couple of midwives were drawn to the din which was occurring in the shower room and I was encouraged to move back down the corridor to our room.

I was reluctant to go anywhere although the somewhere deep within the logical me agreed that I probably shouldn't give birth in the toilet. I recall being keen to avoid wearing a towel on the journey ("I'm too hot") but again logical me would have to agree with a midwife who insisted naked, labouring women should not be roaming the public corridors.

Then Valerie arrived back. Her warm, confident, empathetic smile had an immediate calming effect. I made my way gingerly back to room 4 and flopped onto the bed on all fours whilst waiting for the birth pool to fill. The urge to push was increasingly overwhelming and I wasn't sure I could make it over to the pool but with Rob and Valerie's support I climbed in.

Wow. The warm water was incredibly soothing. I settled onto all fours and geared myself up for the next contraction (these were definitely not surges...!). The pushing stage was mind blowing. Despite my best efforts I could not avoid roaring like an Amazonian warrior. It was a very primal reaction. Between contractions, though, I felt absolutely fine and tried to reassure Rob that it probably sounded worse than it was. The lights were dimmed and we were all so relaxed, joking about the concept of orgasmic birth (honestly...). I was able to reach down and feel baby's head (very encouraging) and was absolutely not frightened.

After a bit of burning, Valerie told me to pant and I felt the head being born and then at 7.05pm with one last almighty contraction, he slipped gently into the pool (Rob still encouraging me to pant).

"I did it!" I couldn't believe it. I'd actually had a baby all by myself! Our little man was put onto my tummy by Valerie and there he was. Our little boy! He was utterly calm, beadily looking at Rob and I before finally falling asleep.

We stayed in the pool for what seemed like ages afterwards just watching in awe as our little man got used to his new world. Baby had his first feed whilst we were still in the pool (I've missed breast feeding so much!). Valerie encouraged me to birth the placenta naturally and Rob was given a very informative little talk through the placenta, cord and amniotic sack. He was weighed – 8lb 1oz (so much for a big baby...!) and dressed and then took his first feed before falling back to sleep again.

I returned to the shower room and had a much quieter shower this time, dressed and we were ready to go home!

It took ions to go through the discharge paperwork but we were finally able to leave at 10.30pm. I did toy with the idea of popping into the pub for last orders but Richard's band were playing which I thought might undue all the good work we'd achieved giving him a gentle introduction to the outside world! I went up to Mum and Lou's who both had a cuddle before my brand new baby and I came home. We were tucked up in bed by 1am.

A truly beautiful day.

I can't express how grateful we are to Valerie for all she did to help us achieve our perfect birth. Her calming presence, her genuine passion for her job and her expert knowledge have inspired me to think about retraining as a midwife. She made all the difference and we'll never forget her!