

The Home Birth Of First Time Twins – A Positive Experience

Daniël & I found out we were having twins at week 19. I have never sworn so much in 20 minutes. We soon learnt how naïve and romantically people view having twins 'how lovely' most people would say – I felt awful and incredibly ungrateful with my feelings of shock and horror. How would we cope? How do you pick up two tiny babies at once without their heads falling off? How would we cope financially as I wouldn't be able to work for at least a year?

We soon realised that just as annoying as Jo Public's views were romantic, the NHS' policies and attitudes to twins were shocking – routine intervention, endless scanning, water birthing out of the question, expected epidural and C section 'very likely'. When we started to ask questions about more natural options we were told wonderful things by consultants such as 'if babies were meant to be born under water *dear*, they would be born with gills' and our sixty year old male consultant told us on a number of occasions that 'if [he] was having these babies' a pointless and annoying thing to say. He also let us know that if anything were to go slightly astray from the NHS timed robotic birth plan his staff would "panic" and I would have an emergency section.

Before finding out we were expecting twins Daniël and I had discussed having a home birth. On discovering the multiplicity of our expectations we initially followed obediently (and pretty out of character for both of us) the line that we would not 'be allowed' a home birth. A phrase that we were helped to realise was ridiculous within the first few of our NCT classes. We both had total faith in my body and in nature. My body had decided it was big enough and strong enough to conceive and carry two babies naturally, so therefore I felt certain that I could squeeze them both out, at home, hopefully with no drugs; with the guidance of a wise experienced midwife.

We decided at this point to go with our initial instincts and discuss the situation with an independent midwife. Valerie Gommon was recommended to us, she came round for dinner and for the first time in our pregnancy we discussed our options with a professional practitioner who seemed to use common sense and wisdom rather than fear of litigation. We decided for the safe arrival of our girls, in a relaxed atmosphere where I would feel empowered and in control, £3,500 was worth every penny. To put this into context of our spending this is twice as much as we spent on our car and 35 times what we spent on our wedding. Independent midwives are not just for the rich; we believe the money was well-spent and actually fantastic value for the level of care and amount of time Valerie and her colleagues spent with us.

I was determined to go to full term if only to prove all those know-it-alls that it was possible to go to full term with twins. I had a fantastic pregnancy and worked (gardening, tree work and building fences) up to 34 weeks when it was getting difficult to stand for more than a few minutes and my skin was virtually tearing open across my tummy. By the end of the 36th week my body, the girls, or all three of us decided we had had enough. My lower back had been getting so uncomfortable that in order to get any sleep between my hourly toilet visits through the night I had been using a TENS machine for three nights. I thought this was just the pressure on my back of carrying two strapping girls, little did I know this was actually Elisabeth deciding she was on her way and slowly starting to twist her way down into position.

On Thursday night about 8pm my waters broke. I thought I had wet myself until I realised that I had just come back from the toilet and there was no way that my bladder could hold that much water anymore. We had not finished decorating the house, Daniël was painting skirting boards and I was 'helping'. My mum was due over with a take away and she arrived to find me standing in the doorway just looking confused – I couldn't be in labour I hadn't even made it to 37 weeks. We phoned Valerie who made her way over while mum and Daniël were amazing and transformed the building site that was the living room into a spotless, relaxed, candle lit birthing room complete with double bed deconstructed and bought down stairs!

I spent the next 22 hours or so 'niggling' having very mild and random contractions. My lower back was the centre of the intensity, while Elisabeth continued her spiralling descent into the world. The TENS machine became my best friend over this time. At about 6pm on Friday I went into 'active labour' I had a sudden powerful contraction that left me breathless on my hands and knees. Valerie, who had spent the previous night at our house and under consultation with me, had left me to get on with it in peace with Daniël. I was sure nothing would be happening that day. We phoned her and she came immediately (having just delivered another baby during the day).

The contractions became more regular and continued to get stronger. A month earlier I had been with my sister as she went into labour, I felt really privileged to have been there and felt the labour thing had been somewhat demystified by seeing her in the early stages. She had told me I had nothing to fear and that the feeling of a contraction was just like a strong period pain, and she was right.

Valerie and Daniël set up the pool and I was really keen to get into it, Valerie told me to wait for as long as I could as it would give me greater benefit of relief, this sounded wise. About five minutes later I got in. By about 11pm Valerie phoned Jane Evans, a really experienced and lovely twin midwife who I felt really lucky to be able to have as my second midwife. They did alternate 3-hour shifts of sitting with me and resting upstairs to minimise their presence. In the early hours of the morning I thought I had stopped contracting as I had been sleeping in the pool. Jane handed over to Valerie and I heard her saying 'regular contractions every 5 minutes & starting to vocalise – I had been sleeping through them! I felt really relieved as I thought I had 'gone off the boil' – something that could result in medical intervention.

Daniël took the whole labour in his usual laid back manner and managed to get a lot of sleep, something that I logically fully supported but felt slightly resentful of as time went on. He did get woken up a number of times to change the water from cool back to warm. I started to get really fed up as I felt I'd been contracting away for hours (days in you count the early backache stages) and it felt like nothing was happening.

At one point on Saturday morning Martha's heartbeat went very fast. In hospital this would have resulted in an immediate C-section, however with wise midwives it resulted in me being told to eat something and 20 minutes later her heartbeat was back to normal. Sometime around this time the 3rd midwife called Lynne arrived, I needed three midwives, as we were having two babies, one for each potential patient.

I started to feel really quite negative but didn't want to say anything. I was still very determined to do this at home. At about 10 or 11am I went to poo for what would be the last time. I sat on toilet feeling so tired and fed up of not being able to get on with it that I actually started to think of giving up. 'What is so wrong with having a Caesarean' I heard myself think. I was in transition.

Back in the pool I started to feel like I wanted to push. Valerie said that I would know when it was time to push because I would just have to push. Suddenly I had the urge to vomit and Daniël caught it just in time. My body knew it was about to wring itself out completely so emptied everything. I can remember thinking it really unfair just when you are at your most knackered and at a real low, then to spew too. Thank you nature. But I knew it must have been for a good reason.

Suddenly my body had a huge contraction and I had to push. I felt so relieved that I could push at last. I felt an incredible power on each contraction. I became loudly vocal like a butch Wimbledon finalist. It was involuntary but really helped. I had heard of the sphincter theory and had practised it earlier with snogging Daniël to open up. Now I found this really helped too, so I encouraged myself to open my mouth wide and let it all come out.

Very soon I felt something happening, I could actually feel something between my lips with my hand and was told it was the top of a head, it increased in size from a squashed walnut to a squashed golf ball

with each contraction and then go back a little in between. I really felt like I was getting somewhere at last. The contractions were fast and strong and as each one started I told myself 'you can do this' & thought of generations of women in my family who had given birth naturally.

I felt myself really opening up and said 'I think this is the ring of fire', Valerie, at my head end said 'I don't think you'll feel that yet', but Jane, who had a mirror on the bottom of the pool reflecting up with a torch said 'I think it might be actually.' I wasn't hanging around.

Things were suddenly really moving. Someone told me 'a couple more big contractions & the head will come out, and then another 1 or 2 and the body will follow. Along came the next contraction & I pushed and felt such a power surge through my whole body. I felt a rush of movement & suddenly there was a baby at the bottom of the pool. As I had only been expecting a bit of a head my very intelligent first words were 'oh, it's a whole baby!' Someone told me to pick her up, so I scooped her up, this grey squiggle that looked like a pound of sausages with a pair of big blinking eyes looking up rather astonished. I said 'Hello Gollum' she was covered in vernix and all big eyed.

As it happened so quickly there was a concern for #2 who was breach, she might fall sideways into the gap left behind so I got out of the pool. Elisabeth's cord remained uncut, so I held her while Martha's heartbeat was searched for. My mother in law walked in the back door just at this point and hurriedly left again. Martha's heartbeat was found quite low down so it was decided she was probably head down. We cut Elisabeth's cord (we left it as long as we could to balance out our blood levels). Elisabeth was passed to be held by her dad who was ready with a bare chest for some skin-to-skin loving.

I was worried that I was going to have to go through that whole transition stage again. I really wanted to get on with it. Thankfully almost straight away I had an almighty contraction and wanted to push; so back in the pool and a couple of contractions later I felt something present... a foot... ah.

I had been forewarned that a natural breach birth is best left to gravity, therefore out of the pool and not interfered with. So surprisingly quickly and gracefully, I got out of the pool and made it to an armchair, where on my knees I bent forward and within a few contractions felt feet, legs, & hips come out... then nothing, no contractions. I am pretty sure I had willed the previous contractions to come along strong and fast as there was an air of concern and I was determined not to go to hospital now. But Martha's head was stuck. I had nothing to push on as she was through the birth canal. I could feel immense support behind me from the three midwives urging me to push. I told them I was trying but nothing was happening. Time was ticking, the cord was round Martha's neck and they could see the colour draining from it. The urging escalated until Jane virtually shouted 'just push' to which I replied with equal force 'I can't.' She came back even stronger with 'You can', so I did and Martha came out. Jane had slid her fingers in and released Martha's chin.

I had been told Martha would probably need a bit of help getting going, but was confused to hear 'gin and tonic' being rhythmically chanted behind me. It was Valerie timing the oxygen mask. All was done very calmly and I had total faith in the midwives and Martha that she would breathe, and she did. She was passed back to me through my legs, on a very short cord.

A while later I had the urge to push again and the two placentas flopped out. Jane and Valerie were very pleased with the size and colour of the placentas, saying they were 'very big & very healthy.' In fact we think they were more excited by the placentas than by the babies!

Elisabeth Rose weighed in at 2.88kg @ 1:12pm and Martha Alice 2.68kg @ 1.48pm. Daniël and I lay in bed with our girls while the midwives wrote up their notes and in very high spirits we all tried to figure out the imperial weight conversions. Our mums arrived and did an amazing tidying and cleaning up job of lots and lots of blood and gore. And then we were left alone with our girls to wonder and sleep and squeeze, elated and exhausted and quite amazed that we had done it all at home.

Hannah Thorogood-Bos, August 08, 1 year after the event. That's what having twins does.