

### Emma's story

My daughter was born in April 1994. The contractions started early one morning. I went with my husband to the hospital at about 3 and they had a look, said I was only 1 cm dilated, booked me in and told my husband to go home. He chose to stay. I remember spending most of that evening and night, the contractions coming slowly and steadily, in my hospital room. They gave me something to eat at one point, and my husband fell asleep with his head on the end of the bed. Sometime very early the next morning they transferred me to the labour ward. I was examined again and told I was still only about 2 cms dilated, but nobody said why or whether this was normal or anything. No-one told me anything.

I lost count of how many times I was examined, by various people, but I remember vividly the consultant's examination. I was taken into a separate room to see him by a brusque, unfriendly nurse. She came into the labour ward and told me it was my turn to see the consultant. She said to me: "are you wearing knickers?" and when I said yes, she told me roughly to take them off and keep them off as it would make examinations quicker and easier (for whom?). I said I wanted my husband with me, and she said there wasn't time and there wasn't the space (not true: as it turned out there was space for a whole crowd of people).

I was taken into the consultant's room and helped up onto the dreaded examination chair (there has to be a more humane way to carry out these examinations without that awful, dreadful chair) legs in the air. The consultant hadn't yet arrived. A minute later, he walked in, followed by a flock of other doctors in white coats. No-one spoke to me. No-one asked me if I minded the most intimate parts of my body being utterly and completely exposed to 5 or 6 complete strangers, in a situation of great vulnerability.

I had never met this man before. I think he said good morning, but nothing else. The rest of the time he talked to the other doctors, not to me. He examined me and took a sample of amniotic fluid. I know he did this because I am a reasonably well-read, intelligent human being and I knew this was a standard procedure in the circumstances and I understood what was being done to me. I don't know why he did it. He didn't tell me. He didn't tell me what he was doing. He didn't tell me anything. He didn't speak to me at all, I was just a lump of meat. When he had finished, he and his acolytes left the room without addressing a single word to me. A woman doctor was left and she helped me off the chair. I remember her clearly, an intelligent, kind face with dark hair. I remember the fact that she couldn't look me in the face and that she said sorry to me. I felt utterly violated.

I was taken back to the labour room. I remember walking around for a bit, the pain steadily getting worse and worse. I remember trying to do things to help the pain, following all the techniques I had been taught. Nothing helped, it just went on and on and got worse. At some point I was taken back to the examination room and they broke my waters. Still no-one told me anything, why it was taking so long, why wasn't I dilating as normal. Other babies were being born to women who had been admitted long after me. Why wasn't my baby coming?

After this, they put me on an oxytocin drip. I know it was oxytocin because I found out afterwards. The same brusque nurse arrived with the drip: I asked her what she was doing and she said I had to have it to make the contractions stronger. She didn't tell me anything else. She didn't explain the side-effects or that it would make the pain considerably worse. I had no pain relief at any stage. At all. Not even gas and air.

After that, things get a little blurred. I couldn't move around any more. They put me on a glucose drip after a while, as I was so tired, and strapped on monitors. I disappeared into a black abyss of pain: in my head I was screaming, "help me, please someone help me, I can't do this anymore" but I said nothing out loud, because you just don't, do you? None of the doctors seemed to be behaving as if anything unusual

was happening, so who was I to make a fuss? Everyone said childbirth was tough, so maybe this was all normal. Anyway, what child? I neither knew nor cared about any baby by now, I just wanted the pain to stop.

Sometime late in the afternoon, my baby's heartbeat started to waver (again, I know this now, but was told nothing at the time). I remember a doctor looking at a print-out from the monitor, then calling in another doctor, who took one look and said "caesarian, now". I remember hearing the words and thinking "thank you, thank you" because I knew I had reached my limits. I had been in labour for over 36 hours, with no pain relief, and could stand no more. Someone apologised to my husband. Not to me. No-one said anything to me.

Suddenly the room was full of people in green. Someone pulled up my nightdress and began to give me an enema. Someone was shaving me with cold water. Someone was trying to get me to sign a form because at the time my husband and I were not married so I had to give my consent to the operation! There was a sense of urgency. Someone put me on a trolley – the enema kicked in, which was horrible and humiliating. The contractions were coming every couple of minutes by this stage. I remember a nice anaesthetist, looking down at me and telling me it would all soon be over. I remember a nice midwife, holding my hand simply to give me comfort. I remember my husband saying goodbye. I remember being completely terrified.

They took me into the operating theatre. They put me on the cold, hard table with that notorious circle of lights above your head. They strapped me down. **THEY STRAPPED ME DOWN.**

I thought for one brief moment "I might die now, I really might die" and asked God to protect me. And then finally they put me to sleep. When I woke up, a nurse was saying to me "you have a lovely baby daughter". I didn't care. I didn't care at all. All I knew was that it still hurt, there was still pain, it was supposed to be over and they had lied to me.

I finally saw my daughter sixteen hours later, the following morning. Someone brought her into the room, dumped her on my bed and said "there you are" and left me. My first meeting with my daughter. What is supposed to be one of the most joyous moments of your life.

Very funny.

Four months later, when I was physically healed, the symptoms of PTSD began. Although I was very lucky and got the right help to recover, telling this story again, ten years later, still leaves me shaking and in tears. I will do anything I can to ensure that no woman ever has to go through what I went through. I have, by the way, a beautiful, intelligent, loving daughter with whom I have a wonderful relationship.