

## THE BIRTH I HAD

This is my experience giving birth to my first child. The pregnancy was planned and although I went to all the antenatal sessions and the childbirth education sessions available, nothing had prepared me physically or mentally for what lay ahead. The reality is that birth is traumatic for the mother and the romanticised perception that the sessions portray is just a façade.

Conceiving was the easy part and the pregnancy wasn't much different apart from some stress due to a low lying placenta, (which later corrected itself) and gestational diabetes. I was due to give birth on 25 October 2006, but nothing happened, so the obstetrician discussed inducing me on 31 October 2006. My husband and I agreed. I went into hospital the night before and the morning of the 31st at 8.45am I was induced. My waters were broken and I subsequently requested an epidural, it was inserted and ready to go for when I required pain relief. The contractions were getting stronger by the hour in response to the drip being increased. At 10.00 am the contractions were getting even stronger, so I asked for some pain relief. From then on I felt no pain and went to rest on the bed.

I had lunch and later that afternoon the obstetrician came to check on what progress I had made. I hadn't urinated since 10.00am. To prevent any bladder damage occurring during the delivery I needed to empty my bladder. I didn't have any urge to go to the toilet, so a catheter was inserted to relieve the pressure. At 5.00pm I had dilated 9cm and by 5.30pm I had dilated to 10cm. At 5.45pm the obstetrician asked me to stop using the epidural so that I could feel the contractions and push. As I felt the contractions, I pushed and pushed but not much was happening. The obstetrician must have suspected that I needed assistance and mentioned that she may need to use the ventouse to assist the delivery. I continued pushing for nearly 2 hours and still the baby had not crowned. The obstetrician opened my vagina (with her fingers, I think) and could see the baby had black hair. I was past the point of having a caesarean as an option.

The ventouse was tried but failed. I then saw the forceps come out and my heart sank to the bottom of my chest. I feared the worst and what made it even worse was that I had lost control of the situation. How could this happen to me? I then felt the pressure of the episiotomy, (I still had substantial pain relief) and forceps tightly forcing my baby out. I felt mainly pulling. At this point I had lost total control and in disbelief, tears built up in my eyes. I was **shocked**. My daughter was pulled out at 8.17pm. Her umbilical cord was wrapped around her chest and under her armpits making her shoulders too wide to give birth. She was purple, but as she inhaled oxygen her colour changed to normal. I received stitches while I had my daughter on me. The midwife put my daughter on my breast to feed. It was extremely painful.

Only a woman who has previously breastfed unsuccessfully would understand the pain. I continued to breastfeed regardless of the pain, as I wanted what was best for my daughter. She would feed but not for long as she would get tired very quickly. On day two she was diagnosed with jaundice and was transferred to the nursery to receive treatment. I was devastated and cried for sometime. My husband was very supportive but I felt horrible that this was happening to me. It was difficult enough to deal with the birth, let alone deal with this. I continued to breastfeed but the pain was having a psychological effect on me. I became very anxious and dreaded the phone calls from the nursery advising that my daughter was hungry and needed to be fed. My nipples would instantly feel the pain. They became cracked and were

bleeding. The paediatrician ordered I give my nipples a rest for a couple of days. So I expressed my milk.

It was day 5 now and I was still in hospital. I was feeling very isolated, anxious, sleep deprived and stressed about the breastfeeding. The paediatrician asked if there was any pressure for me to return home. I wasn't going to return to work and had no one at home, so I decided to stay in hospital (BIG MISTAKE) until I was confident that my daughter was healthy and I could master the art of breastfeeding.

The hospital lactation consultant assisted me for two days and breastfeeding was still not successful. As the days went by I became more sleep deprived and my mental health was deteriorating. I would cry day and night and tell anyone who entered my room that I didn't want to breast feed anymore. The nurses thought my crying was due to the baby blues. On the 9th night I had had enough of being in hospital. I realised that no one in the hospital was going to assess and acknowledge my situation and provide me with the option to formula feed. Once I made the decision to leave the hospital I felt instant relief but the biggest relief came when I came to terms with the fact that breastfeeding had not worked and wasn't going to work. I no longer cared about anything apart from getting my daughter and myself out of hospital.

To my husband's surprise two midwives acknowledged that they were glad I had made the decision and that they could see that I was having difficulties but couldn't say anything until I (the parent) had made a decision. A midwife explained to me that the hospital had a Babyfriendly Hospital Initiative policy that was launched by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation in 1991.

Unaware of what this policy meant I did my own research and found that the policy involves 'The "ten steps" to successful breastfeeding. I was **shocked** when I read Step 6. Step 6. Give newborn infants no food or drink unless "medically" indicated. **No promotion of formula milks.** If breastfeeding is unsuccessful, what happens then?

As a first time mother I had no idea that there could be problems with breastfeeding. Being unsuccessful at it has broken my heart. But what infuriates me is the inflexibility of the policy. I believe that circumstances should take priority over policy. In situations where hospital staff can see there is difficulty with breastfeeding the option to formula feed should be discussed openly with the mother. Not long after I got home, I felt isolated again, sleep deprived, claustrophobic and couldn't cope with my daughter's crying. I would leave the house in the evening for a break, after my husband returned from work, and found myself not wanting to return home. I would force myself to return home. This happened on several occasions.

I went to my obstetrician with my husband and explained the situation; I was diagnosed with depression and put on medication. I am on my way to recovery, (I have a lot of healing to do) and am managing matters much better.