

## Grace's story

My son is now 15 years old and I can still remember as if it were yesterday the full horror of his 'natural' birth. I had suffered high blood pressure throughout the pregnancy. I was in hospital under observation a week before my due date. The doctors decided to induce me on my due date.

I was given syntocinon intravenously to induce labour, trussed up like a chicken with an intravenous drip on one hand and linked to an automatic blood pressure monitor that inflated every 5 minutes and hurt like hell as well as a foetal monitor. I experienced full-strength contractions from then on. I was not warned that this would happen and not supported by any member of staff. The midwife was not interested in helping me use a tens machine and as a result I could not cope with the pain and asked for a shot of pethidine. My hospital did not give epidurals. After full-strength contractions for something approaching 6 hours and only gas and air for pain relief, I was ready to push. I was utterly exhausted and after 2 hours of pushing I was ready and willing to die. I had overdosed by this time on gas and air. I was unable to think or talk coherently.

A doctor was called and forceps used to assist the delivery. I was also given an episiotomy. When my healthy 8 pound 4 ounce son was born (so much for high blood pressure and small babies) it was discovered that an artery had been severed during the episiotomy. Blood spurted out in time with my heartbeat! The doctor in attendance began to stitch me up without any anaesthetic. I was so beffuddled with gas and air I could not form any words to tell her the excruciating pain I was in but instead tried to grab her hand. She told me bluntly that she had to stitch me. I bit my own hand so hard to stop me screaming in agony that I drew blood. I wanted and hoped to die and was pleased when I passed out.

The whole scene has haunted me ever since. I was violated and betrayed. I was treated like a piece of meat and damn nearly killed. I had to have a 3/4 unit blood transfusion. The pupils (not the whites) of my eyes were full up with blood from 'pushing' when I awoke after the delivery and I could not see straight for days. I was in full shock. I re-lived the whole process in my dreams and when awake for many years.

The worse aspect of it all is that no one has ever truly understood the effect this awful experience has had on me. My husband has never been able to acknowledge that he failed me by having to leave the delivery room when it resembled a butchers shop as he could not cope. I also wrote to the hospital to ask for my notes to try and understand what actually had happened but they replied saying I could not have them (this was in 1990).

When I thought I might be pregnant again, when my son was 3 months old, I was horrified and determined to have an abortion rather than go through with childbirth again. I have only got one child - I could not ever face the prospect to childbirth again.

I would be only too pleased to support your research in the hope that other women truly have choice in the way they give birth. What would have helped?

- Members of staff who knew me - they all treated me like an incompetent imbecile
- Not being forced to endure the whole process flat on my back linked up to machines that delivered measured amounts of torture!
- Anaesthetic to numb the pain of being stitched!
- Epidurals
- A female to support me (political correctness says husbands should be present, mine was there in body only, he could not empathise with me and was of no support)
- I have only managed to come through all this with my marriage of 27 years intact because I have shoved the whole degrading, undignified, horrific experience to the back of my mind. I still cry when soap operas like Holby City show childbirth sequences.

Above all I feel cheated of an experience that should have enriched my life but instead left me vulnerable and traumatised.