

I gave birth in 2009 to my first child. I was anxious about the delivery but had a realistic approach and trusted the professionals around me implicitly. Three weeks after the due date, with the baby still not engaged, I was booked in for an induction. The first stage began with a hormone pessary and the long wait began.. Later that night after intermittent heart monitoring and other checks I lay on my back strapped to the monitoring machine, listening to the race and slump of my babies heart- the nurses were keen to keep checking on the fluctuating heartbeat, but were not overly concerned. I had a sense, however, things were not right.

The next morning a midwife came and gave me an internal examination. It was incredibly painful and without warning. She couldn't find the pessary and forced her finger through my cervix. I howled and squirmed away from her. She was angry that it wasn't there any more, halting the induction process. Somehow it had come out and she told me off as if I were a child. I was shocked at her aggressive approach, but felt unable to complain.

Another midwife escorted me to the delivery suite. She attempted to break my water with a plastic implement; she took great pleasure in showing me the sharp, knife like tool, then joking that she had no idea if it had worked. I felt ashamed and afraid, having to cope with yet another person putting things inside me. I heard a woman next door whose screams were terrifying. 'Has that woman had pain relief?' I asked the midwife and she replied, 'They all scream, that will be you in a minute'. Fantastic, I thought, so this is how it is going to be? I'm going to need all my strength to get through this.

The midwife rowed with the registrar, whom she called 'the butcher', and rolled her eyes at me when indeed she failed to reach a vein with a needle and blood seeped onto the bed sheet. I was eventually hooked up to the hormone drip and soon very fast and painful contractions began. I started to use gas and air, it made me vomit and didn't take away the pain, but it was a helpful distraction. The pains continued. I kept as calm as I could. My partner arrived and was horrified to see me strapped to the heart monitor on my back unable to move, covered in vomit. We were left alone with the constant thrum of our baby's heart speeding and slowing, not knowing if we should be panicking. The hormone was reduced and increased to try and keep the baby's heart rate stable, the pain increasing to levels I can not put into words. How can women do this without pain relief? I wondered. I am a wimp, a failure.

A new midwife came on shift at 1pm. She was friendly and kind. She didn't judge me when I asked for further pain relief. She remembered my name and helped change my nightie. I had pethadine and then had to ask for an epidural. This was arranged quickly. I can not explain the relief the epidural brought. I knew I could not mentally or physically bear the pains of labour any further; I had gone beyond my limit. My baby's heart beat continued to race then stall. I vomited often and every time it seemed to stop the heartbeat. I was so tired. I knew deep down I would not be able to give birth to this baby 'naturally'. Doctors came and went, they talked about a 'lack of progress', after 16 hours of labour I had was only a few centimetres dilated. My midwife praised me and held my hand. I was sad when her shift had finished.

A consultant needed to test the baby for distress. My numb heavy legs were lumped onto some rests and a large plastic tube was inserted inside my vagina, a knife was guided up and nicked the scalp of my baby and some blood was taken. I felt humiliated being so exposed and unable to move. I was completely out of control. I could not cover myself; I could not protect my baby. More time passed. No one would tell us what was wrong. My partner came and went, catching rows between the

midwives and doctors outside. The midwives were keen to get the baby out, but the doctors wanted to wait.

By this time I believe I was in shock. I passively accepted these further tests to extract my baby's blood on the hour every hour for the next 8 hours. No one explained what was happening. The heart beat monitor beeped fast then slow then stopped then would start up again. I began to feel very unwell. At this stage I had no energy, no will to fight or continue, I didn't care if I died or my baby died. I just wanted it to stop. My partner tried to ask for help, that I was too tired to continue, I could never push this baby out after so long. He demanded to be told what was happening, but no one was available or able to explain why we had waited so long. He was beginning to panic. I did not care at this point, I had no idea where I was or what was happening. I would have willingly died.

Another 9 hours went by with more tests on my baby, more exposure, but no information. I was told I was on a waiting list for a caesarean. Suddenly in the late evening my blood pressure dropped and it became evident that the baby was in danger. I was taken down to theatre. The anaesthetist discovered that the epidural needle had come out, and the midwife whispered to him it was my fault. I had a spinal injection. I remember the feel of the anaesthetic reaching the bottom of my lungs and panicking that I couldn't breathe then a series of tugs. My daughter was born at one minute past midnight as I vomited emerald green bile over myself. I didn't care about the baby. I felt like an animal, I just wanted to survive.

On the recovery ward things got worse in terms of our care. The first people to see me were not medical staff as I thought but representatives from photographic companies and baby clubs. I had lost a lot of blood (although I wasn't told at this point); I couldn't breast feed and no one would show me how or explain why no milk came. I wanted to sleep but my baby cried all night with hunger. Staff were not available to empty my catheter which leaked all over the bed, or to bring me food. I was in pain and shell shocked and felt very unsafe. Visitors came and were horrified at how I looked. Some midwives were kind, others were not. One chided me for dripping blood onto the floor as I attempted to shuffle to the toilet to empty my own catheter bag. I felt humiliated. One stated I had been given an injection of medication when I hadn't. I often had to ask for painkillers. I deteriorated to the stage where I could not distinguish dreams from reality. To protect myself I knew I had to pretend to be well so I could get myself and my baby out of there and to safety, I had to just get out of there. I was let out within 2 days. I hadn't slept since I was first admitted.

I was unwell after. The caesarean scar heals, but my mental health was poor. I knew I had to pretend that having a baby was the best thing that had ever happened to me. How can a woman say it was the worst experience of her life, a mistake, a disaster? I had constant flashbacks, obsessive thoughts. I did not love my baby, I did not recognise her. I looked after her robotically without genuine love or feeling. Health visitors came and went. I was in tears but pretending everything was ok. I did not trust these women. They did not help me, even when their ridiculous questionnaire showed Post Natal Depression. I eventually ask for help from a friendly Dr when I am desperate and plan suicide six months later. She gives me medication which takes the edge off. I waited 8 months before I was offered 4 short sessions of CBT. Another Dr told me not to have any more babies. There was no help or support. Nobody would talk to me about it. 'Get over it', 'You are both fine and well'. 'Don't dwell, it's all in the past'. 'Draw a line under it now'.

I wanted to be a good mum. I couldn't let my daughter suffer and I wanted to regain my life, so I did some research. I found the Birth Trauma Trust and saw that I am not alone. I wrote to the hospital and paid £50 for my notes; I try and take some power back. I complain to the PCT; I read research. Soon I felt able to speak to a counsellor. She allowed me to talk about what happened for the first time in 2 years and work through the effects having a traumatic birth had on me.

Now I have moved forward, I am no longer in fear or controlled by what had happened to me. I do not blame myself for the traumatic birth and can look at my daughter with love and without guilt knowing that I am a good mum and I feel proud of myself for how far I have come. I want to fight for services for women with PND and PSD which do not exist in my county and let other women know they are not alone.