

Karen's story

My life was completely altered after the birth of my daughter Lisa and I do not envisage that ever changing.

Lisa was born after Prostin gel induction. When originally given the gel, I did not go into labour, but suffered terrible pain for which I was denied pain relief, simply because I wasn't significantly dilated. I was insulted and left, humiliated and sobbing with pain on a general antenatal ward. It was very public and very humiliating to be in such a state in front of people who did not know me, could not comfort me, and probably thought I was being ridiculous! My community midwife came onto the ward and was horrified at the terrible pain I'd been left in. She knew me well enough to realise that I wouldn't make a fuss unless I was genuinely suffering. She gave me pethidene immediately and apologised for the callous behaviour of her hospital based colleagues. When the drug wore off, I did go into 'proper' labour. Lisa's birth was precipitate, and followed a really powerful and extremely fast, second stage of labour.

It was hideously, indescribably painful, but, when asked for help I was told not be ridiculous and called stupid. Lisa was delivered as I was sat in a moving wheelchair, and landed, at great speed, on the floor, hitting her head with extreme force. The violence with which she was born caused her to travel so far from me that the traction on the umbilical cord partially abrupted the placenta, causing in turn a post partum haemorrhage. Lisa took just one tiny gasping breath as she hit the floor, and I begged for them to help her. Instead, the auxiliary pushing me hit her with the wheelchair footplates whilst the midwife ahead of me called me 'ridiculous'. Lisa was, after several minutes on the floor, eventually rescued and passed to me, spending several further minutes blue and lifeless in my arms until taken from me for resuscitation. I estimated that the time taken to resuscitate her was in excess of half an hour (not good), during which time she received the attention of two midwives, one auxiliary and two paediatric staff. She was then transferred to SCBU, where, along with other treatment, she was tube fed against my wishes and given oxygen.

Lisa suffered many injuries. The side of her head that was in collision with the floor suffered extreme bruising and immense swelling. Her face was cut in several places – gashes were visible on her forehead, her nose, both her lips, and her chin. This was due to the collision with the (still moving) wheelchair footplates as she lay with her head to one side on the floor. Yes, that's right - they ran her over.

No-one would listen to me. All my pleas for help, first for myself, and then for my stricken and dying baby on the floor, were met with scorn, insult and abuse. If it had not actually happened to me, I would never believe it, and I am sure that there are many who hear my story who think I am some kind of psychotic lying nutter!! That hurts - one thing I crave is acceptance and understanding of what I went through that night

I made a complaint about what happened to us and some awful, dreadful things were done to me to stop me making what had happened public. The complaint was

overwhelmingly upheld at tribunal, but, in the end, the midwife concerned got away with what she did and yet we continue to suffer. She was not struck off - the profession's regulatory board's legal process was abandoned at the last minute with no explanation as to why. She carried on working at that hospital and she never expressed one iota of remorse. The whole thing, so many years on, remains distressing and disgusting.

My life will never be the same and the worst of it is that I can't quite shake off my own guilt. If only I had refused to get in that wheelchair. Initially, I did refuse, but they bullied me into it even though I knew the baby was coming - well, you do, don't you?! With hindsight, I cannot adequately explain why I did as I was told (it's not normally in my nature to) except to say that I was in terrible, terrible pain, scared out of my wits, and had no-one else to trust.

I'm not the only woman to suffer this kind of abuse in childbirth - that much I know for sure. I dread the day I hear that a baby has died because her mother was not listened to. I cannot watch birth scenes on television. I feel compelled to talk to other mothers about their choices and the dangers of induction (which I have thoroughly researched). I am receiving long term counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy to help me come to terms with the terrible injustice that left my daughter brain damaged. I will never be the woman that I once was and my daughter will never have the chance to be the woman she ought to have been.