

## Krystle's Story

With the birth of my first child in July 2005 came some unplanned trauma. I began to go into labour at 11.00am on 06/07/05, it was strange how the pains came on, almost like period pangs to start with. By lunchtime the pains just consumed me! My midwife came to check on me and said that I was several cm dilated and to take my time and get to the hospital in a couple of hours and ring to let them know I was on my way.

I arrived at the hospital to be greeted by my dream team of midwives, B and K, we had met before and it just happened to be their day on call. After doing the usual checks they took me down to the labour ward where I spent the next couple of hours resting over the back of the bed. This was the most comfy position for me at the time.

B was filling the pool, when K realised that the liner we were using was the wrong one and they had to empty and re-fill it using the correct liner. I was gagging to get into the water, I was supping on gas and air quite merrily but wanted my water birth experience to start as I had heard that this would help my labour pains. During my labour, I was encouraged to get out of the water to use the loo and walk about as it is supposed to help things along. I hated getting out of the water, it was just so comfy! Mark stayed with me the whole time, except to go and have some dinner with my mum. I used Mark to lean on and into, he was a great prop. I didn't eat during labour although I did drink, essential if you are in water as you don't notice how much you sweat or dehydrate as much as you might on dry land.

There was a debate as to whether my baby would arrive before or after midnight. My own midwife arrived at the hospital to see me at around 11pm (a really nice surprise). I was internally examined at 1.45am, only to find out that we were 9cm dilated, knowing that when you get to 10 you give a good hard push, I thought things would be imminent. I got out of the pool at various stages during my labour and had vomited a couple of times while I was out of the pool, not sure if that was the gas and air or just labour. We were not sure exactly when my waters broke either and I guess not every woman has a huge gush, that feeling of wetting yourself is not easy to detect when you are in water.

At 3.30am I had another internal examination and I was still only 9cm dilated, this time we decided to get out of the water and try a syntocinon infusion to get the contractions to speed up but this meant no more birthing pool for me.

I was disappointed as everything was so tranquil and calm in the pool, I was so relaxed (perhaps too relaxed), the other midwives went home to bed and K stayed with us to see the labour through to the end. Contractions started to come faster, about every 15 minutes but I still had no urge to push. By 6am I was still no further on and K told me that she would need to call the obstetrician to examine me with a view to having a caesarean. I was exhausted and just wanted my baby and I to be safe.

The Doctor arrived at 6.30 and decided that the best course of action would be to go for a c-section. I was taken down for my spinal injection (not the nicest experience and I just couldn't believe that I was not going to feel anything. The anaesthetist was very good and attentive. Mark joined me and after some fidgeting and pulling, my baby boy was out in the big wide world. Mark and I looked at each-other and waited to hear his cry, it

came and K brought him over for skin to skin contact. He was the most beautiful little man I had ever seen and it brought tears of joy, relief and exhaustion flooding to my eyes. I asked for a look at the placenta and it was, to my amazement really big. I had seen them on the telly but I suppose things always look different when you see them for real.

The whole experience was fantastic and had been going so smoothly, but after about 21 hours of labour and my son deciding he was far too comfy, he arrived. It was great to be wide-awake to see my little man being brought into the world with my husband by my side.

I found myself in the recovery suite alone with a nurse, it all felt very strange and I was a little confused as to why my baby was not with me. I didn't want him out of my sight, had I actually had a baby?

After recovery I was taken back to the ward, where my new family greeted me. Baby had his first feed from mummy and he took to it like a duck to water. Shortly afterwards, my husband and mother left to get some rest, well deserved as it had been a very long wait.

My son and I began to relax together but I began to feel quite warm, a doctor was called as my blood pressure was dropping. Mark was hard to get hold of as he was sleeping, but he was soon on his way back to the hospital. My bp was 80/50 then 70/55, they scanned my tummy and transferred me back to the labour ward. I was prepared for theatre, where they would deal with an internal bleed.

Mark arrived back at the hospital (with mum close behind him) just as the doctors prepared me for theatre and I had signed the consent form. By this time I was shaking violently and looked as white as snow. Mark looked so scared and worried for me. As they asked me to sign the consent form, all I could think about was what was this woman saying to me, does that really look like my signature, no it doesn't!?! I remember looking at Mark and thinking to myself was I going to see my husband and baby again? I later found out that Mark was thinking the same about me.

I can't explain the despair that I felt about leaving my husband to go under the general anaesthetic and under the knife for a second time in only a matter of hours.

I needed a blood transfusion with 10 units of blood and 2 units of fresh frozen plasma (3,500ltrs loss), needless to say I was not very 'with it' when I returned to the ward. My son had refused milk in a cup from daddy, so as soon as they could, the midwives brought him to me for his second feed. It would take longer for my milk to come through because of the trauma. I spent eight days in hospital and during that time the support from the midwives with the breast-feeding was fantastic, especially from BM. BM took extra special time with my son and I to make sure we were both comfortable with positions and my son latching on to my nipple.

This was really important for me, as I wanted to feel confident on my return home. Support was not going to be throwing itself at me, my mum would be going home and my hubby returning to work.

I had a not so pleasant experience with one midwife, well several incidents in fact. She had a big chip on her shoulder about working nights. She made it painfully obvious that she did not like working the night shift

and that she could never get to sleep after she got home. She knew I had a needle phobia and she came at me one night when I was half way into the toilet to use the loo and stabbed me in the arm with an anti-clotting jab. She was in a hurry and that was all that mattered! Never mind about the fact that I could hardly move, she just took advantage of that. I understand that she was busy but she could have just been nicer about it and explained that to me. The big bug bear was the time when my son was really restless one night and a lovely midwife came in and offered to take him to the nursery for me and settle him so I could get some rest (he wanted boob constantly!).

I was just nodding off when this midwife in question just steamed in with him screaming the hospital down. "He needs feeding!" she said, he had just been fed and fed and fed. I had both sides of the bed up and the table was wedged at the end of my bed, I sat myself up in my soopa doopa electric bed and asked her if she could give me a hand. When I turned round in my sitting upright position she had already left the room. I was miffed to say the least! I managed somehow to wiggle down the bed and get the table out of the way (it was stuck under the bed) and get out to my son. I tried to calm him and when I did I just cried and cried. I managed to call Mark with my phone card, I balled at him, unfair I know as he was working and there was nothing he could have done. I went to the nurses station and asked for more pain relief. While I was there I asked for the name of the midwife who had come in and made me feel that way and went back to my room. I sobbed some more but composed myself just in time for the drug administering midwife to come in and asked me if there was a problem? "Yes there f\*c\*ing is I replied and balled some more. I really let rip at this poor woman! She asked me if I wanted to talk to this lady and sort it out, I said I didn't want to see her again, that I would just lump her on if I did. After that night I decided to complain as I didn't want anyone else to go through the same thing, it made me feel better any way. I have spoken to several people who have also had nasty experiences with some midwives, including my horror.

I guess we can't all get on but I always thought that I did my best to be nice and kind to everyone and I am angry that she provoked such an uncharacteristic emotion in me. Hormones I hear you say!

It was nice and easy to feed at home, we both found the rugby ball position the most comfortable as he didn't sit on my wound when feeding and I could prop him up on lots of pillows.

My health visitor was just great, she got me involved with Sure Starts Home Start and got me some support in my own home. I thought it would be hard to accept help but it was not as difficult as I thought, I had to recover for my son. I met two wonderful ladies who visited me several times a week until I got onto my feet and felt more independent again. They offered me great advice, help and friendship, which I hope will continue for a long time.

In the first few weeks of feeding I suffered a lot of pain and discovered I had a milk blister. Feeding became so painful that I thought I would have to stop. With some stubbornness, internet searching and talking to a La Leche counsellor, I found other options to try first. I found that if I kept my nipple moist, soft and kept feeding, that eventually it just opened up of its own accord. I have not had any problems since and I am so glad I did not give up at this point. I was advised to try feeding off one side and expressing the sore side but it was just such a hassle that my stubbornness kicked in and I just kept on feeding through the pain. Thank goodness for Lansinoh!

When I went out and about I used a ring sling which made feeding in public very discreet. Family and friends were very impressed, especially the older generation. No one batted an eyelid.

I was worried about the cross over from breast to solids. It was an emotional time for me as he was so reliant on me feeding him. I realised that I had nothing to worry about, it is such a fun time that we can enjoy as a family. My nights are still not my own but it does get easier, even if it doesn't feel like it at the time, I just have to relax about my expectations for his development.

I had decided to look into milk donation for the premature babies at a local milk bank as a friend had mentioned it and I thought it would be a great thing to do. I rang the number I had found on the internet and they talked me through how it all works. I was told that the main criteria was that I did not smoke and that I had never had a blood transfusion. That blew me out of the picture and I can't say I was not gutted. I had a good chat though and said that I would try promoting their good work and see if I could recruit anyone who could donate. I introduced a friend and she is still donating milk some 3 months on and still going strong.

I can't say that there have not been times when I nearly threw in the towel and went to try bottles, but I am so glad that I persevered. It has been the one thing that I had always wanted to be a success at. What a fantastic natural thing to be able to do for my baby and so much easier than bottles. Ups and downs, pleasure and pain, I wouldn't change any of it for the world and would do it all over again tomorrow.

I wish anyone who is considering feeding their baby in this very special way to give it a go and just do the best you can. Something is better than nothing where our babies are concerned.

Aside all of my experiences with the caesarean and the trauma of the internal bleed that followed, I would recommend the labouring in water to everyone it was the most amazing experience of my life. Every day our son does something new to amaze us and it is just such a rewarding time in my life, I think I would like to do it all over again! Although I do hope things will be easier and not so scary next time. I will never forget this special time with my little man, he is growing up so very fast and I will treasure every moment we have together.