

Anne's Story

My birth story has a whole episode of events leading up to my son's birth, and I will do my best to keep this story as short as possible, without leaving out important information.

I believed from the beginning of my pregnancy that I would need a caesarean section birth. My family history is caesareans - my Mother had three caesareans, and both my older Sister and Twin Sister have had two caesareans. We are all small framed. After discussing my concerns with my Community Midwife she put me under the joint care of a Consultant and a Midwife.

My pregnancy was trouble free, with no worries or problems encountered. Throughout the nine months, every health professional that saw me (Midwife, Consultant, Scanographer etc) said that the baby was big. My Community Midwife, from feeling my stomach, felt the baby was very large, so referred me for a sizing scan at 35 weeks. Surprising to us all, this scan showed the baby to be an average size, and the Scanographer predicted a baby size of 7-7.5lbs born. I had a discussion with a member of the Consultant's team and it was decided that I would try for a natural birth, but would want it very clear from the outset that I did not want to be trying for hours, and if progress was slow I wanted to be offered a caesarean earlier rather than later.

My due date passed with no sign of baby! The following week my Community Midwife conducted a membrane sweep to see if it would move things along a bit - this was pretty painful! On Monday, (nine days later) I was booked into hospital for induction.

The induction process was extremely degrading - consisting of an internal examination, monitoring the baby's heartbeat and movement for 15 minutes, inserting the induction gel, further monitoring of the baby's heartbeat and movement for a further 45 minutes and then 'getting mobile' (walking) to help the baby move downwards, followed by a further internal examination after 4 or 5 hours to assess the progress.

On the Monday, I had two lots of induction gel. I had pains, which I thought were contractions (although being my first baby I did not know) but internal examinations showed little progress. After the second lot of induction gel (by this time late evening), when they did an internal examination, it was thought that the gel was finally taking effect. However, by the early hours of the morning, the hospital staff said it was going to be a slow process so they sent my husband home and I tried to sleep to keep up my strength.

I woke the following morning (having had very little sleep), with no progress and no contraction pains. At this point I felt very low, bruised and battered down below, tearful, exhausted and scared. At every examination I had been told the baby was very big and hardly had room to move.

I had one further lot of induction gel inserted, and by mid afternoon on Tuesday, I was 3.5cm dilated. In order to speed the process up I was transferred to the Labour Suite where a Labour Midwife monitored the baby's heartbeat for half an hour, then broke my waters (extremely early at only 3.5cm dilated). Having my waters broken was a very painful experience, and seemed to take an age. It felt like a knitting needle inside me.

Over these two days, I had had several internal examinations by various Midwives. I felt as though my body was not my own and that another Midwife was soon to be "shoving their hand up" - sorry it sounds blunt but that is how I felt.

I then had to get mobile to help the baby move downwards. I was getting contractions at this point. The only pain relief I was having at this time was the TENS Machine. I was having continued baths, with warm water on my stomach and also walking around.

The Labour Midwife called us back into the Labour Room to tell us that the one anaesthetist that covered the whole hospital (Maternity, Intensive Care and Accident & Emergency) was off sick, so I could not be offered any higher pain relief than the Pethidine injection (i.e. no epidural and no caesarean).

This threw both my husband and I into complete turmoil - we both firmly believed that the very least I would need would be the epidural. It crossed my mind at that point that women do die during child birth - sounds totally over the top after the event, but nothing was in perspective and I was absolutely petrified. It was too late to go back, we had no choice but to carry on, but we were both emotionally drained, exhausted physically and terrified at the unknown.

The Labour Midwife did her best to allay our fears and convince us that I could do it without an epidural or caesarean. After all, she had no other option but to try to convince us of that, even though I do not believe she thought it herself. She suggested that after the event, although it wouldn't help me now, I could write a letter of complaint at the fact that no anaesthetist was available!!

Half an hour later she came back to us and told us that an anaesthetist is available after all as they had got one to cover the shift!!! All that worry and anxiety for no reason!

She suggested that I might benefit from a Pethidine injection to help my muscles relax and dilate quicker. I expressed concern that I knew Pethidine caused sickness and I was already feeling sick. Because of this she gave me an anti-sickness injection, a Pethidine injection and a paracetamol because my temperature was up.

Within what seemed like half an hour I was very very violently sick - so much so I was covered in it - I was lifting off the bed whilst being sick. My husband called for help, and the Labour Midwife came back in (she had gone off to write notes). She cleaned me up and then tried to find the baby's heartbeat. She couldn't find it. She was all over my stomach telling me to "lye on your side, lye on your side Anne" while trying to find the heartbeat.

She could not find it, so pressed an emergency button in my room. At that point alarm bells were going off in my room and 10 people swooped in on our room all doing different things to me - talking to each other, across my husband and I. We were both petrified.

After what seemed like ages, a man came into my room, asked various questions and I had to sign a form of consent, and they rushed my bed to theatre - it was hitting the walls on the way. They would not tell me at that point if they were knocking me out or not, I desperately wanted to be knocked out, not to know what was going on.

I was rushed into theatre where there were another 10 or so people all gowned up and ready to go. They were all doing different things to me, talking to each other across me. I was eventually knocked out and that was that. I didn't know at that point whether my baby was alive or not - they had not found his heartbeat.

I woke up in the Recovery Room where my husband told me that we had a baby boy, and he was in Special Care. My son was very distressed, he scored 6 on the apgar scale. His breathing was very fast, he was very irritable and didn't want to be handled. He wasn't fully oxygenated, so was on oxygen.

While I was cleaned up my husband went to see our son in Special Care. My husband and I then spent a few minutes alone before they wheeled my bed down to Special Care to see my son. They wheeled his incubator to the door and I looked in at him. I felt no bond - it was just a case of this is your baby - it could have been anyone's baby. The nurses were standing around us while we looked at him. I saw him for a few minutes before I had to be transferred to the Ward and my husband was sent home as it was the early hours of the morning.

My son was in Special Care for two days, on antibiotics and paracetamol. He came to me on the Ward on two days later.

I feel very sad that I don't remember the first time I saw, held or fed my son. My first born baby and it was such a terrifying experience.

My son does have a squint in both eyes - it is very likely that the cause of the squint is the distress he was in when he was born. He has had his first operation on his eyes (the day after his first birthday), and will require at least one further operation on his other eye. Before this first operation he looked continuously cross-eyed. The first operation has made a huge difference. We have to patch his eyes alternately to make him use the weaker of his eyes. This squint is all the more worse because of what most likely caused it - it is a constant reminder of what we went through. The Consultant treating his squint made a comment that a squint can be a sign of a neurological problem, as the straightness of the eyes is controlled by the brain, he said we should keep an eye on his development. So even though he probably meant nothing when he made that comment, it is always in the back of my mind, a nagging doubt, and I am constantly looking at my son, for signs of any potential problem.

I would not be without my son now, and I would not change him for the world. He is such a happy contented baby. I worry though that other women go through similar experiences because they are not listened to. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but surely the healthcare professionals looking after us should not have allowed the induction to take two days, and when that was showing no real sign of progress the caesarean should have been offered at that point.

I do still get flashbacks, and I can't even think about a second baby, as the thought of heartbeat monitoring throughout the pregnancy is too raw to handle at the moment. I cannot watch births or baby things on the television - I have to switch over.

I think this sort experience is something that you come to live with, rather than get over. The smallest thing brings the memory back to me, but hopefully with time it will get easier. I am lucky that my husband is a real strength, showing great support and was with me throughout the whole experience (until I was knocked out of course!). It has brought us closer together as we have shared a terrifying ordeal and come through it the other end.

I believe the BTA will be a huge huge support to other parents going through traumatic births, and I fully support it. I only wish it were established when I had my son - to talk to other Mum's going through similar thought patterns would have been a great benefit 14 months ago. We were offered counselling by the hospital, but after one session did not feel it was going to be our way forward. We believe that talking it through with friends, family and amongst ourselves and other people experiencing similar traumas is the best way forward.

Thank you for reading my story