

Briony's Story

Up until 27 weeks, my pregnancy went without a problem, apart from a water infection which had cleared up with antibiotics. Then at 27 weeks exactly I was at work (I worked as a manager at a multiplex cinema) when I started to get a few little pains and realised that I was losing some blood. I rang the hospital and they said that I should come in straight away. Luckily it was my boyfriend's day off work and he came to the cinema to meet me. I waited an hour for another manager to turn up and take over, and then left for the hospital.

At the hospital we were left waiting in a side room for about 45 minutes then a nurse arrived and took a urine sample. She said that there was a bit of blood in it but not to worry, as it was probably just another urine infection. She asked if I minded if she took some swabs and I said no it was fine, then as she was doing it she suddenly looked very concerned and called for another doctor. She then explained to me that she could see the sack of waters bulging through my cervix, which was quite dilated. The doctor arrived, examined me again and confirmed that I was 3cm dilated, and the likelihood was that I was going to give birth in the next 24 hours. Myself and my partner were then left to gather our thoughts, all I can say is that I was completely shocked and petrified. The pregnancy hadn't been planned and I had had a hard time at the beginning accepting that I was going to have a baby, but to find out that the baby was going to be born in the next day was extremely frightening.

Another doctor arrived and gave us some more information about premature babies, but it just went over my head because I was in such a state of shock. I was then given 2 steroid injections to help the baby's lungs to develop. I was taken up to the most frightening looking theatre type of delivery room, as I was told that they would need all of the space and equipment in there for when the baby was born. I was put on a drip to try and stop the small contractions I was having and stop the labour from progressing, and one of the nurses from the special care baby unit came to talk to us and it just seemed so unreal. All of the midwives were brilliant, they really looked after me. It was my first baby and I was only 20 so they really mothered me which is what I needed. My boyfriend was given a camp bed to sleep on in the delivery room - but needless to say we didn't get much sleep that night. By the morning I still hadn't delivered, and a surgeon came in. He explained that they could carry out a procedure that morning to put four stitches in my cervix to try and close it back up again. I agreed to have it done but I was the most frightened I had ever been in my whole life, it was awful. The midwives gave me some tablets to calm me down ready for the operation, then they took me into the theatre and started to try and put the spinal anaesthetic in my back. They had me sitting on the side of the table leaning over, and I felt so dizzy and sick. At the time I thought it was because I was so scared, but looking back I think it was probably the sedatives I had been given. They tried several times to get the needle in but couldn't, and I kept saying to them that I really needed to lie down because I was going to faint. They let me lie down but warned me that it would be much more difficult to get the needle in that way, but I didn't care cos there was no way I could have sat up any longer. I was just glad to be lying down. They asked me a few more times if I was sure that I couldn't sit up and I said yes, and in the end they managed to get the needle in after I had been in the operating theatre for an hour. A very strange pain shot down my leg, then felt very warm as it travelled to the rest of my lower body. As the operation was being done I can just remember reading through the serial numbers on the underneath of the drip machine over and over again to try and keep my mind off it.

For the next 3 days I had to stay in bed all the time, and was eventually moved to the pregnant women's ward. I had to have injections every day to stop me from getting blood clots, and I needed blood tests every day too. So many people kept wanting to visit me, which I thought was really insensitive, who would want to be visited by every work colleague and old schoolfriend under the sun when they are going through something like that? My mum kept asking what she could do for me and I just told her to fend everyone off that she could, I didn't want them all turning up. It wasn't because I was feeling sorry for myself or anything, it's just that I was a mess and I could still go into labour at any time, and I didn't want to have to keep explaining everything to everyone and enduring loads of awkward silences when people didn't know what to say to me.

I really didn't like being on the ward, the only time I cried was when I was left there that first night. All the other women were 9 months pregnant and waiting to go up to the delivery suite, wondering around chatting to each other. I was only allowed out of bed to go to the toilet and felt really left out, I don't think the other women knew what to say to me. At about 12.30am, I was still awake and I felt a rush of water between my legs. I had lost a little bit a few times during the day but was told it was nothing to worry about. I rang the bell and told the midwife, who took me to the toilet. Loads more water came out as I stood up and when we got to the loo I could see that it was pink. The midwife told me to go back to bed whilst she rang someone about it. She came back about half an hour later and said "We are going to have to take you back upstairs to the delivery suite because we are not sure what's going on". This really scared me, and I asked if they could ring my boyfriend. When we were upstairs a doctor arrived. He was the only one that I didn't like whilst I was there, he seemed like he didn't really know what he was doing, and mumbled as he spoke so I couldn't understand what she said. I'm sure he was perfectly well qualified but his manner didn't give me any confidence in him at all. I was told that my waters had obviously gone and the stitches would need to come out as I was probably about to go into labour, and if the baby came out with the stitches in it would rip my cervix to bits. I asked if taking the stitches out would hurt, and they said "We won't lie to you, yes it will." I asked the doctor if I could have a spinal anaesthetic again for it and he said no, as I might want an epidural when I was in labour and I wouldn't be able to if I had one now. I was told how to use the gas and air and my legs were put in stirrups as my boyfriend arrived. Having those stitches taken out was the most horrific experience of my life. I would rather give birth three times over than have that happen again. I breathed in the gas and air in massive lungfuls with no breaths in between until everything was spinning and echoing, I was moaning with the pain but at least the gas and air made me care about it less. The nurse who was holding one of my hands kept asking me "Are you ok?", "Are you sure you are ok?" I was nodding but I think my face was telling a different story. I was grabbing my boyfriend's arm so hard that he had really deep nail marks in it afterwards. I thought it was over but the older midwife at the end of the bed was saying that they would have to insert a different longer speculum to try and get the last stitch out. I can remember really shouting when the doctor was trying to do it, and him saying "I'm sorry dear", but the gas and air made everything really confusing. I then felt a massive pop, everything was so horrific and I was in so much pain I genuinely thought that's it, he has hit one of my main arteries and I'm going to die. The weird thing was that I wasn't that bothered about it. They said he had finished and I could see that he was covered in water. The midwife asked me if I thought I had done a wee, and I said no. I was sure that I hadn't. They then realised that when my waters had gone down in the ward they were actually my hind waters,

and the doctor had popped my forewaters when he tried to get the stitch out. I don't know what I would have done without my boyfriend there throughout that, he is not someone who shows affection publicly and he can be quite shy, but he was so instinctive and just kept talking to me and kissing my face, he was so wonderful. The doctor explained that he couldn't get the last stitch out and I would have to give birth with it in, and that they expected me to go into labour in the next few hours.

Three more days passed and I still didn't go into labour. The baby's head was quite far down and I had no waters, I was really uncomfortable. By this point I wasn't letting anyone examine me internally without gas and air because I was so sore. Occasionally some pains would start, but then they would stop again. Throughout the whole week that I was there I was having pains on and off, usually about 7 minutes apart and sometimes worse than others, but they never got any more frequent.

I was moved down to the ward again because they needed the beds on the delivery suite. I really didn't want to go but they explained that I would have a side room this time which I was a bit happier with. That day my boyfriend went home to get a shower and some clean clothes, and my stepdad came to visit me, followed by my brother. I asked my brother to leave because constant pains were really wearing me down and I felt like I needed to go to sleep. The pains had only been slightly worse than usual. I tried to get to sleep and as I was nodding off the most massive pain ripped through me, and I knew that I was in labour so I rang my boyfriend up, luckily we only lived 10 minutes from the hospital. I tried to ring the buzzer for a midwife but I knocked it off the chair it was resting on. I managed to ring it and when she came in I told her I had had a really massive pain and she said that she would go and get me a heart rate monitor belt! It was my first baby but I knew that it was slightly past that stage! I then had another massive pain that really caused me to shout out and lasted for about 30 seconds, it's was so extreme and unlike anything I had ever felt before. All the midwife did was sit next to me and hold my hand! I told her that I wanted to push even though I didn't, because I thought that it would make her get some help or something. Some other midwives came into the room and I asked if I could have some gas and air, so one of them went to fetch a canister as it wasn't piped through the walls in the ward like it is in the delivery suite. They decided not to try and move me to the delivery suite because they didn't want me to give birth in the lift. Lots of doctors and NICU staff arrived in the room along with a resuscitaire, and to be honest I don't remember things too clearly after that. My boyfriend arrived and I could hear him talking to them but I didn't know what it was about. I was so frightened, I hadn't been to any antenatal classes as it was too early and I didn't know a thing about giving birth. I was so out of it on gas and air, no-one told me to push or anything but my body just kind of did it. I think as well as being on the gas and air, I was really worried about the baby dying and I just wanted to distance myself from it, it was all so horrible that my mind sort of cut me off and went into a coping place. I was in labour for an hour. When Dylan was born I heard him squeak which I was really glad about, and he was whisked away to the NICU.

The placenta hadn't come out yet, and one of the midwives put a clamp on the cord to stop it from going back in. They decided that I would need an operation to remove the placenta, and whilst they were out of the room arranging it the cord started retracting with the clamp on it, which was really uncomfortable. About half an hour later the operation was arranged, and the anaesthetist came in to talk to me. I was adamant that I wanted a general anaesthetic after what had happened with the spinal one before, but the anaesthetist said he really wouldn't advise it and didn't

want to do it so I had to prepare myself for another spinal. I was so emotional, really at my wits end that after all I had been through I would need to have another operation, I just kept asking my boyfriend to make sure that he would be there as soon as I came out of the theatre. The spinal anaesthetic went in so much more easily this time, I was so relieved. I asked why it was so much quicker and easier this time and the anaesthetist said that he had looked at my notes and he was a much better anaesthetist than the one I had before! That last stitch was still left in my cervix so I asked if they could take it out there and then, I just wanted everything to be over and not have to worry about any more procedures. They got the placenta out pretty quickly but took a while longer getting the stitch out. Throughout the operation they had someone there to hold my hand and talk to me, and really nice theatre assistants so it was much less of a traumatic experience than the first operation. Its amazing how much you change when you are that scared, I've always been quite a private person and wouldn't show my emotions to anyone I didn't know, but I was so glad that there was someone there to hold my hand in that theatre.

Dylan stayed in NICU and SCBU for 9 weeks in total, and is now completely well with no problems apart from being small. Doctors have told me that they don't know what caused me to go into labour early, apart from the fact that it runs in my family. If I was to get pregnant again I would almost certainly need preventative stitches putting into my cervix at 17 weeks as it is now quite damaged, and even with that there are no guarantees that I won't go into premature labour again. I am certain now that I won't have any more children, I don't think I could survive emotionally if I had to go through the whole experience again.