

Carla's Story

I had my first child in August 2001 at 32 weeks. I was 19 years old and had a revealed placental abruption. I had an emergency c-section.

I was sat in the kitchen when I felt a rush of liquid I checked what it was and I was bleeding very heavily, straight away I started going into shock. I told my boyfriend (now husband) to ring an ambulance as neither of us drove at the time. The ambulance came and the paramedics took it very much in their stride, almost as if they were bored, at the time I thought this was terrible but looking back I wonder if they did it deliberately as it calmed me down.

I was admitted to the delivery suite where they gave me an ultrasound and examined me, I was in no pain and at this point everything was still pretty calm. At some point when they were examining me, it must have got worse as things suddenly turned into a scene from casualty. I was rushed into another room and told they were going to deliver the baby I don't remember being told why, although I'm pretty sure I wasn't. There were a lot of people in the room I had a midwife shaving me, one inserting a catheter one cutting off my nightie all at once. Also people were injecting me with steroids to mature the baby's lungs and inserting drips because I was losing quite a lot of blood. All the time this was going on the consultant was going through the consent form with me when I signed it I was shaking so much I couldn't even keep the pen on the line let alone write.

They wheeled me into the operating theatre and then I was alone (without anyone I knew). A midwife was holding a heavy oxygen mask on my face and I thought I couldn't breathe I alerted her to this she said it was ok and put it back on. The anaesthetist kept shouting at people to get the bloods from the lab because they needed to do this now (his words paraphrased) this was absolutely terrifying and I was convinced I was going to die. I was put to sleep then I was praying as it was all I could do.

When I woke up I had a tube down my throat and was being wheeled somewhere, someone was saying I had a little boy but all I cared about was getting the tube out. When I woke properly someone came to tell me about my baby's condition I can't remember who or what they said, still no-one had told me why this had happened. I didn't sleep at all that night I could feel the blood (lochia) and every time I felt it I would break into a cold sweat I was convinced if I went to sleep I would never wake up. The next day my boyfriend took me to see the baby. I didn't feel anything I looked at my tiny son whose chest was working ten to the dozen to keep himself alive he had wires and drips attached to him and was in a little plastic box and I felt nothing. I burst into tears. There was no gush of love or protectiveness I was just numb. I believe this was because of the way he was delivered. I must say at this point that the staff on the delivery suite were fantastic although they were very brisk and nothing was explained to me they saved

my life. I was told later that I was very lucky and half an hour more I would have lost the baby and been very touch and go myself. However the after care I received in hospital was nothing short of appalling. The experience I had gone through was extremely traumatic and yet no-one acknowledged this. I was left feeling very frightened and stupid. I must again point out that the staff on the maternity ward were very overworked.

After I got home and things got back to "normal" (my son was in and out of hospital for about 3 months) I found myself extremely traumatized. For a long time I assumed it was PND but now I believe although this was part of it the symptoms were more in line with PTSD. I became convinced I was going to die. I stayed up one night (while my son was in hospital) because I had a pain in my leg and became convinced it was dvt. Somewhere in the middle of all this the world trade centre came crashing down this made matters worse. I became obsessed with the news watching it till the early hours in the morning even when nothing was happening. For months afterwards every time I started a period I would have a panic attack. I also had panic attacks in the supermarket and cinema. At the time I didn't know what they were.

Eventually I overcame this through the support mainly of my friends (my husband handled it very badly telling me to pull myself together).

I had my second son a mere 8 weeks ago. Again I had an abruption both revealed and concealed. Again I had a c-section. I was due to have an "elective" section as I had developed symphysis pubis dysfunction and was unable to walk the length of the house or care for my son properly. I was only diagnosed a couple of weeks before I was due so physio was pointless.

Between my first son and second my husband and I had talked a lot about what I went through and this time he was extremely supportive. I handled the pregnancy very well better than even I expected every time I started having obsessive thoughts my husband and my friends were there to help me through it. There was a slight hiccup when I was told I had total placental preavia. I broke down completely when I realised the implications again though my wonderful husband helped me through.

At 34 weeks I was rescanned and against the consultants expectations the placenta had moved. At 38 weeks I was sat watching television and realised I was bleeding the blood was bright red and to me there was a lot of it. Straight away I panicked my son was in bed I told my husband to get him and my notes we would go to hospital and drop him off at my mums on the way. While he was getting my son up I started to "lose it" I had to ring an ambulance. While I was on the phone to the operator I got very dizzy my vision began to blur and I was very close to fainting. The only way I could keep it together was to lie on the floor and block everything out. When the paramedic got there they gave me oxygen straight away as I was extremely pale they also put me on a drip. I was pale due to shock rather than blood

loss I found out later. When I got to the hospital I was examined and was told they would leave me through the night and deliver during the day when they were better equipped. I could feel the blood and again it was sending me into a cold sweat. Eventually they examined me again and decided to deliver that night after all. I still don't know weather this was due to the blood or the fact I obviously wasn't going to leave them alone until they did. This time I was kept awake for the delivery. Everything was much calmer than the time before and although I was still very panicky it was no were near on the level of the time before.

Again it was the aftercare which let everything down. I was on a ward with 5 other women all who had c-sections we had one midwife between us and the ward next door. I couldn't move to even pull my baby's blankets over him and the midwives never had time. It was an absolute nightmare. All the women on the ward felt the same we were simply not capable of looking after a child and yet we were expected to function like a normal mother who had a text book birth. A c-section is very unnatural it doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out that when you replace labour with all its natural hormones with an operation that makes you ill and leaves you unable to move, it is going to have some impact on bonding with the baby. Yet again no one acknowledges this and the expectation that you should bond naturally makes it 1000 times worse leaving you feeling like the worst mother on earth.

Like I say I spoke to all the other Mums about it and they were all of the same opinion. The problem is that no-one will speak about it because they think they are the only ones and the hospital, midwives, health visitors and gp's all reinforce this. All I and all the other Mums on the ward wanted to do was give the baby to some one else to look after while we recovered ourselves. I wanted to go home were I would have my husband to support me.

Amazingly enough on the second day I nagged the life out of the midwives asking them to go home only to be told I couldn't because Neil (my son) was jaundice. Later that evening I was so down I was sobbing (I know people will think baby blues but the amount of crying that went on that ward was far more than baby blues) the midwife actually said "see and you wanted to go home" as if home would be harder work than the hospital.

There were a number of other incidents in both deliveries particularly the aftercare that I found very traumatic I have not listed them all here as I am not sure what is relevant. The worse one however was after 2 days after I had my first son my alcoholic father turned up drunk at the hospital. I was on SCBU with my son when I received a phone call from the maternity ward the midwife informed me that "my father was here he was drunk and abusive and she had directed him to the neonatal unit" (paraphrasing her words) further more when I asked her to ring security she told me it wasn't her job and I would have to ask the nurses on neo natal to do it. Just writing

that still makes me very angry it should be noted that I did inform her in no uncertain terms that it was her job and she did ring security. I can only assume she did this to avoid the paperwork involved with ringing security. I really regret not making an official complaint about that incident the problem is they can treat you however they want because you are so vulnerable.

It is a massive abuse of power. I also felt I was treated differently due to my age many other Mums I have spoke to who have had Babies in there teens have felt this to.

I think it is fantastic that your organisation is out there. I would like to help in anyway I can. I know I never went into labour or experienced any sort of natural child birth but it was defiantly a very traumatic delivery and I would like to help other women who have experienced similar situations in anyway I can above all I would like to change the aftercare system to make sure there is support there for Mothers who have had problem births or c-sections.