

Emily's Story

Apart from morning sickness every day for the first 5 months I'd had a pretty pleasant and trouble-free pregnancy. It was on a Sunday morning at 11:30 when my waters finally broke, I was nearly 2 weeks overdue and due to be induced on the Tuesday but was determined to have my baby before that. I went in to hospital at 12:45 to be examined in case of infection, they confirmed that my waters had broken and that I was having contractions but was only ½-1cm dilated so I was sent home again which I was quite happy to do.

I spent the rest of the day bouncing on my birthing ball, walking around and practising my breathing techniques. The pains started to become stronger towards the evening so I telephoned the hospital and they said to come in to be examined. I went in at 23:45 but was sent home again as there was still no change.

As the night progressed I was in a lot more pain, I telephoned the hospital twice more and on the 2nd call was told to "take a couple of paracetamol, make myself a milky drink and go to bed" I felt like I was being fobbed off, I was having a baby not suffering from a headache. As this was our first baby we really didn't know what to expect.

In the early hours of the morning the pains were getting really strong and 3mins apart so my partner called the hospital and they finally said I could come in. By this time it was 04:00 and when examined, I was 4cms dilated.

I was given some pethidine and managed to doze between contractions. By 07:15 I was 8cm dilated and was allowed to have some more pethidine shortly after this, the pains were really strong by now and I was put on a CTG monitor.

At 08:15 there was a change of shift so I had a new midwife. I was catheterised at one point as I had not been to the toilet for a while and they discovered ketones in my urine so my partner was told to go and buy me some lucozade to drink. I asked a couple of times if I could try different positions as I had been laying on my back the whole time I had been there but was told no, to try and stay as I was to see how I got on. Not once was I offered a bath to relieve the pain.

It was Monday and by 11:00 I was getting strong urges to push and after another examination the midwife told me I could start pushing as I was fully dilated. However, shortly after this my contractions started to reduce in frequency and length so the registrar was called and I was placed on a Syntocinon drip.

By this time it was 13:15 and there was another shift change so I had another new midwife. This midwife took away my gas and air, made me move across the room onto a delivery bed and my legs were placed in stirrups and strapped down. After another half an hour of pushing I was given another internal examination, only then, after 2½ hours of pushing, was it discovered that I was not fully dilated at all and because I had been pushing my cervix had swollen (oedematous) on one side!

By now it was 14:00 and I asked to have an epidural, I was exhausted from pushing and felt completely out of it, dizzy and not really quite with it at all. The anaesthetist was called and I was told "not to push", I had to wait nearly an hour for him to turn up as "he was at lunch".

I was told to sit on the edge of the bed and arch my back as much as I could while he tried to put the needle in, he didn't explain what he was doing but I kept feeling the needle going in my back. He then told me "I had put on too much fat on my back during my pregnancy so his needle was too short". He had to send a nurse to theatre to get a longer needle while in the meantime he carried on trying to jab me until he finally said it was in. In total I had 6 needle marks on my back.

My partner was told to go and get himself a coffee and that I would probably be asleep by the time he came back. However, by this time it was 16:00 and the epidural had clearly not worked as I was still feeling loads of pain.

The registrar then came to examine me. This was complete agony, I was crying it was hurting so much, it was a really rough examination. By this point all I had was gas and air although another midwife had come in to the room I was in to try to take it off me for someone else to use.

Another half an hour passed and the registrar came back in to examine me again, I was really scared when he walked in the room and I didn't want him near me, he hurt me so much the last time. Both my partner and I ended up in tears this time, it was agony. I later learned he was trying to get the swollen bit of cervix over my baby's head but not once had anyone explained what he was trying to do. My partner told me that he was shoved to one side as there was no room around the bed so he could hear I was in pain and distress but could not get near me to help.

This time I was almost fully dilated so was told I could start pushing again. At this point I was still up in stirrups and had 2 midwives either side of my legs. My partner and I could not believe it when they started to have a conversation with each other over my legs, between me pushing, about the registrar, basically mocking him for a facial disfigurement that he had. It was as if I wasn't even there.

After another 1 hour 20mins of pushing the registrar came back in again, I told him I did not want him to come near me, I was crying, scared and in pain. A ventouse delivery was mentioned as he said a caesarian at this stage would be a difficult one to do. He stayed back as he could see I was distressed while the midwife examined me but whilst he was in the room the CTG monitor showed my baby's heart rate had suddenly dropped to 60bpm.

The registrar told the midwife who said "it was OK, it was not the baby but my heart rate that was being picked up", however the registrar insisted it was the baby and adjusted the sensors on my tummy and he was right.

After that things became a blur, someone called out to get the paediatricians in, the bottom of the bed was dropped down, green gowns were put over me, loads of people seemed to be in the room. I remember sobbing and looking at my partner saying over and over again "I'm scared, I'm scared". Everything was happening around us but no-one was explaining what was happening, I just remember the midwife saying that in 10mins time I would have my baby.

My partner was watching the CTG monitor which by this time had dropped down to 40bpm, again he was shoved to one side, pushed out of the way by a midwife and left to sob in the corner of the room on his own whilst everything was going on.

By this time it was nearly 18:00, coming up to 31 hours since my waters had broken. The registrar told me he was going to perform an episiotomy, which he did, then the forceps were inserted. Never in my life have I ever experienced pain like I did then, I was screaming out and arching my back in pain with my legs still tied in the stirrups, everything went white and I remember shouting out that I was going to faint. I really felt like I was going to die and was completely out of control of the situation. It was the most horrendous thing I have ever gone through and what should have been one of the best days of my life turned into the worst. Someone said the baby was out and my tummy went warm. I realised they had delivered my baby using my tummy as a place to put him, he was then whisked away to the 3 paediatricians who had entered the room, I don't remember hearing him cry. There were loads of people in the room at this point but I did not know who most of them were and was never told.

I was given an injection to deliver the placenta, I remember asking if that was going to hurt as much as the baby did but they said no as it was soft. Once the placenta was out the registrar began to stitch me up but I could feel every stitch he was doing, I had to ask in the end if he could inject me to numb the area, he said "but I thought you had an epidural" to which I

replied "yes and I told you it hadn't worked". In the end he did numb me and I had 31 stitches. I had lost nearly a pint of blood. My baby was finally handed to me but I never felt the instant love that people talk about, I wasn't really sure how I felt but I was really happy he was OK except for the massive black eye and misshapen head he had from the forceps. He was born at 18:00 and weighed in at 9lbs.

I was offered a bath at this stage but when I went to stand up I felt really dizzy and threw up so the midwife washed my legs down instead as I was in quite a mess. We were then left alone for a while with our baby son before being moved on to the ward.

I had flashbacks of the final delivery for weeks afterwards and could not stop thinking about it. I felt like I was making a fuss over nothing, all my friends had said birth was painful but that it "wasn't that bad". I felt like I was a pathetic failure.

On the day we left hospital we were loading the bags into the car and I could hear another women in labour screaming out. I was crying as we drove away from the hospital, it brought it all back to me.

I had trouble moving about, walking, sitting, getting in and out of bed, whilst caring for my baby for a few weeks after as I was so sore and bruised down below. For months after I was also in lots of pain due to recurrent urinary and vaginal infections. I felt like those first weeks were just going through the motions of being a mum and I was doing what people expected me to do. I was still quite positive about my baby but it took me a while, weeks in fact, to properly bond with my son and I remember that I kept kissing him all the time to try and make myself really love him.

I can no longer watch anyone giving birth on TV as it still upsets me, I turn it over or go out of the room where I can't hear it. In the meantime I'm trying hard to put it all behind me with the help of my wonderful partner and the BTA.

I am disgusted at the way we were treated and spoken to and amazed at how much the care between midwives differs. The midwives I encountered were nothing like the experience I had expected according to my antenatal classes. Being a midwife should be a privilege not a chore.

During my pregnancy, labour and afterwards my partner was really supportive and has always been there for me, I could not have got through the last couple of months without his love and understanding. Unfortunately we are not sure if we will ever have the 2nd child we both want.

The BTA

I saw an article one day on 'This Morning' about the BTA and was relieved to hear that there were other women out there who also felt the same and had had bad experiences. I looked at the website and read some of the stories and found it helped to know I wasn't the only one.

One of the website leaflet's encouraged me to apply for my maternity notes which I did and this is how I have been able to give exact times and details of events during my labour. So much of it was a blur through the drugs, pain and tiredness but getting my notes has really helped to fill in the gaps and I can see where things went wrong.

I want to thank the BTA for trying to raise awareness of these issues and for the help and support I have been given. All women should have happy memories of their birth, but unfortunately for some it doesn't work out that way. Staff need to be trained to realise that this is the most important event in a woman's life and that every woman deserves to be treated with respect, have things clearly explained to them, be given adequate pain relief and to go away with a positive experience.

Thank you for reading my story.