

Louise's Story

My story is a long one. I have made it as brief as I can but I think the length of the whole thing is a big part of it. I hope it can be of help. And I really hope when my story finally comes to an end I can begin to help others.

p.s. I've included parts of the pregnancy that I think are relevant to my problems.

On March 5th, day before my 25th birthday. My pregnancy came as somewhat of a surprise. I had a nice new boyfriend and has been seeing him for six weeks. That was when I found out I was five weeks pregnant! Well actually the first time I visited the doctor with a positive pregnancy test, but bleeding he told me I was having a miscarriage, and to continue taking my contraceptive pill. Luckily I saw another doctor two days later who sent me for a scan and there on the screen was my baby, well a round circle with a nucleus looking thing in the middle.

The bleeding started again a few days later and I was advised bed rest. So I lay there for two weeks, this was going to be the start of my life for the next year.

The sickness started at six weeks. I couldn't eat a thing except cucumber! Although every evening my well-meaning partner (after reading a pregnancy website) would make me eat stuff that was good for me. I will always remember the bowl of tinned spinach.

At eight weeks I was sent for another scan, and then I saw my babies heart beat. Everything seemed fine.

After the earlier GP's wisdom though I was convinced I would have a miscarriage. So at thirteen weeks booked in for a nuchal translucency test, and then realised I was really going to have a baby.

Spent week after week in bed, we moved house when I was fifteen weeks pregnant. I slept through it on a friends sofa!

At eighteen weeks I finally started to feel a little better, but had already given up my job by then as I hadn't been since I found out I was pregnant. So things became very boring! Things carried on ok, scan at twenty-two weeks showed everything was good and we were having a boy.

By about this point I was so excited, I couldn't wait to have the baby. I had so many plans, I wanted him delivered onto my stomach, skin to skin and really wanted to breast feed.

From this point on I started having bladder infections, which I'd never suffered from before so was practically on constant antibiotics for the rest of the pregnancy. I started realising I was pretty big when my antenatal classes started. All the women would drive themselves there and I couldn't fit behind the wheel any more so had to get a taxi

At thirty-six weeks I spent a night in hospital because of terrible pains. I was examined and was 1cm dilated. Stayed overnight but things calmed down. So was sent home again.

At thirty-seven weeks my stretch marks started. I thought I was going to get away without any. By about thirty-nine weeks they had spread up to my bust and some were an inch wide. Sometimes they would bleed.

Was so miserable by now, couldn't walk for more than five minutes because of back pain and couldn't sit down as I would get stabbing pains in my vagina.

Forty weeks midwife appointment said all was fine, laughed at the size of my stomach, felt the

baby, estimated about 9lbs. I was getting a bit worried now as I'm only 5ft 1inch.

Eight days overdue, had appointment at the hospital. Said if I hadn't had the baby they would induce me at eleven days late. I aired my worries about the size of the baby, he just said yes it does seem larger than average. Sent to rest for the weekend as blood pressure a bit high.

Monday 11th November

At 8am I arrived at the hospital for the induction. At 8.30, after persuading the midwife to let my partner stay, I had a pessary. They then sent him off to wait with my mum outside as it wasn't visiting time.

I lay there for an hour, then went to find David and my mum in the café as I didn't want to be on my own. I started getting really bad period pains almost straightaway. Had to keep stopping with the pain while I walked to the other side of the hospital to the café. I didn't really know if I was in labour though as I had had these kind of pains on and off since thirty-six weeks.

Mum and David saw me back to the ward after a couple of hours. Then they had to leave as it still was not visiting time. I lay there on my own thinking, I'm going to have a baby soon, but felt quite lonely and more like I was in hospital for being ill.

The afternoon passed with me being uncomfortable but not too bad and feeling hot! David and mum left at 8pm and I settled down for the night. The midwife said the doctor would examine me the next morning and if I was dilated enough they would break my waters.

About 2am, I woke to really bad pains, it was like waves of period pains but much worse. The pain was getting much worse and then not so bad, but there wasn't any gap in-between, so I was confused as it didn't seem like contractions were supposed to be like.

After about 10 minutes, I went to find a midwife, I described the pain. She said that it didn't sound like labour but gave me a form to fill in every time I had a pain and how long for. I found this impossible as the pain was constant and also I couldn't sit still. So I started walking up and down the corridor and found this helped a bit as it gave me something to do.

After about 10 minutes of walking up and down past the midwife station, looking pleadingly at them hoping someone would help me, one of them shouted out, "What are you doing? Go back to bed." So I walked back to my bed, at this point I had started to cry but hid it as best as I could. I felt silly, how could I be making such a fuss when I wasn't even in labour.

I lay in bed tossing and turning for a while longer. I had to bite the sheets so I didn't cry because it hurt so much, and I was scared of annoying anyone. When I couldn't stand it any more, I staggered back to the station and said through gritted teeth, "It really hurts." The midwife looked at me and said, "Well you don't look like you are in labour. Go back to bed. You can't walk up and down, you'll be tired and you will disturb everyone."

So I went back and bit the covers for a while longer. I was getting scared. I was in so much pain and I just wanted David to be there. I got up again and said could I have something for the pain. The midwife sighed and said to go and have a bath if you don't want to stay in bed. So I went and got in the bath after struggling to clean it with the cream cleaner they gave me. It was about 4am at this point.

When I lay down in the bath I realised it was a mistake. Instead of helping, the water made the pain much worse. I lay there for a while crying, then started to try and get out. It took four goes, every time I was half way out I fell back in again, splashing water everywhere. I eventually made it and

after putting my nightie on again, tried to clear up the water a bit. I felt a bit braver now and decided I would carry on my walk up and down.

After a while I needed a wee. I was frightened when I saw quite a bit of blood in my pants, so I went back to the midwife and said I was bleeding. She pointed at the toilet door and said to go back in and pull my pants down. I stood there and waited for her with my pants down feeling awful. She came half in the room holding the door open with her leg and looked at my knickers. She gave me her disapproving look again, it's only a show she said and walked out. I felt really stupid, all those baby magazines I'd read, I should have known.

I walked up and down a bit more and then saw a different midwife so I went up to her and told her how much it was hurting. I had tears running down my face, it wasn't so much that the pain was unbearable as I wasn't screaming or anything, but I was frightened and distressed because it hurt all the time and I thought there would be gaps.

The midwife gave me two paracetamol tablets but said I couldn't have anything stronger until I was in the labour ward. She said I might be able to go there after the doctors had examined me, if they thought they'd be able to break my waters. They would be round about 8am – that was about three more hours.

I went back to bed and rolled around for a while longer biting the sheets. I couldn't stifle my crying any more. I felt so awful, I just wanted David or my mum. I think the midwife heard as she came to my bed. She said I can examine you if you want, but we will probably still have to wait until the doctors come round.

I said, yes please, I knew it would hurt but I didn't want her to go away again. After examining me, she said I was 3cm so could go over to the labour ward now. I went for a wee and when I came back all my things had been packed and they shuffled me over to the labour ward, saying they would call David.

I'm not sure what time I got to the labour ward, I think it was about 6am. I stood in the room, waiting for someone to come when the midwife came in. I was relieved, she seemed much friendlier. She asked if anyone had called my partner and I said yes, that David and my mum were on their way. Your mum won't be able to stay she said. You are only allowed one person, you have to choose either your partner or your mum. I was really shocked, all through my pregnancy, I thought I was allowed two people. I had asked my mum to be there from the beginning as we had always been close, and I had always pictured her with me when I had children. Also she would keep things more light-hearted by making me laugh. But most of all I was so disappointed for her. She was looking forward to it so much, she'd told everyone she was going to be there and had come especially.

David came in soon after and said that they wouldn't let my mum in, they had stopped her at the door, she wasn't even allowed in the ward. He said she was really upset. I felt awful. David went out again so my mum could come in for a bit. She was really worried and confused like me. She asked the midwife why she couldn't stay.

The midwife said that even though my room was really big, some of them were very small and there wasn't enough room for more people in case of an emergency. As a result no one could have more than one person, as it wasn't fair. I just thought the whole thing wasn't fair, I wanted David and my mum there. It was awful having to choose. My mum started crying and so did I, it was so frustrating I just wanted to leave. My mum and the midwife had an argument – they were shouting at each other, it was starting to become a nightmare. Mum went so David could come back.

I was put on some monitors as my pain was getting worse. It showed numbers on a screen when I

was having a contraction, they kept going up but didn't come very far back down. I cannot remember the numbers exactly but they started at something like 30, then went up to 60, then back to 30, then about 30 seconds later would go up to 60, then back down to 30. Then about 30 seconds later it would start again. The pain was so relentless I was getting frantic, I didn't really know what was going on around me. I would get around 10 seconds when I could speak and I asked the midwife for something for the pain.

She brought me some gas and air, I tried it but it made me feel sick. A little while later the midwife examined me again, she said I was 4cm and she was going to break my waters. I didn't really want her to as I was scared it would hurt and I didn't understand why as I was surely already in labour. But she said it was part of being induced so I had to.

I used the gas and air while she did it and started to get the hang of it more. It didn't help the pain but made me feel a bit spaced out. After my waters were broken she said she thought that there was meconium in there, but it was hard to tell as there was so much blood, so she would send some off. I saw her collecting it in the pot. It looked just like blood but a murkier.

I was scared because I thought the waters would be clear, or with meconium. I didn't think they would be red, but the midwife didn't seem concerned. Anyway I was in too much pain to complain.

I remember rolling around on the bed for a while longer. There were no breaks from the pain. Everything was kind of white and I couldn't begin to try and talk.

After a while I managed to ask if I could have an epidural, as I couldn't cope with much more. I don't know how much later it was but a man came into the room. He was obviously in a rush as he shouted MOVE at David who was next to me. He told me to lie on my side at the edge of the bed and arch my back. It was so hard. My tummy was so big it was really hard to arch and I was in agony. It was so hard to keep still. I breathed really hard on the gas and air and tried my best.

The next thing I knew, there was a sharp pain down my right leg. I screamed with the pain and the doctor started shouting at me and said he would have to do it again. The same thing happened and he shouted again, saying it was because I wasn't arching my back enough. I started crying as he was really angry and then David cried too because I was crying. The midwife was being kind and trying to help me keep still and bend more but she didn't say anything about him shouting. The third time I got the pain again down my leg, but he said it was in properly so the pain would go soon.

I remember one of my legs going numb and warm, but the pain everywhere else was exactly the same. If anything it was worse as it was more concentrated. I told the doctor but he said it was in fine so there shouldn't be a problem.

I carried on using the gas and air as the pain was still really bad. I remember the midwife putting a drip in my hand but I wasn't really sure what it was for. After about half an hour the anaesthetist came back and I told him I was still in a lot of pain so he said he would top up my epidural. It didn't seem to make any difference and he went again.

About 12pm my midwife changed shifts, another one came in and she seemed really nice. She made me feel a bit better. She asked if a student doctor could come to watch the birth. I said ok but if I was allowed another person in the room could my mum not come instead. I was told no. I didn't argue, I felt defeated. All things seemed to be going on around me, but I didn't have anything to do with it.

The midwife examined me and I was 8cm. I felt quite scared, as I knew I was nearly there. The anaesthetist came back and gave me another top up. I remember it feeling really cold in my neck, but the pain everywhere else did not change. I rolled around on the bed for a while longer, the

contractions or whatever it was I was experiencing were all the time, I wasn't aware of much else. The anaesthetist was due back soon, the midwife wanted to check something first. She got this stick, I think it was supposed to be cold and she moved it up my body, I couldn't feel it at all. I was numb right up to the bottom of my neck, but still had stabbing pains in my vagina. When the anaesthetist came to top me up again, the midwife wouldn't let him and so he went.

I was examined at 2.30pm and was 10cm, the midwife said we would wait an hour for the baby to come down then start pushing at 3.30pm. By about 3pm I was feeling a bit better, the pain wasn't so bad any more and I didn't need the gas and air. I thought it was a bit strange but the midwife said that happened sometimes. I asked if my mum could come in for a bit before the pushing, so David went out. When my mum came back she asked whether she was allowed in now? As she had seen another woman that had both her parents with her. They said it was because she was only 15 and no my mum could not stay.

Mum stayed for about 20 minutes then had to go so David could come back. By this time the pain had pretty much stopped except for a slight stabbing in my vagina and the contraction monitor was at 0. It didn't show any contractions. I was a bit worried as I thought I was supposed to push when I had a contraction and now I didn't seem to be having any. The midwife said that maybe the epidural had started to work. She dug her fingers into my tummy but couldn't feel anything – she said it was probably because it was too well covered. I suppose she meant I was too fat, but I hadn't put on that much weight, about 2 stone. She said it didn't matter, I could just push anyway.

So the pushing started. I did not know when to do it, so just did it at regular intervals. After the first set of pushes, the midwife examined me and if she kind of prised me apart she could just see a small amount of hair but it went back in again when I stopped pushing. I was encouraged, I thought this is actually going to work.

But after 2 hours of trying as hard as I possibly could, he still hadn't come any further than that first push. The midwife said she would call the doctor, as I might need some help. I remember feeling frightened. I carried on pushing while we waited. The doctor came about 20 minutes later.

She examined me and said she would need to use forceps and to do this she would need to cut me. She also said she might need to put the bed up vertically to help get him out. I was a bit scared but thought that this probably happens to a lot of people and I'm sure it will be fine.

They strapped my legs up quite high in the stirrups, which hurt my back. Then the doctor started injecting my vagina with local anaesthetic. It really stung, especially inside. The midwife asked if they wanted to take me to theatre, but the doctor said no we would stay there. Just before she started the paediatrician came in for the birth.

I don't remember the pain, but I remember crying really loudly, not screaming more sobbing. She told me his head was out but the shoulder was stuck so they put the bed up in the air and cut me some more.

Then William was put on my tummy. I remember him feeling heavy and warm, I couldn't see him as I was flat on my back. I reached down and put my hand on him. Then he was picked up and taken away. I pulled my hand back up and looked at the blood where I had touched him. I don't remember feeling much, just a bit bewildered. Then I remember feeling the placenta coming out. I felt kind of soft.

Then the doctor mumbled something about me bleeding a bit. Everything was quite quiet, for a while no one was saying anything. I asked the midwife what was happening. She said I was bleeding a bit. She came and stood next to me and stared at me. I started to feel something was wrong but no one was talking to me. The midwife that was helping with William put him in David's

arms then came over and started to squeeze the drip bag. I remember another midwife coming in with more bags and putting another drip in my arm. Then I heard the blood pressure monitor beeping so I turned to look at it, it was something over 50. I was getting a bit scared. I tried to concentrate on David who was holding William. Another midwife came and started trying to put drips in my other arm but she was struggling to put them in. Then a doctor came and pulled them out again and put in two more quite high up on the inside of my arm. I then remember the blood pressure going to 60/40.

I wondered if I was going to die. I don't remember any pain, but afterwards David said I was crying. I tried to focus on David but it was getting harder. Things were going quite white, but I do remember feeling really calm and not that scared.

David was starting to look really scared, he told me a long time later how he was watching my face getting whiter and whiter and he thought I was dying. He still cries now when he talks about it. Then I saw the blood pressure go down to something over 30. The registrar turned to David and said "take the baby, walk over to the other side of the room and stand by the door and whatever you do don't look." This frightened me, I thought that whatever is going on down there must be really bad. I remember someone grabbing hold of my left arm, I thought they were going to talk to me but they were looking for a pulse. No one talked to me, no one said anything, and they just stared at me. I couldn't see David any more so I concentrated on the blood pressure machine, I remember seeing it go to 20/10. I thought I am really going to die now. Everything was going even whiter and my ears started to buzz. I felt like I was floating. I remember hearing the midwife shout that she had lost my pulse. Then I do not remember anything else.

I started to become aware of the stitching. I could feel it but I don't remember any pain. I looked around, I had five needles in my arms and lots of drips. I remember one looking like a funny shaped bottle. The Registrar finally finished stitching me, then she came and spoke to me briefly. She said I had haemorrhaged because they couldn't get my uterus to shrink down and also I had developed varicose veins in my vagina that had been cut through. Then she went.

Afterwards I found out my cervix had torn, I had torn all the way out to my vagina, I had one cut that went right down to my bottom and then another that went from my bottom out to one side and into my right buttock. Plus my bladder had been damaged.

I remember realising that my tummy was hurting quite high up. I just lay there crying and not even having the strength to lift my head or arms. Then my mum came in even though David was still there. She was asking what was wrong with me. A midwife said I had lost a bit of blood.

I found out after by reading my notes I had lost approximately 1800ml of blood, but my community midwife said it was probably more as they usually underestimate blood loss.

I remember seeing the baby was in a plastic cot, I couldn't see his face. I wondered what he looked like.

At some point my best friend came in too. To start with I was only allowed one person and now I had three! I heard my mum keep asking the midwife what was wrong with me as I was still crying. It was now 9pm and William had been born at 6pm. She said she was thinking of calling the consultant as I was still in a lot of pain.

Then an auxiliary nurse came in and said she was going to bath the baby. I could just about see her bathing him and putting on a little hat I had bought. I still hadn't held him or touched him since that first brief touch. She came over and asked if I wanted a cup of tea.

The consultant came about 10pm. (All these times are approximate from asking David and mum.

For me it felt like about 5 minutes had passed the whole night.) He felt my tummy and I cried a lot. He said he needed to take me to theatre to do a laparoscopy as he suspected my uterus and cervix were torn. He looked at my blood pressure which was still 40/30 and said they would need to give me 1 or 2 blood transfusion units. We waited a while for the blood but it hadn't come so he said we would wait in theatre. He told all this to my mum. I do not remember him talking to me. Before we went down I said to the midwife that I was worried about William being hungry so she said she would give him a bit of milk in a cup.

When I went down to theatre I was scared, I kept asking the anaesthetist if I would be ok. The theatre staff were all really nice to me. Eventually my blood came. I am AB+ and it was O-. I knew this was fine, but I wondered why it took so long and why they bother to find out your blood group if everyone gets O- anyway.

I felt very anxious.

The next thing I knew I was waking up, there was a tube down my throat and I was coughing. It was taken out and a mask put on my face, but I felt like I couldn't breathe. I was gasping for breath. I shouted out that I could not breathe properly, but someone said I was breathing fine. I still felt I could not breathe, I begged them to take the mask off. It felt like it was that that was stopping me breathing, but they said it was helping. Eventually someone took the mask off and I felt better.

I was taken back to the labour ward and put into a small area near the midwife station. Mum and David went soon after as it was about 1am. I was given a morphine injection and I tried to sleep but couldn't. I was attached to a blood pressure monitor and every 15 minutes or so it would take my blood pressure then an alarm would go off and a midwife would have to come. William was in a cot at the end of my bed, at one point I heard him choking, I felt desperate as there was nothing I could have done. Eventually someone came and picked him up.

A midwife came and sat next to my bed and was writing and I fell asleep.

When I woke up she was standing over me. Do you want to hold your baby? She asked. I said, "I don't know" because it felt strange, I hadn't held him yet and I was scared. "What do you mean you don't know?" She said in a loud cross voice. Oh god, I thought I must be so awful I don't want to hold my own baby. So I pretended I was scared of dropping him. Course you won't, she said.

She brought him over and laid him on me. Then she started to pinch my left nipple to try and get him to feed. It really hurt. William just cried as she forced his head towards me. So she left him on my chest and sat down. He fell asleep, it was nice having him on me, kind of comforting, but I was aware it didn't really feel like I thought it would.

After a while he started to cry, I didn't know what to do, I couldn't sit up or move really, I had too many tubes and wires attached to me. Someone came and took him away. When it was light mum and David came back. Mum picked up William and brought him over to me, I was propped up and it was the first time I had seen his face. His eyes were really open, I thought they would be scrunched up. He had quite a lot of blood on him still and he also had bruises on each side of his face from the forceps. On the back of his head one side was very flat.

After a yoghurt, the first thing I had eaten for about 50 hours, the midwife said she would help me try to stand up. It felt really weird, I was so dizzy and felt like my body didn't belong to me. Then I felt blood running down my legs. I was really scared, I thought I was haemorrhaging again but the midwife said I was ok, it was normal.

In the afternoon with the help of the midwife I managed to get out of bed and walk a few steps to the chair and sit down. It felt like I was sitting on a brick. The midwife said I would be ok to go to

the post-natal ward now. While they were packing my things I looked at William's notes. He was 9lb 1oz, I hadn't thought to ask before and it said his head was 40cm, which in the red book was off the chart for head size.

I was helped into a wheel chair and William was put in my arms like a kind of trophy and I was wheeled across the corridors outside to the post-natal ward. An old lady stopped me on the way, all excited she asked me what I'd had. I didn't want to talk to her. I felt like a fake. I pretended to smile, but I certainly didn't feel it was anything to smile or get excited about.

As the midwife got me settled in and took my blood pressure which was 60/40, I asked if she could show me how to breast feed. She said that she was very busy but she would come back if she had time. I was getting worried as it was 24hrs since William had been born. Before David left for the night William did a poo, me and David tried to change him having never changed a nappy in our lives! We used baby wipes as we didn't know any better which made his bottom really red. After David left at 9pm, I called the midwife again and asked if someone could show me how to breast feed, she spent about 2 minutes squeezing my nipple then trying to push his head towards me, it just made him scream, she said he probably wasn't hungry yet. But I was worried as other people seemed to be feeding their babies and some of them were born after William.

I slept on and off that night and William slept soundly. In the morning a midwife put her head round the curtain and said " Breakfast is here". I lay there, I had a drip in one arm and a catheter on the other side of the bed, which i would have had to carry, and I had no idea how i would carry a tray. Not to mention of course that I had very recently lost nearly 2 litres of blood and had an operation. About half an hour later she looked round the curtain again, " You do know it's self service here" she said and walked off again briskly. I started crying, I felt helpless, and I hated it. Luckily the lady next to me heard me crying and offered to get me some.

I spent the day in bed, every time I got up I felt so dizzy I was scared that I would fall over. I was told that i would have to get up and walk around soon, otherwise I would get a blood clot. I asked if someone could help me get out of bed, but was told that they weren't allowed to help you up any more I would have to use a ladder thing, i tried with it, but still couldn't manage to get up, i was too dizzy.

I managed to get someone to try and help me breastfeed once that day for about 5 minutes but that was all he would take and I didn't get any more help. That night William screamed for hours, I felt so awful, I found it really hard to get up and even if I managed it I was scared I'd fall over. I called a midwife, I said I was worried he was hungry but no-one had time to help me. She came back and put a needle in his foot to measure his blood sugar. She said it was ok, so not to worry.

He screamed for quite a while longer and in the end she came back and took him away. She asked me his name and I realised David and I hadn't had a chance to discuss it yet. In the night I woke up to terrible chest pains and my heart felt it was beating really fast. I called the midwife and a doctor was called, she said I was tachycardic and put up an extra drip.

The next day an auxiliary nurse came up and said breakfast was ready. I said I would struggle to get it because of the drips and the catheter. She said why have you still got a catheter? I didn't know. She went off and a midwife came back and took it out. She said drink plenty of water and when you do a wee bring it to me. I hobbled out to try and get some breakfast but it had all gone.

After four hours I started to think it was weird I hadn't had a wee. I had a bad tummy ache but no urge to wee. I told the midwife and she said to go and sit on the loo and try. When I stood up I felt a very slight urge but when I sat on the loo it went again. By 2pm I called the midwife again and she said she would have to call a doctor, and to keep drinking plenty. I had now drunk 3 jugs of water. While I waited for the doctor I tried to wee again. I found with my mum's help if I stood up and

leant forwards against the wall some wee would come out into the jug. I did not have any control over it though. When the doctor came she said my bladder felt distended but as I was weeing (I'd weed about 50ml and now drunk 4 jugs) she would give me a few more hours.

While we waited we asked if I could move into a room on my own as I was feeling really ill and couldn't cope with having people around. Also I felt really guilty as at night William was always crying because I couldn't get out of bed. They said I could have a side room but it would cost £60 a night. We agreed as I was desperate to have a bit of space, you could touch the curtains from the bed on either side where I was and William had the curtain hanging over his cot as it didn't fit along with the drip.

The side room was not great. It didn't have its own toilet so I still had to use the communal ones, not that I had actually been to the toilet. But it was good to get out of the bloody sheets I'd had for 2 days. By 6pm I was rolling around in agony with my tummy. My mum insisted someone call a doctor. This was 10 hours since I had had the catheter removed. She came and said my bladder was very distended and I would need a catheter back in. The midwife came and did it, it really stung but was a relief. They got 2 full bags out straightaway.

The midwife was really kind and gentle so I told her I was really worried about William not having fed yet. It was about 78 hours since his birth. She said she would help me. He just screamed again and I felt it very painful to have him on my tummy because of the stitches and bruising from the laparoscopy. She said she would check his blood sugar. This time it was very low so I asked if she could give him another cup feed. He seemed fine with that and fell asleep for a while.

I was starting to wonder whether I should bottle feed him as I was getting so stressed about it and no-one had time to help me much. I had only had the help to try to feed him four times at this point. I was scared of asking to bottle feed him as everywhere I looked there were "Breast is Best" posters and no-one had suggested it so far so I thought it was really disapproved of. It felt as if I couldn't breast feed him, I was being really awful, and by asking to bottle feed I wasn't doing the best thing for him.

I asked the nice midwife about it. She said "I shouldn't be telling you this but I bottle fed my babies and its better than him not eating anything now his blood sugar is low." That night mum and David helped me change the nightie I had had on since the birth. Mum gasped when we took it off. She said I was covered in a massive bruise right over my bottom and up above the epidural marks. When I changed my knickers I wasn't surprised I hadn't been able to wee as I was so swollen from the front to the back that it was like everything had closed up and fused together. You couldn't have seen or felt my stitches even. That night I tried the evil breast pump as I thought I could try and express and then bottle feed. Nothing came out, so I was eventually brave enough to ask for a bottle.

Someone brought it in and put it on the table, then left. I wasn't sure how I could pick up William while holding the catheter bag and pushing the drip trolley. Then I saw some safety pins on the side so I pinned the catheter bag to my nightie, that way I could pick William up and use both hands. I managed to sit on the edge of the bed, hold him above my sore tummy and feed him for the first time.

He drank the whole bottle so then I attempted to wind him, then put him back in bed. With my new found freedom thanks to the safety pin, I managed to take the bottle back to the midwives station. "You gave him the whole thing?" she said, he'll be sick. I said sorry and hobbled back off – I didn't realise. "Why have you still got that?" she shouted, pointing at my drip. I didn't dare say anything as I wasn't really sure. She came up and took it off. I asked if I could have some of the canulars out as they were really sore especially the ones inside my elbow. She took out three so I only had one in each arm left which felt a lot better.

That night I had chest pains again. The doctor came and said I was still tachycardic, my pulse was 140, but I ought to go for a chest x-ray and lung scan the next day to check everything. I wasn't sure what she meant. I said I felt really dizzy and faint so she took some blood to check my iron in case I needed more blood.

The next morning as I woke up I felt like I couldn't breathe again, I was gasping for breath and my pulse was racing. I thought it must be a nightmare of when I woke up from the anaesthetic and couldn't breathe. A midwife came in and I was sobbing, she just looked at me then went to check William. I told her about the flashback and not being able to breathe. "How many days ago was he born?" she asked. Four I answered. "Ah the baby blues," she said, then she walked out.

A little later the Registrar that delivered William came in, she said she just wondered how I was doing. I said I felt really rough, "Well," she said, "you're lucky to be here." I told her about not being able to wee, she said she didn't know why but when she had put the catheter in after stitching, all that had come out was pure blood.

After she left I decided to have a shower while William was asleep. I hadn't had one since the morning before I was induced 5 days before and I wanted to wash the blood off me. I still had blood on my hand from touching William. I asked the midwife if it was ok to get the stitches wet, meaning the ones in my tummy, of course she said. I asked what I should do about the dressing, "What dressing do you mean?" she asked. I showed her my tummy.

"What's that?", she asked, "I didn't think you had had a caesarean." I told her about the laparoscopy. This was one of the midwives who had been looking after me since I came on the ward. She didn't have a clue what had happened to me. She told me to take off the dressing if it got wet. Then I borrowed a rubber glove to put over the drips in my hands.

I asked if someone could look after William as I was worried about leaving him on his own. She said NO but if I left my door open they would hear him crying. I went back into my room to open the door and luckily David had just arrived for the 2 hours that dads could come in the morning. Just as I was about to go for my shower, a man came with a wheelchair to take me to x-ray, so I didn't get my shower.

I managed to get in the chair, a midwife found a metal thing to put my catheter bag in and hung it on the side of the chair. I sat in the waiting room for x-ray. I felt pretty self-conscious as there were out-patients and there was I in a shortish nightie with blood down my legs and a catheter coming out of my pants. I thought, well its a hospital, I suppose people are used to sights like me. Then the receptionist came over, she handed me a blanket and said to cover myself up. I should have been grateful, I suppose, but I felt really ashamed. The x-ray and lung scan went ok, except for the scan they had to inject a radio-active substance into my vein, which wasn't pleasant.

That afternoon I managed to have my first wash since William was born, David helped me have a shallow bath. When I stood up to dry myself, milk ran down me and into the water. I started to cry. I should have been feeding William with that!

That evening I asked if they could call a doctor to find out the results of my scan. She came and said everything was fine. I then explained that the doctor the day before had wanted to check my iron level to see if I needed another transfusion. She looked at my results and said they were low, but she would do another blood test to check them again.

The next day, my catheter was removed again, this time I had less luck, I couldn't wee at all and another was replaced. That afternoon I realised my stitches was getting sorer, I could no longer sit to feed William, I had to stand which was really tiring. I was keeping a close eye on the time so I

could go out and ask for my painkillers when they were due. Thinking about it now, I always had to ask for them, they were never just brought to me. The midwives only ever came in if you called, and then they were grumpy like you had disturbed them. The whole time i was in hospital, noone changed my bed, or cleaned, or emptied the bin or anything, i was filthy as i couldn't look after myself. If i asked for help with william or getting my meals i was treated like a naughty child. Talking of meals, i know all hospital meals are bad but for dinner every day there was a plate of chips, and a plate of sandwiches which everyone helped themselves to, all open on a plate. And being a vegetarian all i got most nights was a few chips.

That evening I asked to see a doctor again to find out about my iron as I was still very dizzy and was worried about standing to feed William. It was a different doctor again, she said my iron in the second test was lower than the first, so they would do another blood test. It seemed whatever happened I wouldn't get any more blood and I never did. I was anaemic for about 6 months after. My midwife at home said to me I should have had at least 2 more units for the amount of blood I lost. I always wondered if I had had more if it would have taken me so long to get better. And david reminded me after we had to fight for those two units of blood, i had lost nearly two litres and they still didn't want to give me any. They wanted to see how i would cope first, as my blood pressure had gone down to 20/10, i don't think i was coping too well.

The next morning after I had got over the not being able to breathe episode, which was now happening every morning, I realised my stitches were hurting even more, I called a midwife. She didn't examine me, just said they always feel worse again before they get better. Later a new midwife came in. I had not seen her before. She sat down on the bed and looked at my notes and asked how I was feeling. I told her about my stitches hurting.

She examined me. I could tell from her concerned face something was wrong. She asked if I had been examined before. I said yes, but it had always been from the back, at the ones near my bottom. I'd never had to lie on my back and have the inside ones looked at. She said they looked infected and would tell the consultant. I asked her when I might be able to go home. She said the catheter that had been put in the day before had to stay in for 4 days. I started to cry, I wanted to go home. I was feeling more ill and more tired every day. I wanted some help with William. I didn't know how much longer I could keep going. At least if I was at home I would get some help in the nights. She said she would talk to the consultant.

He came later, it was the man that had done my laparoscopy. It was the first time I had seen him since that night. I didn't even know the outcome of my operation, although at that point I forgot to ask. He said I needed antibiotics for my stitches. I said I wanted to go home so I could have more help as I was struggling to feed William when I was not able to sit down. He said he couldn't take my catheter out until Thursday. I started to cry, that was another 3 days and I had already been there a week. He said if I stayed another day to let the antibiotics start to work, then I could go home with the catheter.

The next morning the nice midwife was there again, she said they had discussed me in their meeting and if I still couldn't wee on Thursday, they would have to put a supra-pubic catheter (through my tummy) so I could train my bladder to work again. This made me feel a bit better as I was worried about having the catheter I had for much longer as it was getting really sore, although I was getting quite worried as no-one seemed to know why my bladder wasn't working. One midwife had suggested my bladder had been damaged by the forceps, another said it could be because I was left without a catheter for too long.

That afternoon I was discharged. The drive home was uncomfortable as I had to perch on my left buttock, but it was lovely to be home. We put William in his Moses basket next to me on the bed and opened all the cards and presents for William. I spent the next day in bed. I could only lie on my left side as the cut in my right buttock was sore.

That day a midwife came to see me, she looked at my stitches and frowned, "I've never seen it done like that before.", she said. I didn't want to look so she explained that the muscle was sown, then another layer on top of that, but the outside layer wasn't sown tight together so you could see through the layers underneath. She wasn't sure if it was on purpose or they had come apart.

The next day we left William with David's parents and got to the hospital by 1pm as we'd been told. I was shown to a bed on the antenatal ward. A midwife said a doctor would be around soon. By 3pm no-one had come so the midwife examined me. She pulled a face and said my stitches smelt. I asked if she would check the ones in my tummy, they were all yellow and infected too. She asked how long I had had the stitches there for. I said 9 days, so she took them out. She said they would take out the catheter when the doctor arrived.

By 6pm he still had not arrived, she said it was now too late to remove my catheter, but I should wait for the doctor to see my stitches. He eventually came around 8.30pm. He said he would give me an extra antibiotic to help the infection in my tummy and he thought I may have an abscess in the stitches down below, but wasn't sure. He said we should go back the next day to get the catheter taken out, but to come in the morning this time. I was worried about William, we had left him for eight hours with David's parents.

By 9am the next morning we were back at the hospital, this time with William left with my mum. A midwife showed me to a room on my own, this one actually had its own toilet and said we should wait for the doctor. David said he would go into work for a couple of hours so he could save his holiday for when we were at home. By 10am, the doctor hadn't come so the midwife said she would take the catheter out. She said I should try to wee and if I couldn't again then I would be sent for a scan, then a doctor would come and put in the supra-pubic catheter. They told me to drink lots and I did, I was determined to be able to wee this time. I drank jug after jug.

About 11am I needed a wee, so went and sat on the toilet. Nothing happened. I called the midwife, she told me to try for a while longer and keep drinking lots. By 12pm I was getting extremely uncomfortable. I rang the bell again and an auxiliary nurse came and said the midwives were busy and could she help. I explained and she said she would get someone when they were available.

By 12.30pm no-one had come. I was lying on the bed, writhing around in pain, my tummy hurt so much, I was crying and really scared. I was so desperate to go to the toilet it was agony. I managed to make it to the bathroom, but still could not go. I had to crawl back to the bed as it was hurting so much. I rang the bell again and the auxiliary nurse came back. I was crying but managed to say please fetch me a midwife. She said "They are doing the handover, I told you one would come when they are available." and she went again. I lay there for another 15 minutes. It is hard to describe how awful I felt, I was desperate beyond belief, rolling around in pain, I thought my tummy would explode.

Then my phone rang, it was David. I shouted please help me to him. He said he was coming now. He sounded really frightened. 15 minutes later he ran in the door after driving like a maniac. He took one look at me and ran out shouting for a midwife. One eventually came. She looked at me and fetched a wheelchair to take me for a scan. While I was waiting I wee'd myself a bit, it just came out, but not that much – although I did get some relief.

They scanned me and the pressure made me sick everywhere. The scanographer said my bladder was extremely distended. They took me back to the ward and paged the doctor. I waited an hour, then the midwife came in and said he would be another 30 minutes, so they would have to put in another urethra catheter until he came to do the supra-pubic one. I started to cry and protesting more as I was so sore I didn't want another one of those. They said I had no choice, another midwife came in and held my legs apart, I lay there screaming and saying no while they put it in. It felt like a

hot knife it was awful.

After I lay there sweating and shaking, I couldn't even lift my arms I was so exhausted. We waited and waited. At about 9pm, 7 hours since he had been paged, a midwife came in and said David had to go as visiting hours were over. I said what about the doctor, she said I had to wait until he came. I could then call David to come and get me after it was done. By 11pm, a midwife had come in and said he probably wouldn't come now until the morning. I should stay the night and get some sleep rather than calling David. I called Dave crying, I did not want to stay, I wanted to be at home with my baby, but the midwife had explained if I wasn't there when the doctor came I would have to wait even longer. So I got into bed, lay there all on my own and cried myself to sleep.

At 11am the following day, the doctor finally arrived, 21 hours after being paged. He said he would take the catheter out and come back in a couple of hours. I was terrified, I'll be desperate by then. I'll come back after an hour he said. Your bladder needs to be quite full to do it. What if you don't come I asked. I was so scared of getting like I was the day before. Of course I'll come, he said, looking at me as if I was some hysterical woman.

After it was out the midwife said why don't you take advantage of not having it and have a walk up and down the ward. I couldn't face it though, not only did I still feel very weak but I couldn't face seeing all the people with their new babies, being all happy, when my baby wasn't even there.

After $\frac{3}{4}$ hour I called the midwife as I was starting to become uncomfortable. She called the doctor who came at 12.10pm. "There you see, only 10 minutes late", he said, pointing at the clock like I was a child. He numbed my tummy with local anaesthetic which really stung then put a tube into my bladder, it felt horrible. Then he stitched the plastic part of the catheter which was flat against my skin onto my skin with 4 stitches. That really hurt as I don't think the anaesthetic had worked very well, but by now I felt too defeated to complain about anything.

They attached it to a bag and then gave me a metal stand for the bag so I did not have to keep carrying it all the time. He said to keep the catheter open for the weekend, then to come back on Monday and they would show me how to close it so I could train my bladder.

Finally I got home about 2pm, 29½ hours since I have left for my appointment. I just lay in bed all weekend as my tummy was sore from the stitches. I couldn't walk around as the stitches would move about and couldn't sit because of the pain. I just lay there on my left side. David put William on the bed next to me but I couldn't really cuddle him or anything.

I got to the hospital at 9am, on Monday, as told, I sat there for hours as usual. We took William this time as there was no-one to look after him. He was getting really fed up by the time the doctor arrived at about 12pm. It was a new doctor.

"What can I do for you then?", he said, "Oh and by the way if I get paged I'll have to go." He didn't know anything about me. So I told him and he looked at the catheter, said it looked fine and then went. I had to wait 3 hours for that. One of the head midwives came in and explained how to close off the catheter, then when I needed a wee, measure it, then open it up and see how much residual went into the bag. I asked how long I would have to do it for, she said I'd probably be better in a week or so and to come back on Friday to see how I was doing.

So the following week I tried my best to wee normally. It was so painful and I still couldn't really do it much, but by the end of the week, I was weeing about 50ml each time and having around 450ml left, which didn't sound too encouraging. Apart from the weeing I didn't get out of bed much. I could stand still so the catheter didn't move around as it was sore and I certainly couldn't sit down.

My own midwife came to see me, she was really lovely, but warned me she had seen one other

person with a supra-pubic catheter and they had had it for six weeks. As I couldn't have a bath or shower because I wasn't allowed to get the stitches in my tummy wet, she suggested I get an unturned bucket and put a bowl on it, and sit in that. So if I wasn't weeing in a jug I was sitting in a bucket. That was my life for the next week.

My midwife had arranged for me to see my consultant in outpatients so I didn't have to sit for hours on the ward. The trip to the hospital was really embarrassing though as everyone was looking at my catheter bag. We only had to wait about half an hour, but I had to stand as there was no way I could have sat on a plastic chair. The consultant looked at my readings of wee and said to carry on. He would see me in another week, and they arrange for the district nurse to come and check my catheter.

The following Monday, David had to go back to work, so my mum came to help for a week. On the Wednesday, my ante-natal reunion occurred. I was determined to go as I had not been able to leave the house yet except to go to the hospital, although the re-union was at the doctor's surgery.

I safety pinned my catheter bag to the inside of my skirt so no-one could see it and we finally got there. I hobbled into the room with mum carrying William. "Oh, have you just had him?" one lady asked, "3 weeks ago", I said.

All the ladies were sitting in a semi-circle on chairs holding their babies and chatting. I couldn't sit down, the health visitor put a couple of cushions on the floor and a blanket. I had to lie on my side on the floor in front of everyone. The health visitor said they were discussing positive and negative experiences from the births. She asked what my positive experiences were. I thought hard, there weren't any, I said. There must have been something, she said. No I couldn't think of any. They didn't ask about my negative experiences, possibly because one of the ladies was still pregnant!

On the Thursday, the district nurse came to check my catheter. When she looked she was confused, she said the catheter I had wasn't one she saw people at home with, and she wasn't really sure what to do with it. She had brought some smaller leg bags with her to try, but it was difficult to fit them on, as there was a piece of plastic that came straight out from my catheter which wouldn't bend, and it was about 6 inches long. We tried bending the actual tube, but it was still too uncomfortable, if I tried to walk it made the tube move which pulled on my stitches. She said I ought to phone the hospital and let them know that she didn't really know what to do with this type of catheter and so was not very happy about touching it. After she had left I called, I told the midwife who answered what she had said. "Of course she knows what to do with it, she said. She knows a lot more than you". I tried to explain it wasn't me who was saying this it was the nurse who had told me to phone. "Don't be ridiculous" she shouted. So I just said ok thanks bye. and burst into tears.

On Friday at my hospital appointment with the consultant what the nurse had said, as she had asked me to check that I had the right type of catheter. "No it is fine" he said. He asked why I wasn't using a leg bag instead of the big one, so I explained that the stitches were too sore. He had a look at them and found that one of them had torn out, "never mind" he said it will be out soon. Although by this time I was still only weeing about 150mls and having around 350mls left. I asked him to look at my stitches down below as the pain was getting worse every day. He gave me some more antibiotics. I asked when the stitches would be taken out, he said they would dissolve when I had healed, I wondered when that would be.

That weekend my mum had to go home as she was paying for someone to look after her dogs. David had no holiday left, so we had to hire a nanny to look after William. It was expensive, but was less than if Dave took the time as unpaid leave. Luckily we managed to use someone I already knew, but it was still really hard watching someone else looking after my baby. I did manage to feed him lying on the bed but I couldn't lift him up to wind him so she had to sit there too. She asked a few times if I wanted her to take William for a walk, I felt bad that he hadn't been out yet,

but i wanted to be the first to take him out.

The health visitor came that week, we chatted for a while about everything, she asked if i had seen a urologist at all about my bladder. I said no, she suggested i ask when i went on Friday, to see if i could see one, as no-one seemed to know why my bladder wasn't working. She was really lovely to talk to, she actually seemed cross about some of the things that had happened to me, and that felt good. It was good for someone to think i wasn't just making a fuss. My midwife at home was really nice too, she came every other day and did reflexology on me, and found an alternative to 2 of my 3 day iron tablets that i was on so that it didn't make it so hard for me to go to the toilet.

That part was another embarrassing thing, I had no control over my bowels, and frequently didn't make it to the toilet. It didn't help that my antibiotics were suppositories and made me really sore. I did tell the consultant about this problem but he didn't seem to see it as a concern.

That week was the most pain i had been in, i lay in bed gritting my teeth and crying most of the time. I had horrendous stabbing pains where my stitches were, and also in my tummy where my catheter was. I went to my g.p. that week, who gave me some tablets to help me sleep, and some different pain killers that she said would help with the constipation. She said she would call my consultant to let him know how much pain i was in. I asked if i should get a second opinion about my bladder as it didn't seem like it was going to get better, she said that i shouldn't. she looked at a letter that had come from the hospital that said i had a tear in my cervix and my uterus.

I saw the consultant again on Friday, he looked at my stitches and i explained that the pain was worse than ever. Then he did a scan to check my uterus, it was still up to the height of my tummy button in size. I told him about the pain in my catheter, which he looked at and found that 2 stitches had now ripped out. He decided he wanted me to come into the hospital again, and he would take some swabs under general anaesthetic of my womb, and other stitches. He said he would also take some of my stitches out, that had healed in parts, and would re stitch the cut in my buttock that was still apart. I asked about the stitches in my catheter, as i was worried the other stitches would come out and then the catheter would fall out, he was very reluctant to do anything, but then said he would re stitch it in surgery. He said i should come into the post natal ward as i wasn't quite six weeks after. And William would be able to stay there too. I explained that i couldn't look after William on my own, more so now than ever, so could maybe David or my mum stay there too, to help me. He said that was impossible, so William would have to stay at home but he said that he could be brought in by my mother but only at visiting times. I was upset by the fact i would be back in hospital and my baby would be at home he said " don't worry about it, it will only be a few days, you can enjoy the rest" I was told to go in the following day at 9am and not to eat anything after midnight. I was really scared about going back, but was so desperate to escape my pain and i hoped this would help me to get better.

We got there at nine and i was put in a private room i hoped i wouldn't have to pay for this one. I was told the anaesthetist and surgeon would be in to see me soon and that my operation was booked for 12pm. By 3 pm we called the midwife as we hadn't seen anyone since we got there. And i was getting really thirsty as i hadn't drunk now for 15 hours. She said they should be up to get me soon, at 4 she came in and said they had been held up by emergencies. I said i was really thirsty, she said she could get me a drip, but wasn't happy about doing it. At 6 pm the porters came up to get me although i hadn't seen the anaesthetist or surgeon. As I was wheeled down the anes. turned up and started asking me questions as we went along the corridor. After the questions he said that i should have a spinal instead of a general. I was terrified, i said my epidural hadn't worked before. He said that a spinal was totally different, I started to cry, i said that the consultant had told me i would be having a general. " well I'm the anaesthetist, not him" he shouted and walked off. I told the nurse who was with me that i didn't want to have it done then, i couldn't bear to be awake. I saw the anaesthetist talking to the consultant. He walked over again and said to the nurse he was doing a general. He didn't speak to me again, not one word.

In the morning a midwife came in to start me on a 3 day course of intravenous antibiotics. I felt upset, that meant that i would be in for at least 3 days. I had a look at my catheter, it hadn't been restitched. After a while i felt a funny sensation, i realised that i was bleeding, i wasn't expecting it as i had stopped bleeding 10 days after William had been born. I called the midwife, as i was frightened. She asked how long ago i had had my baby, i said about 5 weeks ago, she asked if i was breast feeding although I'm not sure how i could have been when my baby was 8 miles away. She said that it was probably just a period. I explained i didn't have any pads as i wasn't expecting it, she said i could have two, but not any more than that. After i had struggled to the bathroom on my own feeling very dizzy from the anaesthetic, i got the pads out but found there was so much blood they were covered in 10 minutes. I called the MW again as it was an hour until visiting when David could come with some pads. She asked to see the used pads and stood there while i fished them out of the bin, she said i wasn't using them correctly, i had to let the blood soak right through, but she would let me have one more and that was it. She then came in with one of those big pad things you put on the bed and told me to put it on. So i didn't ruin the sheets. I was so embarrassed and upset, she was so cross with me. I found out after that i had had a D and C during the operation which apparently can make you bleed. I just wish someone had told me, then i could have brought pads in with me. and also i might have understood why i was bleeding, and not been so scared. At the time though i felt so stupid and such a pain, like i was bleeding on purpose just to be difficult.

William didn't come to visit on the Sunday as I was too ill. On the Monday the consultant came to see me, I was feeling slightly less in pain, so I told him and he seemed pleased. I said my stitches in my catheter hadn't been done so he said they could do that before I left. William was being brought in by my mum each day but I couldn't really do much with him, he just lay in his cot.

Wednesday morning the consultant came again, I was expecting to be let home by today but apart from the improvement the first day I didn't feel any better, so he said I would have to stay longer. By Wednesday afternoon I was feeling really bad, I could hear other people's babies crying and it kept making my breasts leak even though I had never been able to breast feed. I was so miserable, the staff were starting to put up Christmas decorations and it was nearly 6 weeks since William had been born, and I was still stuck in that horrible hospital. I had to call the midwife whenever I needed pain medication or it was time for my anti-clotting injection. No-one came in to me unless I called and then when they did I felt like I was being a pain, I felt like I shouldn't have been there. One midwife even told me that they shouldn't have put me on the post-natal ward as they didn't have the time to deal with a difficult case like me.

When my mum and best friend arrived they found me in tears. They started by clearing up my room for me, the bin had overflowed onto the floor as it hadn't been changed, there were syringes and dressings all over the floor, my sheets were covered in blood from that first morning and everywhere was filthy. No-one had cleaned or tidied or changed my bed since I had been there. Luckily my mum and Emma took charge, they emptied the bins and changed my bed and even swept the floor. Mum said she was going to write a list of all the things that we needed to talk to the consultant about when he came tomorrow and she would come in at 8am and talk to him.

My midwife from home came to visit in the morning and I asked if she could stay while we spoke to the doctor. My mum managed to come in even though it wasn't visiting time. When she was asked to leave she said no. It wasn't like she was disturbing anyone I was in a room on my own with 2 doors to the ward.

When the doctor came I think he was shocked to see so many people! He stood by the door as usual. My mum said could he sit on a chair as it felt quite intimidating when someone is looming over you. That put his back up straight away. I have found with a lot of doctors I saw, if you don't say anything you don't get adequate treatment but if you do they get angry and treat you even worse.

My mum got out her list and said first of all we wanted to see a urologist. I hadn't been able to urinate for nearly 6 weeks and we wanted to see someone who specialised in bladders. He said "I am treating your daughter" and they had a bit of a row but eventually he said someone would come and see me. Then my mum said that I was feeling really bad about being on that ward with all the babies but not having mine there and I wanted to be moved. I burst into tears then as I am not very good at confrontations. He said I couldn't be moved as I wasn't quite 6 weeks post-natal. I was really upset and confessed that it felt like my baby had died, that the baby that came each day didn't feel like the one that had been in my tummy. I felt as if I was grieving for my dead baby. And I felt like I was never going to get better. He said that he would tell the midwives that mum could bring William at any time of the day, except night of course, that would be the best he could do. He wasn't at all sympathetic. He didn't even address what I'd said to him and then left. It was never once suggested to me that maybe i should have some counselling, and noone ever offered to go over what had happened to me. Noone even suggested i be checked for PND.

I do remember one auxillary nurse being nice to me, she would bring me a cup of warm milk each evening as i wasn't allowed the normal tea with my anaemia. One thing that wasn't too great though was that she would complain about the other patients. One night she came in and said "ah, i hate the section patients! They lie there like dying ducks! Why don't they just get on with it" I wondered how many other nurses had complained about me. It seemed if you had a straight forward birth you were mainly ok, but if you weren't too well after, you just got more ill as noone would help you.

That afternoon a doctor came who was a urologist. He stood in the doorway like they all seen to, he actually held the door open with one hand as if he was about to rush off. So I got out of bed to talk to him. I explained what had happened and he didn't give any reason why he thought it had happened. He just said that I should keep seeing the consultant and he would make an appointment for me to see him mid January. He said if I couldn't wee by he time I came to see him, he would teach me how to self-catheterise myself twice a day.

I couldn't believe it, I was only 25 and it seemed like I would never be able to wee again. He saw my big bag and said I should use a leg bag. I explained I couldn't as it pulled the stitches. He said supra-pubic catheters don't have stitches, so I pulled up my nightie and showed him mine. "Oh" he said, we don't usually use those. I said I was scared to walk in case the two remaining stitches came out and the catheter fell out. "Don't worry", he said, "if that happens just go to A & E". Then he left. So I was none the wiser except it seemed more strange that he had thought my catheter was odd. And I was really scared. I only had a few weeks chance left, then I would never be able to wee. And since being in hospital it had got worse again. Two days later I was allowed home. Before I went another doctor came to put 2 more stitches in my catheter. She stitched it kind of off centre so it was even harder to walk now. I was sent home with yet more antibiotics.

Later that day i started to notice something strange with my catheter, I wasn't weeing much, but nothing was coming out into the bag. But i found if i lay on my side it would drain slowly. I wondered if it was anything to do with it being off centre, maybe it was getting blocked. By the evening my tummy was feeling sore and bloated, so we called the out of hours doctor. She said it sounded like it had become blocked, and i should call the hospital. I couldn't believe i might have to go back again, i was so upset. I started thinking about taking an overdose as i couldn't stand any more. It wasn't the idea that i may have another painful procedure, it was knowing i would have to endure more upsetting comments from the staff. David called and they said to come to the labour ward this time instead of the anti natal ward.

They sent me over to a bed and a midwife eventually came over. "I've heard all about you" she said, but not in a nice way, kind of here is the trouble maker. She didn't ask what was wrong, just said she needed me to go over everything that had happened so she could write it down, because this time i would be going to the gynaecology ward. I didn't even know that i would be staying there she

just couldn't wait to get rid of me. she was so rude. I could tell she thought i was just making a fuss, and shouldn't be there. But i didn't want to be there either, i hated the place. It made me feel ill just being there, i would have given anything not to be there. She said a doctor would come and see me. We had taken William with us to the hospital as it was 11pm at night. She pointed at him and said "you won't be able to take baby with you".

When the doctor arrived i told her i suspected my catheter might be blocked as not much was draining, but i still needed a wee. She said it was impossible for it to be blocked, and i probably had a urine infection so they would send off a sample. While i was there she asked another couple of questions like how was my bowel working? I told her that sometimes i found it difficult to control it. "what you mess yourself" she said in a loud voice. I was really humiliated, she said it like i was really disgusting, and didn't offer any advice, just said i could go when the midwife had taken a urine sample from my catheter. We waited another 2 hours for the midwife to take one, and in the end had to go and ask if someone would do it.

Two days later i had an appointment with my consultant. I told him my concerns about the catheter not working properly as it still hadn't improved. He said that it couldn't get blocked and even went and got a catheter to show me the holes around it to make his point.

Two days later was Christmas, we had planned to spend it at my parents house but there was no way i could have sat in the car for 3 hours, so my mum, step dad and brother, plus two dogs came to us for the day, bringing Christmas dinner with them. I tried to sit at the table with lots of cushions but it was far too painful, so we got the sofa bed out, and i ate my Christmas dinner on my side in the lounge, with my catheter bag next to me that my brother had decorated in tinsel.

Two days later i saw my consultant who gave me more antibiotics for my stitches, after examining me, he said i was starting to heal, and i saw a few stitches coming out when i had my 3 times a day sitting on a bowl. I found i could sit down on the sofa for short periods of time if i leaned on one buttock. However my optimism was short lived as, my catheter site was getting more and more painful. I felt like i would never get better, like because one thing was getting better i had to be punished by another thing getting worse. Even though i could now sit down for about 10 minutes i still couldn't have William on my lap as it hurt too much. I just dreamed of being able to sit down and hold my baby, and maybe feed him. Because my tummy was getting so sore if i wanted to walk, it had to be with my right knee bent all the time and my foot on tiptoe, to prevent it pulling my stitches and making the pain worse. I was leaning over to one side all the time which hurt my back. But the only way i could hold William was standing up, although it was still difficult for me to stand as i was very weak.

Over new year my mother and father in law came to stay, i know most people have problems with their in laws but i will mention this briefly as it exacerbated the way i was feeling. First my mother in law complained that the sink was ghastly, then she wanted to take William for a walk as she said it was important for him to get fresh air. i put my foot down on this point and said i wanted to be the first person to take him out and she could open a window if she wanted. But the worst thing she said which always sticks in my mind, and often haunts me at night is this. I was sitting on the sofa eating my lunch, an egg sandwich, and my MIL was on the other sofa feeding William his bottle. I hated lots of people feeding him but it seemed to her that anyone should be allowed to do it as i couldn't. Then she looked down at William and said "look at your mother sitting there stuffing her face, when she should be the one feeding you". That was another really low point for me, i went upstairs and cried all afternoon, it highlighted how i was feeling and what everyone else must have been thinking, i was a awful mother who couldn't even feed her own baby.

on 3rd January i had another consultant appointment. i told him of my discomfort, but he didn't seem concerned, he said another stitch had pulled out of the catheter but it wasn't really possible to put it back in as the skin was too thin. My weeing wasn't great but had improved slightly, although i still had 250mls left after every time. He said he would see me again after the weekend.

Over that weekend the pain in my tummy got worse and worse, i had noticed a funny smell in our bedroom over the last few days but i didn't know what it was. Then i started to notice i could smell it in the bathroom too. When David changed my dressing on Sunday it became immediately obvious what it was. As he took it off, the smell was overpowering, it took over the whole room. David took me down to the out of hours doctor, who swabbed the site and gave me more antibiotics. I was so embarrassed, you could see him physically recoil as he took the dressing off. But he wasn't too worried after he knew i would be going to the hospital the following day.

When we arrived at the hospital the following day, i couldn't get out of the car despite having taken two lots of strong painkillers . I was in agony, it felt like a hot searing pain through my tummy. David had to go and get a wheelchair for me as i couldn't walk. I cried and sweated and shook as he pushed me along and through the hour we sat in the waiting room. When we got in to see my consultant, again he didn't seem concerned. I told him about the pain and the smell. He said " well it is about time we took it out now anyway." I was very worried, i was still leaving 250 mls every time i weed, (less than 50 is considered ok). He said if i came in to the hospital on Wednesday "WE COULD TAKE IT OUT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS" I couldn't believe it, after all this i could see myself back to square one, not being able to wee, and ending up with another urethra catheter, and then having the man at the end of January teaching me how to self catheterise. We didn't really know what to say, so we just agreed and left. Before i went a nurse said she would clean the catheter site for me, i nearly hit the roof, when she touched it, i had a look there was a big red angry area all around, I lay there crying and sweating.

The health visitor came to see me that day and she suggested i go to see a private urologist so that i could get a second opinion before i was due to go into the hospital. My GP was very reluctant, but eventually we managed to get her to give us a name, and we made an appointment for two days later.

I had to tell the consultant what had happened so far, it was really hard to talk about it but he was kind and sympathetic. He asked to examine me, he looked really gently at the catheter and the area around it, and he even apologised when he hurt me. He then said to come back and sit down. He asked me to clarify how long i had had this catheter for. i worked it out and it was seven weeks. We could tell he was angry and astounded, he said that the type of catheter i had was a temporary one. IT SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN USED FOR LONGER THAN 48 HOURS. He explained the reason i was in so much pain, and for the smell, was because my body was desperately trying to reject it, as it wasn't designed to be in for longer than 48 hrs. let alone 7 weeks. He said it was almost certainly blocked and that he was concerned it may have snapped off because it was made of a brittle plastic inside. He asked if i had had a cystoscopy to see inside if there was any thing that was still preventing me from weeing. I said no. He wasn't supposed to be operating the next day, but was so worried about the state i was in that he managed to ring round and find a theatre and an anaesthetist. He said he wanted to remove the catheter and put in the one that i should have , that is designed for around 6 weeks, and also to do a cystoscopy to have a good look in my bladder. He offered to ask if he could do the operation in the normal hospital,so we would just have to pay for him, but we said no, there was no way i wanted to set foot in that place again. The cost of the operation was £1620, plus it was around £100 each time we saw the consultant. We couldn't really afford it, but there was no choice. So we put it on the credit card.

It is hard to describe how i felt after seeing him. i suppose i should have been angry, but i i think i was just so relieved that it all seemed to make sense at last. why i was in so much agony, why the catheter wasn't working. It was just such an amazing feeling to have the consultant listen to me, and to feel that i might actually be able to get better. It was also so good, to know that i wasn't just making a fuss, as i had been made to believe, there really was a problem. I can't believe that i was seen weeks after week by the previous consultant, and that he either didn't know i had the wrong thing, or that he just didn't want to say i had the wrong one. I'll never know why, but i know that through their neglect, i suffered so much.

The operation revealed that my bladder was very badly inflamed by the manky catheter, and it had crystallised so it wasn't draining properly, but apart from that he couldn't see any reason why i shouldn't be able to get better. I don't really need to say much about how different it was at that hospital, but it wasn't really the fact that it was a nice place, it was just nice that it was clean, and mainly that people were nice to me. I didn't feel that i was being a nuisance by being there. And also after the anaesthetic, i didn't feel so absolutely awful, I'm not sure if they used a different type, but they actually weighed me beforehand so perhaps i got a better dose.

The new catheter was sore for the first couple of days, but after that it was much better. It had a balloon inside it, so it didn't have to be stitched in and was made of soft rubber rather than hard plastic, so i was able to bend it round and tuck it inside my knickers. I didn't even have to have the big bag to carry round. I could walk normally at last, it was so strange to be able to stand up straight instead of being all hunched over. But the best thing was, that i could cuddle William, i finally managed to sit with him on my knee like a proper mum. 4 days after getting the new catheter, i managed my first outing. 9 weeks after William had been born i managed to push him in the pram for the first time. I remember turning to Emma and saying " I've got a baby".

My bladder improved noticeably every day, it really helped that it didn't hurt so much to wee. and by my appointment one and a half weeks later my residual amount was down to less than 50 mls. Which my consultant said was fine. He would have taken the catheter out then, but i was still very scared of not being able to wee, so he left it for another week to put my mind at rest. So a week later it finally came out, i was really scared, but everything was ok. And to think if i hadn't gone to see him i could have been having my appointment to teach me how to self catheterise that week.

I also saw a private gynaecologist a few weeks later because it was still sore to sit down. He said i have a lot of scar tissue, and recommended i saw a physiotherapist to do perineum ultra sound. and he also found i had an anal fissure caused by all the suppository antibiotics. He also thought i was suffering from PND and recommended i saw my GP about it, who gave me prozac. The hospital never called to find out why i hadn't turned up for my stay to take out the catheter and wait and see, we never heard from them again. Not even a bill for my private room.

So 2 years on... Physically : I was diagnosed with interstitial cystitis 7 months ago, which is like having cystitis all the time, my bladder wall is inflamed, with ulcers, and it bleeds quite a lot and gives me awful pains sometimes. It can be caused by having previous damage to the bladder so it wouldn't take much to guess that it was probably from that manky catheter. I can't eat or drink anything with acid, or vinegar, or caffeine in it. That includes alcohol and chocolate, and my favourite cheese. I also get infections quite regularly. But it is something i just have to live with. My scar is still uncomfortable to sit on hard chairs, sex is difficult, and tampons i wouldn't even dare! And i have period pains nearly every day. (I also get quite a lot of pain where my epidural scars are??)

Mentally not too great, hence my finding the BTA. The PND seemed to get better, but I'm still left with flashbacks, and horrific nightmares. I lay awake for hours at night despite sleeping tablets, and then wake up in the night soaked in sweat. Everything that happened goes over and over in my head. And the things that stick are mainly when people were horrible to me. I saw my GP, and suggested i had PTSD but he wasn't concerned about that, or that i have lost 3 stone in 3 months presumably through the stress. He said to me. " if you ask anyone in the street if they would like a massage, then they would mostly say yes. and it is the same for counselling, most people would like it if they could, but it doesn't mean everyone gets to have it"

I sometimes think about taking an overdose just so i can get some help, but i don't want to die, i want to get better. Just to finish, finally! I've included an excerpt of my diary .

3rd January 2005

I looked at William's scan pictures for the first time today, for the first time since he has been born, i was putting something in his special box and i saw the book i knew they were inside, i couldn't help but look even though i knew it would upset me. I can't explain why, but when i saw then i felt

grief. It seems strange as he is a happy healthy 2 year old. But when i think back to looking at the scans when i was pregnant and feeling him moving inside me, and all the excitement and love i felt, it doesn't feel like the same thing, after everything i went through, it is like that baby died. I want to be able to feel that love and excitement about something again.

My mum asked me on Christmas eve if i was excited for Christmas. I didn't lie, i said no. She asked why not and i said because i don't get excited about anything any more.

I am so frightened that one day i will get my feelings back, but it will be too late, William will have grown up, and I'll have missed it.