

The Birth of Elizabeth Katherine

Contributed by Stephanie Swanson

Our first daughter, Alora, was born in a hospital. Not knowing what to expect we went in at only 2 cm. Four hours and only 4 cm later, we were not moving as quickly as their clocks, so we were told. The doctor, whom we had never met before, informed us that she would need to break my bag of water and pitocin would be administered to increase the strength and consistency of my contractions. I had already been in labor since noon the day before. It was now 8:00 p.m. and I was tired. I opted for the epidural. What was to be a natural, wonderful experience was quickly spiraling out of our hands. My husband, Ryan, and I felt helpless. Three short hours after all the intervention, I was complete and began pushing. I never felt the urge to push, but was told I needed to. I pushed for 2 ½ hours. Our baby was stuck. I knew if I did not get her out, they were going to go in and take her. So I said a prayer. Instantly I felt sick to my stomach. Vomiting pushed our baby past my pubic bone and 30 minutes later our beautiful baby girl was born. I had suffered major tears and several other health issues due to lack of care. But in the end I had a beautiful baby girl who was healthy.

When Ryan and I decided to have another baby, I just knew there had to be a better way to bring our bundle into this world. I then began my research. We discovered it was just as safe, if not safer, to birth at home. We learned that the doctor had put our daughter in danger by breaking my water when she did. It boiled down to this: if something horrible was going to happen, the hospital may be the cause or could not have saved us anyway. Any other issue that would have arisen would simply end up in a transport to the hospital. That's when we decided we would have our baby at home.

We interviewed every midwife in town and that's when we met Dotti. She was so warm and gentle. I immediately felt comfortable and safe with her. She was very organized and had a lot of experience. It was an easy choice for us. Throughout our pregnancy Dotti became a friend to our family. I was able to bring anyone to our appointments so our friends and family could be a part of our pregnancy. At one time we had 6 people on the bed trying to see and hear the baby! That would have never happened in a doctor's office.

At 28 weeks I began having contractions. They were strong and close together. At about 32 weeks I was already dilating. At 34 weeks I quit my job and went on "home" rest. Everyday seemed to last an eternity and everyday Dotti celebrated with us another day to a healthier baby. To pass the time Dotti loaned me Ina May's Guide to Natural Childbirth. This, I would later learn, was the key to a wonderful birthing experience.

We wanted our baby to be healthy, of course, but what kept motivating me to get through each day was the fact that I DID NOT WANT TO HAVE THIS BABY IN THE HOSPITAL! We had to make it to April 1st to accomplish both goals. I never stopped having contractions. But we made it!

On April 6th, five short hours after Ryan's birthday (5:00 a.m.) I got up to use the restroom. When I got back into bed, I had a stronger than normal contraction which was followed by leaking. I woke Ryan up and told him my water just broke and I needed a towel. His response "Are you sure you didn't pee your pants?" A smack in the arm later he got me a towel. We then made our way to my husband's parent's house, since this is where we decided to have the baby.

I said a little prayer before we hit the road. I asked for a safe delivery, healthy baby, and no pain (if you don't ask, you don't receive). We hit every green light to their house! When we arrived I took a shower and discovered my contractions were stronger when I was standing. I then went into the living room and put on my favorite movie. Dotti and Bobbie (her apprentice) arrived and discovered I was 5 cm. I was already further than I was with our first!

During each contraction I would breathe, stay relaxed, spoke "I am opening up," and leaned over the coffee table. Ryan would rub my back as I rocked my pelvis. Between contractions I stayed relaxed by sitting back down. I drank water after each contraction and used the restroom every 30 minutes. These were all things I had learned from reading Ina May's book.

I never timed the contractions. I learned from previous experience that at this point it was not beneficial or necessary for me to keep track, Bobbie was. I was just listening to my body.

After our friend Judy arrived, my contractions began to pick up in intensity. I remember not being able to find a good place for my hands. I said it was time to get into the water.

In the pool Dotti checked me again (it had been 2 ½ hours since she had last checked) and I was at 7 cm. She suggested I sit back. Ryan held my hands while Judy rubbed my back. Within a couple of contractions I was overwhelmed with a sensation I had never felt before. I felt like I needed to go to the restroom. Dotti checked and said there was still a little cervix left. I changed back to the leaning forward position and rested my head on the side of the

pool. I suddenly did not want to be touched. Dotti spoke kind words. I envisioned myself riding a wave and was telling myself that I was at the top and the longer I could ride it the quicker I would win. This only lasted for a few more contractions. Next thing I know my body was telling me I needed to lie down.

When I reached the bed, the sensations I began feeling overwhelmed me and for the first time I felt I was losing control. Judy saw what was happening to me and told me to breathe and relax. As soon as I did I was back in control. When Dotti explained to me that I could push, I realized I was not going to the bathroom, but having a baby. I then pushed through the contractions with all I had. Within minutes I could see our baby's head.

As soon as the baby began crowning, I could feel that familiar "ring of fire!" Dotti kept reminding me to let myself stretch. I was fearful of tearing, again. So we took our time pushing the head out. It hurt but was well worth it in the end. The head emerged and Ryan hopped over to pull the baby out. Within seconds our beautiful Elizabeth was here!

We cried and were so overjoyed. I have never felt so empowered or more ready to conquer the world. It was the most amazing experience of my life!