

## Birth Story

I think it's safe to say that our birth experience would have been totally different without the help and support of our doula team, Lauren and Nina. Right from our initial meetings, my husband and I felt completely comfortable with them, and we felt listened-to and guided by them. These sessions proved invaluable as they filled in the gaps missed out by some of our other antenatal classes, and were tailored to our needs and wishes, but Lauren and Nina really came into their own during the on-call period, and the labour. Lauren was on hand for us in the time before I went into labour, checking-in to see how I was doing, seeing if I had any signs yet, and answering questions that I might have felt silly disturbing a midwife with. When I eventually did go into labour at home, she was in regular contact with my husband by phone throughout the first half of the night, and arrived at our house at 4am, enabling my husband to get a couple of hours' sleep before we ventured in to the hospital.

I had a very long labour (30 hours) in which I 'failed to progress', and I ended up having a C-section. Once we arrived in the hospital (just before 8am on Saturday morning), Lauren stayed with us in the Birth Centre almost constantly until Nina came to relieve her (at about 5pm later that day), and inserted some fresh energy into the room. During the time she was with us at the hospital, Lauren conveyed our Birth Plan wishes to the midwives (such as not offering me drugs) enabling my husband to focus on me, she encouraged me to eat and drink as I'd got dehydrated from vomiting through early labour, and her presence meant that my husband was able to have a break to get breakfast or have a nap whilst I was still being supported. By the time Nina arrived in the late afternoon, I had only dilated from 5 to 6cms, and it had become clear that my baby's head was stuck and not fully dropped into my pelvis. Nina put some Clary Sage aromatherapy oils into a diffuser, and we spent the next 4 hours (until my next midwife check) doing squats, pelvic tilts on the birthing pool stairs, and even some Rebozo sifting (a method used by Mexican midwives, using a scarf to release the pelvis and try and help the baby jiggle into position). During this time the midwives watched, but stayed in the background - they were very supportive of everything we were doing, but these were not specifically methods they were trained to use.

Unfortunately none of our attempts had worked, and it became clear we would need to head to the Labour Ward for a change of direction with the labour. We talked through our options, and I decided to try for the trickle Syntocin drip initially without any pain relief drugs, but there was an emergency on the Labour Ward, and we were unable to see the doctor for five hours. As with Lauren, Nina stayed with us this whole time, keeping both of us calm, mediating with the midwife in the room and chasing up the situation with the doctor, and again enabling my husband to have a nap to keep up his strength. It became clear that my energy was running low, and I decided that whichever way my labour was going I would need some pain relief. Once I finally saw the doctor at about 3am, she established I'd progressed no further in all this time, and also that I had an infection brewing (my waters had broken before I went into hospital). She told me I had the option of either the full syntocin drip - which might produce contractions strong enough to encourage the head into the right position, but equally might not, and we'd be looking at another 8-12 hours of labour with the possibility of a crash C-section at the end of it - or an emergency C-section as quickly as they could get me into theatre. My husband and I talked in depth with

the midwife and Nina about these two options, and decided that at this point, C-section was the more preferable of them. Since I wasn't allowed more than one person in theatre with me, my husband joined me there, but once the baby was born he went with him whilst he had a cannula fitted, and Nina was waiting for me in the recovery room. A few days after the birth, Lauren and Nina came to our house, and we spent a few hours having a full debrief of the birth, and reflecting on exactly what had happened. We watched the video my husband had taken of the birth, and looked at some of the photos that Lauren and Nina had taken of us during labour. This felt like such an important part of the whole experience, and enabled my husband and me to move on and focus on 'what next'.

The main reasons I had decided to have a doula initially was to have someone to support me and my husband in the case of any difficult decisions, to advocate for me if necessary, and to have some consistency through the hospital shift changes. I was unaware when I initially contacted Lauren that I would be getting all of that for double the value – two doulas rather than one – and I am so grateful to them for this setup. It meant we had double the care (before, during and after), and fresh support for the second half of the labour. I also didn't expect that we would come away with two new friends, and a bond with two people who have been there through one of the most intimate and amazing times of our lives.