

Being Observed in Labour and Lots of Other Very Useful Things

I wonder if this is the latest birth report you've ever received ... our daughter Eloise was born 9 months ago on 22nd May and I have thought about writing to you so many times since then, but somehow life has always got in the way!

I just wanted to tell you what a wonderful experience Theo, Eloise and I found hypnobirthing to be. I've made jokes about standing on street corners wearing a sandwich board extolling the virtues of hypnobirthing, but it's not that far from the truth!

We had Eloise at home in our little flat with a birth pool which took up pretty much all of our sitting room. The days before her birth I spent preparing our home so it felt really beautiful – filled with flowers and calmness. Our telly and sofas were pushed to the side and the sitting room was filled with my favourite things and pictures. I even got around to making a cake for the midwives!

At about 7 on Friday evening (our baby was due on the Monday) I started feeling surges that were more frequent than the Braxton Hickses that I'd felt that week. We went to bed, but I knew that our baby was on its way. At around 2 am I woke up because the surges were getting stronger, and Theo went to inflate the birth pool (we'd had a trial run a week earlier which was really helpful). We started timing the surges at around 3am and at 5am Sarah, an NHS midwife came over to check on my progress. At this point I was using our bed for support – leaning forward over lots of pillows with a hot water bottle against my tummy. Sarah was lovely, supportive of our hypnobirth and impressed with how well we were doing by ourselves. She gave me an examination (the only one I had) and I think said I was 3cm dilated.

I was gently telling myself to stay calm and focussed in my own bubble of concentration, but Sarah's presence had a noticeable impact on me. I could really feel the surges becoming less strong and less frequent, rewinding to how they had felt an hour earlier. My husband spoke to Sarah about this and we decided that we would much rather continue with my labour alone, so that we could concentrate on getting back into the bubble I needed to be in. Sarah was happy with my progress and happy to leave us alone until we felt like we needed more help. This was brilliant and made all the difference for us.

After she left, we kissed and cuddled and quite quickly my surges returned to their previous strength and frequency. Around about this point I moved to our tiny loo where I spent several hours! I had been getting frustrated by how often I needed to pee, so it just seemed easier to stay where I was rather than rushing to the lav every 20 minutes or so. Not glamorous, but very comfortable! I found the upwards breathing really helpful at this point and found myself doing some rather strange tonal singing which helped release the build-up of energy.

I think this was a really efficient part of my labour and Theo was amazing in helping me stay very focussed with my breathing and visualisations.

At 9am our new midwives arrived. Rose, the midwife looking after me was wonderful. She popped her head around the loo door, introduced herself, and then slipped away again. She was so respectful of our wishes and incredibly supportive of our hypnobirth – to have her there was brilliant. I got into the pool and things speeded up quite quickly. Theo was amazing – I really couldn't have done it without him. My surges were very powerful by now, but I can remember saying to him that I was enjoying it! Sort of extraordinary, but we were having a baby, and the reality that we were about to meet our baby was starting to hit me and it was very exciting.

The second stage of labour was fairly full on, but over pretty quickly (about half an hour), and Rose and Theo were again brilliant in supporting me through it.

At 1.45 Elouise was born. Theo caught her in the pool and we put her on my chest straight away. The feeling of elation and surprise was unlike anything either of us could have imagined or possibly describe. Just 'Wow'. Lots of tears of delight.

We waited for the cord to stop pulsing before cutting it, and I expelled the placenta naturally. The midwives continued to be wonderful looking after us and helping Theo clear up the flat which really didn't take long. It definitely wasn't the messy event I think I'd been fearing (I'm a bit of a tidiness freak).

It was magic to be able to climb into bed a few hours after the birth of our beautiful baby and be in our own calm, beautiful home. I really do use the word 'wonderful' to describe the birth of our baby, and I know there are so few women who are lucky enough to do that. I believe so strongly in the power of positive thought and the strength of hypnobirthing – we put in a lot of practice, and it really paid off. Thank you Katharine for teaching us. The gift of helping to give us a wonderful birth is something that we really treasure.

- Daisy