

Homebirth

My father, a small town doctor who'd delivered hundreds of babies, was mortified when I told him I wanted to try homebirth for my second child.

"But Beth," he exclaimed, "what if something goes wrong?"

I sighed. "First of all, the hospital is five minutes away. Second of all, my midwife has delivered over six thousand babies in her career. At home. With no complications for any of the mothers or the babies. My obstetrician can't even come close to that average."

"That's not fair."

"No, of course it's not fair. Doctors have to deal with all the cases that my midwife won't touch because they're too risky. That's my point. She has the experience to know if there's a problem she can't handle. She's interviewed me thoroughly and decided that the risk factors for me are extremely low."

My mother-in-law tried to be polite, but it was clear she wanted her son to speak up and do the right thing for her future grandchild. She was of the generation that entered the hospital at the first sign of labor and woke up from their ether haze a few hours later with a beautiful baby whose lop-sided head would grow back into its proper shape in a month or so. To her, homebirth was something for "hillbilly" families who didn't have the sense or the finances to take advantage of all that modern science had to offer.

My husband, bless his heart, didn't rise to the occasion the way she wanted him to. When I thanked him he said, "Hey, I'm just a spectator here. You're the one who has to go through this. It's your decision."

My first birthing experience had been horrible. I was terribly nauseous and throwing up, so they gave me tranquilizers, which put me to sleep between contractions. I'd dream about the Gestapo torturing me and wake up to see that, no, there was no answer I could give that would make the pain go away. I'd been very specific about how I wanted my birthing experience to be, and the people at the hospital, none of whom I'd ever met before, ignored every instruction.

One of the primary topics of conversation at all social groups for young mothers is comparing birthing stories. In my small Las Madres group, everyone had a horror story...except the one woman who had birthed her baby at home with an experienced midwife and who describe the experience as, "beautiful."

So, I went for it. And that second birth was so painless compared to the first that we waited until much too late to call the midwife. My poor husband almost had to deliver the baby himself!

Now, I have to say that my third childbirth, also at home, was not nearly so idyllic. I was 36 by this time, and during one of the early contractions my uterus tore. Ouch. Each contraction felt like a knife thrust. My midwife earned her fee with this one, staying with me for over 24 hours. It took every ounce of courage, faith, and strength I had to deliver that baby. At one point, the pain was so bad I left my body and watched the scene from the ceiling. But I survived. I did it. Me. Not a doctor. Me.

It takes a lot of courage, faith and strength to be a mother. I'm deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to homebirth two of my children. Hospital births, at least in my experience, are equally painful. But the power goes to the nurses and doctors. With homebirth, the power stays with you.

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