

Anna Marie's Birth Story

By Sarah S.

Leading up to the last week till my due date with Anna, I had a couple evenings when light contractions had me thinking her arrival was imminent—only to lay down and wake up the next morning to find that the contractions had stopped. I had been preparing for a non-medicated birth throughout the entire pregnancy, and while I certainly did not want to put Anna in any danger, I was anxious for labor to begin a bit early on its own so that we didn't even have to have the induction discussion. Plus, since that previous Friday's appointment, I had been on light bed rest (prior to that I had continued working full time) due to elevated blood pressures, and I was starting to get restless!

On Wednesday evening, I started experiencing contractions again (we'd tried just about everything to get labor going). Since I'd been faked out a couple times already, I didn't immediately think much of it, but we began timing the contractions around 6 pm. Fortunately I had downloaded a great iPhone app that made timing the contractions super easy. By 8 pm it was clear that the contractions were regular, about 5 minutes apart, but they were only lasting about thirty seconds. The contractions seemed reasonably bearable, but regular. We couldn't decide whether to call or not, but figured when in doubt, call.

The midwife on call was Karen Brindle, who was the midwife we had seen the most during the last trimester. She suggested I try lying down, taking a bath, etc. to find out if the contractions stopped (i.e. if it was false labor). She said she would be at the hospital all night, and suggested we call around midnight if things kept up. She also asked what kind of labor I wanted—and I said I wanted to do as much laboring at home. That sounds a whole lot more doable early in labor! My contractions continued to increase in intensity, but with my husband, Chris' help, and trying to keep the rest of my body relaxed, I felt capable of bearing the contractions—at least that was how I chose to approach them since I had no idea how long labor would last. My mother's first labor (with me) lasted 23 hours, so I tried not to anticipate anything other than being in this for the long haul.

About midnight we called Karen back. I had Chris call since though I could still talk between contractions, I had to focus more during contractions. Karen basically said that if contractions got a lot worse, to call in an hour, and otherwise to call in two hours. At that point I was starting to get uncomfortable, but I so did not want to get to the hospital only to have hours and hours of

laboring ahead, so I figured as long as I thought I could bear it at home, that was best. Around 1:45 am I was laboring on the toilet (the supported squat seemed to be the only thing that helped me bear the contractions which at that point were coming one on top of the other). We called Karen at that point, though I had basically decided I was going to the hospital no matter what she said. I had no idea how far along I might be, but the fact that contractions were coming non-stop convinced me it was no longer the time to labor more at home.

Karen told us she would be waiting for us, and Chris, having gotten everything into the car, helped me get into the car. By this point, I really did have to stop and hang off of Chris when contractions came, but I tried to keep my face relaxed, and as Ina May suggests, keep my mouth loose and make a low moaning sound (as opposed to a tight-faced wincing that many women do).

The drive down was interesting...the tight turns and changing speed necessitated by the road made it challenging as contractions came. Fortunately the contractions spaced out a bit on the drive, especially once we were on the highway. During the entire drive, Chris kept coaching me through the contractions. We never really did the coaching as a wave thing like Bradley suggests, since it was too difficult for Chris to figure out when my contractions were peaking. As it turned out, even when contractions were close, like in the car, it was still helpful for him to coach me to relax one part of my body (like my shoulders) since it gave me something else to focus my mind on instead of thinking through the entire contraction.

We got to Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in I don't know how long, and other than contractions, the only thing I remember from the car ride was drinking two bottles of juice (the only thing I could really stomach during labor was an energy bar that I had at home). When we got to the hospital, Chris got the bags and I got out of the car, and rather immediately had a contraction. I had another halfway into the front doors from the car, and I think at that point my water broke, but only enough to leak.

We made it to the elevator, and just as the doors closed I had another contraction, which meant I had to hang on Chris' neck AND scoot out as the doors opened on the labor and delivery floor. We got out of the elevator just far enough for the door to close, and then waited for the contraction to pass before moving the few more steps to the desk. The ladies at the desk were waiting for us, and Chris started getting the paperwork cared for as I leaned over the counter as contractions came.

Fortunately we had done all our preregistration paperwork, including the multi-page health questionnaire the midwives had given us so help speed check in, and we were soon led down the hallway to a room. I had contractions on the way, but just would stop and hang off of Chris' neck when they came till they passed.

Once we got into the room, they got me changed, and started all the tests and such to get me set up. I don't remember in what order it all happened, but Karen checked my dilation and said I was already 10 cm! I thought for a moment maybe I wasn't dilated at all because I thought it took her a moment more to check than I expected. My blood pressure was higher than they wanted, so they ran all the PIH labs again (I'd just had them run earlier in the week and they'd been normal).

If there is anything I'm most proud of in terms of the labor it is how far dilated I was. I didn't know going down to the hospital how far I was (it did occur to me that I was going to be very frustrated if after all I'd already experienced I was only barely dilated). But I think it is a testimony to my and Chris' relationship and the support he gave and the preparations we had undertaken.

It apparently took about an hour from parking till I started pushing, but all I remember was once things (the settling in) started calming down, Karen told me I could push whenever I felt like it, then she stepped out to do something. It took me a minute or two to figure out that the pressure I was feeling was the need to push, and when I figured that out, I told the nurses. It probably only took two minutes for them to get Karen, but it seemed like a lot longer. Chris stayed by my side throughout, coaching me through the contractions. We had practiced him coaching me through pushing, but the baby was still posterior, so Karen took over coaching me at this point as Chris stayed and encouraged me.

Karen first had me turn onto my left side to push then get off the bed and squat beside it to push. We did that for a while, then back on the bed to push on the right side. I think maybe I was in that position for half of the pushing. Karen broke my water at some point. I could hardly tell, but Chris said it there was definitely a good deal of liquid when she did.

Some of the most helpful things Karen did was place her finger to give me something to push towards, and she told me that when it hurt the most, to push the hardest. At one point she asked me if I wanted a mirror to see the baby born. I was concerned that if I could see I would get scared (of tearing, etc.) and maybe not push as hard, so I decided against that. Chris was nearby the entire time, and later said it wasn't nearly as disgusting or such as he expected based on movies and TV!

Some people told me about the burning when the baby's head is born, but I wasn't sure enough when that was happening, nor was I thinking necessarily about the pain (I was more aware of the pressure)—anytime my brain received a signal of pain, I tried to just take that in as an indication to push HARD.

Karen and Chris could see the baby's head for a bit then a few more pushes, and she was out! It was so surreal! Karen quickly wiped her a bit, and then put her on my stomach. I had really wanted to do skin to skin, so I quickly hiked up my hospital gown. We have a picture of her lying there, just born; the umbilical cord hadn't even been cut yet. Her umbilical cord was like a corkscrew...which I believe given how squirmy she seemed in utero!

We waited for the blood in the cord to stop pulsing, and then Karen helped Chris cut the umbilical cord. They took the baby, whom we had decided to name Anna Marie, to clean her up, and Chris went and stood close by her. It took a little bit for the placenta to be born, maybe 10 minutes, because Karen told me to tell her when I felt cramping and that took a bit. Karen told me I had a second degree tear, so as they finished looking over Anna, Karen worked to get me stitched up. The local anesthetic didn't work well on one side; though she put a lot in (she even had to have Chris go get the nurse to get her more at one point). But at that point, I just wanted to be done with it, so we pushed through. At the end when the discomfort was the most, Chris stepped out to the waiting room to tell my mom and sister, and they put Anna on my chest, and I think that helped keep me calm as Karen finished the stitches.

After that, Chris returned, and along came my mother and sister as well. During this time nurses came to clean and weigh Anna, and I watched from the bed as Chris stood right there. Chris also stayed with her when they took Anna to do her hearing test. Since my blood pressure had been high, and didn't immediately drop a lot afterwards, Karen talked with the supervising doctor and they decided to put me on magnesium sulfate. Fortunately Karen was able to get the orders for just 12 hours—after which point we'd see—as opposed to the standard 24 hours.

It's impossible to express what it felt like those first days with Anna. How awesome! I've worked on writing this birth story in spurts, and as I finish with these last few paragraphs, this birth story that I started in her first week is now being completed just two days before her three month birthday. We have come so far since those early days—from sleep patterns and breastfeeding to her being able to interact with us and seeing her learn new things. Anna is an incredible blessing in our lives and we are so excited to see who she turns out to be!