

On the night of June 21, I went to bed around 10, feeling incredibly tired but keyed up at the same time. I had a hard time falling asleep, and felt like I was only half drowsing the whole night. In retrospect, my body was probably already gearing up for labor in ways that I could sense but wasn't consciously aware of.

I awoke at 5:09 a.m. when I felt a "sploosh" as I rolled over. Immediately, I wondered if my water had broken -- that was how my labor started with Maggie -- but after going to the bathroom, no further water seemed forthcoming. I went back to sleep, and awoke again around 6 when I realized I was having very soft cramping at about 10 minute intervals. (I'm going to use the term "cramps" instead of "contractions" here, because up until the pushing stage, they really just felt like menstrual cramps.)

Huh.

I made a mental note of the cramping, but tried to get some more sleep without success. Matt got up around 6:30, and I thought of telling him what was going on, but decided against it. After all, it could be nothing, and I didn't want him getting keyed up for no good reason.

At 7, he left for work, but by 7:30, my cramps were lasting about a minute and were about 5 or 6 minutes apart, so I decided to call him and ask him to come back home. He'd asked me not to call his cell while he was at the office unless I was (a) either in labor, or (b) immediately started off the phone call with saying "I'm not in labor!" So it was exciting to call, hear him answer, and then wait for a minute . . . until he realized that no disclaimer was coming, and therefore, it meant that it was time!!!

I tried to focus on getting Maggie breakfast, but it was hard to concentrate. She kept asking "what's wrong, Mom?" and I said, "I have a belly ache, sweetheart." I decided to eat plenty of breakfast myself; since I knew I would need the energy if I really were in labor. Kashi Go Lean, coffee, orange juice, cottage cheese and almonds - protein power!

I had a midwife appointment scheduled at 8:30 and a massage at 11, so I began to think about canceling my appointments. Luckily, Maggie's care was already arranged -- my mother in law, Peg, had been planning on keeping Maggs all day so I could rest. When Peg showed up at 8, I called my midwife to cancel my appointment and let her know that I appeared to be in very early labor. To my surprise, she told me to come on in to the hospital. Drat! I wasn't planning on leaving for the hospital so early, and besides that, the cramping was still so easy to deal with that I figured there was no way I was ready to be admitted yet, even if the intervals were getting shorter.

I called my doula, Nichole, to let her know what was going on, and called my sister Sarah as well on the slim chance she would be able to make it (she lives 2 hours away, would have to get someone to watch her son all day, AND has been suffering debilitating morning sickness with her pregnancy, so I wasn't counting on her being able to attend). To my shock, Sarah called me back and told me that the stars had aligned and she'd be able to come! Yippee!

Matt got home at 8:30, and we spent about 45 minutes packing the last few things in the hospital bag, getting Maggie packed up and sent off to Peg's, and joking and laughing. I admit to slow rolling things a bit -- I REALLY didn't want to leave yet! When we finally did head out, I told Matt to stop at Dunkin Donuts on the way. He shot me a look that clearly said, "What the

hell?" And I was like, "Yep -- sometimes, you just need doughnuts. And right now, I NEED SOME FUCKING DOUGHNUTS."

The cramping slowed down while we were in the car to about once every ten minutes or so. I called my massage therapist on the way to let her know I wouldn't be making my 11 a.m. appointment, and I could hear in her voice that she thought I was way too chipper and upbeat on the phone to be in serious labor. I wondered the same thing myself!

We arrived at the hospital around 9:45. In the waiting area in labor and delivery, my cramps picked up again, increasing in intensity and length, while the gap in between the cramps shortened. While I was having a cramp, I closed my eyes, hummed at a very low pitch, and swayed from side to side. That's all it took! I really was in no pain at all - the cramps really were just "intense sensations requiring my full attention" (thanks, Ina May!).

My midwives, Angel and Caitlin, came to meet me at the front desk, and debated whether to send me to triage or just admit me. After watching me hum and sway through a couple of cramps about two minutes apart and lasting about two minutes each, they looked at each other and said, "Admit her." I STILL didn't think I could possibly be far along - after all, I was laughing, joking and smiling between each one! But back we went to a delivery room, where Angel checked me and discovered that I was 7 cm, fully effaced, with a bulging bag of waters and a baby at zero station.

WHAT!

I couldn't believe my ears, and asked Angel to repeat herself. Then, I burst into laughter. Really?? I was nearing transition after just four hours of easy labor, and without ANY pain? The news filled me with energy and eagerness to keep going. Alas, hospital protocol required that I hop on the monitors for at least 20 minutes to provide them with a strip on the baby and on my contractions before I could move around. I grumbled, but acceded to their requirement just to get it over with. Besides, my doula and Sarah hadn't arrived yet anyway - maybe this would slow labor down.

Boy did it ever.

For the next 45 minutes, Lucas firmly refused to stay on the monitor for more than a couple of minutes at a time. Over the course of those 45 minutes, I had exactly ONE cramp, and it was an incredibly mild one, at that. I itched with frustration -- get me OFF THE MONITORS, dammit, get me off get me off get me off -- I need to get up and WALK! I was radiating energy and adrenaline, and being stuck in bed was torture. It felt incredibly unnatural to be tethered to a bed when my body was compelling me to be upright.

Nonetheless, it served some good because Sarah and Nichole showed up just as I was about to get up again, and labor resumed its intensity. We all linked arms and walked up and down the hallways of the unit. The atmosphere was exuberant, light, and filled with joy and happiness. Nichole, Sarah, Matt and the nurses we encountered all kept repeating the same thing: "I can't believe you're so cheerful! I can't believe you're talking/laughing/smiling/cracking jokes!" But to me, it felt SO right. I was thrilled to pieces -- not only was my baby's birth imminent, but I was actually having the birth experience I had longed for. I had spent 12 miserable hours in labor with Maggie to get just to 3 centimeters before I crumbled and got an epidural and Pitocin, so to make it to 7 centimeters without any pain at all felt miraculous. This labor, this birth, this baby -- everything was RIGHT. My body was doing precisely what it was meant to do, and it felt **good!**

It's hard for me to even find words to describe the ineffable joy and energy that filled me as I danced my way toward Lucas's birth -- I felt, quite literally, radiant - as if I was shooting white and yellow and pink waves of light from my head, my face, my eyes, my very core. When I closed my eyes, I felt bathed in warmth and light. (Appropriate, I suppose, since my name and Lucas's both mean "bringer of light!") Every once in a while, I would have a stronger cramp and would have to actually pause and hold on to the wall or onto Matt (his broad shoulders and chest felt so strong and good), but otherwise, all I needed to get through a cramp was some swaying and humming.

After a while, we returned to my room so that the nurse could check Lucas on the fetal doppler. At that point, I felt like I needed to do something other than walk, so I used the birthing ball for a little while, rolling it from side to side with my hips, and Nichole also used the rebozo, wrapping it around my hips and gently swaying me back and forth.

Matt mentioned plugging in my iPod so that I could listen to the massage music I'd selected for the birth. We listened to about 30 seconds of the first song before I said, "Okay, this is all wrong. I need something more upbeat." So, Matt played DJ and we listened to Lady Gaga, Roisin Murphy, Oona, Justin Timberlake, Beyonce and The Lonely Planet (some of the raunchiest lyrics EVER - even during a cramp I couldn't stop giggling!). I sat on the bench in the L&D room, holding Sarah and Nichole's hands, and swaying, humming and smiling.

Around this time, I knew I was at 10 centimeters, and realized I was hesitating to go further. Something was blocking me. I asked everyone except Matt to leave the room, and spent some time hugging him, swaying with my arms wrapped around him, talking about my hesitancy, and talking about our excitement over our son's imminent birth. He asked me what I thought was the problem, and I said, "I don't know" -- but in retrospect, there were a few things standing in my way.

First, I had skated through the first part of labor so easily that I was still very much in my head, and not in that animal place that I needed to be in order to get naked and stop worrying about whether my water broke all over the floor or not (yes, I was worried about making a mess!). I had never been naked in front of my sister before, and the idea of her seeing my vag and (most likely) seeing me poop kind of freaked me out.

Second, I was *scared!* Even though labor had been easy thus far, I was still pretty tired, and I feared not having the energy or stamina to get Lucas out. I also knew that pushing was going to hurt - and I didn't want to be in pain.

Third, I had heard my midwives and the ultrasound doctors voice concern enough times about my polyhydramnios and the possibility of a prolapsed cord that I was worried about my water breaking willy nilly during pushing and having an emergency situation on my hands. Even though I knew that Lucas was now far enough down in my pelvis that a cord probably couldn't get swept past him, part of me was still caught in fear.

Last, I felt like I was taking too long already in this labor. Weren't second labors supposed to be fast? I forget what time it was exactly, but it was at least 12:30 p.m. Why wasn't I done yet? (My sister, sensing my concern, later grabbed a chux and covered up the clock on the wall.)

The interesting thing in retrospect is that my body very much responded to my fear and my sense of being stuck, and the cramps virtually stopped during this time (which only added to my

anxiety, because I rather stupidly started to fear that I wasn't doing labor "right"). I could also feel my body restraining itself - I had a sense of holding back a tidal wave.

After a few minutes alone with Matt, I decided to go talk to my midwives about what was going on. I forget if it was Angel or Caitlin who suggested a slow, controlled rupture of my membranes, but I agreed almost instantly to the proposal. So back we all went into the room, where Angel very carefully started a small leak of my waters.

I toddled off to pee shortly thereafter, and while on the toilet, experienced my first post-rupture contraction (notice my change in terms there). Ohhhhh, it was a TOTALLY different animal than what I had been feeling before. For the first time, I groaned aloud, and the pitch in my voice rose. "UuuuuuuuuurrrrrrgaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAH!" Matt came running in, and helped me off the toilet and back to the bed. "Oh God," I said, "This is really going to hurt."

And it did.

Labor after my waters were broken was much, much harder than it had been before. (Perhaps this is part of why my labor with Maggie was so painful - my waters broke before labor started.) I sat down on the bed, closed my eyes and hummed again, but the contractions were rapidly getting much harder to handle. More and more, I was groaning upward, the pitch of my voice getting higher on the scale.

I asked Angel and Caitlin to leave for a bit, wanting only Sarah, Matt and Nichole there as I entered the pushing stage. I sat down at the bottom of the bed, eyes closed, and chanted to myself, "I can do this. My body can do this. Big, big big. I'm going to get so big. My body grew the right size baby for me. I can push him out. Monkey brain, Lucy, monkey brain - get in your monkey brain. Relax, relax relax." I wondered if I felt like pushing -- and then suddenly I HAD to push.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" I hollered. Angel and Caitlin quickly came back into the room.

I left my mind behind, and became a cave woman, an Amazon, a primitive being. Monkey brain, indeed.

I pushed in a supported squat for quite a while, then pushed on hands and knees, clinging to the back of the bed. Oh God, it hurt so bad! Between contractions, I whimpered, "It hurts. It hurts so much, Matt!" and he whispered in my ear, "I know, babe, I know. But you're doing it - you're already doing it!"

Then RAAAAAAAAAAAAWR and push some more.

"I changed my mind!" I said. "I don't want to have this baby anymore!" (And even as I said it, I thought - wow, Lucy, what a cliched thing to say.)

And then RAAAAAAAAAAAAWR.

I yelled. I hollered. I tried not to scream. It hurt - really bad!

Angel kept suggesting that I push on my side. I didn't want to, but since she kept suggesting it, I figured that maybe it was worth a shot. I had one contraction while on my side -- and screamed like I was dying. I couldn't even help push -- the pain was too incredible for me to try to push

through it. Someone - I forget who - said "Don't scream - you need that energy to push out your baby!" I knew they were right, but all I could think was "Fuck you -- YOU try doing this!!!"

And so I got back in the squatting position and kept pushing.

I had no sense of time anymore. I very nearly lost my sense of self -- there was just this body, splitting in two, and the pain of pushing. Between contractions, I collapsed, my muscles trembling from exertion. Matt and Sarah both whispered in my ear, "You're doing GREAT. You're totally amazing. He's almost here!" I heard them, but couldn't respond. Language was beyond my capabilities. Every fiber of my being, every cell, was dedicated to Labor.

At last, I was too exhausted to even support my body weight while pushing. Angel suggested getting on my back, and with relief, I did so. I know the on-your-back position gets a lot of grief from people, but it actually felt great to me. When I wasn't pushing, I could fall backward onto the bed and just fall out for a minute or so. When I pushed, I curled upward to the point that it felt like I was going to push Lucas out vertically and have him hit the ceiling!

Someone put a mirror down at the end of the bed so I could see my progress. If I'd had the presence of mind to laugh, I would've - because every time someone would say "Can you see his head?" I had to say, "No!" I suppose the mirror was there to show me just how far I had come, but the truth was, he seemed SO far up there that when the nurse finally said, "Just a couple more pushes and he'll be out," I didn't believe her. But I pushed anyway, and pushed and pushed and OH MY GOD, the ring of fire. I just knew I was ripping in half -- I could feel everything tearing apart, making way for this baby who had to be the biggest baby of all time --

and another push

and a scream as I pushed harder than I ever thought imaginable, every muscle straining

and then someone held up a GIANT and put him on my chest and holy shit -- I'd had a baby! It was done! I gasped in surprise and pleasure.

My son! Born on June 22, 2011 at 3:50 p.m., after approximately 2 hours of pushing, weighing 10 pounds, 2 ounces, and measuring 22" long.

He cried lustily, and was then taken to be checked. Unfortunately, his breathing was a bit "wet," so he ended up getting worked on for a while, and some oxygen while he pinked up.

I began shaking violently shortly after his birth, so the nurses bundled me up like a mummy.

I asked Angel how badly I'd torn, after she checked me out, she grinned and said, "Not at all."

I exclaimed, "Are you serious?!"

She said, "Yep. You're totally intact."

So there you have it -- I gave birth to a 10 pound, gigantic child, with NO epidural or pain relief, no pain up until the pushing stage, no interventions aside from the minor leak put in my waters, no tearing, no episiotomy, and on the date that **he** chose for his birth. I felt like superwoman then -- and I still feel like superwoman now. :D

I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the birth experience that I did -- but even more fortunate to have my incredible, beautiful son in my life.

Welcome to the world, Lucas Everett!

MAMA!