

Oliver's Birth Story, by Anne-Marie

On April 21st 2008, I had the honour of having been blessed with a lovely home vbc of my baby boy, Oliver.

Oli's 4 year old brother Sam was born in May 2005 at St-Paul's Hospital, after an uneventful pregnancy yet a complicated, stressful and long long labour, ending in a c/s following failed forceps in the operating room. I often joke (somewhat) that I experienced pretty much every complication in labour, a classic cascade of interventions...Induction at 42+2 days past due, epidural, oxytocin, fever, decels, exhaustion, and a baby boy who was born angry at the world, having had endured such a stressful welcome. Sam spent a bit of time in the nursery, while I recovered from surgery. It was hours before I saw him, and I'd always felt cheated somewhat at not having been there to hold him, during his early hours.

In a weird and fateful twist of events, during my year of maternity leave, I was offered a position as the Office Manager at Pomegranate Community Midwives and soon learned that such birth experiences, while not all bad, are unfortunately more common than I had thought, in hospital settings.

When I became pregnant with Oli, I hoped this time it would be different. Luckily for us, our midwives were also friends and so it was easy for me to convince my husband that we would be best to birth at home. I spent the months pregnant telling everyone that we were hoping for a home birth, but knowing full well that sometimes things are beyond your control; mamas get tired, labour takes too long, babies just don't want to be born at home and you make the sometimes difficult decision to transfer into the hospital to birth your baby. Since I also had the risks of a vbc birth to consider, I knew that the stars needed to be aligned for Oli's birth to go according to our 'plan'. I knew the risks, and the rewards of both birth locations and yet, deep down I very much wanted this baby to be born at home.

In the meantime, I educated myself to the best of my abilities; I devoured pregnancy books. I listened to empowering birth stories. I watched movies and searched the internet for homebirth and vbc support. I contacted my wonderful doula Aleksandra to be by our side, offering support and wisdom. She sent me powerful emails that gave me shivers and made me want to shout out 'I can do it!'. She helped me prepare physically, and mentally as well, suggesting I imagine myself birthing my baby - I saw myself in the birth pool, pushing my baby out, imagined the pride I would feel when it was all said and done and we were safe at home.

Starting at about 37 weeks, I did a lot of labour prep, in hopes of not going late again. I began weekly, then twice weekly acupuncture sessions, drank a lot of birthing tea, took evening primrose oil caplets, and pretty much everything else my midwives and doula suggested :)

At about 39 weeks, I started experiencing very mild contractions on and off for the weekend. I continued on with my days, shopping, going out for lunch on Granville Island, hanging out with family. The contractions were coming every 20 minutes or so. I was able to walk through them, breathing and distracting myself. On Friday and Saturday night, at the suggestion of my midwives, I took a warm bath, some Tylenol and

Gravol and had a good night's sleep. However, by Sunday morning I was tired of 'niggling' and wanted to get things going. I went to an acupuncture session I had already booked and hoped I would meet my baby soon.

That night, while my husband was getting Sam ready for bed, my contractions suddenly picked up in strength and intensity - my husband came down to the living room at 8:30pm and found me on my hands and knees on the sofa, in tears. Initially, I was scared - I had been dealing so well all weekend and though I had wanted this so bad, I was afraid of the intensity of the pain all of a sudden - could I really do this? Neil ran me a warm bath and the water felt wonderful but the contractions continued - every time one started, I would curl over on my side, closing my eyes and moaning. Neil grew nervous, asking if I needed Aleksandra to come, if we needed to page the midwives. It's funny, even in the midst of labour, I worried about what I was supposed to 'sound like' - what were those guttural sounds I was supposed to be doing? Was I breathing right? Was I labouring 'correctly?'. I think the intensity increased at this point and my husband called Aleksandra, who arrived at 9pm. Contractions were coming every 2-3 minutes, lasting 60 seconds. The three of us laboured together for 1.5-2 hours, in the bath then walking around our house while Aleksandra offered encouragement and sips of water, and Neil held my hand through contractions.

I read in a blog once, regarding labour expectations "I will grunt and sweat and pant and push and poop and moan and rock and I will probably even barf. This is what it will take to get my baby out, And this is okay. I don't have to like it. I just have to do it'. This particular passage resonated with me and it's a lot how I saw my experience. I vocalized a lot during labour, yelled, moaned, cried and just let myself be in the moment, be scared yet strong, in the comforts of my home, surrounded by people who loved me.

Sensing that I was coming along quickly, Aleksandra paged our midwife at 11pm and she arrived a few minutes later. By this time, I was walking around our house, working on getting the baby in the best position possible, doing lunges, squats and leaning into Neil whenever a contraction would hit. Immediately upon arriving, Janice listened to the baby's heartbeat and everything sounded great! At 11:50pm, while sitting on the toilet labouring, my water broke with a pop and a gush! This is one of my most vivid moments in my labour and coincides

with when I hit transition - I remember losing control, and looking into the toilet to see if the fluid was mec-stained (which might have necessitated a transfer to the hospital) - everything was clear, which was great. I also remember Janice saying to me 'you're in transition' and I thought 'of course I am! This makes much more sense - and totally explains why I'm having a hard time coping!' There was a bit of a flurry to get me to the couch, since Janice hadn't even had a chance to check me to see how far dilated I was - 9 1/2 cms! I was in shock and remember laughing when she told me that - I knew then that I could do it!

While I continued to labour with Neil at my side, Aleksandra filled the birth pool and Janice called for back up. Once my urges to push got stronger, I started pushing in the tub, alternating between floating on my back and squatting, holding on to Neil's arms for support. I pushed like this for an hour but couldn't quite get enough of a grip for the pushes to be effective enough. At 1:40am, I got out of the tub and sat on the birthing stool and that's where I really felt myself pushing. Pushing was by far the strangest and most powerful sensation of my entire labour. It felt out of my control, my whole body pushing, every fiber, every muscle working to get this baby out.

Not long after I sat on the birth stool, our 'little' 9lb Oli was born and was immediately placed in my arms, wailing his lungs out. I had done it! Drug free, complication free, the way I had imagined it could be and the way I had dreamed it would be. We cuddled and

bonded, nursed and snacked while admiring our new baby boy in the quiet and comfort of our living room.

Janice helped me shower, get dressed and tucked us into bed shortly after - I was suddenly exhausted! Oli met his big brother Sam (who slept through the entire thing!) that morning and life continued on as it should...In the end, it was a lot easier than I had anticipated, yet much more intense than anything I'd ever experienced and I will be forever grateful for the experience.