

June 5, 2007

I am at peace.

I am birthing this baby.

These two phrases swim through my brain almost constantly today. I close my eyes to rest, and see myself birthing this baby, peaceful in the awareness that my body is capable of birthing.

It has taken me months to reach this place. When I discovered I was pregnant with my second child, I was immediately gripped by fear. Fear that I would be as ill for the entire pregnancy as I was with my son's pregnancy. Fear that my labor and delivery experience from my first birth will repeat itself. Fear. Fear. Fear. Quickly, I found a midwife in the new city we were moving to. I knew I needed to ground myself in this new environment through midwifery care. It felt like a lifeline, and I was terrified at the prospect of negotiating my desire for a VBAC with an obstetrician. Quickly, I was received by Pomegranate midwives and reassured that my feet were firmly on the ground of prenatal care that would be nurturing, respectful and woman-centered.

Months unfolded in a very different way during my second pregnancy than in my first. My morning sickness was manageable, and at times, not even present. I worried that I was not "sick enough" and was at risk for miscarrying. Bleeding in week 9 brought my worst fears to the surface. Reassurance was quickly offered by my midwives, and I welcomed the fear in a new way. Peace came to me before the bleeding stopped, with a trust that my body would do what it needed to do. This was a novel feeling, as I realized I had come to doubt my body's ability to do anything well related to pregnancy. Instead of debating this trust, I decided to simply embrace the feeling. Things continued to progress with my pregnancy without incident.

I reached my second trimester and began to experience the energy surge I had only heard about from my friends. During my first pregnancy, I endured nausea and vomiting 24 hours a day, for the entire pregnancy. Now, I felt energized, buoyant and jubilant about the growing life inside of me. My son began to develop an awareness of the life growing inside my uterus and we have heartfelt conversations about the sibling he will welcome in a few months.

Despite my positive feelings about the pregnancy during the 2nd trimester, I continue to be plagued by fears about the birth, and my ability to successfully complete a VBAC. My midwives, Janice and Kat, provide me with information from the medical community, and the midwifery community. These papers are dry, and full of statistics on uterine rupture (which continued to be the focal point of my fear). I craved writing that engaged me, that told me stories of women like myself. I found books written 20 years ago about VBAC that do contain these types of stories, but are contextualized by outdated supporting information. I felt lost.

I realized that perhaps I didn't need to read about "success" stories of women who have negotiated the emotional turmoil leading up to VBAC. Perhaps I just needed to be inspired. I began reading the writings of Rachel Naomi Remen and find a home for my fears. Through her writing, I was able to access a sense of strength and determination in my journey through VBAC. I was able to acknowledge my fears and understand what motivates me to hang on to them, despite my stated desire to "be okay with it."

Mystery requires that we relinquish an endless search for answers and become willing to not understand. That we be open to witness. Those who witness life may eventually know far more than anyone can understand.

R.N. Remen

My sleep began to improve.

My breathing changed.

I am calm.

I am at peace.

I am birthing this baby.

June 11, 2007

I sit in the waiting room at St. Paul's hospital, waiting to meet the anesthesiologist. Janice has suggested a consult, in hopes of preventing another C-Section performed under General Anesthetic. I wait, hoping the doctor can provide me with reassurance that what happened last time was simply a one time occurrence and not a pattern destined to repeat. I am struck, as I engage this thought, about how my trust in this moment is moving outside of me, into a medical community that hasn't exactly met my expectations up to this point. I

shrug internally, knowing that this is just a conversation, and that at the centre, I am still connected to a sense of peacefulness about my upcoming birth.

The anesthesiologist calls me into the exam room. He asks me to recount the details of my previous C-section and the failure of the spinal anesthetic. I explain the birth of my son Declan, and provide an explanation as to why certain interventions were performed, despite my plan for a drug-free, natural birth.

“Are you a nurse?” he queries. “No,” I reply, “but I have learned a lot since this experience.” He murmurs an affirmative response under his breath.

“Based on your history and what you told me about your son’s birth, I see no reason why an epidural or spinal wouldn’t work with this planned elective C-section you have upcoming,” he states matter-of-factly. My heart jumps to my throat.

“Well, actually,” I interject, “I’m planning a VBAC. Do you see any complications arising if a spinal or epidural would need to be administered in an emergency c-section?”

He looks at me for a moment, as though I have asked the question in another language, one that he struggles to understand, but has heard before. In this moment, I am sure he is judging me, questioning my decision, putting me in a category that doesn’t fit well in the medical system. I feel the heat rise to my face.

“No, I’d say it would be the same as what I previously stated,” he replies calmly.

“Good.” That is all I wanted to hear. Now I want out of this office.

“Do you have any other questions for me today?” asks the doctor.

“No, I feel confident in what you have told me” I reply. My husband, Paul, nods his head in agreement.

“Good. Well, that was easy. I like the easy ones,” the doctor chuckles.

“Yes, well, I plan on being an easy one. In fact, don’t take this the wrong way, but I hope I don’t see you again when I’m here for the delivery.”

I have rediscovered my voice and my trust, and am not ashamed to share it with him.

He looks up, meets my gaze, and then responds "Yes, me too." I genuinely believe him. It is a good moment.

My husband and I leave the hospital. As we walk out the front doors, I muse "Well, it's interesting. With Declan's birth, I skipped the chapter on C-sections in *Birthing from Within*. I was convinced it wouldn't happen to me. And of course, it did. This time, I have walked into the hospital, and discussed the possibility with the anesthesiologist. In a weird way, it feels like by doing this, I'm allowing myself to make different choices. I feel more in control of the birth, knowing that a lot of it is out of my control."

"Yes," says my husband. "It feels like that for me too" We clasp hands and walk to the car, away from the hospital. Away from the fear.

Birth is the sudden opening of a window, through which you look out upon a stupendous prospect. For what has happened? A miracle. You have exchanged nothing for the possibility of everything
-Unknown

August 20, 2007

Janice came today to do the home visit. After much deliberation, Paul and I have decided that if things are progressing well during labour, we would like to have a home birth. It has been a long journey to get to this place. I am still fine with going St. Paul's if it becomes necessary, or if in the moment, I decide that's where I want to be. In truth though, every time I visualize giving birth lately, it is here, at home, on my bed, during the night while Declan sleeps. Seeing it this way gives me a feeling of calm and peace. I have to trust it.

Life has an elegance that far exceeds anything we might devise. Perhaps the wisdom lies in knowing when to sit back and wait for it to unfold. Too hasty an activism may lead to lesser outcomes and, more important, may cause us to trust ourselves rather than learning to trust life.

R.N. Remen

August 31, 2007

I wake at midnight, in the grips of a strong contraction. There is no doubt for me now, I am in labor. I felt it coming for the past few hours, with the odd contraction interspersed with long reprieves of relaxation. Now, I know the baby is moving down, ready to be born. I wake Paul and begin walking around the bedroom. My back is aching, and the intensity of each contraction shocks me.

"The baby is posterior, I know it" I whisper through tears to my husband. "Everything is going to be exactly the same." My worst fear screams itself in my head over and over. Silently, Paul rubs my back and we move to the living room, where I can be on my hands and knees on the carpet. My fear is met by my determination to turn this baby. With each contraction I rock back and forth on my hands and knees, breathing deeply in an attempt to relax.

Quickly, the contractions increase in frequency and intensity. By 1:00am, I ask Paul to call the doula, and I make my way to the shower to try to get some relief with the hot water pounding on my back. Paul gets the doula on the phone, and she informs him she is still engaged with another birth. She asks to talk to me, and Paul tells her I'm in the shower on my hands and knees, and won't get out. He holds the phone out, so she can hear me working through the contractions. When Paul returns to the phone, she advises him to call the midwife. As we suspect, things are moving quickly.

Paul phones the Janice as I move myself to the bed, continuing to labor on my hands and knees. She asks if we have decided whether we want to go St. Paul's or stay home. If we want to go to the hospital, she says she'll meet us there. Paul asks me what I want to do. The months of work I have put into regaining my trust in myself finally pay off as I utter the words "I want to stay here." Paul conveys my wishes to Janice and she says she is on her way. Paul goes into the next room to tell my parents that Janice is about to get here.

Janice arrives and checks me. She assures me that things are moving along nicely, and reiterates that if I want to have a hospital birth, we need to make the move now. Paul and I take a moment to reconfirm what I already know in my heart: I want to give birth to this baby at home. We convey our wishes to Janice.

Things continue to progress at great speed. I feel like I don't have a chance to breath between contractions and I can feel the baby moving down with each one. The sensation is indescribable and I am overwhelmed with the realization that I

couldn't stop the process even if I wanted to. It is so different from my experience of birthing Declan. It is painful, yet exhilarating. I feel energized and strengthened by each contraction.

By 3:30 I want to start pushing. Janice phones Beth to come, and encourages me to wait a little longer until I'm fully dilated. Beth arrives as Janice sets up for the birth. I am aware of what's happening around me, yet at the same time, totally focused on my body and what it is doing. I take a moment to look around the room – the lights are dim, the bed is exactly the way I imagined it would be, and Paul is kneeling next to me on the bed, holding my leg. Despite the intense contractions wracking my body, I feel peaceful.

Shortly after 4:00am, Janice lets me know I can start pushing. Time loses its importance to me. I am intently focused on my body, on the baby and the pushing. The phrase "I am birthing this baby" continues to repeat in my mind. It, along with Janice, Beth and Paul, reassures me. Janice tells me that on the last push, the baby turned the corner. "There's a corner???" I ask, surprised by her turn of phrase. We all chuckle, myself included and I am proud that I am so present and calm, even at the height of the pain.

With a couple more pushes, the baby is born. 5:02 am. I cry in pain, in joy, in ecstasy as the baby exits my body. Janice delivers the babe up onto my chest and I sob. "What is it?" I ask her, wanting to know the baby's sex. "That's for you to discover," Janice says gently and holds the baby up for me to see. A girl. My dreamt of, longed for, blessing of a daughter. I draw her to my chest and breathe her in.

"It's a girl!" I cry, and quickly my parents enter the room. They both recount to me later that they have never seen such pride, love and exuberance in my eyes as they did in that moment.

Soon after Sadie cries for the first time, we hear my son. He has been awakened by the celebratory sounds of her arrival. My father goes to comfort him, in hopes that he will sleep a little longer. After awhile he comes to greet his sister. He climbs up beside the bed, and looks at his sister for the first time. He smiles. "That's my sister," he says plainly, as though he knew it would unfold in exactly this way. I look at my husband, my son and my daughter. My parents. My midwives. My birth. In my house. In my room. My peace. Blessed.