


# The Transformative Power of Birth

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## ABSTRACT

A mother recalls the home birth of her first child. Her story exemplifies the power of birth when a mother is supported to listen to her body and labor on her own terms, and she praises the comfort of home birth and the respect of midwifery care. She emerges from the other side of her birth empowered and transformed, ready to embrace motherhood.

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I have desired to be a mother as long as I can remember. On “career day” in kindergarten, I brought my baby doll to school. Growing up, I loved to hear my mother tell my birth story, her natural birth with twins in which she arrived at the hospital urging the staff, “Catch these babies!” Then, in college, I found myself working as a research assistant for my Sociology professor’s project on surrogacy, and later writing my own undergraduate thesis about women’s birth experiences with midwives. After college, I felt called to become a doula, childbirth educator, and lactation counselor. I even incorporated my passion for birth with my longtime hobby of belly dance, and taught prenatal belly dance workshops.

When I finally saw those faint pink lines on the pregnancy test after 8 long months of trying (even though you had to hold it in the light just right and squint), I was elated. After years of helping others in their journey to motherhood, it was finally my turn. I immediately knew I wanted a home birth,

though ironically, my husband had to convince me (the doula) to hire a doula! I thoroughly enjoyed my pregnancy, and basked in the glow of my growing belly and changing body. I stayed active throughout my pregnancy, taking time to connect with my body and my baby daily through belly dance, yoga, hiking, and bike riding. I even performed a duet with my mom when I was 6 months pregnant, the same choreography she performed while pregnant with me!

My husband’s cousin was getting married on December 29th, and my mother-in-law had been fretting for months that we wouldn’t be able to make it to the wedding because of my pregnancy. I assured her over and over again that it was 2 weeks before my due date and most first-time moms go late. Lo and behold, I woke up around 5:30 that morning to use the bathroom, and when I climbed back in bed, I felt a pop and gush of liquid between my legs. I woke my husband Chris and said, “Umm...I think my water just broke!” He checked and confirmed. I asked him to make sure the fluid was clear and odorless, which thankfully it was. We were both excited, but I knew we should go back to bed and try to rest while we could.

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Around 8 a.m., I called my midwife, Andrea, to let her know my water had broken but I still wasn't feeling any surges. She gave me the rundown of what to expect, what to look out for, and tips to start my contractions. I had a chiropractor appointment scheduled that day because baby was stubbornly ROP after weeks of daily *Spinning Babies* exercises, and I asked if I should still go. She said as long as I was feeling fine to go ahead. I took a shower and Chris helped me put on an adult diaper to catch my leaking fluid, something I never thought my husband would have to do! We ate breakfast and then went to my appointment at 11:30 a.m. The chiropractor asked me basic intake questions like how far along I was, and I told her, "38 weeks and 2 days, and my water broke this morning!" She was shocked, but I assured her my midwife gave me the ok to proceed with the appointment. She performed the *Webster Technique* and it felt so good! I had been putting off seeing the chiropractor because I had never been before and was nervous, but I wish I had gone sooner. I highly recommend it!

After the appointment, we went to the grocery store to pick up last minute supplies for my home birth because I hadn't expected to go into labor so soon. While we were there, I started feeling mild surges around 1 p.m. I credit that chiropractor appointment for getting baby into position and kick-starting my labor! We picked up hot wings for lunch because spicy food is supposed to induce labor, but I couldn't finish my food. That's when I knew things were getting real (I can always eat!). We went for a walk after lunch and I needed to stop occasionally to breathe through my surges. I found breathing incredibly helpful throughout my entire labor. My surges started picking up when we got home, and the rest of the day is a blur. I just remember breathing, swaying, moaning, and changing positions as my body guided me. I don't recall my surges ever feeling painful; I just felt a lot of pressure in my body.

At some point later in the evening, Chris called Andrea because he had been timing my contractions and they were 3 minutes apart but varying in length. I was also starting to get restless and lose my rhythm. She told me to eat and drink to see if we could get the contractions more consistent, and Chris lovingly prepared me a plate of cheese at my request but I couldn't even eat it. It tasted so salty! I tried to choke it down along with the "laborade" he also made. At that point, my doula Jessi arrived and helped me get back into rhythm with breathing

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and the TENS machine. I didn't think I would like TENS during labor, but it helped so much! The rhythmic clicking on of the machine at the beginning of a surge and clicking off at the end was so soothing and became my new ritual. It was something I could focus on and control as my body surrendered to my surges. Chris and Jessi stayed with me, keeping me grounded by rubbing my shoulders and my back and breathing with me. I remember alternating between side lying and hands and knees as my labor progressed.

A little while later, my midwife Andrea arrived. She knocked on the door in the middle of a surge, and Chris left my side to let her in. I looked up at Jessi and begged her to tell him not to leave me! When he came back, I scolded him for leaving, and he said, "I had to let Andrea in. It's cold out there." I snapped back, "She can wait!" (Chris loves to remind me of that part of the story.) Andrea settled in and checked me, and I was 10 cm with a lip and already feeling the urge to push. She suggested emptying my bladder, then lying on my side to breathe the baby down first. I looked up at Chris from the toilet with tears in my eyes and told him I loved him. My emotions overcame me as I knew we were getting close to the end.

I returned to bed and settled into a side lying position to relax and breathe the baby down. I breathed as deeply as I could but at the peak of each surge, I couldn't fight the urge to push a little. I stayed there until I couldn't stand it anymore and moved to hands and knees to push with my body's urge. The urge to push was so strong I couldn't fight it and Chris kept reminding me to breathe, but I turned to him and said, "I threw all that out the window!" Pushing was simultaneously the most amazing and excruciating feeling ever, and I could feel my baby inching out then pulling back in little by little. Taking my time to breathe, relax, and follow my body's urge paid off

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though because I didn't tear at all! I felt the most overwhelming sense of relief and joy when my baby finally emerged and Chris looked at me and said, "Say hello to your baby girl!" Marjorie Laurel Sedita was born at home with love at 11:42 p.m. on December 29th, and we are still over the moon.

Despite my knowledge as a lactation counselor and doing everything "right" with immediate, prolonged skin-to-skin and establishing the first latch, breastfeeding got off to a rough start. We both fell into a deep sleep and didn't wake up until many hours later. I figured she would cry and wake me, which never happened. We tried all the tricks to wake her, even touching her with a frozen steak! Worried, we called Andrea who warned us her blood sugar dropped and she was too tired to wake up and latch. My nipples were sore and I couldn't manage to express any colostrum to wet her lips. So, my loving husband drove to three different stores to find

organic formula and through tears I syringed it into her mouth to rouse her. It took countless hours of trial and error, blisters on my nipples, a tearful call to my mother who reassured me, an emotional visit from my doula, and me coaching Chris how to evaluate a proper latch, but we finally got the hang of it, and I'm so happy to share that breastfeeding is now going well!

I'm overjoyed with my birth experience, though it didn't unfold the way I envisioned. I always pictured myself dancing my baby into the world, but dancing was the furthest thing from my mind! My labor was a lot more still and quiet than I had anticipated. I had to turn off my doula and childbirth educator brain to allow myself to relax and embrace the experience. It was the hardest thing I've ever done, but at the same time easier than I imagined. I hoped my birth experience would be empowering, peaceful, and sacred, and I'm so happy to share that it was all those things and more. I had the freedom to listen to my body and labor the way I needed to, and I felt respected and supported to do so by my wonderful midwife in the comfort of my own home. I emerged from the other side transformed and empowered to be the kind of mother I always hoped to be. Every mother should be

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supported and respected to birth on her own terms and claim this empowering, transformative experience for herself!

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RACHEL FURR is a childbirth educator, doula, lactation counselor, and belly dancer. She is humbled and inspired as she experiences motherhood for the first time.

#### **DISCLOSURE**

The author has no relevant financial interest or affiliations with any commercial interests related to the subjects discussed within this article.