

Submission
No 357

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

May 2008: My first birth. I did my best to prepare but when labour began I had a midwife on duty who I had only met once. Despite being part of the [REDACTED] Hospital midwifery group practice I was not cared for by a midwife I'd developed a connection with. Throughout my labour she seemed absent, perhaps busy with other birthing women. I was quiet and left alone. When labour was not moving much I was encouraged to have syntocinon to speed labour up. I was NOT helped into or shown useful birthing positions. I was not encouraged to move around. I was left trying on my back, alone for hours unsupported. About 12 hours after I presented my primary care midwife came on duty. My waters broke and I was pushing. After some time I was given an ultrasound and told "your baby is not going to come out this way.... you need a caesarean."

I was told to stop pushing, to pant and to prepare for surgery. After being given an epidural, a doctor looked up at me and said words to the effect... "oh yes, you are regressing. Your cervix is only 7cm." He didn't ask or discuss checking my dilation. He just numbed me and put his fingers inside me.

I was in shock.

After the surgery the same doctor looked at me, when my midwife was not present, and told me "If you ever have another baby, it would be best for you to have caesarean. Your baby was too big to fit through your pelvis."

This was shocking. These words were disempowering and WRONG!

I was not emotionally supported in any way following the birth. When I called my midwife weeks later in tears she said she'd try to come see and never did. I had no one to help me process the intense grief, confusion and other emotions I felt as a result of the sudden surgical birth. There was ZERO support available and the hospital/midwives did not follow up with me.

Those words sowed doubt in me that took years to overcome.

I went on to birth 2 healthy live, full term babies vaginally! My pelvis was not too small. My babies were not too big for me.

2012: pregnancy 2: I laboured at home for a long time with a posterior baby. We tried many natural pain relief methods. I was so scared of and determined not to birth in a hospital again. However, I felt it better to seek some pain relief to help me birth my baby vaginally.

This time it was a registrar who ignored my wishes and tried to take advantage of me while under the influence of gas. I had declined to have my waters broken and I had declined to have my dilation checked. I wanted time to settle into the space after having arrived from

home. I wanted time to connect with staff before having their fingers inside me. I wanted to feel safe and at ease in their care.

Unfortunately this was not to be.

After I'd been using the gas for a while and was feeling a little bit high the registrar stood by me during a contraction and said "now, when this contraction is over, you can roll over and I'll examine you and break your waters. "

I almost did. But thank goodness the midwife on duty took the registrar outside for a conversation. Meanwhile my doula alerted me to my woozy state and asked if I wanted to take a break from the gas to clear my head a little.

After that-I had no more gas or pain relief. When my waters were broken, they were clear. Mother and baby were doing well. Baby was born with Apgars of 9 and 10. Again I was emotionally rattled by this birth experience and attempted medical rape.

The registrar was a woman too which somehow felt even worse!

2015: I opted to birth my 3rd baby at home. Only a medical emergency would see me in hospital this time. I birthed my 3rd without drugs, without suffering, feeling safe and supported at home by my midwife, family and doula.

I took 5-10 to work through the trauma of the first two births. The medical raping, the disempowering language, blatant lies and lack of support for hospital staff induced problems. The system was so flawed. Healthy baby does NOT equal healthy Mother.

A healthy mother requires a supported, safe birth where the mother's autonomy is respected. A healthy mother requires emotional support and debriefing following a birth that was traumatic or unexpected or unsupported.

A healthy mother requires a healthy mother centred support system from the very first appointment to the very last.