

Submission
No 666

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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My birth story - A submission to the NSW Inquiry into Birth Trauma, By Sarah Whaley

I was 18 when I gave birth to my first born son, I come from a large family and had helped raise multiple siblings and cousins and thought I had heard my fair share of horrific birthing stories and I was under no illusion that my birthing experience would be any different though I desperately hoped it would be.

I'm from a small rural town in NSW called _____, our nearest access to pre and post natal care is located 170kms away in _____ and I didn't realise until I educated myself when trying to heal from my sons birth that out here, horrific birthing stories are talked about so casually, it's like an accepted "norm".

My Husband (21) and I (18) decided to hire an Obstetrician after experiencing a miscarriage previously. The OB was very experienced, infact he had delivered me!

We paid a small fortune for me to be his patient and we felt safe.

Wednesday 13/01/2010 I was 5 days over due and we had driven to _____ for an OB check up and 'stretch and sweep', I started having irregular pains on the way home that progressed into Thursday and intensified, so we travelled back to _____ and booked into a motel (the only option available to those from out of town)

By 12.30am Friday morning we called the hospital and they begrudgingly said to come in if I must. After arriving they checked my cervix and stated that my waters had broken and I couldn't leave the hospital and my Husband had to leave immediately.

I was then walked up to the maturity ward and placed in a room away from the occupied rooms, alone and I did not see another person until 7am.

I have anxiety and depression which is stated in my file so being alone, in agony, contracting for 45 seconds every 3 minutes with no one for support, they hadn't even left a jug of water. I laid perfectly still, paralysed by fear with my eyes closed and then every 3 minutes they would open as a contraction started and i would watch the clock on the wall and then close them again once it finished. I got up only to get myself a paper towel to wet and put on my head and to get a drink from the tap, using my hand as a cup.

7am came and shift change had taken place a lovely nurse literally stumbled upon my room, they hadn't even informed her I was here on staff changeover, I felt truly forgotten.

She got me up and walking and my husband arrived, the staff then informed me i was being taken down to delivery to be induced.. I was so tired I wondered if they were seriously expecting me to push out a whole human when I could hardly open my eyes.

They were and they did.

Once in delivery they consulted with my OB at the door of my room, he did not speak to me, he did not enter the room, but I did catch him say 'give her an epidural early because she has anxiety' .

For reference my Mother almost died from a botched epidural at this very hospital, under the care of this very same Doctor (Dr _____), he knew this and while I was open to discussing options, this didn't happen, he just gave the nurses his recommendations and left.

The nurses then hooked up and fetal monitor (better late then never?) and started an IV of Pitocin, they did not check my cervix even though by this stage it had been over 9 hours since I entered the hospital.

Within minutes I went from manageable, progressive pain to horrific, aggressive pain, it wasn't just the pain that changed it was the intensifying of the physical contractions that seemed to also make the baby panic every time one came on (by this stage It had been 43 hours since my first onset of pain), I begged them to turn the petocin down or to keep it the same level but they continued to increase the dosage regardless of how I tried to plead with them,

Eventually I asked for an epidural, i got one, it numbed one side which was a huge relief, the Dr left and during this time i was semi numb a nurse repeatedly tried to insert a catheter, having no less then 10 attempts before swapping to a smaller catheter size before being able to empty my bladder successfully.

After about 40 minutes the epidural failed completely, providing no pain relief on either side, I fully understand this happens though. Even though I had full feeling and movement of my legs I was not permitted to leave the bed which limited the things I could try to help the labouring process which lead to extreme distress on my behalf, not being able to move or change positions, I felt trapped, all while being reminded by the attending nurses that they

finish at 3pm so unless I wanted to get to know a whole new team of people I better get moving (this was said, not implied, multiple times which caused me to panic and spiral every time it was mentioned)

Eventually after 5 more hours my son, _____ was born.

Then without warning, consent or explanation I was jabbed in the left thigh with an unknown substance then told to push out the placenta.

After it came out they worked fast, i assumed it was because they were now half an hour over their scheduled shift times, I was covered with a blanket while a few family members came in to see the baby. I remember feeling funny, I could hear everyone in the room but I don't remember actually conversing with them, I assumed it was from the last 48 hours of pain.

When everyone cleared out I sat up and put both my legs over the side of the bed to hop up and all of a sudden 2 nurses rushed at my with hands full of towels and absorbent pads and they said I was bleeding a lot and to move slowly.

I stepped over the side of the bath while the nurses turned the water on (it had a hand held shower head) I started to feel yucky and asked for a seat which they got me a plastic stool thing, I then remember saying 'i don't want a bath' as I could feel the water rising up my feet as I was sat on the stool with my eyes closed, barely conscious. They assured me I wasn't having a bath, but a shower, I opened my eyes and seen that it wasn't water rising in the bottom of the bath, it was blood.

I don't remember much else of the shower just getting propped up by a nurse underneath each arm while another wiped up my legs repeatedly while she was trying to pull my underwear with pads in them up but it was pooled around my feet again.

I was in and out of consciousness the rest of the afternoon, my husband done anything that needed to be done for our son during the times he was allowed to visit.

I remember going to the toilet sounded like a tap was on, it was blood exiting me, I was told this was normal.

every time I needed to move the bed up or down i had to get up and go to the end of the bed, reach under and wind it up or down, while I was doing this multiple times I had bled through all of my pads and it went all over the floors.

I felt like I was dying, but anytime I brought it up I was made feel like a naïve 18 year old who was a sook and was quickly dismissed. Even when the nurses came in to do the belly check where they would feel around my abdomen the bed and all bedding and sometimes a little of the floor would be flooded with blood, no concerns were raised and I did not see a Dr during my 7 days in hospital.

I was even asked on day 4 how my blood transfusions went, I was very confused and the nurse flipped through my file and said it stated I had blood transfusions, I didn't receive any blood transfusions, I told her this and she replied with 'oh well you're probably all good by now it's been 4 days'

There was a lot more questionable behaviour when it came to helping me breast feed but for the purpose of this submission I'll stick to the objective.

I'm from the country, we are raised not to complain or sook and to suck it up, so I did. But I knew it would stay with me.

I remember hearing people say 'you forget the pain and go for a second' it would literally make my heart race and I would feel sick just at the thought of having to go through that experience again. But we are meant to be tough out here.

1 year after my sons birth I fell pregnant again and my mental health had declined and I suffered intense anxiety that led to the devastating choice to terminate the pregnancy, I simply could NOT do it again.

For years afterward I found myself unable to even go in the vicinity of the hospital, until my uncle was actively dying and I had no choice, when I left I vomited in the carpark, not from my visit to my uncle but by just being THERE.

After 5 years we decided to try again, I had educated myself which led me to realise my birthing experience was not normal. It took a long time and a lot of work to get to the point of even considering a second child but we got there.

This time we were armed with knowledge and our amazing private midwife our second sons birth healed me in so many ways, it showed me that birthing can be beautiful when you are listened to, it doesn't have to be and should never be the way I experienced it in 2010.