

Submission  
No 752

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially  
Confidential

To whom this may concern,

This is the story of my traumatic birth. The trauma with the inclusion of prenatal, labour, delivery and postpartum, all of which was extremely traumatic. To even have to relive this in words is daunting and something which I haven't yet healed from. I will tell my story if this means that women in the future don't have to suffer the same trauma I did. I will share this story with the detail that I am capable of. So starting with prenatal. I was attending hospital in Sydney. During my pregnancy I was abnormally swollen, not just in my legs but absolutely everywhere, my face, my nose, my eyes even looked smaller due to the swelling, no shoes fit me and to say I was uncomfortable would be an understatement. Each prenatal appointment I would explain the swelling, the dizziness, all symptoms I had voiced SHOULD HAVE RAISED RED FLAGS OF PREECLAMPSIA.

Instead I was dismissed and told that is "completely normal" . Consistently when my blood pressure was taken at prenatal appointments, I would have a high reading. So each time I was told "Let's wait a bit" Then the midwife would do another reading and ONLY write down the second reading. Very alarming! Fast forward to my labour and delivery. I was at home and my waters broke at midnight, I called my friend, who also was my birth partner. She lived in the same building complex, so she came up and checked on me to see how I was going. Then we both went to get some rest preparing for a big day ahead. At home the fire alarms went off at 3am; only 3 hrs after my water had broken. Going outside knowing I'm in labour, seeing two big fire trucks, and alarms going off, my body went into shock and had slowed my contractions down.

After all of this I went back to sleep till morning. In the morning I called the hospital and they said to come in for a check up because my waters had now broken. I went in with my birth partner, sadly she was not allowed to physically come in with me for the check up due to COVID protocol. I was left with two options: I can go home and try and get the contractions closer together naturally and to come back at 12am that night as it would have been 24hrs since my water had broken and would need to have something to prevent infection or my second option was to stay and be induced. I opted for the first option. So we went home and I did everything with my birth partner to bring those contractions closer together. From walking up and down flights of stairs, raspberry leaf tea, fresh pineapple, bouncing on a fit ball.

So for all this time I've been in active labour the contractions were slower and even more intense due to such a build up of time in between. Roughly 40 mins apart. So I did everything I could until 12am that night. My birth partner and I went into the hospital at 12am. I was given an IV to prevent any infection and was told I would be induced at 5am and that I was first to be induced in the morning. So still in labour I tried to get rest which did not happen. Any time I would try and sleep my body would be thrown forward from laying down into a seated position from so much agony in pain. My contractions were still further apart, about 35 mins, with so much build up between each contraction. In the morning someone had come in I believe to do OBGYN but not much talk about the induction. Later someone else had come in and we asked about induction and only then were we informed that they were on skeletal staff and that the nurses were on a 24 hr strike.

I wouldn't be able to have my induction until a midwife could be with me for my induction and the rest of the labour and delivery. So I laboured all day long. My friend/birth partner was with me the whole time and we hardly saw anyone from the medical field. No food was ever brought to me (even though it was asked repeatedly and was told it would come next meal time) so the only time she left was to go to the toilet or get me something to eat. I continued to labour and induction was not started until 6PM that night! I can't remember when exactly but they had to "break my waters some more" .

My water had already broken days before but there was some kind of behind sack that had not been broken. The process was hardly explained to me. I was told it needed to be done. But finding out later after my birth how the procedure was done, it would have been empowering to actually know what was being done to my body rather than "We need to break your waters some more". I wish I felt heard in my birth rather than told what to do like a child, who had no voice! Once the induction had begun I was able to get an epidural. The epidural was not successful. I suffered from an epidural puncture. Which caused a pool of blood over my whole back, a block to my right leg meaning the anesthetic was only working in my right leg. I could feel pain everywhere else. After the epidural puncture, I had to wait a while for the consultant anesthesiologist to come and give me another epidural.

I felt so scared and all that could run through my head is what if it happens again. After a while the consultant anesthesiologist arrived. I had a little bit of hope that this time it would work as this anesthesiologist was a consultant, a position that was much higher than the first person who did my epidural. That hope sadly was not a reality and the second epidural was a failure also, the catheter was pushed in either too far, or more to one side. So still pain everywhere with only numbness in my right leg. I believe in between the epidural Pitocin was started. Pitocin is a medication that fast tracks labour, bringing contractions closer together. My contractions came so close together I was not even getting a break. Contraction after contraction with no respite, it was brutal torture! At this time I asked them to turn it off. It took a while for it to be turned off and for me to actually get a break; this felt like an eternity. My baby and I were being monitored.

My baby was monitoring well, I on the other hand WAS NOT. Blood pressure through the roof, extremely dangerous. Through all of this no medical person from the hospital was talking with me though what was going on. I am so blessed to have had my beautiful friend and birth partner to be there supporting me, talking me through and doing whatever she could to help me through. I'm literally tearing up right now at the insanity of what I went through. So through all of this I was crying for a caesarean, and was told that I would have to speak to a doctor about what I wanted to do. We waited and waited. In this time my midwife also paged for another anesthesiologist to come to try and fix the epidural to receive some sort of respite. Finally after a very long time the doctor came and I told her I wanted a c-section. I wanted the torture , agony, and pain to stop. I wanted to meet my baby, not just be going through pain that has not been progressing. I had been in labour for over 2 days at this point.

The reaction from the doctor was disgusting. She hardly let me speak, dismissed me, shouted at me and over me "said I was too young and that I couldn't get a c-section" and then proceeded to walk out of the room. My friend advocated for me. She asked my midwife to

ask the doctor to come back in and have an actual conversation with me. My midwife was kind and I could tell she was hesitant, as sometimes higher positions are very intimidating. It was obvious this Doctor used her higher power for all the wrong reasons. After my dear friend and birth partner encouraged the midwife to go and speak to the doctor, my midwife with bravery did go and speak to the doctor to come back in. The doctor came back in and to no avail the outcome from this doctor was the same- no help at all.

Fast forward some time the third anesthesiologist came after she got out of surgery. She moved around my catheter and gave me some medicine which gave me the shakes. I thought yes maybe it's worked this time because whatever the medicine was I felt some respite for a bit. So after this, it was about midnight and my midwife next to me was taking some notes and my birth partner and I tried to get some rest, just waiting for me to dilate to 10cm. The medicine began to wear off and sadly I had realized that the epidural still had not worked, but grateful that the medication has given me a bit of respite. I felt so defeated. When will I meet my baby? Pain without any seeming productivity.

The midwife checked me to see how dilated I was. After the medication wore off and back to being in the same agony I was just prior. Feeling everything, only numb in my right leg..... Praise the lord I was finally 10cm dilated! My dear friend said to me "Remember this is now productive pain" with that sentence it helped me get through. I was about to meet my baby! We had to wait a bit because there had to be more medical people in the room with me for delivery. When it came to delivery it only took 20 minutes of pushing and my beautiful baby girl was born at 4.20am on the 1st of April. I laboured for 60hrs straight, really it was quite inhumane. After my baby had arrived and some time had passed, my beautiful friend went home to get some much needed rest. She had gotten no sleep and was also a Mum to 5 beautiful children.

After all the trauma I was pretty much left alone on the ward, hardly anyone from the medical field came to check on me after the toughest thing I've ever been through. Trauma to isolation. The sad thing about all the trauma is I remember sitting down with my birth partner when I was pregnant and discussing my birth plan. I remember voicing that a water birth would be nice, but was very open to just having a flexible birth plan with the expectation that not everything goes to plan. My biggest thing I had voiced and wanted to avoid was birth trauma. That was my only thing I had hoped for and sadly that hope was crushed and the trauma still affects me to this day. I'm going to briefly speak about postpartum. This whole story, putting it into words, has been emotionally draining and has taken me hours over many days to get this into words.

But I'm doing this because my prayer is that my story will help spark a change and that my reality would NOT be a reality for future mothers. Now onto a quick summary of postpartum. I was home for 1 day and night with my baby girl. The hospital sent me home with high blood pressure with the exception I would check in with the doctor the next day to check my blood pressure. My blood pressure was still through the roof. I went to the doctor with my beautiful friend/ birth partner. The doctor put me on two different types of blood pressure medications, it was not looking good.

Later that afternoon I was at home and I had just taken my medication. I called up my friend/birth partner who just lived across my unit in the same building. I told her I wasn't feeling well and dizzy and could she please come over. Everything is quite a blur from there. But I went on a decline very quickly. I remember my friend's husband lovingly holding my daughter as I layed there fearing of losing consciousness. My friend was on the phone to the ambulance and I remember her telling them I had a left side droop where my lips were. My words were slurred and my blood pressure was extremely high. All of my symptoms were stroke symptoms. Everything else was quite a blur but it was so scary "am I going to live?" I was rushed via ambulance to the trauma ward at hospital.

My friend called my family, my loved ones to let them know what was going on. From there she stayed with me test after test on the trauma ward and I can't remember much else but that I was moved to ICU I think early the next morning. In the ICU more tests were done and I was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia. My blood pressure at one point went to 200 over something all the beepers went off and people came running into my room. I was not allowed to have my baby with me till I was stable and after a few days could go to maternity to have her be with me. I'm now again in tears of the horrific trauma that had taken place. All of which could have been prevented. If my voice was heard, not dismissed I could have been spared so much trauma. Tragedy after tragedy, postpartum I nearly lost my life. I missed out on time with my baby in those first few days. I will never get them back.

My beautiful doula friend witnessed all the trauma I went through and my heart breaks to think of the thoughts and feelings she was suffering from. Was she going to lose her friend? I can't write much more. My heart is shattered and I can't even read back over what I've written because of all the agony. I pray that my story is a turning point for birth trauma. Please don't let my story become a story for anyone else.