

Submission
No 815

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My birth was absolutely nothing like I had imagined.

I was 29 when I fell pregnant. I was in the fittest phase of my life. I felt great, I was healthy, I was working full time (Primary Teacher) and I was happy.

I had no reason to assume that my journey would be difficult.

The first 4 months were filled with terrible nausea. I couldn't eat, except bagels with cream cheese and capers and maybe a coffee. And teaching while nauseous was horrendous. Nothing helped, it felt like it would never go away.

This eventually subsided into agonising stomach pain, sharp stabbing pain. Again, nothing helped. In the later stages of pregnancy I developed Oedema (swelling in legs and feet). And this progressed to such a stage that I couldn't walk more than a few metres in a day.

I was hospitalised at 35 weeks at _____ as they suspected that I was going into early labour. I had some bleeding, however after 5 days and Braxton Hicks type pain, they released me.

I was then in hospital for ECG scans every few days, with no changes.

At 38 weeks I was back in hospital, in _____ this time with preeclampsia. My blood pressure was sitting at 210/170.

No medication was helping, and I was in agony. My legs hurt, my stomach was so sore and the Braxton Hicks like pain was amping up.

On Friday they induced me, at 2pm, with a dose of gel. It was almost instantly the period type pain started. Like bad stabbing, can't sit down, period pain. My water broke naturally at Midnight, on the dot.

_____ was called back in, and my bloody pressure was rising and rising. They couldn't stabilise it. I had 4 drips in one arm, and they eventually put in a second cannular for more. The midwives weren't discussing anything with us. They started removing my jewellery for ICU. But couldn't take me because my BP was still too high. So in order to bring it down they gave me an epidural. It didn't work. So they gave me another. This time they pumped it full of double dosages to get it kicked. It made me so nauseous and dizzy, awful. Eventually it worked and my BP came down. It was 4am.

Around 7am, they started to induce me to bring on labour, I was only 2cm dilated. This continued for hours. Eventually we had 3 Obstetricians, 4 midwives and 2 paediatricians in the room. They tried to remove him with forceps and after that failed, then they suctioned him.

I felt nothing. Physically or mentally.

It took him a while to come around, and we heard no sound from him for a few terrifying minutes.

It was a very quick stitch up, a forced shower and then back to our room.

The midwives for that I had for postpartum were awful. They were abrupt and rude and made me feel guilty so many times. I developed a fear to ask for help or to ask questions, and being my first baby was not ideal.

I asked to leave the next day.

Going home was terrible. My BP kept rising, I got mastitis in the first 5 days. I was on so many drugs. I was a hormonal mess. AND I couldn't breast feed. But after my experience in the hospital I was so convinced that there was no other option. I persisted, bleeding, cracked nipples and all. 3 visits from the lactation specialist, the use of nipple shields still didn't stop me from screaming each time he was latch. I don't even have a word to describe this pain. Unlike anything else.

I had no emotion towards my son. I cried everytime he cried. I cried everytime he wanted to be held. I felt nothing towards him, and I started to resent his presence. All he brought me was pain. And I knew this wasn't how I was meant to feel. So I told no one, and pushed on. I hated it.

I bought up some issues a few times to some people, and their answer was always the same, 'thats what mum's do' or 'everyone goes through that'. So I thought my experiences were normal, so I stopped speaking about it.

It was also the midst of COVID so lockdown was happening, so I had no visitors, no outside help. Nothing. I was so lonely. And I felt so utterly alone. All I saw on social media was other women I knew who had babies at the same time, in their perfect bubble surrounded by their community of other mums. And I had none of that, no mum friends, no community and I was still in agony. I was miserable. But again, I thought this was normal, so I didn't ask for help or speak out. I should have, I know that now, because I was not coping.

6 weeks in, I could finally feed without a nipple shield. And it wasn't until around 4 months that I started to feel some happiness. But we had a bad sleeper. If he woke 2 times a night, that was excellent! He was getting to a stage that he was up every 50 minutes. I called because of COVID I couldn't go in, and I had already tried everything they recommended. They eventually told me to pin him in the bed till he stopped crying. That was absolutely the worst thing to ever try. It made it so much worse.

At that stage it was just one thing on top of the next.

An experience that I never want to relive.