

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had a very healthy pregnancy and, other than heartburn and obviously being exhausted in the first trimester, I felt pretty good. I cycled, did yoga, went swimming, looked great.

At 32 weeks I – quite luckily and flukily – found out my baby was breech. The midwife at [redacted] had said she wasn't – but mistook her head for a bum. It was only because I had an ultrasound due to my subseptate uterus that they found out she was breech.

I did everything under the sun to try to flip her naturally – moxibustion, lying on ironing boards, an online course called Turning Babies. I even played Edelweiss at my nether regions when I drove to try to encourage her to spin to better hear the music.

Nothing worked until --- a lovely midwife called [redacted] told me about Dr [redacted] the baby whisperer who can not only flip breech babies but deliver them. One of the only doctors in NSW who can do this.

And indeed he did. We drove over to [redacted] and met a doctor- slow and patient like no other. He listened, he explained, he was thoughtful. In the end, we had the ECV that day – at 37 weeks. He injected me with the uterine relaxant and, in the 10 mins we were waiting for it to take effect, it was like a dance party had started in my stomach. Such was the bouncing!

Then, when [redacted] started, he'd been going for about 15-30 seconds, I thought he was warming up. But no, she was flipping – and after 45 seconds, she was flipped. The [redacted] midwife said it was the fastest ECV she'd ever seen. Painless. And the little beauty never flipped back.

So that was week 37. We then went into semi-lockdown as Omicron was everywhere and we wanted to make sure [redacted] was at the birth. We did everything in our power to have a beautiful special birth in that sense.

Saying no to social occasions, eating outside. And then, she was 2-ish weeks late, so it was like 5 weeks overall. I was drinking red raspberry leaf tea, bouncing on a ball, swimming in the beach, eating well. I listened to hypnobirthing podcasts, printed out affirmations, borrowed my friends Calm Births course, took baths. I was bored and frustrated and ready for her to come – but I was incredibly healthy. Now, I feel so sad that that was the last time I was healthy. I feel broken compared to that woman who could frolic in [redacted] at almost 42 weeks pregnant. The whale of [redacted] as I called myself.

So – now, let's get to the labour. Which is why I'm writing this. And why I feel sad and shit.

I was due to go in for induction Monday morning 6am. Saturday- we went bowling. The weather was bad, I thought ANYTHING to inspire labour – and we could do an indoor task as [redacted] PCR was only 36 hours away. So Saturday, we had Vietnamese and went bowling. Came home and at 5:30pm I felt my first proper contraction. Go time. [redacted] and I sprung into gear. I wanted some things from the chemist. Off he went, I defrosted Bolognese pasta for dinner and we settled in for what we thought was going to be a rainy night of labour. It was exciting – she was finally coming, although at this time – we didn't even know she was a she.

After a few hours, I had a bloody contraction. We googled. Bloody contraction = probably go to the hospital. The midwife on the phone, a lovely lady called [redacted], said to come in.

We drove on in – [redacted] had to stop twice to push my back as I contracted in the car. One of the stops was a 'no stopping' spot and we got tooted.

I wrote this six weeks after the birth last year.

On a rainy Saturday evening in February 2022 I went into labour at home. I was due to be induced on the Monday morning at 6am but, after two stretch and sweeps, my baby had finally decided it was ready to come. We were excited – she was finally coming, although at this time – we didn't even know she was a she.

After a few hours, I had a bloody contraction. We googled. Bloody contraction = probably go to the hospital. The midwife on the phone, a lovely lady called _____, said to come in. We drove on in – _____ had to stop twice to push my back as I contracted in the car. One of the stops was a 'no stopping' spot and we got tooted.

We arrived at _____ Hospital and the reception from the midwife was pretty ho hum. We just waited in the waiting room as I had very painful bloody contractions. She sauntered down the hallway. I think I've since realised that the midwife who answers the call, takes on the client. In retrospect – and if this was the case – she was avoiding us. I called out to her in the hallway which (I think) meant we ended up with her rather than the lovely _____. I sometimes cast my mind back and think – if we hadn't – would we have had different outcomes. Cos she was pretty terrible.

The decision was made to send us home, a couple more bloody contractions. The decision was made for us to stay. And we got transferred up to the birth suite. I thought we'd won the lottery – the birth suite, and so fast!

Only shame was bloody contraction meant no water birth for risk of infection. This was disappointing to me but I could get over it. _____ went to the car to get some stuff and I was pretty surprised at the time _____ the midwife didn't push on my acupuncture spots on my back whilst he was gone. The contractions were only lasting 50 seconds about every 8 minutes. She would have only had to push twice, but instead ignored me and fussed about on the other side of the room with whatever logistics she had on.

_____ arrived up in the birthsuite very full handed – maternity pillow, suitcase, the works. We met _____ and _____ – the doctors who'd look after us on this rainy Saturday night. _____ I have since met again and really liked but at the time – I didn't like the push towards inducing. I found it quick and premature. I said no. Eventually I agreed to have my waters broken.

The next few hours are a bit of a blur. My contractions were painful – I assume cos of the blood. I asked for gas and air. For a number of contractions, I couldn't understand why I wasn't enjoying the machine – was I doing something wrong?! I took out the mouthpiece as it was harder to breath using the machine rather than just alone. Turns out, it wasn't on. We pushed the button, in came _____ and rolled her eyes that her colleague _____ hadn't turned it on. _____ seemed to resent us as patients. It was only when she realised that I was trying to go it alone with minimal drugs that it felt like her respect for my partner and I increased.

I had morphine, it did nothing for me in terms of pain relief but may not have been great on the baby's heart rate. Considering heart rate determined so much of the course of action later, this is disappointing to me. I had it twice.

I also had the water sterilisation injections. The most painful thing ever and wasn't aware that afterwards, that would mean my partner couldn't push on those acupuncture points. I wish I'd been told that, as the pushing had provided a decent amount of relief.

I just kept remaining at about 2-2.5cm dilated. I pushed through in the night and really wanted to get to 4cm – active labour. And then thought, with this pain, I can then be put under the epidural and the active labour will continue the dilatation.

I was devastated when, after a long night of labour, at about 6am I was told my cervix wasn't anymore dilated. That meant induction and epidural. Epidural first – I'm not stupid.

So about 7am, in came a delightful chirpy lovely anaesthesiologist. The end of his night shift – and he was talking me through the risks of an epidural. A bit scary getting a potentially paralysing procedure from someone at the end of his night shift but we went for it.

It didn't work the first time – they didn't find the best spot in my back. So we went again. While this was happening, in came – our Japanese midwife. As I sat there, in a world of pain, I could hear her laughing in the background as she did her handover and started her Sunday morning shift. I was so disappointed she didn't just shut up. It's not like they were talking about me and, if they were, I would have liked to have been a part of that handover conversation as I never felt the midwives or doctors provided the level of detail I would have liked when passing on to their colleagues. Such is the model of a lack of continuity of care.

The epidural worked, it was out with in with . And a young woman stood against the wall and watched as put on a continuous fetal monitor and syntocin for my induction. I was surprised not to be introduced to her but, considering she was a young medical student who turned out to be divine, I can forgive her that. I think she was nervous – her first day at a birth. But I think as well it should be standard practice for her to be introduced, even if she didn't feel comfortable or that it was her place to do so. She was staring up my vagina after all.

So now I'm on a drip for syntocin and the epidural – and I have a fetal monitor up my vagina. Let the pin cushion process commence! I could walk – it was a walking epidural – but a lot was involved in doing so. I settled in for a day in bed, being told that it would take about 10 or so hours to go from the 3cm I was to 10cm.

My memory of the day was hazy. I know at 9am, the proverbial hit the fan somewhat. My bladder filled up immensely, to the point that I had a hump as, under the epidural, I didn't get clues that I needed to pee. I was then fitted with a catheter to drain my bladder which made me even less nimble. It caused issues for my baby's heartbeat too – I remember there was a scare around that time with all the doctors and midwives rushing in – but can't remember what caused it.

I found the care under really lacking. Throughout the morning, she gave the medical student a lesson in the room for most of the time. I could just hear them talking away on the other side of the room as she explained her job, the practices of the hospital etc. The med student did my obs which I was fine with – but , the midwife saviour who shall appear later on, didn't let her do them as she did them herself. In retrospect – maybe I should have been asked if a second year medical student could do them, rather than a trained professional. Especially since my situation was getting increasingly complex.

Her English also wasn't strong. I remember asking her a question about a particular intervention and I wanted to ascertain if not having it increased the risk of stillbirth. She didn't understand the word stillbirth. I asked it another way, then my partner did. We got an answer to a different question, we gave up. Clear communication wasn't going to be a thing.

Eventually I got so irritated by the situation, I pushed my partner to go outside to the leading midwife and ask if we could be assigned someone else. It took a while but eventually we got the lovely ,

who'd done our birth course as an educator. That was when things improved from a midwife standpoint. We had _____ for about an hour and then in came _____, young, bright and a safe pair of hands.

Throughout the day I should add there were a number of scares with the baby's heartrate. At times, I worried it was because the induction/syntocin levels were too high. I pushed for them to be lowered – to make it a slow and steady progression, rather than pushing it to happen too fast. I was respected in this but I was pushed to speed things up and I do wonder if that caused heart rate dips at times. I would love the data on this reviewed because the constant up and down of her heartrate – and the fact that it sat at a lower level than usual for much of the labour – is what I think inevitably led to the shitshow of how my labour finished up. I'll get to that shortly.

The other thing that occurred was that the epidural stopped working. The dose wasn't high enough. I can't tell you how excruciating that was. I was on a high level of syntocin so my body was being chemically induced to be more open than it should be – and then all pain relief disappeared. That was sorted by a Canadian anesthologist.

We continued to while away the afternoon, with the doctor coming in and testing my levels of dilation. We thought I'd be 10cm by 6pm, leave it an hour and then push at 7pm. But, at 6pm I was only 9.5cm. So the decision was made to wait til 7pm, when I'd be 10cm, then wait an hour and push at 8pm. I had dinner (which I wouldn't have done if I knew I'd need to push shortly as it wasn't advisable).

That was all the plan until the consultant entered the room. It was a Sunday – she'd been a phone-a-friend to the relatively junior doctor from home during the day. It wasn't my birth she'd even come in for but a scary twin related c-section down the hall.

The power dynamic that entered the room is something I really lament. She looked at the data and, at 6:20pm, the decision was made that I was to push immediately. Even though I wasn't fully dilated and therefore the push reflex hadn't kicked into effect. And I'd just had dinner.

Against my wishes, I was put in stirrups in a non-active position. I pushed through my pelvic floor, unable to feel it because of the epidural. I pushed through my back passage and, the damage I feel there now, I am sure must be because of this.

_____ gave me gas and air – and talked me through how to use it for effective pain relief. Where was she when I needed her almost 20 hours prior and I wasn't shown how to even use it and time it with a contraction. I wonder if I would have needed so much pain relief if I'd just had a caring midwife who gave a shit and explained to me how to use it.

After a short while, the decision was made that pushing wasn't going to work. Perhaps because I wasn't yet dilated, the reflex hadn't kicked in and baby wasn't far down enough. I was told it would need to be forceps. I can't tell you how much I didn't want these used – and how clear I made that to the doctor.

I begged- can I be given two contractions to be in an active birthing position to give it the best chance. Can they try the vacuum. Can I at least put my feet up on the stirrups, rather than my legs, so I can be in a lying down squatting position. The doctor said all of this was too dangerous for the baby and she had to come out immediately. I screamed: "What is this, the 1960s?!" I felt so unheard and unlistened to. The lovely _____ who we'd worked with all afternoon convinced me to do it. As did my partner in the end, who was fearful what would happen to the baby. A pediatric doctor had entered the room and the number of doctors was pretty substantial. Forceps were used, an episiotomy was performed without mentioning it to me – or with my consent. I only found out after.

Out came the baby and she was put on me. I was so pleased when I saw she was a girl. It's all a blur. I look at the pictures of me at that time and I honestly don't recall it. I'm so swollen, I had so many drugs in me, I basically can't remember the start of her life. I remember seeing a head come out of me down there, it didn't look like me or and I felt quite detached from it. Then she came out, a beautiful little thing, covered in forcep marks. I've just looked at the images again, 5 weeks on. She's the most lovely creature, I'm very lucky to have her. She has a beautiful disposition. I feel so blessed to have a daughter. And I feel she's a wise old soul whose been here before. Truly blessed. She came out knowing how to feed, how to latch. She didn't cry much – it was like the gorgeous little thing knew mummy needed to recover. And she's been such an easy baby. I'm truly truly blessed.

But I feel sad about what happened to me. I felt my agency was taken away from me. I felt the lack of continuity of care led to an increase in interventions which ultimately leads me to describe my birth as a shitshow. I know have a big excel spreadsheet where I'm looking at all the different elements of my recovery that need work. The pelvic floor, fecal and urinary incontinence issues, a very sore tailbone that makes all movement hard, a divet now in my lower back in terms of how it's healing. Internal and external haemroids, a thickened perenium.

A friend described her forcep delivery the other day and I found it so triggering. I'm scared about the long-term damage. I feel ruined and discarded. And the baby is important – but I feel the process made me feel incredibly unimportant. Discardable. Only useful as a vessel to get the baby out and now feed it with the udders on my chest. She's the most beautiful creature and I'm incredibly lucky – but I'm hurting, I'm sad, I struggle to pick her up as I'm very weak and I feel broken.