

Submission  
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## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

In November 2017 I confidently walked through the doors of our local public hospital for an elective induction, on my due date. I was under the care of an obstetrician and had only decided a few weeks earlier not to have an elective c-section, even though I was informed it would be a good option as I 'would not have to go through labour'. As I walked into the maternity unit, I was incredibly excited and had no fear whatsoever. After all, this was exactly what women were supposed to do, and I was about to do it.

The induction process was explained to me briefly and I was told it would take around 24 hours to get labour going. I had the first gel inserted around 5pm. I was told by my obstetrician to go out for dinner and enjoy myself as another round of gel would not be administered until around 9pm. As my husband and I were preparing to go out I started feeling odd. I had severe cramping and felt going out for dinner was the wrong decision. He headed home to collect a few things and while he was gone, I began having intense contractions. I became quite distressed as I was not expecting things to escalate only a couple of hours into the process. I was in a great deal of pain and went to the midwife's station to ask if what was happening was normal. Two midwives were sitting down drinking tea and eating cakes. They looked up and told me I could not possibly be in that much pain as I was not having this baby until the following day and if I couldn't handle a little cramping how would I handle birth. I was told to go back to my room and relax, neither of them got up out of their seats. As a victim of trauma this immediately sent me into panic as I suddenly realised I was not in control of the situation and the people who were supposed to support me were not going to.

My husband returned and the contractions increased to a point where I could not walk or talk. I asked him to get a midwife, I wanted an epidural. The midwife checked my cervix, told me I was nowhere near giving birth, I could not have an epidural and was given gas. Things intensified yet again, this time I was refused an epidural and given morphine. I begged for an epidural at least 4 more times and was refused each time. I had eyes rolled at me, told to 'settle down', 'you're not having this baby until tomorrow' and was scoffed at for being dramatic. I have never experienced pain like I experienced that night. I began to spiral as I knew something was wrong and no one was going to listen to anything I said.

Eventually my husband demanded an epidural and the midwife said she would have to call the obstetrician and she would be angry if I was nowhere near ready to have a baby. Another cervical check put me around 3cm and more eye rolling. He insisted she call. I was eventually granted an epidural around midnight. I had spiralled into a complete trauma response and was pacing around the room like an animal. My husband had to keep me in the room as I was so distressed. I kept wanting to run away and locked myself in the toilet trying to keep away from these women. Eventually a young anaesthetist came in and after seeing my distress promised me things would be much more manageable very soon. At last, someone was going to help me. After 3 attempts at an epidural and me still being in excruciating pain it was deemed a 'failed epidural'. I looked at the anaesthetist in horror and begged him to put me under general aesthetic. He said he could not do anything for me without the express permission of my obstetrician. I will never forget the look on his face at that moment. He knew the entire situation was wrong, so much so he would come to visit me the next day and apologise.

I began shaking uncontrollably and my heartrate decreased as did my baby's. I was subjected to yet another cervical exam and it was discovered I had dilated from 3cm to 10cm. Suddenly, it was panic stations. I was not having this baby tomorrow, I was having this baby now and myself and my unborn child were considered 'at risk' due to our heartrates. The midwife who had mocked me started yelling, 'She's (the obstetrician) on her way, prep her for a c-section'. At this point I once again begged to be put under general aesthetic. I was told I needed to wait for the obstetrician as compression stockings were put on my legs. My legs had been in stirrups since the failed epidural. I was still shaking uncontrollably.

After what seemed like an eternity the obstetrician walked in and barked 'take those stupid stockings off and get me the forceps'. I screamed repeatedly 'No, no, no, not forceps, I want a c-section, anything but forceps.'. The obstetrician walked up to my face and told me 'Stop it! You have no choice.' At this point I left my body. I was laying there but I was watching myself from above and could not speak. 'Just a small cut' she said as I felt the most intense sting on my perineum. No consent was asked for. She pushed the forceps into my vagina and yelled at me 'push like you're doing a big shit'. I couldn't move. I felt something twist inside me and she put her leg up on the bed and with great force ripped my baby out. She yelled at me to 'put your hands down and grab your baby'. My baby was plonked onto my chest. Her cord was cut even though I had requested delayed cord clamping.

I was given synthetic oxytocin without consent and then my stomach was pumped by my obstetrician repeatedly to remove the placenta. It was excruciating. By this point I had given my body over and was in complete shock. My husband whispered to me with tears rolling down his cheeks, 'I'm so sorry, you never have to do this again.' I repeated 'I will never do this again'.

It was then time to stitch up the non-consented to episiotomy. My body was still shaking and I was told to keep still and had my legs repeatedly pushed open. The obstetrician made a comment to my husband that I 'don't like to keep my legs open'. She then inserted her finger into my anus without warning, dug around a bit and told me she was done and to go and have a shower.

I handed my baby to my husband and went and stood in the shower. Blood ran down my legs and I was in immense pain. I had felt like this once before after being raped. But this was actually far worse. So many people had been in that room. I felt like they had all raped me and my husband was a bystander. It was one of the toughest tests of our marriage. He was also deeply traumatised and his inaction led to immense guilt and a rift in our relationship. It took 5 years for us to end up in \_\_\_\_\_ office to discuss what had happened and how it had affected our relationship.

I asked to be sent home for 4 days but was denied. I wanted out of the hell hole that hospital is. Every day a different midwife would come in and say something along the lines of 'Wow, you're the super hero first time mum who gave birth in 7 hours.' It was so confusing. I felt completely violated and looked at my tiny, screaming child in disbelief. There was no connection at all. Postnatal depression began immediately. Yet all these professionals were praising me for my 'amazing birth'. It was like being in the twilight zone.

I was in chronic pain while in hospital. No one would take the baby for me and I had to push her into the toilet block even if she was sleeping as I had no control of my bladder or bowels due to damage sustained by the forceps. When I told one of the midwives I kept wetting myself she responded with, 'How do you know it's urine, it could just be blood.' I eventually discharged myself.

At a follow up appointment, I asked my obstetrician how it all went so wrong. She responded with, 'Yours was a good birth! You should be happy. At least your baby will go to a 'normal school.', implying what she did was necessary, or my child would have come to harm. I now know this is not the case. This was a lie. My notes were also incorrect. A timeline had been constructed to gaslight me.

Early December, a month after my baby was born, I was so depressed I asked my husband what we were going to do as it just wasn't working. I wanted to give my baby away. I realised I needed therapy. I reached out to several community organisations, but no one could see me until January as everyone was closing for Christmas. Eventually I was offered an appointment in January with a male psychologist. I declined. My pelvic floor physiotherapist was the closest thing I had to a counsellor. She urged me to file a report. With a newborn and the physical injuries I had sustained, I just didn't have it in me.

It took me 3 years to even think about trying to conceive again. I was terrified the entire time and was convinced I would be booking in for an elective c-section if I did happen to become pregnant. I believe my birth trauma was a factor in the 3 miscarriages that followed. I required a D&C the third time – the same obstetrician performed the procedure. After not having a period for 12 weeks, and having a haemorrhage in the middle of the shopping centre, I phoned her practice to make an appointment to see her. She told me over the phone everything was fine and my period would come back. I voiced my concerns and asked her if her advice was to do nothing. She hesitated a moment and said, 'yes'.

I decided upon a second opinion and a simple internal ultrasound immediately showed evidence of 'retained products of conception'. I was absolutely distraught. Not only had I lost another baby, part of it had been left in my body for 3 months. I had an infection and had to go in for surgery with my new gynaecologist. The retained placenta was removed and I was given a course of antibiotics. We discussed if I were to try to get pregnant again IVF could be a good option.

After this incident, my husband and I saw Birth Time. We have never sobbed so hard in our lives. Finally, we were seen. Others had been through the hell we had experienced and for the first time we saw powerful women giving birth on their own terms, at home. We decided there and then if we were to ever have another child, we would not be stepping foot into a hospital.

By chance, I fell pregnant naturally again and this time I reached 12 weeks. The fear was paralysing but I reached out to an acquaintance who was a shamanic homebirth midwife. She was thrilled and ready to help me have a successful birth. For the remaining 6 months I immersed myself in physiological birth: Rhea Dempsey, Ina May and Rachel Reed's books

became my bibles. I hired a female embodiment coach. I had appointments with . I took Jane Hardwicke-Collings Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy course. Anything I could do to educate myself, I did. And I realised very quickly what an absolute joke the maternity system is and that it had failed me. Under no circumstances was I playing into the system's hands again.

I went into labour at home, 41+3 weeks pregnant. I laboured gently and beautifully, remembering all I had been taught. After what I would describe as the most powerful, transformative, healing 9 hours of my life, I birthed my little girl into my hands with a smile on my face. When she was in my arms I burst into tears and said, 'I'm so sad it's over.' Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought those words would have come out of my mouth. My midwife guided me to my couch and I lied there for 2.5 hours, bonding with my baby before I birthed my placenta. No tearing. No excessive bleeding. No trauma. Just healing bliss. I was guided to the shower afterwards and I had vivid memories of my previous post-birth shower. As the water hit me I smiled and allowed the trauma to wash from my body. This birth healed the first ten-fold. Every woman should feel how I felt in my shower that day. I was beyond invincible, and so at peace. I then went to my kitchen and made everyone coffee while we spoke about how incredible the whole experience was. It was the best day of my life.

It is interesting to note that not once during my pregnancy, birth or post-partum did my midwife insert anything into my vagina. No cervical checks. No digging around to see what was going on. Just complete trust in me as a woman. She spent hours at my home talking me through past trauma and how she would hold space for me this time. I had 100% faith in myself going into my birth and I had 100% faith in my midwife. She and I created my experience together. She is now considered part of our family.

It is also interesting to note that my baby was a face-presentation. She took a little longer to be born but was completely fine. Her birth was a variation of normal. If I had been in hospital I am 100% confident she would have sustained facial injuries from unnecessary cervical checks and when discovered to be face-presenting would have been considered an 'emergency'. Who knows what hell I would have endured if I would have been in a hospital.

Everyday I am grateful I stepped out of the system and trusted my body. Everyday I will encourage all women to do the same. Thank you for hearing my story and the stories of so many women. There is a way to end birth trauma and heal birth trauma. The question is whether such a broken system can handle handing power over to the very women it abuses and commercially benefits from.