

Submission
No 1342

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Kim. My story occurs on _____ country, N.S.W. I have brought three children into this world. Only one of those births is (almost) free of trauma. I will only be discussing the most recent birth (22/09/21) in this submission in an attempt to be as succinct as possible. I am however available and willing to share or elaborate on any of the three stories upon request in the future. The trauma mentioned is not related to Covid based impacts. Having had the experience of being mistreated in the previous two pregnancies and births, and knowing this was my final birthing effort, I was determined to make this time different. I am unable to afford a private midwife and/or doula, which I know both to be fundamentally necessary to provide adequate support for any pregnancy, alas onwards we trudge. I will skip forward through the pregnancy in order to utilise valuable page space for the atrocities that are my third birth story. Please do not mistake this to mean the pregnancy was free of duress, pressure or medical omission. My water broke at home at 7:30pm. My first contraction was at approximately 9pm, spontaneous labour had begun. There (as usual) was never any reason to believe otherwise. By 11pm I was in an observation room (I am unaware of the proper name for this room), on the labour ward of my local public hospital. Contractions were now at a point that I was silent when they hit. I was in this room far too long. My husband was beginning to get frustrated at how long we had been in there and I knew it had been too long because I had explored all surfaces to brace for contractions but this room was tight and sterile with fluorescent lighting and I needed to move on. My first two pregnancies had ended in caesarean, maybe necessary, maybe not, I guess we will never know. But disclosing this to staff upon our arrival on the night created push back, that I should reconsider my intentions (to birth vaginally), even though I had already fought this hospital's expectations throughout the booking procedure and final weeks of my pregnancy in addition to being expressly backed by one of Sydney's leading and most experienced obstetricians (he had called the head of staff here on my behalf to show his support of my case, Covid made travelling to him for the birth tricky). I decided at approximately week 38 after having a successful (free of duress) appointment at the local hospital that it would be the one I birth at (we also had two little children -3 & 1 waiting for us at home). Encountering this reluctance in a time of such intensity was not only frustrating but avoidable as I had done the work for the hospital leading up to this moment to ensure a smooth welcoming (or so I thought). We eventually got moved in to room 6. I will give credit where it is due, this room was large and dimly lit, great for birth. I met my midwife (FOR THE FIRST TIME?!?!?!?) and my obstetrician (again, for the first time – so much to unpack in that, but again that's another page worth of explanation). We began by discussing between contractions about how I saw this turning out, my intentions and what I wanted as far as interventions were concerned. To which I expressly stated that I wanted this birth to be natural and untampered with unless deemed absolutely medically necessary. I remember the obstetrician repeating this back to me, and how strange it felt that she soon after informed me my requests have been accepted by her superior but I am not permitted an epidural (didn't I just say I don't want anything?!). I can't speak for long on when they put the foetal heart rate screw into my son's scalp. It hurts my heart too much and I am ashamed that I caved. I said no so many times. But they persisted, and in my vulnerable moments, they broke me. Right now, my cheeks are burning and my vision is blurred by the tears before they fall on this keyboard. I was so scared that were going to take me in to surgery that after many prompts, I had no option but to let them. In that moment I was led to believe that it was the lesser of two evils and that they were my only two options. Shame on both these women and the system they represent for placing me and my unborn son in that level of distress on what should be such a beautiful, precious and special moment. How could I possibly stay strong

when both the midwife and Dr are daunting between (big by this point) contractions pushing for this action over and over, saying how important it is that they monitor him... Even though there is absolutely no reason to be suspicious that anything is wrong. Default should not be to assume problems. I would also like to say that not once did I request help of any sort, I felt great... not just good, but GREAT. I lifted my chin and roared with both passion and power through my contractions, I was in my element. I knew I could do this deep in my bones I knew this was going to happen for me, I just needed to be granted permission (Yuck!) to be left alone to do so. Isn't that just awful. Permission. So sad. Another moment I feel you should know about is when I hit the red button as instructed (because I felt my body change from opening to expelling – again I don't need help). I was on my knees in the shower, my head resting in the lap of my husband because we had been left unattended AS IT WAS OBVIOUS BOTH MY SON AND I WERE FINE once they screwed a metal monitor into his scalp. It appeared to provide reassurance to them and they left to tend other women no doubt and were content to do so given they won the battle to monitor him from the desk. I regret pressing that button so much. If I didn't press it, I would have lunged this little man into my hands or perhaps the shower floor with my husband as the sacred witness. But things sadly turned out very differently. The midwife and Dr entered the room at the same time. The obstetrician on my right arm and the midwife on my left, lifting me off the floor (where I was comfortable and wanted to be) repeatedly yelling at me to get on the bed. I know my husband was in the room but I can't recall where. I did not want to get on the bed. It did not feel good, all of me wanted to get down. My body wanted the ground. The bed was high and made me feel a risk of falling off, it was not wide enough to feel relaxed on at that height, especially in that condition. It took up energy that should have been funnelling down to welcome my child. They made me lie on my back. I told them that hurts my back, that I didn't like it and I moved myself with great difficulty (at this moment my husband was on my left holding my hand next to the bed) back to my all fours but now I couldn't lean on my husband and use his hands and scent as strength in these final pushes. I had been disturbed and the presence of these women who had made themselves opponents (due to earlier encounters) was growing my feelings of fear. The Dr told me I was allowed (yes, she said that) 2 more pushes before I had to lie back on my back. I told her 4 more because I thought that was a big number considering she offered 2. She told me she could see my baby was in distress and that I would need to turn over to let her look. I obediently followed orders because again, I don't want surgery and I know I don't need it. I wish I just blocked her out. She then said I require a vacuum to help him out but in order to do that I would require an episiotomy. This was all very fast, upon recount of these events I find it perplexing that I went from blissfully roaring through my shower contractions, listening to my body, moving when it needed to this abrupt apparent need for intervention? I knew how close I was to holding him in my arms, and I knew that I was becoming depleted in my ability to fend them (staff) off so sadly I surrendered to this too. Interestingly, she couldn't get the vacuum on and he was born just fine, very soon (2:30am) without it. No complications, no issues, textbook, straight forward born. If only I had been left alone to enjoy it. (recap: scalp screw, episiotomy, attempted vacuum. Each unnecessary, not requested and even refused by the mother multiple times). The only thing I used for pain relief was the presence and scent of my husband, the knowledge I was fine and a heat pack periodically in the early stages on my lower back. After that it was me roaring the intensity out of my mouth to the ceiling. And this worked just fine, I wish the staff could have respected that. And it didn't even end there. Both the midwife and Dr then worked as a team to convince me I needed an injection to prevent excess bleeding, that I needed it. I said no. I was holding my

son at this point. He was on my chest. I was no longer susceptible to manipulation the contractions had been providing them. She showed me the cord had 'stopped pulsating' so would be fine to cut. It was pegged and cut. I wasn't ready for any of this to happen but I felt grateful (so much to unpack there to!) that I had pushed him out my vagina regardless of the truth of what had just happened. I started a new paragraph so you can really feel this. SHE THEN YANKED ON MY UMBILICAL CORD AND PULLED OUT MY PLACENTA. No warning. No consent. No consideration. I felt both tugs, it was not painful. But I heard the blood hit the floor in a splash that was alarming given the spiel both her and the midwife had just chocked me with. I asked if that was a regular amount and should I be concerned. She again stated it best I get the injection. So, I did. Never again will I get the chance to birth a placenta. I didn't even get to see it. I was robbed of so much that night and this was the cherry on top. The story goes on, but let's be honest. None of my story is unique or new to the ears of the community. We all know the system is an abysmal mess. I don't know what you need to hear to get things to change, so I don't know what it is I am to write for this message to resonate with you and for my message to be really heard. To be seen and have this awful circumstance exposed for what it truly is; ugly, hurtful, perpetually damaging, appalling nonsense. Literally, it doesn't make sense. But it does make cents, doesn't it? I know that what is done, is done. That I have lost my chance at the transcendent experience of birth, but that doesn't mean that I can't make way for the mothers of the future to have it differently. I now have a daughter and I cannot possibly let the opportunity to contribute to not just correcting but replacing the system blow past me without standing up and making my effort at correcting wrongs. I have so much more to say but such limited time to write.