

Submission  
No 1453

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 15 August 2023

---

Partially  
Confidential

I consider myself lucky to have had a "good" obstetrician compared to the stories I have heard from friends and strangers. I opted to go private, and I was deemed lucky to be able to have got a spot with my high demand OB. My son was induced at 39 weeks. He is my first and only child. I was 37 years old at the time and was quite a physically fit person which I think helped my body a lot in the end.

Towards the latter half of my pregnancy my OB kept telling me how it seemed like my son was going to be really big and may be difficult for me to deliver. She was great in the fact that she sent me for complex scans regularly, looked at my son on the ultrasound in her office, measured and weighed me. I trusted everything she said and discussed it all with my son's father. I weight trained right through my pregnancy and gained healthy weight appropriate for my average/ fit size 10-12 frame. I'd been having some pain in my ribs, at the site of an old sport injury, which was making me quite uncomfortable towards the end but otherwise everything was good. I did specialist physio to help with the chest pain and pelvic floor strength. The closer I got to birth the more the discussion was raised regarding his potential large size and birthing issues.

I opted to have the inducement as suggested at 39 weeks. I didn't know any different. MY OB was great, I trusted her and her educated opinion. The conversation was always – “it's up to you. I just want you to know your options....” I was afraid that he was going to be large, and I'd have issues. I was born breech and i know it was hard for my Mum. Not that my son was in this position at all. I was terrified of having to have a caesarean at “my age” which was discussed.

I went in to Private Hospital the night before. Got hooked up to all the things, got the drugs to get things going. I sent my partner home after a while, to sleep and I hung out alone, listening to my baby's heart. By the next morning I hadn't really moved along much. My OB came in at 7am to break my waters. I had also opted for an epidural, but the anesthetist didn't start shift till 9am. I went on to the gas, sucking it down as instructed, my contractions came on hard and fast. The rest of the time from here is a blur but the day was long.

Sometime after 9am the anesthetist came to administer the epidural. I remember he was young, nice, casual, friendly with an air of experience. I remember thinking, he's done this 1000s of times because he was so chill.

Contractions kept coming on hard then settled after a while. Or moreso that I couldn't really feel them anymore. I had to pay attention to the monitor as instructed so I knew when they were happening. Sometime after this, maybe around 1030 – 11am my OB came back, and they decided I was getting close to having to start pushing. Some time passed and she was back again, and it was time for me to do the work. By now I was feeling so numb, but I figure that's just how you feel with an epidural. I really had to work hard to focus on my time to push. To get my body working in precision with when the monitor and then the nurses were telling me that it as time.

Something happened in here. I don't know what. But I slowly felt my body going numb. Well about the waistline. I was finding it hard to breath. I couldn't concentrate on pushing anymore because I had to concentrate on breathing. They told me to keep going. That it would be ok. My limbs began to shake uncontrollably. I still don't know why, no one ever explained what happened. There became urgency in the voices, that I needed to keep pushing. To get it done. It was

impossible. I had to use so much mental power to try to tell my numb body to stop shaking, my lungs to breathe and my body to push at the right time. I remember looking at my partner and telling him something was wrong and that I couldn't feel anything. He didn't know what to do. They told him to hold my hand and try to keep me calm, I think. To help me focus. I was numb up to my throat.

I remember crying, and trying so hard to focus, being so afraid that something was wrong but not knowing what was happening. No one telling me what was going on. I don't even remember seeing them pull my partner aside. I can recall us discussing this at some point and that we both assumed they just had it all under control. After a while they told me that if I didn't push my son out soon, I would need to go for an emergency caesarean. They decided to turn the epidural off and give me some time – maybe it was an hour or so – to get some feeling back and to try again.

I remember lying there. Watching the monitor. Trying to calm my body and mind. Remembering to breathe. Feeling for every little thing so I could know when it was time. I think the nurses kept checking in on me, asking me how my sensation was. I remember they started to come more frequently, and I felt like my window to safely birth my son was closing.

It came to a point where they said, "its now or never" and they asked me if I could do it. I remember through the tears I said "yes, I need to try". I pushed so hard in that time. I think it took another hour to get him out maybe less, I have no concept. I know in that time the nurses and OB had quiet conversations away from me and my partner. Because we talked about it, wondering what they weren't telling us. After that I know I pushed so hard, using every muscle in my body, mustering every bit of energy I could. Clinging on to the thought that he might die if I don't get him out. Of course, our minds go to the very worst places, but I didn't know any different. My sister-in-law and her daughter had both almost died in birth the year prior I kept thinking of that.

I remember some discussion about; I had one or two more goes at pushing before they would have to use forceps or something similar. I remember being explained things like 2 or 3 different ways to do that, but I can't recall more than that. All I knew is I had a few more pushes to get him out or my baby might die. Or might die. But I didn't really know if any of that was even the case because no one ever told me what ACTUALLY was going on. I pushed with all of my might.

He came out on my last chance, about 4:20pm. He didn't cry. They took him straight to a table under a warm light and rubbed him for a while till I heard some little whimpers. They loosely wrapped him and put him on my chest. He just stared at me blankly with dark eyes. So quiet, so calm, not a sound. He was so small. He came in under 4kgs. Not this big giant baby that had been predicted.

I had no idea what to do other than to hold him. I had no idea what happens now. After a while I called out across the room to the nurses. The nurse came over and told me I should be trying to feed him. She was astonished that I hadn't been trying. It had been about 20 minutes or so by then. I'd just been holding him. I looked at the clock and noted it for some reason. I didn't know how to do that. I had to call her back and ask for help on how to try to breast feed my baby. She was polite enough, but I felt like they were annoyed that just didn't know what to do.

Eventually my little tear was sewn up and I went off to my room. I don't remember much of that afternoon. Except feeling sad and happy and confused all at once. I mostly remember that I felt so alone. Even with my partner there in the day. That night, and the next few nights forward I had great difficulty trying to get my son to breast feed. I feel like that story is another one altogether. I still don't know what went wrong. No one every explained or apologised. Maybe there was some mumble about the anesthetic going too high but I'm not even sure about that. Even when I asked questions I got no answers.

My body was wrecked from that time. So weak and I was so very sad. The hardest part about all this was the mental toll. The one that came along and planted it roots. The one that said to me that I'm a terrible mother because I held my silent baby there in my arms and didn't even attempt to feed him for 20 minutes. That I denied him the initial connection with me as his mother. That thought weighed heavy all through those early days of difficulty with breast feeding. Onwards into every time I felt like my growing son has hated me or that we didn't connect. I still don't know what the nurse said exactly. I could have been nothing much at all, but the look n her face made me feel like I had committed such a crime. I was a horrible mother. I became a theme of my spiral during depression.

My physical body failed me over time after that. 18 months later I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. A year or so after that I had elective surgery for urinary incontinence because no amount of physio could help me. I always though it had something to do with the amount of stress I placed on my body in that time. Maybe it would have been like that any way, even if it all went smoothly.

My son is 5 now and we are close. I took me a lot of therapy to move through it all. To disconnect from that time, to stop associating the fact I didn't feed him straight away with a lack of bond between us. To get passed being totally in the hands of medical staff and having no idea of what was actually going on. Having no control over my own body. I've always felt like my story isn't "that bad" because I've heard so much worse. But the feelings of fear and despair around that time have never left me. They are just buried deep in a filing cabinet in my brain. In a draw I choose not to open often anymore.