

From the Waters Birth Stories

Avila's birth

Avila, named for the beautiful mountain that lives between Caracas and the Caribbean, was born on Tuesday, November 21st just after noon. She has a gaze that can touch your soul and an affectionate nature that couldn't make her parents prouder.

Her birth was magical and sacred.

Natasha:

It was so much more than I was expecting - both in terms of what it required of me and what we received from it.

As we celebrate our first week as a new family, the overwhelming joy and gratefulness I feel just keeps increasing. I am ever so thankful for a healthy, adorable daughter. For the nurturing, encouraging, homestyle environment in which she was welcomed into this world. For the rare opportunity to have experienced this age-old celebration in the hands of midwifery care. As I write these words, I bask in the warmth of the memory.

Avila waited for her grandmother to arrive, 5 days after her due date. It was an unplanned coincidence that my mom made it for the birth, deciding to come on Monday to avoid the Thanksgiving traffic, which might have prevented her from flying for another week. We picked her up from the airport and enjoyed a lunch punctuated with light cramps that were manifesting every 15 minutes. She was overjoyed at the idea that the baby might be with us any minute. It felt great to have her there - knowing that she knew what I was going through, herself having had the experience of natural delivery.

The actual birth energy was something that I had romanticized, not really anticipating how far it would expand my boundaries. I thought I had reached my threshold of pain 10 hours before I met my little girl. When we arrived at the hospital at 2am, my heart sunk as I learned that I was only 2 centimeters dilated and was sent back home. And yet, one rush at a time, one breath, one push at a time, we got through the journey. I had imagined myself chanting and meditating through the birth - in reality that barely took me to the shallow shores of the early surges. What followed required me to draw from resources I had previously not known.

In the ten years that we have been together there have distinct moments that have exponentially expanded my love for my husband, Stephane. Avila's birth, our birth as a family, was one of these times. As he cared for me, supported me and showered me with affection - he made my heart open and stretch wider than I thought it could go.

I had thought that the metaphor of waves would be helpful to me, but when Germaine, our doula, reminded me of them, I felt like a small boat in a huge, dark ocean storm with each contraction that came in. Using only the primitive language I could manage at the moment, I said "waves no - flower" remembering the photos of the flowers that Avila's great-grandparents had just sent from their garden in France. Easily interpreting my cryptic message, Germaine gently dropped the waves and helped me visualize a huge red rose that was blossoming and blossoming and blossoming. Stephane had reminded me of the sphincter theory and through my tears

I started interlacing swishing sounds to remind me of an opening sphincter with very deep “aahhs” reminding me that I was to open in that shape. Germaine was a huge part in my labor. When she arrived after being woken up by Stephane in the middle of the night, she immediately focused on the progress we were making, thus soothing the anxiety that had started to build up as a result of the torrential waves. She must have massaged my back for hours, strongly applying pressure to relieve the pain, and reassuring me that my body knew how to birth – that the pain had a purpose, that we were going to take on one surge at a time. She was also a very calming presence for Stephane who suffered just watching me.

At one point, when we were at the hospital, approaching transition, my sister, who had been calling my mom to follow progress, insisted on talking with me. My mom placed the phone to my ear and all I could hear was my sister saying “eres una guerrera” -“you are warrior – you can do this”. It made me laugh, because she said this right as I was feeling like a big chicken. And laughter was right what I needed to release and let my water break.

Yeshi, the midwife, was attending our birth, bringing grounded warmth and compassionate wisdom. She ensured that Avila’s birth be human, gentle, welcoming, homestyle. As she monitored for a safe passage, the midwife encouraged me to trust my instincts and she followed their cue. When it came to pushing, I remembered a drawing in Ina May’s book of an indigenous woman giving birth by squatting and pulling on a rope that that tied to a tree branch. As I mentioned the possibility of trying this, Yeshi looped a sheet over a bar on the bed and let me squat like the woman in the book. She then got under the bed to be in the right place for this position!

Avila’s head emerging was the greatest relief and joy I have ever known. Stephane handed her to me without even realizing she was a girl. When I discovered it, and told him his dream had come true, tears streamed from his face.

I delivered the placenta under the wide-open gaze of my daughter. Yeshi brought it over to us and explained that this was “el arbol de la vida,” the tree of life that had sustained Avila during her first nine months of life – and we celebrated its role in nurturing our little girl.

The other midwives had met us on our first trip to the hospital and delivered disappointing news (2cm) in the most loving and encouraging way possible. They also visited us post-partum and relived our joy and we shared our birth story, providing the same warm support they had offered during the pre-natal care.

There is a Venezuelan song about Avila, the mountain, which says:

“vas regalándole al día
carga de buena energía
vas haciendo más humano mi sentir y mi cantar”
“ you bring to each day the gift
of good energy
you make my life and my song more human
– more soulful”

The "Homestyle" midwife team, Germaine and the whole maternity ward, brought to Avila's birth the gift of good energy, and ensured a very human and soulful entry into this world.

Stephane:

It was a lot more intense than what I ever imagined but it was so worth it... It was really difficult for me to see Natasha in such pain. At midnight the contractions were getting really close and very long so I decided to call our Doula, Germaine. She was sound asleep but in 20 minutes she was in our house and that made all the difference. She helped Natasha tremendously throughout the night as she was massaging her back and there to let her know that everything was fine. It was a very painful process for me too as I felt helpless. I was there all the time but at the same time could not do much to help her go through this. I thought that this was really difficult to cope with. I wish I could have taken some of her pain... ..though I would have taken an epidural, right away ;)

After a long night and long morning our Avila was born. I wasn't prepared for this but Yeshi caught me by surprise and asked me to help her catch the baby and pass her to Natasha. This was a very intense moment for me. I then cut the umbilical cord, which again I wasn't planning on. I tell you Yeshi with her very gentle but yet very commanding voice can have you do anything.

I am very grateful that Natasha decided to go with the 'Homestyle' midwives. It was an experience of a life time and they were here for us and with us all along this long journey. Germaine our Doula was also of great support and I am still wondering how we would have done without her.

I think that we got our ideal birth and our Avila is more than I could dream of.

