

From the Waters Birth Stories

The day Lucius was born from his Dad's perspective

I'll do my best to give you a play by play of Lucius's birth. A few of the more graphic details have been omitted to protect the innocent but overall I think this is a fairly accurate description. Of course, it's all my side and nowhere near captures Sue's experience. She was amazing and I will never forget what she went through. All in all it was an amazing day. Sue started having contractions on Tuesday night around 10 pm. They were about 20 minutes apart and not too intense but we called the hospital anyway. They told us to take it easy and call them in the morning. The contractions decreased in time and increased in intensity and by the morning it was pretty clear that the baby was on the way. We talked with the hospital again and we called Germaine (our doula). Then Sue's water broke around 10:30 am and things started to get crazy.

At this point, I realized that the stereotype of the crazed/clueless father-to-be running around trying to get everything together is 100% accurate. I was a mess. I could feel all of the knowledge/lessons that I had learned in the past 9 months slip away. How often do I need to call the hospital? What will Sue wear? What do we need to pack? This all culminated to a grand finale of cluelessness, when we left for the hospital at 2pm and I found myself second guessing myself on how to get to the hospital (which was only three blocks away). Fortunately for me (and Sue), Germaine arrived at 11 am and was instrumental in keeping everyone sane.

I can't say enough positive things about Germaine. She is a soft-spoken, Irish woman who looks all of about 15 years old. Leading up to the birth I was a little worried that she was too young and a little too touchy feely for me, but by the time Lucius arrived, she had easily proven her mettle. Sue delivered Lucius without drugs and there is no way on this green earth that would have happened without Germaine.

The main thing that Germaine did was to encourage us to relax and take a moment whenever any decision had to be made. That started when I called her at 10:30 am with the news that the water broke and that we thought it was time to go to the hospital. "We gotta go, we gotta go" was basically what I said. And I was actually a little perturbed when she suggested that we wait. At this point the contractions were about 5 minutes apart and I was pretty clear that we had to leave NOW and if Germaine couldn't see that well, then she was just being difficult. I grumbled to myself but I didn't want to make a scene with Sue doing all that she was doing. By the time Germaine arrived at 11 am, I was pretty clear that Sue's contractions and resulting pain were several steps beyond my ability to support her adequately. I stepped back and let Germaine do her work. She was quickly able to ensure Sue that all was OK and that we didn't have to rush off to the hospital. Sue was mostly on her side for a good part of the time. Germaine suggested several different positions and pillow structures but Sue always felt most comfortable (relatively of course) on her side. She spent some time on the bed, some time on the floor and sometime in the shower. Germaine massaged her and talked her through the contractions. Sue did great but you could definitely see that things were getting harder and harder.

Most of this time is a blur for me. I sent out a few emails letting people know that Sue was going into labor and asking them to send their good vibes our way. I figured every birth needs some grandmother energy. So as Sue's contractions strengthened, both of parents were rushing across the country to our side. Slightly dramatic, if I do

say so myself.

I also started to realize that I was nowhere near prepared for all of this. All of the food that we had bought in preparation for this day, we had eaten the week before. All the lists we had made about what to bring were lost. I knew I was in trouble when Germaine told me that it was time and that we needed to get some clothes for Sue. Clothes? No one had told me that I would need to pick out clothes. I ran around and found some of Sue's pajamas – pink bottoms, a yellow top and a maroon sweater. Nothing matched but by that time, she couldn't care less.

When we left for the hospital at 2pm, Sue's contractions were down to 3 minutes apart and were getting longer. She could barely make it to the car. And when she did get to the car, she couldn't sit down and had to kneel on the front seat. Since the hospital is only a few blocks away we originally had thoughts of walking there. But that definitely didn't happen and its funny to think that we even thought it was possible. Actually most of our plans – walking to the hospital, playing music in the room, using the yoga ball, having candles and even a little shrine - ended up out the window. They were replaced by survival and Sue's efforts just to get through the ever-increasing amount of pain and discomfort.

I dropped Sue and Germaine at the emergency room and went to park the car. When I got to labor/delivery they told me that Sue was in one of the Triage rooms with another patient. Sue's back was really hurting her by then and the intensity of the contractions were starting to scare her. A few times in the triage room she mentioned that she didn't think she could go on. She couldn't get comfortable and we had trouble supporting her in the confined quarters. But Germaine kept working with her and she worked through it all. Every time Sue would hit a new level, Germaine would say something like "OK – so that is how it's going to be from here on out." That would somehow reassure Sue and she would be able to prepare for the next contraction.

We had a bit of a shock when nurse Bonnie came in to check Sue for the first time. She was all happy and chatty and I'm pretty she thought that Sue was over-reacting to the pain. Most people come in much earlier then we did so Bonnie was surprised to see that Sue was at 5 centimeters. Of course we were all a combination of shocked, scared and disappointed to hear that Sue was only at 5 centimeters. As far as I could tell, given what she had gone through to get to 5, there was no way that Sue could get to 10 without drugs. Heck – even with drugs, I didn't know if it was possible. Fortunately, the doctor came in for a second consult. When she checked Sue out, she said 8. That was only about 15 minutes after Bonnie's initial assessment so I'm thinking that Bonnie was a little off. But whatever happened, it was pretty clear that the baby was on the way and that Sue needed a delivery room pronto.

Sometime in all of this (around 3pm) Sue started to have the first urges to push. Because of the discrepancy in the dilation size we couldn't be sure if this was a good thing or not. Early on it was mostly scary because if you push too soon there is the chance of tearing the cervix. As the transactions got stronger, she had to hold back the urge to push. Eventually what helped the most was when the doctor gave her permission to stop resisting and push a little during the contractions.

Also, in the triage room, it became clear that Sue wasn't going to use drugs for the birth. Basically, we (as if I really did anything) had done so much work at home that it was too late to administer an epidural. The doctor said they could rush one if we wanted but that they couldn't guarantee that the drugs would kick in before the

delivery. Again this was a moment on mixed emotions for me. We had talked about doing a natural birth but I never really believed that Sue was 100% committed to the idea. I figured at some point the pain would be too great and she would ask for the drugs. So when I heard that we had gone past the point of no return, I was amazed that we had gotten that far and very nervous about the path ahead. Germaine was obviously excited with the situation. I'm sure she would have supported Sue if she asked for drugs but Germaine was very much in favor of natural birth and this was an opportunity to really show her skills.

Around 4pm, a delivery room opened up and we rolled Sue there. One thing that amazed me is how much Sue relaxed in between the contractions. I wouldn't say she ever really got to a peace/ pain-free place in between the contractions but for a minute or so her face completely relaxed and she was able to talk and take long deep breaths. Germaine started to coach her in getting ahead of the contractions. Instead of reacting to them, Germaine told her that the contraction was coming, to breathe through it and ultimately push the pain out. I had never seen Sue so coachable. She did whatever Germaine asked and when it didn't work for her, she would say so and they would come up with another plan.

I, on the other hand, didn't have much to say that helped. At one point I was told not to kiss her anymore. Another time she said that the "you are doing great's" I repeated really weren't helping much (or at all). So I kept to stroking her hair and breathing with her when the contractions came. As far as I could tell, I was clearly way above my head and I figured the best thing I could do was do what I was told and stay out of the way as much as possible.

Of course all of our plans were way out the window. No yoga ball, no shower, no music, no anything besides finding the least of uncomfortable positions and going with that. For about 20 minutes we moved into the bathroom where Sue found some comfort by sitting backwards on the toilet. And this brings me to one of the more aromatic points of childbirth. Sue poo-ed. Given how hard she was pushing it absolutely makes sense but I can tell you childbirth poo stinks the same as regular poo. And I'm just slightly ashamed to admit that while my wife was pushing with all of her might, I was thinking, "man does this stink." Call me shallow.

Sue was in the bathroom for 10 or so contractions. She even did a few standing up. Germaine gently nudged her into doing a few more because it was working so well. When she finally got back to the bed, Sue was really exhausted and very much in another place. I could see moments of fear but Sue was a super hero and kept working through the contractions. My mom arrived at the hospital and I asked her to stay in the waiting room. Being a great mom, she agreed without hesitation.

Sue was now in the final stages. She was pushing hard with every contraction and the baby started moving down. Germaine and I held Sue's legs while she pushed. This was basically too much for Sue but Germaine kept saying that the best way to deal with the pain was to push it out. So Sue pushed and pushed. I have to say that I was impressed and amazed to see her go through all of this. Stephanie the nurse started to check Sue out and from her facial expressions I could see the baby was getting close.

For some reason that I can't remember, Sue decided to kneel on the bed rather than lay on it. This allowed her to push during the contractions and bear hug the top (which was angled up) while she was resting. Although difficult, this appeared to be

the best position for her. Around 5pm, the nurse started making calls to the doctor letting her know that Sue was close. The first thing that had to be decided was how Sue was going to deliver the baby. The kneeling position was working for her. I don't think it was the doc's first choice of a position, but she was up for what ever worked for Sue and gave it 'a thumbs up'.

So the stage was set. Sue was kneeling on the bed and groaning with every contraction. The nurse and Germaine were looking at the head appear and disappear with the same contractions. And I was standing at the front of the bed, holding Sue's hand, not believing this was actually happening. The doctor came in and put on the gown and this little clear shield over her eyes. The next big shock was when the doctor told Sue that she could reach down and touch the baby's head. "Really?" she said. The said yes and did so during the next contraction. Sue squealed in delight, shock and horror.

The moment Lucius was born was a very surreal moment. Sue was pushing, I was holding her hand and Germaine was reassuring Sue and videotaping. The doctor was at the base of the bed in the "catch" position. Sue gave one more push and out came this little purple-ish, grey ball of arms and legs. What made me catch my breath was when he turned over and I saw his face for the first time. That was when I realized that had actually created a new little person. This was a person with eyes, a nose, a mouth, hands and two little feet. I will never forget that moment. The doctor asked me to tell Sue the sex of the baby (that was something we put in our birth plan). I checked things out and let Sue know that she had a brand new son.

But due to how she birthed Lucius (on her knees), Sue was in no place to appreciate the joy of the moment. There she was kneeling above her newborn child who was still connected to her via the umbilical cord. All she wanted to do was flop down and she couldn't. And since the doctor had little (if any) experience of births in this position, she didn't know how to turn Sue over and get the baby to her chest. We fumbled a bit and got nowhere. So the doctor asked me to cut the cord, which I did (a bit anti-climatic I must say). While the nurse was sucking out the goop from his nose and mouth, we got Sue on her back and I put the baby in her arms. She smiled and said something like "it's my baby." She was happy but too tired to really say much.

Lucius arrived at 5:25 pm on April 4 2007 weighing 7 pounds and 14 ounces and was 19.5" long. He was healthy in every way. The best news was that mom was healthy and doing as well as could be expected given what she went through. It still hadn't hit me that we were a family and I was a father. I actually don't think that will hit for some time. All I can say is that I was extremely happy to have everyone safe and sound.

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