

Henry's Birth Story

I decided during my first trimester that a home birth might be the way to go. I had my daughter, Ellie, at Kaiser Roseville in 2009. The birthing experience there was good, though I was in labor for 25 hours. The midwives there followed my birth plan and gave me the time I needed. I did not have an epidural so I knew I could do it again without drugs. Because they were understaffed, when Ellie looked a little "dusky" a few hours after birth, they took her to the NICU rather than just the newborn nursery for observation (which was their original plan). She was put on antibiotics (in case she had a lung infection) and dextrose, and trying to breastfeed her was a nightmare-- I was on the 3rd floor and she was in the basement, and they dissuaded me from feeding her more often than every 3 hours. We were having latch issues and the lactation consultants were "not allowed" to come to the basement to help me. I have heard that this is different now. I hope so. I felt terrible about my baby being in the NICU and missing out on precious bonding time, I felt lousy at breastfeeding, and it took me a long time to recover from the whole experience. Though a home birth is not cheap, I would have paid any amount of money not to go through that situation again.

So! A home birth! My husband took some convincing, and his first response was, "That sounds messy. Can't we have it at someone else's house?" Ha! I found Birthstream Midwifery through another mom in my prenatal yoga class and felt comfortable with the midwives right away. They spent over an hour with me at every visit, and came to our house for appointments (a blessing with our toddler!). They also do excellent postpartum and newborn care. I felt very well taken care of and looked forward to birthing in the company of women I trusted. Our plan was to transfer to Kaiser South Sac should I need to go to a hospital. Newly licensed midwife Rachel Hansen would be my first phone call since she lived closest to us, and then Tosi or Rachel Fox-Tierney would assist and advise her.

In the meantime, I was also going to some of my Kaiser appointments just to make sure they had a record of me if I needed to have a hospital transfer. They were not thrilled about my having a home birth, though some midwives there were more understanding and as supportive as they could be under the Kaiser model. Kaiser had me dated at 2/17, and Birthstream had me at 2/24 as I have a longer cycle and ovulated late during my cycle. I ended up giving birth on 3/3-- a full 15 days late according to Kaiser! They definitely would have induced me.

I was curious how my body was doing so I asked to be checked at my later appointments. By 40 weeks I was dilated to 5 cm but my contractions were not regular. Rachel Fox-Tierney even said that were I in actual labor she would have let me get in the tub right then! He was not ready to come out yet, clearly. I went on so many walks trying to get the contractions to stick around! That Sunday I walked 4 miles around Curtis Park, and contractions were still going but getting further apart. At bedtime I called Rachel (midwife) to see what I should do to try and actually get some sleep. She suggested a small glass of wine (hooray!), which succeeded in stopping the contractions and getting me some good rest. The whole process of stopping and starting was frustrating but I also tried to remember that my body was doing what it needed to do and he would come when he was ready. A few days before actually giving birth I started to have some random really strong contractions, and thought "Oh yeah, THIS is what labor feels like! Maybe I'm not ready just yet!"

Side note-- At my 40 week Kaiser appt (Monday 2/13) I met with a midwife who took some pleasure in telling me that going beyond 41 weeks means there is a greater chance my baby would die because the placenta would get "tired". Also she guessed at that time that he was about 8.5 pounds and would continue to grow about a half a pound a week. I felt like she was trying to scare me into an induction and I wasn't even at my due date yet! No thanks!

Once I hit 41 weeks, which was almost 42 weeks by Kaiser dates, I needed to get my amniotic fluid level checked. I arranged this through Kaiser. They also insisted I do a non-stress test, even though I had an NST scheduled with Birthstream midwives the next day. I went along with it. My fluid levels were great-- the nurse said I should wear goggles for when my water breaks! I was contracting throughout the NST and during one of my contractions (just one), baby's heart rate dipped from the 130's to the mid 120's. All the other contractions were fine, but they brought in a doctor to tell me to go to Labor & Delivery for

further monitoring. I had been sending texts to Rachel H throughout the monitoring and tests; she assured me that everything was fine and they would come in the morning to check on us. I felt confident telling Kaiser "no thank you" to further monitoring and went home. I was intent on letting my little man come on his own time table. I should note that throughout this whole process of stopping and starting, dealing with Kaiser, etc., my home birth midwives were a wonderful support. They were on call 24 hours a day and I felt comfortable calling and texting them at any hour with any and all questions and concerns.

I went home that night from Kaiser feeling a little defeated and like he was never going to come! I even told my parents not to bother flying up from southern CA just yet-- they had already made 2 false alarm trips. I really wanted them to be there for the birth but I was also feeling like a watched pot that was never going to boil! I went to bed early that night; contractions had stopped again. At 3:30am I woke up feeling restless. I went down to our extra bedroom/birthing room and read my book for about an hour, had a bowl of cereal, and then decided to pee again before going back to sleep. It was about 4:45 am on Saturday 3/3. I couldn't pee but after a minute some liquid did trickle out, and when I stood up a little more came out. Looked like my water was breaking! I looked in the toilet and it was light brown. I waddled down the hall to wake Mark up, still trickling into my pad. Then I went back to the toilet and called Rachel H. She said she would be over in about 20 minutes. I stayed on the toilet as fluid continued to leak, and leak, and leak.

Rachel arrived a little after 5 am, having also called Tosi who would be driving in from Davis. She checked the fluid and confirmed that it probably meant meconium but there was a good chance it was "old poop". She had me sit on a chux pad and once I did that we saw that the fluid coming out was now clear and baby's heart rate was good so there was no reason to think he was in distress.

I sat on the bed through my contractions, with Mark and Rachel rubbing my lower back. By the time Rachel arrived they were about 5 min apart and getting stronger. I was able to moan through them and enjoy the period between them to rest and regroup, knowing that while the contractions sucked there was an end to each one. I pictured myself holding my baby and nursing him and feeling like I had things under control. It was not long before Tosi arrived and they decided to start filling the birthing tub. It was about 6am and my contractions were now 2-3 minutes apart and getting more painful. I was afraid I would get into the tub too early and have to get back out. I asked them to check my dilation first-- I was 8cm! Mark said later that he also couldn't believe it was time to get in the tub-- my labor with Ellie had been so long we thought we were still looking at 10+ hours. I practically jumped into the tub as soon as they said it was ready, wanting to get in before the next contraction hit. It was 6:30 am. The water felt amazing-- it took the edge off the contractions and made it easier to move around and try different positions. Throughout my entire labor they were listening to baby's heart rate with a Doppler, even in the water, and my movement was not restricted at all by the monitoring.

At 6:40 am Ellie woke up and Mark's mom brought her in to say good morning to me. It was so wonderful to see her! I didn't want to scare her with my noises so thankfully she came in between contractions. Contractions were getting stronger and I was starting to feel like things were out of my control and I couldn't do it. I spent a lot of Ellie's labor feeling scared of what was coming next, trying to control what was happening and freaking out between each contraction. I didn't want that to happen this time. In the meantime, I could hear Ellie and my MIL in the kitchen deciding on breakfast and I said, "I can't do this with her here. Can they go to McDonald's or something?" Once I knew Ellie was on her way out of the house, things sped up quite a bit. I spent a few contractions in the tub in a terrible mindset-- crying, saying I couldn't do it, asking Mark to do it instead (ha!).

The last thing I remember saying is, "I know I can do this, I just really don't want to". I think at that point I gave up control and got out of my own way. I came to the realization that I was the only one who could get this baby out. The contractions were awful but they were a means to an end, and the more I worked with them the sooner I would be done. I had written down some birthing mantras weeks earlier, and the one that stuck with me throughout pushing was, "My body knows how to give birth". Shortly after that I switched from hands and knees to semi reclining in the tub, which made me able to push with my legs on the sides of the tub during contractions and made me feel like I could focus my energy more on pushing. By 7:20, I was experiencing "involuntary urges" to push at the peak of each contraction. I relaxed with a

cool compress on my forehead between each one, and I wasn't even screaming during pushing-- my body would just rise up in the tub as I focused all my energy on bringing the baby down. Mark was behind me and I was squeezing his hands for each push. No one was yelling at me to push, they were just telling me I was doing a great job and letting my body do the work. I pushed for about 20 min like this, and then reached down to feel his head but it was not crowning yet. This was discouraging and I lost some momentum. Then things picked back up. I was also motivated by the thought that Ellie would be back from breakfast soon and I had to get this kid out! By 7:50 a bit of his head was showing with each push, and then a few minutes later was visible between pushes. I could feel how close he was and like my hard work was paying off, and even though my body felt like it might split in half it was kind of a good feeling too because I knew I was almost done. At 8:02 his head crowned and I could feel the "ring of fire" burning like crazy and I just blew through contractions. Tosi was telling me my "tissues were opening beautifully to get his head out" which sounds cheesy but was just what I needed to hear. (The midwives took notes throughout my labor which is why I know times everything happened!)

At 8:07 his head was born and I lost the urge to push. His shoulders were stuck. They had me switch back to hands and knees, and then kneel with one leg up! How I got into that position with his head hanging out is beyond me but it happened quickly. They gently guided his shoulders out and at 8:09 he was born! They had me reach between my legs and pull him up to my chest. He opened his eyes immediately but he was blue, not breathing, and not moving around yet.

They had me get out of the tub and over to the bed, where they placed him between my legs and rubbed him with warm blankets while Tosi milked cord blood back into him. He was not yet breathing but they said he was getting oxygen from the cord. They suctioned him and gave him a few puffs of room air with a mask and bag and he started to pink up. Mark and I talked to him the whole time and told him what a good job he was doing. At 1 min his Apgar was a 3, at 5 min a 7, and by 10 min he was a 9. Phew! It was quite scary for the first few minutes but the midwives were so calm and I knew we were in good hands. I have no doubts that had I been at Kaiser he would have gone straight to the NICU. Instead I was able to hold him and get my skin to skin time, and put him to the breast. We waited to cut his cord until Ellie came back at about 8:40 since she had said she wanted to help. She was curious about the placenta and so excited to meet her little brother!

Oh! I almost forgot to say-- I am not diabetic (tested at Kaiser) and my placenta was not "tired"-- there were no deep grooves or calcification marks showing this.

Henry weighed in at 11 pounds, 2 ounces, and 23 and 1/4 in long! He is a big guy! I had one small tear. He's about the size of a 2 month old, which is pretty ridiculous. The craziest thing to me is how much easier it was to birth him in comparison to Ellie, who was 8 lbs. 2 oz. Except for the scary few minutes immediately after he was born, I could not imagine things having gone better. I am proud of my body and so thankful for the loving support I had during the birthing process. Having a home birth is truly one of the best decisions I have ever made. I