

The Birth Experience

by Jeff W.

Nothing in life can possibly prepare an individual for the experience of birth. I have heard some people refer to child birth as a JOY and now, after the birth of our son, I join those proud parents in saying, "It was truly a joy!" It has made my heart grow and my spirit find new light. The following is a short story of my experience in the birth of our son.

Prior to the birth, two things happened which made the experience different and exciting. On March 27, while on maneuvers with my Platoon, I broke my lower leg in several places and consequently could only walk with crutches. Following that incident, my wife suggested that we use a doula for assistance and support throughout labor. As a Navy SEAL, I was confident that this was unnecessary and that I was prepared to handle anything that may transpire. However, I agreed and discovered that once labor began, everything I thought I knew or expected seemed different.

On Sunday, April 5, 1998, Lori returned home from her baby shower at 2:00pm concerned that her water might be leaking. As a precaution, we contacted our obstetrician, Dr Magone, and after speaking with her determined we should get examined. Since, as far as we knew, she was not having any contractions, we hung around the house doing last minute things and watching TV. At midnight, pretty confident we would be sent right back home, we were off to the hospital. The first examination neither confirmed nor denied the presence of amniotic fluid, so we were told to walk. That was a sight to behold . . .pregnant Lori, pushing me in a wheelchair. Thank goodness the hospital corridors were empty! Still confident that we would be home in our own bed within the hour, we returned to the triage at 3:00am. After four separate tests it was determined that it was amniotic fluid and to our surprise, we were admitted to the hospital.

Although Lori was experiencing contractions according to the monitor (pain meter), but she still was not feeling them. We decided to attempt to get a couple hours of sleep and call Gerri, the doula in the morning. I fell asleep, "like a baby" and Lori stared at the four walls for the next three hours. As the sun was coming up she called Gerri and when I awoke about 8am I found them in deep conversation. Since everything was running so smoothly, I decided to grab a bite of breakfast and when I returned, Lori informed me they had started her on potocin (a drug used to assist in labor.) I immediately panicked, thinking something was going to happen right away, but we spent the next three hours watching TV. At noon, with everything still running smoothly, so I decided to get some lunch.

When I returned at 1pm Lori's contractions had increased in severity and quantity. She was no longer able to speak during them and it was evident she was uncomfortable, to say the least. Gerri and I helped her to change positions every 20 minutes and tried as best as we could to continually soothe her through interactive conversation and massage. Actually, Gerri did most of the work, while I just held her hand and tried not to say anything stupid. The contractions continued to get worse until about 3:30pm when Lori asked for the epidural. Gerri was great, continued to explain what was going on, and as she did, I became more comfortable and began playing a larger and larger role. However the next half hour was rough. Lori started into transition and her body, hormones and emotions went right off the scale! I must admit mine did also, and with a

tear in my eye I tried to help Lori concentrate and work through the discomfort. At about 4pm the epidural kicked in, and everything was under control again so I had a quick dinner and took another nap while Lori and Gerri continued to talk.

The fun and excitement for me - not necessarily for Lori - really began around 7pm. She was now 10cm and 100% effaced and it was time to start pushing. When this phase began, I must admit I had a mixture of feelings from anticipation to down right fear, but after about twenty minutes something amazing happened to me. As if I was struck by lightning, I suddenly wanted to do everything and be everywhere. I started counting with Lori, and it did not take long for me to realize every time she was pushing, I was flexing my own stomach. It turned out to be one hell of an abdominal workout.

The doctor showed up about 8:45pm. At this point I had been staring at Lori's head -- helping her count, trying to ignore what was happening down below. About 9pm I asked if Scott had hair and when Dr. Magone answered that he did, I became excited and got the courage to take a look. All of a sudden childbirth seemed the most natural thing, almost instinctive, and I was once again ready to go. I had previously discussed with the doctor catching the baby, and till this point, I was kind of hoping everyone had forgotten - no such luck! About one minute later Dr. Magone asked me if I was ready to catch the baby. I immediately put on a pair of gloves and prepped myself while still assisting Lori in counting during the contractions. I was not prepared for what I was actually going to do but I would not have traded it for anything. About four pushes later, Scott's head had crowned and after one more push I saw his ears. I touched his ears and cradled his head and with Dr. Magone's guidance delivered our son. I realize this is not for everyone, but it made me feel like I really participated in the birth and it was a wonderful, unforgettable bonding experience. We planned to allow Scott a couple of deep breaths before we cut the umbilical cord so after about a minute - at 9:50pm - I made the cut that separated baby from mom and realized that I was a dad.