

How my Calmbirth changed my life...

After the birth of my first child I was left feeling traumatised. As I lay alone in the hospital room, just hours after the birth with my new baby next to me, I had scary flashbacks. When my doctors came and saw me the next morning I felt I should just be grateful that I had a healthy baby. It didn't even enter my mind to ask questions about her birth. For the next two years I felt upset whenever I heard a natural birth story. Somehow I felt that I wasn't woman enough for childbirth. These feelings interfered with my early parenting. The first year of my daughter's life was marred by anxiety. I didn't seem to be able to believe she was fine and I was fine as a mum, as a woman. Calmbirth changed all of this.

After our first morning of Calmbirth classes I spoke to Kerri-Ann about my first experience. Kerri-Ann listened carefully, then explained what happened in that birth. She told me what a wonderful job I had done with the first stage, and that it wasn't my fault that intervention was used. What relief! Finally I understood. It was time to focus on the birth of my second baby.

I was four days overdue, and six days into an injury of the ligaments across my belly brought on with the beginning of a very painful 36hour pre-labour. I had been using calm breathing to cope with the pain of the injury, and surprised even myself by being able to keep calm and excited as the hours ticked by with still no labour. I was unable to stand up for long, and so spent a lot of that week in bed thinking about the labour. My overwhelming feeling was of excitement, when doubt and anxiety came along I was reminded of the story on the CD. I was able to go within, I already knew everything I needed to know, I must listen to myself. My partner knew this too, and kept reminding me how strong I was and telling me what a great job I was doing coping with the injury, with not being able to look after Maisie- which I was very sad about.

With a little pop at 9pm my waters began to leak. After a quick check on the baby at the hospital we were sent home as no contractions ensued. By the time we got to the car park however I knew I was in labour, and we both smiled and laughed all the way home. Once there I lay in bed and started my calm breathing, there wasn't time to go to labour land as there had been with my first labour, as the contractions quickly got closer together. If I started to think too much about how they felt, I just imagined holding my baby. My baby was coming soon! I had been waiting so long for this day. With these thoughts I lay and counted my breaths. Within an hour we were back at the hospital. As my midwife Wendy took my observations and started talking to me about my birth wishes I had to tell her when I was having a contraction. She couldn't tell because I was so calm! Jeremy gently touched my back on the out breath, and reminded me how strong I was. By at about 11:15 Wendy asked if she could do an internal examination. Before she did this I reminded her I didn't want to hear anything negative, that's how much I knew what I needed! We were both surprised when she found I was about 7cm already. I really felt it was very easy, and instead of bracing myself for those final cm's, I embraced them. Each one was bringing my baby closer! Calmbirth had given me an amazing gift- to know how to see these feelings and to focus on what was important. I was amazed when at 12.05 I felt the need to push- surely not yet? Surely there was much suffering to go through first?

Skye arrived soon after. It seemed birth was imminent. Then the baby turned posterior! For the next two and a half hours I worked with Skye, Wendy, Jeremy and my other birth partner, my best friend Emily to try to get the baby to come out! There was a big ache in my back, but it was nothing really and my overwhelming feeling was still of calm excitement. I was able to comment on how cheeky the baby was, and felt like laughing when the remaining waters broke and again when Wendy broke it to Skye that the mirror was broken when she asked for it. Eventually Skye suggested an episiotomy. Straight away I knew that was the right thing. I felt that even during my practice I found it very difficult to relax that area. I knew that was what I needed and happily agreed. I had been working very hard and knew that physically my strength was waning. Up on the bed I was surprised to discover that being on my back, looking at my tummy and bracing myself against Jeremy and Emily was the right position for me. When I pushed I lifted my pelvis. We worked as a team, everyone was involved, everyone was encouraging me and I them! It was beautiful to be surrounded by these wonderful people and to work so hard to birth my baby. It was incredible to feel his head when it finally came out, and then to feel the shoulders and whole body. To lean forward and discover that it was a boy was just fantastic. I held him to me and he calmed down. Jeremy announced his name. The room was joyous. I kept exclaiming, "I did it! I couldn't have done it without my team and I did it!" Our baby was not a pretty picture, but we were in love immediately this time, and just so happy! Once Skye helped me feed him I felt the birth was complete.

Wendy was first to leave. I found out later that she hugged Skye, she was amazed by the experience. Skye was next after lots of chatting and celebrating. It was her birthday and she had to get some sleep before a big day ahead. Emily found it hard to leave, we were all so caught up in reflections of a wonderful birth and the new baby Clancy. When she went Jeremy and I just basked in the glory of the whole thing. Reminding each other of funny moments and telling each other how we had felt at different times. Looking at Clancy- in bliss. It was six in the morning before I convinced him to go home and get a little sleep before our two year old Maisie woke up! The whole time I hadn't felt the need to ask for pain relief at all. I was overwhelmingly motivated by the image of holding my baby, and my perspective on the pain never changed, it was bringing him closer. It's hard to describe, I know that I felt pain, especially in my lower back, but it was so out of my focus that it really didn't matter.

Over the next few days I noticed a different Michelle had been birthed that night. I was confident, I was strong, I knew when to ask for help, how to deal with worries and what to be afraid of (or more importantly not be afraid of). Jeremy and I had shared something remarkable and we had seen with greater clarity how strong our love was, what we could handle together. His support and understanding in those early days was remarkable. Wendy was wonderful. We too had shared something special and every time she worked in the following days she would come and talk to me. At first we reflected on the birth, in celebratory style. It took me a little while to realise how touched she was to be part of it. It was wonderful to hear her story, how all the moving around had in fact helped move Clancy down. After that was done she would come and just talk. We had become friends. Clancy often went on little adventures around the hospital when Wendy was at work! Skye called a few days later and we talked over the birth from her perspective. I felt all the better to find out he came out with the very widest part of his head first!

My family have since commented, and I've seen it in myself, an inner strength becomes an outer strength. Jeremy and I have tackled every challenge, from the pain of stitches, mastitis and worst of all engorged, over supplying breasts. Nights where we have had to be up with Clancy all night, and toddler stubbornness to boot! We are calm parents working as a team. Friends are amazed at how "well" we look. For me it's been a rite of passage, and I finally feel like a woman. Thank you Kerri-Ann, you're an angel.