

I lost my mother when I was 19. We were very close, she was more like a mother, sister and best friend all wrapped into one. So over the years, when various milestones and rights of passages have come up in my life - ACL reconstruction, college graduation, international job assignment, wedding - it was really hard to not have my mom by my side. As we humans do, I have learned over the years to take the pain of losing her and turn it into a strengthening experience with each passing milestone. But one thing I knew I always feared was having a baby without her guidance at hand.

Time passed though, and my biological clock started ticking and I told my extremely patient husband that I thought I was ready to try for a family, as I knew my mom was there with me in spirit guiding me and I could be strong as she had been for me when I was a child. We got pregnant very quickly, the first month of trying, and were so overwhelmed and excited preparing quickly for the beginning of our family. At the time, we were living in England as I was assigned there for my job. My husband works offshore based out of the Gulf of Mexico and was doing rotations for 8 to 12 weeks away from home. I had my first scan when he was gone and received the devastating news (alone) that I had miscarried. In fact, there was something wrong from the start with the embryo and it had just taken my body longer than normal to reject it. This was a heart-breaking experience for us, especially being apart. But we made it through and eventually decided to try again.

This time, we got pregnant the first month of trying again! But this time the early pregnancy symptoms were undeniable and motherly instinct kicked in and I knew it was a boy from the start. I wanted the best life for this little man I was carrying inside of me, and for me, that started with a calm pregnancy and beautiful birth experience. I had heard of doulas because I had two friends who had recently used them for their births. I liked the sounds of having one for my family for many reasons - 1) we were living away from home without a strong support structure close by, 2) this was a first child for both me and my husband so we weren't familiar with what to expect, especially on a different medical system, 3) we had recently experienced a miscarriage and I wanted someone with pregnancy knowledge near by in case anything unusual should happen, 4) I really wanted to stay centered and tranquil throughout the pregnancy to provide a loving, peaceful womb for my baby to prosper in and 5) I wanted someone who could essentially provide a nurturing sort of care for me, without my mother there.

Knowing that a doula could provide all of those things for us, I set out to find one in SW England. That proved to be the hard part because the doula profession is really just beginning there. I only found two different agencies representing doulas in all of England and found that there were only two certified doulas in the SW area. So, I was a bit dismayed that the percentages were stacked against me in finding a personality that would gel well with mine.

From the moment I heard Sarah's voice on the phone, I felt at ease. We got along very well and I knew that she would be an excellent match for my family. We began a doula-client relationship early in the pregnancy (about 5 months) and continued regular contact until closer to the end of the pregnancy, when we spoke with Sarah much more

frequently. Not only did Sarah fulfill all of my criteria in having a doula, but she far surpassed them. She was a great knowledge repository throughout the entire pregnancy – from anything to do with the British NHS system to different birthing techniques to pregnancy nutrition, etc. – and became a voice of reason in the last 2 harrowing weeks when I was 15 days overdue!! Her family was planning a relocation to Israel from England, and she did the unimaginably selfless act of pushing her flight back a few days to make sure she attended the birth of our son.

And boy was the wait worth it! March 15th 2007 is and always will be the best day of our lives. Sarah was purely divine that day – a soothing, reassuring presence in the midst of some unforeseen circumstances (my father and aunt, visiting from the States, no longer wanted to go to London because they wanted to go to the hospital, as they expected hospitals in England to be like back home with a birth waiting room; my husband had to deal with getting them to the train station at the peak of labor before we could go to the hospital; the water birthing pool was no longer available, so we had to figure out other pain relief methods; etc.). I can remember how calm I felt with her at the house while my husband was gone to the train station, as we were sipping peppermint tea, I was bouncing on the birthing ball and she was applying pressure in JUST THE RIGHT SPOT to help ease the pain, just passing time waiting for dilation to progress. I felt my mother's loving presence there, so far from home all the way in England, and I knew then that she put Sarah in our paths for a reason.

I look back on our birthing experience and still get goose bumps and tears, all in one. My husband and I regularly read and reminisce the day's transpiration of events through the birthing story that Sarah provided us as she was parting for Israel. What a lovely surprise that summary of the day was! Our friends and family even got to enjoy it on our son's website and rave about how great a story it is to this day! We wouldn't have these wonderful memories of the most important day of our life if chance and circumstance hadn't brought us to the divine Sarah Vine. What a blessing she is! I only wish I could pack her up in a suitcase and ship her to Houston, TX to be here with us for the arrival of baby #2 in August 2008!!! But I know that I will have her support by email and phone, as she is just that kind of gal - always there for her fellow mothers-to-be...

Thank you for being the best doula ever!!!