

## **Pax's birth**

Pax was born via a natural delivery on Tuesday, January 17, 2012. However, the story doesn't start there. It starts on the previous Sunday. My due date was January 18, 4 days away, and I'd been hiking, walking and swimming throughout the duration of the pregnancy, including hiking the morning before with Ben. On Sunday, after a yummy steak dinner at Jay & Marilyn's (steak was definitely the abnormal part), Marilyn and I decided to go for a slow hike up North Mountain. We got almost all the way up the rocky part of the mountain (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the way to the top) when my water broke. I didn't hear a pop, like some people do, but I was definitely pretty well soaked down to my knees by the time we turned around and got back to the car.

I dropped Marilyn off, and went home to try to stem the tide. As soon as I got home, I called Ben and asked him to come home, which he did (he was in the middle of a bike ride). I spent the next 20 minutes cleaning myself up. As soon as that was done, I started reading about what to do when your water breaks before you're in labor. (85% of women's water breaks after labor has already started.) According to the Bradley books, 90% of people will begin contractions within 24-48 hours after that, so I felt pretty comfortable with the fact that the baby would be here soon, and we called our doula/birth instructor Kristin Fellows to keep her updated on the situation. She sent us an excellent article about what to do in this situation, however, it had an extended set of comments at the end written in by parents who went 3 weeks without labor starting and had to fight their doctors and even midwife every step of the way. This was less than encouraging to the confrontationally-averse, like myself.

When Monday morning rolled around (Martin Luther King, Jr Day), and still no contractions (about 18 hours later), I was a bit worried. I was not worried about the baby or contractions, which I knew that as long as I didn't do anything ridiculous to increase the risk of infections (vaginal exams, swimming, having sex, tampons, etc.) everything would start on its own and be fine. What I was worried about was going to my doctor appointment that afternoon and having to fight my doctor, who I knew would want to induce me right away (this is the standard policy in the US when water breaks before labor has begun, in order to avoid infection). I went on a worried walk to speed things up and decided to call Kimels for some acupuncture help in speeding up labor. As I turned around to walk back, there was a lovely rainbow. This helped calm me and reminded me that God's promised love endures forever. After that, I went to Kimels for acupuncture and ran a few errands. Since Gene told me to go home and take a walk (despite already having walked that day), I went home and walked again. After lunch, I showered and went to my 4:00 doctor appointment, where I met Ben.

We informed Dr. Kwark that my water had broken the day before, and as suspected, she was less than pleased that we hadn't called. She wanted to send me to the hospital on the spot and said we could wait and see if labor started naturally, and if not by the next morning, they'd induce me. We said we wanted to go home and see if contractions would start first to avoid induction. After a bit of discussion, fetal monitoring in the office, and an ultrasound, (all of which showed that everything was very normal), she finally agreed to let us go home

until the next day, with the understanding that if contractions hadn't started by then, they would induce me as soon as I got there.

By this point it was after 5:30, and we decided to go ahead and go to Jay & Marilyn's for supper group, since we had no other reason not to. We didn't tell anyone there (other than Jay & Marilyn, who already knew) that my water had broken and that I'd be going to the hospital the next day, just to avoid questions and excitement. When we got home, we did a few final baby preparation things (like installing the car seat) and we went on a (3<sup>rd</sup>) walk and discussed how we felt about a possible induction (BAD) and what to do about it (keep walking). During this walk, I started to feel some occasional soreness in my back. We took the long walk around, to see if they'd continue. (They did.) I thought these might be contractions, but I really didn't know for sure until we got back. I was using my computer and all of a sudden winced and said OW, as I felt a stiff pain in my stomach and back. Then I knew.

When I told Ben, we decided that they weren't close enough (5-10 minutes apart for about 30-40 seconds each) to go to the hospital, so we continued doing some of the labor stimulation techniques we had read about and I just kept breathing deeply and relaxing through them. Finally, before heading to bed around 11 PM, we decided to walk up and down the street outside the house to give us something to do as the contractions grew stronger and closer. After going to bed, it became clear that there wasn't much sleep that was going to happen, but it was good to still feel like I was at home and not bound up in a hospital scenario. Eventually, we decided to head to the hospital, around 3 in the morning.

When we got there, we went to the maternity triage ward and when we handed the nurse our birth plan, she noted that we were hoping for a natural birth and suggested we use moaning for pain management. I had remembered discussing this in class once or twice and was all for natural pain management at that point. She did a quick vaginal exam and discovered I was already 5 cm dilated, which I know is an estimation at best, but was still helpful to know.

At that point, the moaning commenced. Up until that point, deep relaxed breathing through the contractions had been enough to get me through. Then I started using the moaning and as it turned out, it was extremely useful.

Once we got up to the labor and delivery room around 4 AM, Ben and Kristin Fellows, our Bradley instructor and doula, began doing everything they could to help me out. While I was attached to the fetal monitor about half of every hour, they could see the contractions on the screen. When I wasn't attached, they'd hear them coming from the moaning. They slowly got stronger and stronger and closer and closer. They usually started in my lower back and then radiated around to the front, but the bulk of the pain was still in my back. I did everything I could to keep my hands, jaw, legs and back loose and relaxed, which really did help. Every time I did accidentally tense up, I was in significantly more pain.

At one point, as I felt that I was working quite hard and had been for quite a while, they came and did a vaginal exam and I was at 7 cm. For some reason, Ben and Kristin were far more impressed with this than I was. However, with every contraction, one visualization

that helped this list-maker was knowing that even if I didn't know how many more contractions there were, I knew there were a finite number, and with each one that passed, it was another one crossed off the list. During this whole process, I lost all kinds of fluids, the nature of which I can only guess, from various orifices, but I was obviously too busy to care.

Either way, work continued with Ben and Kristin helping into various positions to see what was least painful. We tried many things including a birthing ball, hands and knees, on the toilet, etc. The most effective thing for me seemed to be laying on either side with the peanut-shaped birthing ball between my knees and the bottom hand under the pillow under my head. Then, when a contraction came, Ben was immensely helpful by not just holding ice to my back, but literally pushing it HARD into my lower back. He did this for at least 6 or 8 hours. What a blessing! Not only that, but he made sure I was drinking water or the Sprite I requested and ate the honey sticks we'd brought. This kept the light-headedness to a minimum, but it was definitely there. Even as overwhelmed as I was during the whole labor, I was constantly thinking how awesome Ben was being (not that I expected anything less). Kristin was equally fantastic, running to get more ice, suggesting other positions, double-checking things the doctors and nurses asked or suggested, etc. Additionally, we had a student nurse named Angelina who was actually with us nearly the entire time. Many times, as I was moaning through a contraction, I'd realize there were 3 sets of hands on me pushing and massaging various points to help out. Again, more blessings.

Throughout this time, over the course of probably 3 hours, various people trying to get an antibiotic IV started were poking me (they wanted use the antibiotics to protect the baby against infection, given the length of time that the water had been broken). The first nurse got one started, but then it shifted and nothing was flowing and she couldn't get it back. She called someone else, who called someone else, who called the anesthesiologist, who called a supervisor, who called a director, and so on. All in all, I think at least 7 different people tried to put a line in my wrist before the last person just gave up and put it on a vein near my elbow, which I told the very first person was where I had the best veins, albeit untraditional for labor. As irritating as it was to continue being poked and compressed and tourniqueted including during contractions, in some ways I actually didn't mind because it was somewhat of a distraction.

A ways down the road, one of the on-call doctors from the practice I'd been going to came in and did an exam and noted that I was now at 8 cm. (To me, I was pretty sure it had been ages since the 7 cm exam, and I was frustrated and in pain. Labor math strikes again...) The doctor also noted that there seemed to be a bit of the water bag still intact that might be slowing things down, and should she break it. We asked her to wait, knowing that that could induce even more pain. However, when Dr. Kwark came in a bit later, Kristin mentioned that when they had done this for her, it had led to pushing and a baby quite quickly. (At this point, I was really looking forward to pushing, since it was something active I could do, and mostly it meant the end was very nearly in sight.) Apparently Dr. Kwark discussed this with Ben (I have no recollection of this), and they decided to go ahead with it. I also have no recollection of her actually doing this, partially because I also had felt a

number of decent sized gushes of liquid previous to that, which I thought may have been it. Either way, when she had done this, it did seem to move things along, and brought me to the 10 we were aiming for. In the meantime, I had to continue to endure super-strong contractions that definitely were leading me to push (not quite full pushing contractions, but definitely with a clear inclination in that direction) without actually pushing. These (which I assume was “transition”) were by far and away, the worst. I really just wanted to curl up in a ball (impossible with a pregnant belly) and saw ow, ow, ow, but I knew that would only make the pain worse. So, I kept moaning (quite loudly by now), and trying not to push (only marginally successfully). For a bit, I had tried leaning over the back of the raised bed on my knees, but anytime I had to support my own weight at all, it was much worse. As soon as I flipped onto my back (sitting up in bed) with lots of pillows, I was visibly in less pain.

Finally, they called Dr. Kwark back and everything was in place to begin pushing. With knees back and chin down, the hard work began. During classes, Kristin had said that you push till the point of comfort, and I had laughed at this phrase every time, since it seemed to be diametrically opposed. As it turns out, they are diametrically opposed. I pushed until I ran out of steam with the contraction, usually 2 breaths and 4 pushes, before totally flopping back on the bed, and Ben soothing me with cold washcloths on my face. Thankfully, these contractions were farther apart, and the more contractions I had done, the more exhausted I felt, gasping for air afterwards, as if I’d just run sprints. I remember noticing every time I opened my eyes (not often) that there seemed to be a fair amount of people in the room (5 or 6?), but I didn’t know who they were since I didn’t have my glasses on. Either way, after every contraction, it would be seemingly silent in the room, until I started pushing again, when the excited, encouraging directives were the sounds all around.

As glad as I am that she was doing this, Dr. Kwark was massaging the perineum during the pushing, which somehow or another made it seem more difficult to push. However, it was probably immensely helpful in controlling any tearing that occurred. As we had discussed on several occasions in appointments and in our birth plan, we wanted to avoid an episiotomy as much as possible. With every push I could feel the baby getting closer, but was not hearing anything from the doctor about actually being able to see it, which was very frustrating, feeling like I wasn’t making any progress. Slow going, but progress was actually being made.

However, as I continued pushing and the baby got closer and closer, there was definite tearing occurring, none of which I felt at the time, and (as she told me afterwards), if I had continued without intervention, there would have been extensive tearing “all over the place” and specifically she wanted to avoid tearing through to the rectum, which sounds *horrible*. I don’t know if she asked me directly or if she asked Ben, but at that point, I was all for anything that was going to bring the baby quicker, so she made a small cut (which, as the books said, didn’t hurt) and with the next push, his head popped right out, and one more tiny push brought him all the way out. 1:11 PM.

They called out that it was a boy and put him on my stomach. We oohed and ahhed for a few minutes, Ben cut the cord, and then they took him to be weighed, suctioned, etc. At this

point, I was so immensely exhausted, that I needed to rest a few minutes before I could begin to take it all in. After this, Dr. Kwark started working to deliver the placenta, and stitch me up, which seemed to be a fair amount of a workout for her and semi-painful for me, although she did give me a numbing shot for the stitches. After having gone through a 17 hour labor, this seemed to take forever, though I'm sure it was just a few minutes. Meanwhile, thankfully, Kristin was taking pictures, which I'm glad to have (even though I look awful). When they handed him back to me, we breastfed for a few minutes and then everyone left and the three of us just rested together after such an immense experience. It was amazing. As we discussed later, neither of us were flooded with the intense emotion right away that many people describe, but it came slowly through the course of the next day or two.

In the next hour, we decided on a name and Ben went to work sending texts and emails proclaiming the happy news. Marilyn came as soon as she could leave work, beaming from ear to ear. After another hour, we were both starving and exhausted, so Ben went out to get some food (Chipotle) and I ordered from the hospital (fruit, cheese and soup). At this point, while Marilyn happily held our little Pax, the nurse came in to take us up to the recovery room, but asked if I wanted to go to the bathroom first. As I got up to go, I started feeling light-headed. By the time I was in the bathroom, the room was spinning. There was a lot of blood involved in going to the bathroom, and by the time I was done, my mind was all over the place. The next thing I remember was the nurse calling for help and the 2 of them literally breaking open the smelling salts, which brought me right around, though still very woozy. They steadied me, got me back to bed, and cleaned me up. Dr. Kwark came by and determined that I had a "lazy uterus" which wasn't quite firming back up like it should, hence the rush of blood. She did some pretty firm "massaging" of the uterus and things shaped right back up.

After another hour or so, they took us up to the recovery room, and from there, life with Pax began. :-)