

The Home Birth of Hugh

Sally Mitchell – for www.birthinangus.org.uk

I had my third son, Hugh, in Montrose in March 2009. My other two children were born in Australia, and I have experienced three very different models of antenatal care. I am very much a believer in natural birth, and that if a labour is left to progress naturally, without interference, this will lead to the best outcome possible for both mother and baby in the vast majority of cases. But key to trusting ourselves and our bodies to birth as nature intended, is knowing that you have professional, experienced care providers who will know when something is out of the ordinary and take appropriate action if need be. This is precisely what the midwives at Montrose Maternity Unit provide.

Hospitals have always made me feel uncomfortable, like a fish out of water, and I believe that this feeling of unease was one of the reasons my previous two labours had been so long, 60 and 18 hours respectively. For this reason I decided to have my third child at home. Not only was I hoping that this would make for a faster labour, but having no family here, it also solved the fact that we didn't have childcare for our older two children. As my pregnancy was completely normal, the midwives supported my decision to homebirth from beginning to end, for which I am extremely grateful as I know that being on call for a homebirth on their days off must not be very fun for the midwives concerned!

The antenatal care provided by the Montrose Midwives was second to none that I have experienced before. There was never any waiting for appointments, and if at any time I was worried about anything I was always told to come straight up to the infirmary so it could be checked out. The day before my due date I passed a very bloody show, which I had never done before, and I wandered up to the infirmary for one of the midwives check that all was OK – which it was. I was content knowing that this meant labour was probably imminent.

My contractions began ten minutes apart on Saturday 14th of March, our baby's due date, at about 9pm. They were very uncomfortable, a little bit painful, but I wasn't certain whether it was the real thing or Braxton Hicks. I went to bed at about 10pm, but had a very restless night's sleep with intermittent contractions all night. When I woke at 8 am on Sunday I thought I'd jump in the bath and see if the contractions disappeared. They didn't, so I figured it was time to get up and stay active. Mostly I wandered around the house doing random housework and playing with my children.

At about 10:30am the contractions were coming a bit closer together and I felt I needed to start to focus a bit more so I went upstairs and listened to my relaxation CD. Afterwards I was back downstairs still wandering and moving, but I was having to call Stuart to come for every contraction to put pressure on my lower back.

At 1pm I texted Karen, our doula, asking her to come, as contractions were 2 minutes apart, and Stuart was having difficulty reaching me to help due to having to cater to my demands (like fill the birth pool!) and also supervise and take care of the

kids, and I felt I needed someone with me with every contraction at that point. We called the midwives at this time, simply to let them know I was in labour and to be on stand-by to come when we called. At this point I was still expecting another long drawn out labour.

I felt the need to get away from the kids and their noise, and enter my own space so I went upstairs to our bedroom where we were intending to birth the baby. While I was waiting for the birth pool to be ready, I laboured kneeling on a mattress on the floor, leaning over the bed. At that point I vomited for the first time, which past labours had shown was normal for me. As soon as the pool was ready I stripped off and jumped in. I had been in the pool about 5 minutes when Karen our doula arrived at 2:15 pm. At that point Stuart went downstairs to focus on the kids, and Karen stayed with me. Stuart continued to pop up and see how I was going, and Iain and Angus did the same occasionally.

The pool was heaven. It gave me so much more freedom of movement and the pain relief it provided was absolutely wonderful. Initially I relaxed back and rubbed my own back while floating during contractions, as at that point leaning forward was very painful. We were in no doubt that the little man was coping well with the labour, as he was extremely active between contractions so much so that my moving belly gave Karen and I a giggle. At about 3pm the reclined position became uncomfortable so I rested between contractions sitting on the pool floor, but was leaning forward or kneeling up during them.

Contractions were getting even closer together and I was having difficulty finding any relief during them, and I asked Karen to put counter-pressure on my back during the contractions. At that point I decided to give myself a quick internal to see if I could feel anything of interest. Baby's head had descended somewhat but I still had a way to dilate I thought. I was finding no relief even between contractions now, and I grappled with the idea whether to call the midwives so I could use the gas, or continue as I was. My heart was saying call them, but my head was saying no. My past labours had been so long that I felt there was no way I could be near to birthing my baby, so I continued in silent conflict for a while. By this point the pain was such that I was pretty much non-communicative.

At 3:30pm I felt I couldn't continue without more pain relief. So internally I made the choice to either be ready to push and get the baby out, or call the midwives. I checked myself again, and felt the baby's head had really descended, and the waters were bulging. They broke when I poked them, and were nice and clear. At this point Karen asked if she thought we should call the midwives. Again, I thought I had a while to go, but after a quick think I agreed so Karen gave them a call, and she was told they'd be here in 20-30 minutes.

Then although I had no physical urge to actually push, I decided I wanted to give it a go for a few of contractions and see if I felt any movement. I felt good descent and burning with about the third contraction. Although I hadn't told Karen I was already pushing, she realised the birth was close, so ran down stairs to get Stuart. I continued to push through contractions while kneeling on the pool and leaning over

the side. At that point Stuart was at my head holding my hands and Karen was at my side pushing my back. With the next push I felt his crown, kept pushing, and I spoke for the first time in ages to say "His head's out". The time was 3:50pm (Karen's notes). Stuart went scrambling around the back to watch and help if need be. I waited for the next contraction, and with the next push his shoulders were born into water. Stuart lifted him up, I did some gymnastics with the umbilical cord, and then I was holding our new little baby. He a little slow to move and breathe but as he was still attached to his umbilical cord this didn't worry me. I rubbed his back, and talked to him to encourage his breathing.

By the time Karen ran downstairs to get Iain and Angus, they came back up to hear him let out his first small cry, before he fell asleep breathing quite well.

Karen then called the midwives again to tell them the baby had arrived, and they arrived about 10 minutes later. I was really, really glad to have them here because I found the contractions to birth the placenta excruciating and it was nice to have them there for reassurance. As soon as the cord stopped pulsing we cut it so I could hand him off and concentrate of expelling the placenta. It was almost as bad as labour. I had never had a natural third stage of labour before, and it was a fantastic thing to experience and have them guide me through it.

The midwives checked Hugh over, checked me, and dealt with the placenta etc. cleaning as they went.

I had a quick hot shower to warm myself up, before dressing and climbing into bed at 4:38pm to give baby Hugh his first feed. By the time the midwives left, the only 'evidence' that a birth had taken place was a pile of wet towels to be washed. With Karen's help, Stuart went to the supermarket, and we had the kids fed and in bed by 8:00pm. The three of us, and baby Hugh, then sat down to a beautiful bowl of pasta that Stuart cooked for us. By 9-ish, Karen had left, and Stuart and I (and baby Hugh) had some quiet time to ourselves before heading to bed for the night.

All in all it was a perfect day, and a perfect birth, made all the more so because we shared it with our children, and were able to have the birth exactly the way we wanted it and it wouldn't have been possible without the exceptional care provided by the Montrose Midwives.

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