

The next hour at home literally flew by, because all of a sudden a swarm of fruit flies invaded our kitchen, having hatched in the compost bin by the hundreds, and moved into other rooms from there. We used our vacuum cleaner hose to catch them in the air. How ironic, so many lives ending in our vacuum cleaner bag, while I'm giving life, all part of the continuum of Life. While I was taking the compost out, the front door locked shut, but my husband wasn't able to hear the doorbell with the vacuum cleaner on. So I leaned onto our building's mailboxes with my arms stretched out during another contraction, amused and a little alarmed by the fact that my husband wasn't wondering what had happened to his laboring wife. When he eventually heard me shouting, he turned the vacuum cleaner off and asked why I hadn't rang the doorbell.

Meanwhile, I was constantly rushing to the bathroom to sit through a cervical expansion on the toilet – I knew this place was already connected to releasing. When I felt like squatting, I placed some towels on the floor to catch the bit of pee that came out each time. Soon, I didn't want to get up in between contractions, because moving made them come back-to-back. Resting in bed calmed things down a bit. When I checked the time it was already after 9pm. After another thirty minutes on the bathroom floor, I told my husband it was time to leave for the birth center soon. I had a long list of last-minute things to prepare and pack – mainly food and drink, which the midwife had recommended in case of a long labor. There I was, telling my husband to make sandwiches, cinnamon and nettle teas, unaware of the fact that I was already in advanced labor. During the car ride, a cat and a fox crossed our path, my husband told me, but all I was looking at were the stars and the clock: my contractions were 2-3 minutes apart.

At the birth center, the midwife on duty, Yvonne, turned on the warm and dim salt crystal lamps in the room with the large tub. I would have loved to spend the rest of the time on the toilet, since one contraction was coming right after the other now. However, part of the procedure was to initially measure the baby's heart beat for 20 minutes. I was allowed to kneel on a mat on the floor while I was hooked up to the machine, while I stretched my front body and leaned back onto my husband's back. The midwife later told me that this is considered a position to avoid in labor, but she didn't intervene, and I'm grateful that she trusted my intuition. All sensation was in the front of my body, and finding relief in any other way was impossible. When she checked my dilation, I was 7-8 cm.

After a long 20 minutes on the floor and some emptying myself on the toilet, I got into the tub in hope of relief. This made me feel dizzy and I announced that I was nauseous, so I got back out, where my body released everything it didn't need anymore. Liquid came out on all ends: vomit, pee, amniotic fluid and blood. I thought about how nice it was of the midwife to wipe up after me, and caught a glimpse of my husband's concerned face – the only time he had that look. He was surprised that I was ready to get right back into the tub, but I felt much better now. The water welcomed me with a minute of relief, for which I silently expressed gratitude. I only remember three occasions on which I had a little break between two contractions – things were going fast!





Soon I felt like I had to poop some more, but the midwife said it was the baby's head entering the birth canal. She checked: fully dilated! I was going to get to push soon! I couldn't believe how fast it had gone – I had always imagined myself panicking in transition. By constantly concentrating on my outbreath, and making low sounds when I needed to express the discomfort, I had stayed centered throughout labor. Pushing was the most natural urge, fueled by roars that arose from the depths. Then it was time to decide whether I was going to birth the baby in the water, or on land. Since I felt like rising with each contraction to pull on the fabric that hung from the ceiling, I didn't want to have to stay submerged in water for the rest of the birth. So I got onto the bed on all fours, and as the baby crowned, the midwife soothed my stretching skin with a warm washcloth. It was so comforting and less painful than I imagined. She asked me to resist the urge to push for one surge, to avoid ripping, and showed me how to breathe. It didn't take long for the head to emerge, and Yvonne invited me to touch her hair. With the next push or two, a slippery body came out with a splash, as most of the water had remained inside. It was 12:55am, and we had been at the birth center for only two hours.

I looked down at my baby, as it made little mousy sounds. I remember being a bit disappointed that it wasn't chubbier. My husband remembers the relief of watching her skin turn rosy, but I have no more memories. She was placed on my chest in a bunch of towels, and I reclined into my partner's lap. Slight discomfort announced that the placenta was on its way, and releasing it was the most satisfying feeling. We marveled at the placenta, which was then placed in a plastic container, to be frozen until we would find a place to bury it and plant a tree on top. By now the second midwife had arrived, and they checked me internally. I had two small wounds that would heal in their own. Emma latched on and sucked while looking into my eyes and wrinkling her forehead. I will always remember that picture. I was glad that the midwives took care of weighing and dressing her, because I needed a break. I was shaking

from exhaustion, but felt like a champion. It had been intense – but totally doable. We drove home in the middle of the night, and while a fresh baby slept soundly, a new Mama watched her in awe until the sun came up.

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