

BIRTH STORY, JENNIFER AND SOPHIE

I guess the sequence of events that led to Jennifer and Sophie's births started on Saturday afternoon, 4th Sept. 2004, the day before they were born.

I had been a regular visitor to Poole Maternity Unit in the latter stages of my pregnancy, as my blood pressure was high and at that stage was attending every other day to have it checked. During my visit on the 4th, I was told my blood pressure was sky high and I was to stay at the hospital overnight till it stabilised. During the night I had a midwife monitoring my blood pressure every ½ hour, and, as I was moved to the delivery ward, I remember thinking "I know what's going on here, if the b/p gets even higher, it's along the corridor for a fast c-section". But it was good to know that my situation was being monitored, and I was in very capable hands.

The next morning, all seemed to be o.k. with the b/p and I was taken back upstairs to the ante-natal ward – a place I was familiar with as by now, I had had at least two stays of several days there, while b/p monitored. I phoned Marcus my husband and said as nothing happening, to go to church as usual with my older daughter Natasha (age 8).

I was due to be seen by a doctor later in the day to assess me, and probably to be released, but my body had other ideas... at around 11.30 a.m. I leaned to the end of my bed and felt a sharp, stabbing pain. It continued, then I felt a great urge for the loo – I went to the loo, then the pain was bad and must have been pretty extreme because I pulled the emergency cord. When the auxiliary came to me, I said 'I think I'm o.k. just need to do a no. 2!!' (those of you reading this may be aware that the urge to 'push' is a similar experience to emptying your bowels!!) However she insisted on examining me, and it was found I was several centimetres dilated. So I was whipped down to the delivery suite – with the birth of my older daughter, I was induced and taken down there in a wheelchair, but this time I went down in the bed!!

As my bed, complete with me by now in full labour, exited the lift to be wheeled into the labour ward, I was vaguely aware of a couple of men standing outside the labour ward (anxious relatives waiting for news?). There seemed to be a delay while deciding which room to

put me in! One of the staff had called my husband, and he and my daughter duly arrived.

I demanded gas and air which I'm glad to say arrived speedily – my labour had been too far advanced in my first birth to even contemplate epidural, and I had found gas and air very beneficial then, and it didn't fail me this time! At one point in the proceedings, as I was perspiring slightly (i.e. sweating like a pig) my dear husband was mopping my brow - it wasn't till later he admitted he was using a sock as, with the speed of proceedings, the plan to dab my forehead with a flannel and a light spritzer went out of the window. (I decided not to ask him if it was a clean sock...)

I was beginning to wonder 'Where are all the doctors/backup staff? I'd been told with twins, there's supposed to be all these people in the room ready to take over/step in for emergency c-section etc. Where were they all? Didn't they realise I was having twins, for God's sake!! Later on Marcus assured me that several people were hovering outside the door, ready to go into action if required.

Things continued to progress very fast – as with most labours, a lot of it progressed in something of a blur. At one point, I glanced at the monitor which showed my blood pressure. A top reading of 180?? No, that couldn't be right! I decided at that point not to look at the monitor again, as reading my blood pressure reading was going to raise it even further!!

Finally, at just under two hours after the first pain, Jennifer Maya Andrews was delivered into the world, weighing 5 lb 7oz. I recall that, after her being placed on my tummy and breastfed, she was passed to the proud Dad. It took another 40 (yes 40!) minutes before Sophie Rebecca arrived, and I was aware of Dad in the background cradling Jennifer, and of course revelling in the 'new dad' role – some bad feelings (and a few choice words under my breath) towards the new father crept in at that point, as I was still pushing for England to get the second one out. The work hadn't finished yet!

By now, I was really struggling and feeling exhausted, but the midwives and doctors were fantastic and kept me going, with some help of course from hubby! One of the midwives told me to imagine I had major constipation, and that seemed to work quite well on the pushing front! Eventually Sophie Rebecca appeared, weighing 4 lb 3 oz. She made absolutely no movement, and didn't cry so we felt a bit anxious for a minute or two but she was whipped away for a breath of oxygen, and almost straight away, there was a bit of a splutter and life!

Dad Marcus had filmed both births - I had breastfed both girls before leaving the Delivery Suite - Natasha, my eight year old daughter, entered the room straight after the births - when being told they were both girls, she raised her arms in the air and whooped with delight - think she was already looking forward to future years of girlie stuff, doing hairstyles, etc. and all those shopping trips.....

Following the birth of the twins, I knew there would be negligible family help available, so I decided for the first couple of nights in hospital to get good nights' sleep and let my girls sleep in the nursery, being fed by the night midwives if required. It's one of the best things I did, as of course there was plenty of broken sleep in the following months. The pregnancy had been hard (especially the last month or so) so I regarded this as good preparation for later.

My best friend Myeong came to meet the twins straight after Natasha to share our joy with us. Marcus asked me if I was happy, and at that point I started to cry - it had been a 3 year wait to have our beautiful girls via IVF.

The care from the staff at Poole Maternity Unit was very special. I had got to know them all on my regular visits for blood pressure checks etc. and one midwife that I had got to know well ended up in the delivery room with me. We feel forever indebted to the doctors and midwives on duty that day.

The girls and myself were in the hospital for 11 days, just to get feeding established. I made an appointment with the breastfeeding counsellor in the hospital for a chat about feeding, as I really wanted to establish it with both twins. One of the best tips I was given, was to breastfeed before giving the bottle, (if as in my case bottle feeding also) so the baby's more inclined to 'work' at the

feeding as they are hungry! They were breast fed and bottle fed combined from the start - Jennifer breastfed till 8 months and Sophie breastfed till 10 months - there have been moments I've felt so exhausted I didn't know how to get through the day, but now 4 years later, they are happy, healthy girls and our family is complete.

