**Poppy’s Birth Story**

One of my college professors, Dr. Kenneth Clinton, said “*The difference in doing something and doing something well is preparation. Preparation, preparation, preparation!*” I have found this to be true, and try to apply it in everything I do.

When Jeff and I decided to try and have a baby, we put our hearts and souls into it. We found out we were expecting on November 6, 2014. We would have a baby by July 2015! Thus began our journey and *preparation* to a most perfect pregnancy, birthing and new baby.

We knew we wanted something different from the standardized health care that we would receive at any of the local hospitals. I had a really traumatic experience giving birth to Jack in a hospital (with no underlying medical concerns). We believe whole-heartedly that pregnancy and birth is not a medical issue, but a natural and normal event that my body was made for. After researching our options, we chose to use a midwife in an effort to avoid any unnecessary medical interventions. We met with Audrey Stucker at the Baby Place Birthing Center in Greenville, TX, for a holistic approach to prenatal care and a natural, drug free delivery.

Next we enrolled in The Husband Coached Child Birth Classes – The Bradley Method with Amber Kensinger in Greenville, TX. This class met every Tuesday evening for 2 hours, for 12 weeks. Participating in this class really opened our eyes to a better, more natural way to give birth to a baby. I highly recommend it! The material for this class was really informative and led me to seek out other resources to support this method. We spent our entire pregnancy devouring books, forums and documentaries on natural childbirth. *Preparation, preparation, preparation*! I will add my resource list to the end of this story.

After extensive education on the matter, we decided to have a home birth. Relaxation is the most important thing in natural, pain free childbirth; so staying home was an obvious decision for us. Audrey was very supportive and said home births were the very best. I would be able to labor and deliver in my own environment, without disruption or traveling. Audrey assured us that everything she would have at the birthing center, she would bring to our home.

My estimated due date was July 15, 2015. Audrey said full term is anywhere from 38 to 42 weeks so the due date is really just a guess. My prenatal care consisted of monthly visits with urine analysis, blood pressure reading, monitoring baby’s heartbeat, Group B Strep test, Gestational Diabetes testing (but not with the nasty synthetic orange drink!) fundal height measurements and 3 sonograms. My prenatal care did not include pelvic exams so we had no idea if I was dilated or not. My entire pregnancy was a very healthy and happy one. I had no complaints!

By June 24th, I was in week 37 of my pregnancy and was really starting to “feel” pregnant. I was tired and felt heavy and had a lot of pressure in my pelvic area. Jeff would often take one look at me and say, “You’re about to have a baby” in a tone that indicated he wouldn’t be surprised if it was right then and there.

A week later, on Friday, July 3rd at 4:25 am, my water broke while I was in bed sleeping. I nudged Jeff and told him that my water had broken. In his deep sleep, he must have forgotten all of our preparation because he asked how I knew my waters had broken! We got up and became really excited! Today was the day! We cleaned up and got back in bed so we could rest. Jeff went right back to sleep, but I was just too excited. I had a lengthy list of to-do’s that I absolutely had to finish before I could have this baby, so I set about getting them done. We got all of the items needed for the home birth ready, cleaned the kitchen and bathroom and tried to relax. Around 7 am I sent Audrey a text letting her know my water had broken and she said to let her know when my contractions were about 10 minutes apart. I cooked breakfast and headed to the gym at 9 am to tie up all the loose ends before I took my maternity leave. I got home around 10 am and settled in to wait on contractions. By lunchtime, I still hadn’t had any, so Jeff and I decided to grab lunch at Two Senoritas, thinking that it might be our last good meal for a day or two. We came home and to pass the time, we watched a movie, harvested fresh tomatoes and okra from our garden and took a walk. By that evening, I still wasn’t having contractions. Audrey said to just get some rest that contractions typically started within 24 hours of your water bag breaking. So maybe Nana was right, Poppy would be a 4th of July baby!

Saturday morning on the 4th of July, we woke up ready to have a baby! I still hadn’t had any contractions. Audrey said she would come by around 9:30 to administer a dose of penicillin so there was no risk of infection. Jeff and I went on a walk and got home just in time for Audrey and Linda (another midwife) to arrive. They gave me the penicillin and outlined a regimen of things I could do to naturally jump start contractions. She suggested I use my breast pump for 10 minutes on each side, every hour. Then she gave me some herbs to take. I took Master Gland Formula every hour, alternated 2 droppers of Root Bark Cotton and Labor Enhancer tinctures every 30 minutes, and rubbed Clary Sage essential oil on my belly as needed. She wanted to me to sit on the birthing ball to help Poppy move lower into position. She and Linda had to leave to attend another birth and said they would return around 3 pm. Along with pumping and taking the herbs, Jeff and I would take 15-20 minute walks, a couple of times each hour, which seemed to help. I was starting to have very mild contractions but they were very irregular. I still wasn’t progressing at 3 pm, so Audrey said she would be back at 6 pm. By 4:30 pm, I began to get discouraged. It had been 36 hours since my water had broken. If I wasn’t in active labor at 48 hours, we would have to seriously consider going to the hospital to start Pitocin, a nasty synthetic drug used to induce labor. Jeff was very reassuring and told me to trust my body and not get discouraged. We kept on with our regimen. By 6 pm my contractions were becoming regular and were about 12 minutes apart. Audrey and Linda arrived around 6:30 pm and administered another round of penicillin. Audrey said we probably wouldn’t have her by midnight, but because I was in labor and my contractions were progressing, I no longer needed to worry about going to the hospital. Audrey said for me to go get in bed and try to rest, that I had a busy day ahead of me.

By 8 pm my contractions were about 10 minutes apart and getting stronger. Jeff tucked me into bed, turned out the lights, lit a lavender scented candle and put on the music playlist he had made for the birth – it was all of our love songs. He lightly rubbed my back and my hair, reminding me to relax, open my jaw and breathe from my belly with each contraction. The whole time, I was mentally telling my cervix to draw up and open wide. I told my body to relax and allow my uterus to do its work without resistance from me. I reminded myself of all the things we had done to prepare for this and that I was ready. By 9 pm, my contractions were stronger and 4 minutes apart. I told Jeff I wanted to get in the bath. Linda came in to check on me and suggested we wait a bit longer on the bath so that the soothing effects of it didn’t wear off before hard labor. She suggested I wait about 30-45 more minutes. 10 minutes later, I told Jeff to run my bath and let Linda know I was getting in and didn’t want to wait longer. Audrey came in and did my first pelvic exam and was surprised that I was already dilated to an 8. She agreed it was a good time to get in the bath. Jeff lit candles and turned out the lights and moved the music to the bathroom. The water was deep and warm – it felt so good! I sat back on my heels with my knees apart and leaned over the side of the tub, resting my forehead on my arms during contractions. I focused on my breathing, relaxing and mentally reminding myself that I was made for this and that I had prayed for this baby and this labor. After about 25 minutes of progressively stronger contractions, I started shaking uncontrollably and I knew that I was in transition and would see my baby very soon. The contractions continued to come on stronger and were right on top of each other. I kept my focus on relaxing and allowing my body to work with this labor. I was mentally telling my body to be open and soft. I wasn’t scared and didn’t feel tense. Jeff was kneeling opposite of me, on the tub step, holding my hands and whispering how great I was doing and that Poppy would be in my arms soon. He squeezed cold water from a wet rag over the back of my neck and gave me ice water to drink between contractions. The overall atmosphere was very peaceful and calm. The room was dimly lit with candles, and our music was playing softly in the background. There was no rushing about or unnecessary activity or talk. As requested in our birth plan, the midwives sat back and allowed Jeff and I to work through this together, agreeing to step in only if absolutely necessary.

As the contractions intensified, I felt the first urge to push and focused on using my breath to breathe the baby down my birth canal. I had 3 pushing contractions, and I could feel each one bring her deeper down. I remember feeling fully aware and “in the moment.” With the third pushing contraction at 10:36 pm, her head had completely emerged. I felt the top of her soft head with my hand. It was the most amazing feeling and I know I will never forget it. I told Jeff that her head was out and to reach down and feel. He did and with tears welling up in his eyes, said “Oh my God.” At 10:37 pm, with the next contraction, her body was born. Jeff lifted her up out of the water and placed her onto my chest. I noticed her umbilical cord was wrapped around her neck so I looped it off of her head and out of the way. Audrey put a warm wet towel on her back to keep her warm. Poppy was so calm and everything was still very quiet and so serene in the bathroom. I remember thinking and then saying out loud “I want to do this again. I feel so good.” Linda told me that it was my body surging with love hormones. Poppy lay on my chest for about 15 minutes and we just relished in the tender first moments after her birth. Audrey whispered, “I don’t think she realizes she has been born. She thinks she is still in the womb.”

Audrey checked her heartbeat and breathing and gave her a one-minute Apgar score of 7, and a 5-minute Apgar score of 10. Later Audrey told me the only reason she initially received a score of 7 was because she wasn’t moving or screaming but she felt that it was because Poppy didn’t realize she was born, not due to any concerning health issues. We waited for her cord to stop pulsing and then Jeff cut it. I wanted to stay in the tub for a bit longer to try and breast feed and deliver the placenta. Poppy latched to my breast very quickly. She seemed very alert – no doubt because she wasn’t drugged up with painkillers. After awhile, the water started to cool, so we got out of the tub and snuggled into bed to continue with skin-to-skin contact and breast-feeding. I remember thanking Audrey and telling her that this was everything I had imagined it to be; it was everything I had hoped and prayed for. She said that this was one of the most graceful births she had attended and that it was an honor to witness it.

I told Audrey that I didn’t think I needed stitches and after a quick check, she confirmed that I had just delivered naturally with an intact perineum. Everyone asks if it hurt or was painful without meds. The answer is no. It wasn’t painful. It was intense and it was hard work, but not painful. After delivering my placenta, Audrey and Linda made an imprint of it on canvas for me to keep. Then Audrey took my placenta to encapsulate it for me to use as a postnatal supplement. The midwives cleaned everything up and allowed me, Jeff and Poppy to cuddle together in bed.

About 2 hours after her birth, Audrey said she was going to weigh and measure Poppy. She picked her up and guessed 8 lbs. on the dot. I remember thinking, no way – she is way smaller than Jack (who weighed 8 lbs. 1 oz.). Audrey placed Poppy in a crocheted baby hammock and weighed her with what looked like a fish scale. She was 7 lbs. 15 oz! (This is also what Jeff weighed when he was born!) She measured her head at 14.5 inches around – about an inch bigger than average. I was amazed at what a relaxed, *prepared* female body was capable of.

A little after 12:30 am on July 5th, the midwives left and Jeff and I settled into bed with our sweet family’s newest addition, Poppy LaRue. We toasted her birthday with a glass of champagne and just watched her in awe. We had done it and given the opportunity to do it again, we wouldn’t change a thing. All it took was trusting God’s plan, understanding Mother Nature, believing in ourselves and *preparation, preparation, preparation*!

Resources that we used and I highly recommend:

Books-

*Husband Coached Childbirth – The Bradley Method of Natural Childbirth* by Robert A. Bradley, M.D.

*Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way* by Susan McCutcheon

*Ina May’s Guide To Childbirth* by Ina May Gaskin

*Childbirth Without Fear* by Grantly Dick-Read

*Hypnobirthing- The Mongon Method* by Marie F. Mongan, M. Ed., M. Hy.

*The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* by La Leche League International

*The Happiest Baby on the Block* by Harvey Karp, M.D.

*The Vaccine Book* by Robert W. Sears, MD, FAAP

Documentaries

The Business of Being Born – Ricki Lake

Birth Story: Ina May Gaskin and The Farm Midwives