

For those who are interested in reading positive birth stories, here is mine ... (grab yourself a cuppa, it's a long one...)

👩👩👩👩 - 2TP

🌸 - Known baby girl, Matilda Jane

📅 - Estimated due date 28/03/22

📅 - Born 04/04/22 at 19.17

⚖️ - 8lbs 6oz

🏠 - Planned and actual home water birth.

🩹 - Breathing, TENS machine, aromatherapy, hands on birth partners

🕒 - From first contraction to baby's birth: 26 hours

Trigger - previous c-section

#vbac #hbac

First baby - My first baby was born by unplanned c-section. After 36 hours of labouring and getting stuck at 4cm the consultant suggested we go for the section. This time around I was very keen to have a vaginal birth.

Preparation - I began researching the best chance of me doing this. I bought the affirmation cards and had them dotted around my house, I read books and watched all the videos. I also downloaded the Freya app and practiced my meditations daily. I also did additional meditations that created visualisations of how I imagined the birth would go. Pregnancy yoga was a must and I had regular appointments with a chiropractor and a reflexologist/healer. My doula also met with us in the run up to the birth several times and we practiced birth positions, massage techniques, aromatherapy lotions and potions - it was a whole process! Plus, all the raspberry leaf tea and dates you can imagine!

Some other podcasts that I loved and would highly recommend: The Midwives Cauldron, Birth-ed, VBAC birth stories, the VBAC link and The Ultimate Birth Partner.

Books: Hypnobirthing by Siobhan Miller, Gentle birth, gentle mothering by Sarah J. Buckley and Labour of Love by Sallyann Beresford.

You tube: I think I watched and listened to ALL the positive birth stories

My instagram: is still full of babies coming out of vaginas and bellies!! @builttobirth @positivebirthscotland @theecomidwife (and SO many more!)

👩 Pregnancy:

Like my first pregnancy I experienced some pretty tough nausea and vomiting. It was brutal at night time and having a 4 year old was exhausting. Thankfully this disappeared around 16 weeks and all went swimmingly.

At all my appointments baby was measuring well and growing beautifully. Since I was a previous section I was labelled 'red path' and 'high risk'. I had a couple of appointments with the consultant since I was 'consultant led' that consisted of (1st appointment) discussions around what a VBAC would look like in the hospital setting ie. continuous monitoring, no water birth option, recommended induction at 41 weeks. Then (2nd appointment) explaining my decision about switching to the home birth team, the consultant went through the risks but ultimately said I was in excellent hands.

Other bits worthy of a mention - I started the PBC at 20 wks. I hired an amazing doula around 28 weeks and moved to the home birth team at 32 weeks. I had enquired about the Midwife led unit since I thought that would be a happy middle ground but it is unfortunately closed (temporarily). I cancelled a sweep appointment at 39 weeks.

#### Birth:

Since my first baby was born at 42 weeks I was fully ready to go over the due date. Ready, but still a bit disappointed. I wanted to avoid induction. In the days running up to Matilda's birth I did everything I could to 'get things going' - you name it and I did it!

I was very hopeful that baby would come so we arranged a sleepover at grandparents for our 4 year old. They were booked to look after her when it all kicked off anyways but there was a part of me that thought I can't allow myself to go into labour until I know she's there and safe. The sleepover was on the Saturday night and ... well, I woke up beautifully well rested on the Sunday with not the tiniest of twinges (!) ...so, I did what any sane pregnant person does at this point... (10am) I got on my hands and knees and I scrubbed the floors. It felt like I was channelling my Granny and every other pregnant ancestor and pregnant person who has ever felt VERY ready to have a baby. I scrubbed, and when I was finished my husband and I went for a walk. We took a picnic and walked. It was glorious. (3pm) This was when I felt the twinges - hip hip hooray!! It was starting. I called my folks and asked them to keep the little one for another night. "I would see them all tomorrow."

(5pm) on the Sunday night we eat and I bounce on my ball. I call my doula to let her know and I breathe.

(10pm) Things are moving slowly but progressing. They are coming closer together, lasting longer and are more intense. I decide to go to bed. I think I'm in it for the long haul... just like my first labour.

(11pm) I'm trying to sleep but the surges are coming faster, not lasting for a long time but are regular enough to keep me awake. I also feel like I can't stay still and want to keep moving around.

(Midnight) My husband sets up the living room with all the fairy lights and affirmations. I'm breathing and listening to the Freya app meditations.

(3.30am) We call maternity assessment who tell us a midwife is on her way. I am so relieved, one of my concerns was just that there wasn't going to be a midwife available and I would need to go into the hospital. We let our doula know.

(4am) The midwife (who will forever be known as 'the incredible midwife') and our doula (who will forever be known as 'the incredible doula') arrive at our house. I requested an examination and was told I was 1cm. I was pretty disheartened but, the midwife reminded me that I've done loads. 1cm makes it sound so small BUT a birthing body has to do LOADS to get to that point. We need to remember this. I made the call for her to leave and we'd call her again when things got more intense. Our doula decided to stay.

(7am) By this point they were lasting longer and were definitely becoming stronger. We called the midwife again and she returned to let me know I'm at 4cm and she would now be staying with us.

I spent most of my time now in the birthing pool, the water felt amazing. As the surges grew more intense the need for people to press down on my back was vital. When I was out of the pool I used the TENS machine. I cannot recommend this enough. I'm not sure I could've coped without it to be honest. Every so often a surge would come that would take my breath away. In these moments I needed my team around me to bring me back down, to find my breath. At this point a few drops of frankincense on a tissue was unbelievably powerful. (I never would've believed it!)

(At some point) Another internal examination confirmed our theory that baby was back-to-back. Another blow since I had been so conscious to lean forward/ to do all my spinning baby postures/ to try to make sure baby was in the best position for a swift birth. But... both the midwife and my doula had a few handy tricks up their sleeves to try to get baby moving. We did this for a while.

(4pm) Around now after another internal that confirmed I'm around 6/7cm the midwife starts to suggest we may need to go into the hospital and it would be

likely this birth would be born via c-section. She stressed neither baby or I was in any difficulty but, the longer we go the more likely a VBAC is not possible. We use our B.R.A.I.N. and I ask, 'what needs to happen for us to be able to stay and have this baby here?' She replies that we need 'progress in the next hour'. Also, and this is a really important part, she discovered there was still some waters in the way that is separating baby's head from fully pressing down on my cervix. She popped this bag of waters.

(4.10pm or thereabouts) It progressed. Everything ramped up. I move into transition. I fall asleep in the pool. My head hits the water waking me up and I laugh. In between surges I'm in a state of relaxation. The water feels amazing. I start to think about all the women giving birth at that moment in time. All the women who have given birth through time. It was a pretty magical moment.

(Around 6pm or thereabouts) I hear the phone call being made by the midwife requesting a second. (The second is called when baby is on the way so I feel excited.) I'm starting to feel the urge to push. The midwife encourages me to go with this. The second arrives and she is just as wonderful as the first. My doula and the second midwife are at my head encouraging me and saying lovely things. My husband and the first are behind me. I am on all fours.

(7pm or thereabouts) I can't quite describe this feeling. I wish I could. My baby was born at 7.17pm. The water was cooling down so we were moved to the couch quite quickly. I birthed the placenta straight away (It practically fell out as I walked to the couch!) I didn't feel another surge after that. I lay on the couch with my baby on my chest and watched as everyone around me cleaned and cleared, filled in paperwork and created a pile of towels!

(10pm or thereabouts) The midwives and my doula had all gone home and my parents and the new big sister arrive back. They come with arms full of homemade tomato soup, sandwiches, chocolates, baby presents and they even brought a birthday cake and candles (this was especially lovely for the big sister). This was one of my most favourite moments.

I never imagined that I would have opted for a home birth. I always thought that it was for someone else and not for me. But, the more I read, watched and listened, the more I thought it would be incredible. It was. I am so grateful for this experience. I'm forever thankful that I found and loved my doula and instantly felt safe and cared for by the midwives. Thanks to everyone who posted a birth story that I read and was inspired by and thank you to you for giving me the tools to ask the questions.

Well done you wonderful birthing warriors. You are incredible.