

The Birth of Alma James Wisner by Clara Wisner

I've been waking up at 4:30am the last couple days.

I get up. I eat something, then go back to bed and to sleep.

Pregnancy up to this point had been relatively uneventful. Just the normal discomfort and complaints. A little heartburn. A little sciatic pain. A little fatigue. No serious complications or issues.

But in this last week or so the discomfort has gotten to the level where I was doubting I could handle 2 more weeks of it without giving up on doing anything productive and doing nothing but binge watching Netflix on the couch.

So, this morning I was up, begrudgingly getting out of bed to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that would inevitably give me terrible heartburn. As I rolled my pregnant belly to one side to struggle to sit upright I felt a gush of water come out of my nether regions and realized that the bed underneath my torso was wet.

I initially thought to myself, "Great. New pregnancy low. I am now peeing myself."

Baby Alma wasn't due to come for another two and half weeks or so. It couldn't be my water breaking.... could it?

I got downstairs and notice that the wetness keeps coming as I move. I eat my sandwich (I truly was ravenous) thinking a little more clearly and starting to realize that something out of the ordinary was definitely going on.

I walked back upstairs. Feeling the familiar heat of heart burn. I start to feel the acid reflux come up and I'm gagging already. I run to the bathroom off of our bedroom and bend over the toilet and vomit. As the vomit comes out my mouth, about a cup of water gushes out the other end.

Ok.. my water broke or something is seriously off.

I clean myself up. Put a towel down on my side of the bed and climb into bed with my phone, googling "What does it feel like when your water breaks?" As I'm reading

whatever comes up on google, I tap Sean to wake him up and tell him “I think my water broke.”

He perks right up looking excited and says, “I just had a dream that you gave birth and it was really easy.”

Good omen.

We both google around for a bit on our phone and other than feeling a little wet and the now normal uncomfortable pregnant, I feel good, albeit tired.

We decide to go back to sleep until around 8am and call our midwife, Kayla then.

So we go back to sleep. Waking back up at 7:30am and call Kayla. I tell her the story and she says “That’s a pretty convincing water breaking story. I’d say you’re going to have a baby today. Happy birth day! Call me back around 11:30am. Rest and eat as much as you can.”

Sean starts to cry. Just those silent happy type tears. He’s so excited. I’m touched.

I had been preparing for this day for months at this point. Going to the chiropractor and acupuncturist weekly. I’d read probably 12 books on pregnancy, birth and child rearing. I had taken my morning mindfulness practice very seriously and had not missed a meditation for my entire pregnancy. I was ready.

But... I hadn’t packed my birth bag or written a birth plan. Those just always seemed like something I could do closer to the due date.

So I furiously made a list of “necessary” birth bag supplies and Sean started going around the house getting all of it together.

He made me a waffle. I begrudgingly ate it.

We called my parents. My mom asked if I’d had any contractions. I said, “Not really.. just feels like period cramps.” And she said, “But do they start and stop? Or do you just have them the whole time?” “They start and stop.” I said. “Those are contractions then,” she said.

From about 8am to 10:30am, I hung out upstairs in the bedroom. Trying to rest but also feeling excited and apprehensive, and still not totally convinced this whole thing was happening.

At 10:30am I had my first “real” contraction and the only word I can think to describe it is INTENSE.

If you’ve ever taken acid, mushrooms, or some other psychotropic substance there is a point at which the drug starts to kick in and, in my experience, it is right then that you can decide to have a “good” trip or a “bad” trip. That INTENSE contraction at 10:30am was the point at which I felt I had a decision to make.

This whole birth experience could be a “good” trip or it could be a “bad” trip. Which one was I going to choose?

I started to feel my perception change. Colors looked brighter. Time seemed irrelevant. Normal, every day things like the bedspread took on a supernatural quality. Textures felt different and wild. Smells were amplified even more.

I’m listening to music and I am so engrossed in the Movement by Hozier. Swaying back and forth and, telepathically, conversing with Alma about how I was going to “dance” her out. Telling her we got this and it’s going to be easy.

Repeating a mantra I had been saying my whole pregnancy, “Pregnancy is the labor, the birth will be easy.”

I lean over the bed.

I go sit on the toilet.

I dance a little bit.

Sean came upstairs and comforted me. He suggested we call Kayla. Making decisions seemed impossible. I said OK.

We called Kayla. She asks me about my contractions. I don’t really remember talking to her or what I said. It all seemed surreal and unnecessary.

She says I should eat something. That sounds impossible.

When we get off the phone, Sean is trying to ask me what I want to eat, but that seems like a question I could never answer. Who can think about something like food?

I start to realize that we are going to need to get in the car soon if we are going to get the birth center before I have this baby.. but I also can't imagine being in a car.

Sean brings me up a bowl macaroni and cheese.

I make a face. Like "HOW COULD I POSSIBLY EAT RIGHT NOW?"

After a little bit of trying to coax me to eat the mac and cheese, Sean realizes that it's time to switch gears.

His coaxing changes from getting me to eat, to getting me to get in the car.

I also feel like we need to get in the car, but I just can't imagine it.

I'm starting to need to vocalize my contractions and I hear myself yelling and moaning. It's a strange thing to observe myself as I move through each wave of intensity.

There is finally enough space between contractions for me to go downstairs and get in the car.

I see our dog Ooli sitting in the sunshine on the front steps. He gives me a look that says, "When you get back home, nothing will be the same."

I'm struck by the truth of it.

I start out in the front seat, on all fours, head facing the back seat. I'm so uncomfortable. Just want to move. I make Sean pull over so I can get in the back seat.

He calls Kayla and Whitney (our doula) and letting them know we're on our way.

I start to feel like I'm going to puke. I look around the car for something to puke in, but again, my brain is so not in the physical world I can't imagine what one would use to puke in.

I ask Sean to pull over. I struggle out of the car.

Just to paint the picture:

A very pregnant woman. Dressed in nothing but a black robe. Bare foot. At noon on a Saturday. Holding on to the door of car pulled over on a dirt road. Puking. Wild look in her eye.

I remember a white pick up passing us and thinking, "I wonder what they think is going on."

I get back in the car. The carseat is installed behind the driver side seat and I'm on a fours, arms and head in the carseat.

I have no idea how I'm going to make the hour long car ride. Good thing I don't have any concept of time.

I drop back in to the experience of the contractions.

As one builds up, I start to yell. Since I can't move around positioned the way I am in the car, moaning, yelling and shaking my head seem to be the only way I can process the intensity rippling through my body.

Sean is reporting to me about how much time we have left at regular intervals.

Whenever I do get a break from the intense waves of contractions...

I look at the mountains and think about how grateful I am to live in this beautiful place called Montana.

I breathe.

I repeat to myself a mantra, "I am the portal for all life into this dimension." I feel so empowered by this statement, like I'm connected to all women, in all times and all places. We are the portals of all life into this dimension.

I talk to Alma and tell her how much I am ready for this and her.

When the contractions build, I move as much as I can and start to rock back and forth. I blow air through my lips making a vibration sound. I'm obsessed with the idea that if I keep my lips and jaw loose that will keep my cervix open and loose. So I just keep doing it.

Sean tells me I'm doing good. Sean tells me I've got this. And I don't know what else to do but trust him. He sounds like he knows.

As I start to feel the pressure in my pelvis increase I'm realizing that Alma is coming.

My body wants to start pushing and it feels like the largest poop ever is about to come. It feels impossible that the size of the thing in my pelvis could ever come out of my body, but I assure myself it is Alma and that she will come out because she has to come out.

I'm sweaty and shakey. During a brief break between contractions (the breaks are getting much, much shorter) I tear off my robe and grab a towel and shove it between my legs.

Sean announces we have 10 more minutes and all the sudden I do care how much more time, as I'm not sure I can keep her in that much longer.

Those last 10 minutes felt like one long contraction. The vocalizations coming out of my body become deeper, more guttural as my body pushes for me. It's a bone deep, primal instinct. It feels animal.

When we finally get to the birth center. I somehow get my robe back on (miracle!) and bee line it for the front doors. I go straight to the birthing room. I sit on the toilet. I take my robe back off and sit there naked. Grunting.

Kayla asks me if I'd like to get in the shower. I move to the shower. Sean comes in to comfort me. He's fully clothed. I see his shoes, standing in the shower, and think how strange this is. I'm naked, under the water and he has shoes on.

I have to keep moving. I get out of the shower.

I start to squat. Feeling the extreme pelvis pressure and continuing the deep, deep grunting.

Kayla is whipping around the room getting stuff ready. It's obvious she didn't expect this, but doesn't seem phased.

She starts the bath tub.

Kayla's giving me cues. "Relax the skin between your eyebrows." "Press into the pressure." "Ok. That one is over. Relax. Breathe." I'm so grateful for these cues. They give me something to focus on.

The tub is full and I get in.

I recline back. Feeling the relief of a new position. The relief of being out of the car.

One push. Relax the skin between your eyebrows. Press into the pressure. Breathe.

Another push. Kayla says, "Look at that head of hair!"

One more push. A higher pitched grunt from me. Relax the skin between your eyebrows. Push into the pressure. Breathe.

A little body, covered in white vernix, is put on my chest. She's crying. I'm crying. Sean's crying.

Everything has changed and nothing will ever be the same.

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