

The Birth of Evelyn Lea  
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What a miracle you are to us Evie! We found out about you on Dec 27, 2010 after a day walking around Stourhead in England with your Keevil grandparents, Uncle Gareth, and Aunt Claire. Throughout 2011, we talked about you, thought about you, and we were so excited to meet you. You are the best of us and yet you are entirely your own person. Our lives will forever be measured as “before Evelyn” and “after Evelyn”.

I never thought I would want childbirth without drugs until I was pregnant and natural childbirth seemed something that I truly wanted to experience with my husband and baby. I had never heard of a doula until the month before Evelyn was conceived, but as we learned more, Robert and I were both very excited about the idea of a doula to guide us, support our choices, and be our advocate as we concentrated on giving birth. We were convinced once we met Amanda. My OB at Texas Women’s (Dr. Mary Alice Cowan) was also very easy-going, took time with me and our questions, was excited about working with Amanda, and was supportive of natural childbirth.

My third trimester was full of challenges. I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes and I had three bouts of pre-term labor contractions that were brought on by work stress and dehydration. Despite those challenges in months 7 and 8, I felt great during month 9. Because of my gestational diabetes and an ultrasound that had our baby weighing heavier than “normal”, my OB planned to induce my labor about half a week earlier than my due date. During the last few weeks, I started to feel a lot of period-like cramping and small contractions and by week 37 I was already 3 cm dilated. My body seemed to be preparing to go into labor early anyway. During week 39 I tried a number of natural techniques for inducing labor so I wouldn’t have to use pitocin. The Monday before I was to be induced, I was 5 cm dilated and 100% effaced and my OB and I decided to strip my membranes in order to get labor going. My body was seemed poised to go into labor anyway and I was having a lot of cramping and irregular contractions. My husband Robert and I spent a funny yet strange hour walking around and around each floor of my OB’s office building which seemed to get things going, and I was advised to check into the hospital since “no one goes home 6 cm dilated.” It was a good thing we had brought all our hospital gear with us, so we walked over to the hospital, I called work to started maternity leave a day early, and let my dad, stepmom, and brother know that we were going to have a baby that day. It was so surreal to check into the hospital without being in full-fledged labor. I was disappointed to not labor partly at home, but Robert now says that I got to 6 cm whilst at home; I just didn’t realize I was in labor. I think Robert was grateful not to have to do the hospital drive with a laboring wife in the back seat.

Once we checked in, I called Amanda, who came right over. The three of us walked every inch of the hospital for the next 4-5 hours, trying to get the contractions going more regularly. We went back to the room to have the baby monitored every 30 minutes by Karen, our lovely and wonderfully supportive L&D nurse. It was weird, all the L&D rooms were full, but I seemed to be the only one walking the halls. My dad and stepmom showed up unexpectedly in our L&D room. Since I wasn’t in any real pain, we talked for a little while and then I asked them to wait elsewhere. My stepmom came back a few times, time must seem long and dull when you are not the one going through labor, but Karen sent her back to the waiting area. At 4pm I was 8cm dilated and yet feeling very little pain so Dr. Cowan broke my bag of waters and there was a flood. An earlier ultrasound also showed I

had almost double the average amount of amniotic fluid. After my water broke, I needed to go to the bathroom again and that is when the contractions finally ramped up – FAST and HARD.

From then on my labor went on for just over 4 hours before Evie was born, with me pushing for the last hour. Amanda said I started my labor pains already entering transition. All I can say is that after my water broke, my “real” labor was full on, take your breath away painful, and all-consuming intense. I remember thinking more than once that I wouldn’t be able to do this naturally that it was too much to bear. I alternated being on the toilet, sitting on the birthing ball, and leaning against the foot of the bed for much of the labor. As each contraction came I’d try to breathe and moan. Amanda would say “loosen your face” or “lower your chin” or “more guttural”, and Robert would urge me to grip him harder. After a time in one position, I started to feel a smidgen more in control during a contraction. At that very moment, Amanda would somehow realize this and urge me to move into a new position. A pattern developed of Amanda suggesting a new position, I would refuse, then I would move, more water would slosh out, Karen would mop up around me, I’d start the next contraction, it would be more intense than the last one, I’d curse, Robert would urge me to grip him even harder, and I’d curse at him, then concentrate on getting through the contraction - repeat. My back started to get more painful at some point and it became harder to keep my moans low and guttural, I definitely let out a few screams at those times. I remember my legs collapsing at some point and it was no wonder as I’d walked more that day (Robert calculated about 5 miles on the pedometer) than I’d done since having complications in month 7. At some point, I made it onto the bed and leaning against the back of the bed. Then suddenly I was on the toilet again and needed to push. I decided I was going to push and just not tell anyone because I felt better doing so. I told Amanda and she said that was ok. When we let the others know I wanted to push they wanted me back in the room and off the toilet.

Eventually I ended up on the bed and on my back slightly twisted on my side and that is basically how I pushed, with Karen holding one leg and either Amanda or Robert holding the other. Dr. Cowan had Robert counting to ten and I was supposed to push during the count. I just knew that every time Robert counted to ten it was slower than the last count and I’d get so irritated with him. Robert denies this. When I couldn’t push for the count to ten I would apologize to everyone. During the pushing, I either had my eyes closed and concentrated on the push or looked at Robert’s face. I do remember Dr. Cowan texting her son in New Jersey who was dealing with hurricane Irene (although this might have occurred earlier than the pushing phase) and I also remember her asking Robert to come over to see and touch Evie as her head was coming down the birth canal. At each push, Dr. Cowan was stretching the skin, which also hurt a lot. Early on, I was almost able to catch my breath in the breaks between contractions, but then as Evie started through the birth canal it was too painful to rest and I wanted Evie OUT. They kept saying one more push and finally I could tell we must be close because the pain was so much more intense as she started crowning that all I could do was push and push and push. Finally her head was out and they all had me stop pushing as the rest of her body followed. It seemed like forever until she was on my chest and I apparently counted her fingers and toes though I have no memory of doing that. I do remember saying that next time I was going to have drugs. I held our daughter’s little body and felt her so warm and wriggly against my chest. Robert and I kept smiling at each other and we both had teary eyes. I had to remind Robert to take some photos so he got in a few unsteady pictures as the nurse took Evie to measure her and wrap her up. I think she started crying then because Robert went over to be with her. I was extremely annoyed that the endorphins from delivering Evie and meeting her didn’t make the pain disappear while I

delivered my placenta and was stitched up. Evie was soon on my chest again, we unwrapped her, and Amanda helped me get her to latch for her first feeding. During that time Robert helped me hold her as my arms were still so shaky. There were lots of kisses between the three of us and many long moments of Robert and I looking at one another and at our new perfect daughter. It was amazingly beautiful and profound.

Looking back, I'm so glad of our decision to have Evie naturally. I have a tendency to doubt myself and my abilities and the pregnancy itself was difficult and a little scary during the last trimester. Delivering Evie made me feel so empowered and it was a great way to begin motherhood. Amanda was an essential part of our support system before, during, and after the birth. She is such a caring guide through the birthing process. Evie's birth was the last thing in our lives that went according to plan, as our life now with a baby is a little more ad hoc. We wouldn't have it any other way.