

Two New Lives

A VBAC Journey by Allison Sowers



When I became pregnant for the first time, I knew from very early on that I wanted to bring my baby into the world naturally. I loved learning about birth, and couldn't get enough of the stories and videos. My husband Josh and I took a natural childbirth class, and I remember thinking I wouldn't need any of the medical interventions we were being warned about; my sister had all three of her kids naturally (including twins!) and my mother had accepted drugs with us, but still had fast, uneventful vaginal deliveries. I assumed I would experience the same.

I didn't think too much about the journey of labor, I just fantasized about the end result – the birth of my baby. I couldn't wait for that big cinematic moment where I would give one last push and we would hear the baby's sex shouted out. I couldn't wait to nurse and feel my baby in my arms. I had it all staged perfectly in my mind.

That was not what happened.

At around 7am a few days before my due date, my water broke. My husband Josh and I drove to the hospital, and a check confirmed that my water had broken, but I was only dilated 1cm. I still felt really positive; we settled into our room and were laughing and having a good time. After taking a walk to try and get things moving, we returned to our room, where our nurse informed us that because my water had

broken I needed to progress and have my baby within 24 hours, and I was already running out of time. That was when the party ended.

I began feeling deflated and didn't feel like doing anything I had learned in my birth class. The day passed by in a blur. That evening, they checked me again, and I was only at 1.5cm. My heart sank. Even though my birth plan said NO DRUGS, my nurse gave her best pitch for Pitocin – she said it would help me progress and get me to my vaginal delivery before my 24-hour deadline. I remember her saying something about not wanting me to lose the chance of a vaginal delivery altogether. Until that moment, I had never considered a caesarean as a real possibility. I gave in and said yes.

As the Pitocin dripped away, strong labor contractions finally made their appearance. It didn't take long for them to take over my body, and each contraction felt like it was happening right on top of the next. I felt scared and then guilty, but I needed help. I needed the epidural. Josh was kind and supportive, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd let him down. I was horrified and in tears as they placed it in my back, but grateful once it began to give my body some relief. I was even more grateful when the next few checks revealed I was dilating – soon I was at 5-6cm, then 7, then 8. But then everything stopped. I remained at 8cm



for hours and hours.

I spent the next day working on progressing those last centimeters (My OB overruled the 24-hour 'deadline' because our vitals looked great.) My epidural wasn't giving me relief on both sides of my body so they kept turning it up. At around 2pm, I reached 10cm and was ready to push. Yes! Finally! So I pushed, and pushed, and pushed... I couldn't believe it when someone told me I'd been pushing for almost four hours. Somewhere in that fourth hour I got the baby down so far that her head was right there, but she just wouldn't come out. My OB tried the vacuum twice, but with no luck.

By this point the room was crowded with a NICU team and people were saying things like "shoulder dystocia." My OB decided to call the head physician from her practice, the one doctor I did not like and did NOT want attending my delivery. From the first touch I was reminded why I did not want him near my body. He was so hard on me I couldn't help but scream. Then he declared that the



baby would pass vaginally, and turned off my epidural in favor of a local anesthetic; my birth was now his show. The local was terrible. I could no longer connect my brain with my body to push effectively. When he said, "I was wrong, the baby won't pass, these pushes aren't getting us there," I began to cry. Then he told me I couldn't try squatting or another position, because I had the epidural. He said I needed a cesarean.

I felt completely scared and helpless, exhausted from two days of labor. Everyone in the room was working to convince me to have the cesarean. I remember my mother looking at me and tearfully saying, "We

need to get this baby out safely honey, take the c-section." Josh was also crying and terrified. I remember thinking 'I failed... It's over.'

So into the operating room I went.

They doped me up and laid me out and cut my baby out. Exhaustion and morphine meant I was in and out of consciousness and have zero recollection of my baby's birth. I did not hear my baby's first cry. I did not hear the sex announced. I missed my precious daughter Quinn D'arasay being born. I missed it. I woke up alone in recovery, and when they finally brought Quinn to me for skin-to-skin, I was still so out of it from morphine that I couldn't see straight, and was terrified that she would fall off my chest. I didn't get to nurse her;

I could barely hold her. Later, I was told she had an infection and needed NICU time. I had failed her.

Every time I think about all this I cry. I feel so horrible that Quinn came into the world the way she did. No one understands what the whole

experience did to me – everyone just says, "at least you had a healthy baby." Of course I feel grateful my daughter is healthy and beautiful, but those comments don't help. They make me feel worse, like my emotions were wrong or selfish.

I still don't understand why it all happened. I tried so hard. I felt so cheated. I felt like I let everyone down – Josh, myself, but especially Quinn.

And then came Levi.

Quinn's birth had left me feeling empty and scared. I felt very torn in the beginning of my pregnancy with Levi, because while I

wanted a healthy baby first and foremost, I also wanted to rewrite my birthing history. Two obstetricians told me that I was an “undesirable candidate for a VBAC,” because of Quinn’s “failure to descend.” I initially went with an OB who claimed to be VBAC-friendly, but only made me feel more anxious and confused with how he spoke about the risk of uterine rupture. Since Quinn was 9 lbs 6 oz at birth, he wanted a late-term ultrasound to detect size, and then wanted to discuss a repeat cesarean if the baby was “too big for my pelvis.” It became clear the stars were going to have to align perfectly if I was going to birth Levi vaginally. How in the world could I guarantee that? I didn’t want a repeat cesarean, but I also didn’t want another traumatic birth. Then I found www.vbacfacts.com, and everything began falling into place; finally I had real information at my fingertips.

Thanks to the members of the www.vbacfacts.com Facebook community, I became convinced I needed a doula to attend my next birth. That doula search led me to the Sanctuary webpage, and then to a free Q&A for expecting parents. That night that I met members of the Sanctuary birth community, and it changed everything. Listening to Dr. Stuart Fischbein and midwife Aleks Evangueldi speak about birth compelled me to share my story, and everyone who listened echoed the same words: “Of course you can do it! You are a great candidate for a VBAC. You are not broken.” I finally understood that I needed to take control of this birth, and manually align the stars myself. I left my supposedly ‘VBAC-friendly’ doctor who had only filled me with doubt for a team of hospital midwives, who welcomed my pregnancy and cheered on my VBAC hopes from day one. I hired a



homebirth midwife to act as a monitrice, instead of a doula – I needed her support and wisdom to help me labor at home as long as possible. I took a birth class that taught me new ways to connect with my body and trust in the birth process. I began seeing Dr. Berlin for weekly chiropractic adjustments and massage. I found ICAN. I took spin classes and did yoga twice each week, and even put myself on a low-carb diet to try to keep the baby’s size down! I was a woman on a mission...

For a few weeks before my son Levi was born, I experienced prodromal labor nightly. I’d go to bed hoping to be awoken by ‘the real thing,’ only to wake up the next morning still pregnant and disappointed.

Our due date came and went like any other day and before I knew it, I was officially a week ‘overdue’. I found myself battling old anxieties about my body’s ability to give birth naturally. Was there something wrong with me? Once I hit 41 weeks, I began to undergo Non Stress Tests (NST’s) with fluid checks and membrane sweeps at the hospital. When I went in for my second NST and membrane sweep, my midwife told me she was comfortable letting me go until 42 weeks as long as the baby and I were fine, but once I hit that magic

number we’d need to introduce something to get labor going – hospital policy.

Fortunately, after my second sweep things began to get moving! That night, under the light of a blue moon, I began to contract regularly. My contractions kept me up through that evening and into the next day, and when I went to the bathroom at around 8am, I saw bright red blood. It kept coming, so much that I started to feel anxious – my husband and I drove to the hospital, even though I was in constant contact with my monitrice and she was confident it was just my ‘bloody show.’

My monitrice was right, but I was grateful to know the bleeding was normal. We also found out that I was 4cm dilated! The hospital was willing to admit me, but we declined the offer.

Back at home, my contractions petered out. I just wanted to be alone in our bedroom with Josh. My monitrice hung out with my family, staying close in case I needed her. I was feeling low, and needed space. I felt like this baby was



never going to come out. But then came sunset, and my labor returned, only this time with more intensity. I felt strong back pain and knew my baby was moving lower. It was only a few hours before I began to feel shaky. My monitrice offered to check me, and suggested we should head to the hospital – it was time to have this baby. HURRAH! I kissed now two-year-old Quinn, and off we went.

We were greeted by the midwife on call, and settled into our labor and delivery room. A check revealed I was 5-6cm dilated. I labored for a while on my yoga ball, until my midwife offered to break my water. I was torn; with Quinn, my water



broke before labor began, which led to a flood of interventions and eventually my traumatic caesarean. My midwife and monitrice both assured me this was a new baby, a new labor, and I was already almost 6cm – I couldn't let Quinn's journey decide what journey was best for Levi.

I agreed, and they broke my bag. My midwife suggested heading into the shower, but as I walked I felt a huge gush of fluid and my labor took off like a speeding freight

train! I could barely walk. I could actually feel my pelvis widening. Within minutes I climbed onto the bed completely naked, and squatted facing backward so I could hold onto the back of the bed for support, breathing through each contraction with Josh by my side. One more check – I was 9cm dilated!

From there my body completely took over. I had to push. There was no controlling it. I turned around on the bed and sunk down into my squat, leaning my back against the bed as I pushed. Never in my life had I felt such a sensation. I didn't think I'd be able to make it through the pain, but I had my support team surrounding me, pouring their love and energy into my labor and my body. I can still hear my amazing husband shouting in my ear as Levi was crowning. "He's being born RIGHT NOW! Our son, he's coming, I can SEE him, you're doing it, Allison, YOU ARE DOING IT!" as

I pushed out my sweet baby boy – all 9lbs, 2oz of him – in only 20 minutes! Immediately after his birth, he was placed on my chest, warm and slippery and beyond beautiful, as my husband huddled beside us.

Levi's size at birth was almost identical to his sister's, the size I was told

I was physically unable to birth myself. I had proven them all wrong. I really wasn't broken. Actually, I was a freaking rock star! I carry this new confidence with me daily. It's in everything I do - the way I walk, talk, and love, the way I mother and the example I set for my own daughter. Two lives came into the world that morning – both that of my precious son Levi Zephyr, and a new life of my own as a stronger and more self-assured mother-of-two.