

Twin Home Birth Story

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My birth story begins in January of 2016, before our twins were even conceived, because I'm thorough like that and because their story is so much more than just their birth. I was finally feeling a little like myself after a lot of hormonal disruption after Arlo was born and working through some thyroid issues. I'd been talking about finally having a summer when I'd have older kids and not be pregnant- how much we'd get out and do things, the garden I'd plant, the sundresses I'd wear. It seemed silly, but I was hoping for a few months with some freedom before conceiving another baby.

I traveled to Reno, NV, for the birth of my nephew and stayed there for two and a half weeks to help out. My time there was really exhausting, caring for my sister, helping with the baby, waking every two hours around the clock to help her nurse him then staying up with him so she could pump and rest. It must have been stressful enough to interrupt my cycle and delay ovulation. A couple of weeks after I returned home, we were watching a movie and my legs were restless. It can't be, I thought; it wasn't what I had planned. The next morning, February 17, I took a pregnancy test and shook as I climbed back into bed. I asked David to get up and look at it and he peeked around the corner with a huge grin, holding up two fingers.

"Does that mean two lines?!" I asked, but I already knew, and started sobbing. I was scared- afraid for what this meant when it hadn't been my plan. I had just witnessed my sister's powerful birth that left me with the I don't want to do that for awhile post-birth feeling. I had wanted to have some tests done to look at my uterus and try to solve some of my prior placenta mysteries. I had wanted to finish our foster care licensing first. We went to see our favorite musician in concert that night and we marveled at our news. David was thrilled and his excitement calmed me. I was grateful and loved that baby already, but it took awhile for the anxiousness to fade.

I had been on a very strict elimination diet for my thyroid and knew I'd need to reintroduce some foods fast because the nausea was on its way. I spent a whole weekend batch cooking for the freezer and ended up not even being able to look at that food. I was so, so sick. I had been using progesterone cream to help

hormone balance so I had to continue using it for the first trimester and a common side effect is worsened morning sickness. David would run me home a Chipotle salad or a lettuce-wrapped burger from Five Guys for lunch and dinner some days, and again at 10pm a few times. I was so nauseous sometimes, I could barely stand up. I had chills and body aches for weeks from being so sick and not eating enough. I reintroduced dairy and drinking big glasses of raw milk from the farm helped me get by.

My belly grew fast, knowing just what to do to accommodate a baby. Our beloved midwife Melissa Mayo would come to our house for prenatal appointments- how wonderful to be able to stay home to be checked on! Mae would ask her a dozen questions while she was there, and always asked if there were two babies. Melissa told her that though my belly was big- my uterus was measuring right on but seemed quite wide- she was sure it was only one baby. The kids loved to listen to their own heart beats with Melissa's tools.

In March, we finished our foster licensing and discussed what fostering would look like with a pregnancy and new baby. The need for foster families was huge and we were getting phone calls before our license was official. Just days after my nausea subsided, we got a call for three brothers, ages almost 3, 6, and 7, and we couldn't say no. The next few months were a complete whirlwind. Getting to know these sweet boys, teaching them about the world, setting limits, going to meetings and visits and appointments. We bought a ten-passenger Ford Transit van and cherished the extra room it gave us.

On June 6, we had our 20-week anatomy scan ultrasound. We'd opted out of ultrasounds for our first two pregnancies but chose to do this one to get a look at the baby's placenta and see if it held any clues about what we could expect for the upcoming birth. We piled into the midwife's office with all five kids. Phillip, the tech, placed the wand on my big belly and almost immediately pulled it off. "Is this your first scan this pregnancy?" he asked. We said that it was and he then asked, "So do you know there are two babies in there?"

"Of course there are," David said and we both laughed, and laughed, and laughed. I had always, always wanted twins and I could not believe it. He went on with the scan, measuring and looking around, and asked if we wanted to know genders. We had planned to be surprised just like with our first two but with the news of

twins, David said he'd had enough surprises for the day and would like to know. Phillip found baby A and typed "GIRL" and quickly found baby B and wrote "BOY"- one of each?! More laughing followed. The babies looked perfect, measuring exactly the same and right on for 20 weeks. Melissa had been with another client and we called her in.

"The placentas look great," Phillip told her.

"Plural?!" she replied, and we laughed some more. She measured my fundal height and I was measuring eight weeks ahead. If we didn't know before, we knew now- there were two big beautiful babies inside! She said she'd been trying so hard to ease my worries of twins that she'd convinced us all it was only one! We discussed birth options and knew we had some time to process what this all meant for my birth. We went home and called our families and laughed and laughed more. We met with Chris Miller, another local midwife who was unlicensed and able to legally deliver twins at home. She'd attended dozens of twin births and was gracious with our questions and we loved her immediately. We planned to meet with a MFM doctor to discuss placenta placement and qualities and would make more decisions after that.

The night before I hit 30 weeks, I used the restroom and found bloody show. I was petrified. My sister and her husband had just moved in with us and I went out to tell David and Steph what I had seen. I called the midwife and the OB I had seen one time and they both recommended a visit to Labor & Delivery. We were there until 3 am, monitoring the babies, taking ultrasound of my cervix, and doing a test called fetal fibronectin. It was positive which can indicate impending labor. My cervix was funneling with my contractions, though they were not regular. They gave me a steroid shot for the babies' lungs and told me to come in for my previously scheduled ultrasound with MFM the next day. At that appointment, the twins were still looking great, measuring right on, and baby girl's head was sitting right on my cervix. I had to pull her up so they could even see my cervix. They told me to take it easy and that was about it. I was terrified of NICU time and so afraid of what the coming days or weeks would hold. I took it easy at home, but if I was up and walking or standing for even 20 minutes I would have more bloody show. That week I went to get my hair cut and passed more bloody mucous, and after that I decided to go on strict bed rest and elevate my hips much of the day. This

seemed to work and the signs of cervical change stopped as baby girl moved up off my cervix. Steph took care of the kids each day and we couldn't have been more thankful for how the timing of them moving in had worked out.

I continued concurrent care with the OB and Chris, waiting to see if the babies would come early and need to be born at the hospital or would stay in long enough to be born at home. I prayed so many times for big, strong, babies, and a safe, peaceful birth. The days crept by and my body was so over-worked. I was measuring full term already and my feet and legs were so swollen, just walking to the bathroom was a challenge. Each night I was so uncomfortable I'd just sob and sob until I fell asleep. The bed rest continued to creep by and at 36 weeks, I chose to end my care with my OB and switch over to midwife care completely. The fear-mongering had begun and he had already been mentioning induction, warning that I'd have a still birth if I chose to skip a non-stress test (which I so faithfully showed up for each week despite how anxious he made me), and changing his language from supportive of my birth desires to "We'll have to wait and see." I was not about to have a bait and switch birth and truly believed these babies were safest at home. I felt very strongly that baby B was going to be breech and I knew Chris was the best provider for that birth. I still worried about my placenta delivery and we made preparations and plans for all scenarios, including the possibility of having to transport for the third stage.

My aunts and cousin visited when I was 38 weeks and we laughed as they came and went with no babies. At the end of that week my slowly-rising blood pressure was still rising, my urine was spilling protein, and I felt awful. I swam almost every day and would sit in the pool and cry at the relief the water gave me and with sadness that I'd have to get out and go back to the out-of-water pain and discomfort. I felt like I was trapped in my own body. On Saturday morning, at 38+5, Chris had just caught another set of twins and stopped by to check on me. She stripped my membranes with my consent but nothing really happened. She returned on Monday and stripped them again, though she said there wasn't much to sweep. She said I looked like I had the labor flush on my cheeks and she didn't think it'd be long. I was in my robe and compression socks and joked that I wouldn't be putting clothes on until these babies were out of me. I used the breast pump some and it made me crampy but nothing was consistent. She lives an hour away so she camped out until 9:30 that evening, waiting to see if

anything was happening. She checked me again and because there had been no cervical change that day, she felt good about heading home for the night. My tailbone felt like baby A's head was pushing right on it and I knew I wouldn't sleep in that much pain, let alone labor if that was around the corner- I could barely walk. I texted my amazing chiropractor and she drove over at 10:00 to adjust me before bed. I showered while I waited for her and I noticed my cramps felt like they were getting timeable and consistent, but not any more painful than the intense Braxton Hicks I'd had since 9 weeks. I told her that and she adjusted me and offered to do acupuncture. I hate needles but was desperate to keep things going if this really was labor, and figured it couldn't hurt, so I agreed. She placed the needles and left me to sit for awhile before removing them and going to bed. The contractions continued so I texted Chris and let her know that they were about 30-60 seconds and 2-4 minutes apart, but not intense at all. I climbed in bed and continued timing them until I fell asleep, still thinking it was so strange that they were so frequent and long but that I didn't need to vocalize and could even lay down. Arlo woke up at 1:30 and I couldn't wake David up so I helped him go potty and waddled him back to bed, then sat in my rocker for about twenty minutes to see if the contractions were still happening. I didn't have a single one while I was up so I got back in bed preparing for another few days of pregnancy.

I woke up to an internal popping sensation and knew my water had just been broken with a contraction. I laid there for a minute, waiting for a gush, but nothing came. I had another contraction that was already stronger. I grabbed my phone and texted the midwife, "Have slept on and off with irregular ctx. Just awoke to a long one that broke my water. Will see if that changes things up but they already feel much more intense." I waddled to the bathroom expecting to be soaked but nothing came. My undies were covered in vernix but not much water. Baby girl's head was so low it was blocking the water. I got up from the toilet and another one came and I roared through it. This was it.

"Oh yes vocalizing and much stronger," I texted six minutes after the first text. I never looked at my phone again so it's a good thing Chris knew to get on the road. I was bent over the bathroom counter powering through contractions, one on top of the next. David was flittering around the room blowing up the birth tub, turning on music, and setting up a camera. I mumbled something to him about waking up my sister because I needed counterpressure now. It wasn't long

before I felt like my vocalizing was getting throaty and I couldn't believe I could be close to pushing.

Chris arrived, said "That's an impressive purple line," and suggested I make my way to the bed. I was confused why and told her I didn't want to labor on my back; I wanted to get in the tub! She knew better than I and soon I was laying there asking, "Can I really be pushing already?"

A few big pushes and that familiar fullness came as baby girl crowned and I grunted little nudges and breathed her out. Oh, if I could bottle up that feeling- power, intensity, anticipation- a literal high. Her arm was wrapped around her neck like a scarf and she had a nuchal hand and cord. Chris skillfully twisted her to untangle and listened to her heart, a little slow. She rubbed her for a second and the baby started fussing that piercing, gurgly cry and we all sighed as she was laid on my chest. Mae and Arlo were there, and my mom. Someone said the time- 6:40am. "Holy moly that was fast!" I was shocked.

Baby boy's heart sounded good. I was so excited to check out baby girl- she was so cheesy covered in vernix and so cute!- but all I could think about was having to do that all over again and just wishing I were done already. She kept fussing and I wanted to sit up to help her better but my legs were so swollen I couldn't hardly move.

Chris worked to palpate baby boy, then checked me and found his bulging bag of membranes and encouraged me to push with the next contraction. They hadn't picked back up a whole lot and were nothing like the intense ones that brought his sister here just minutes before. I pushed through each contraction and his water broke across the bed, showering just about everyone with fluid. She checked again and felt a foot- he was coming down breech, like I'd expected all along. David cut baby girl's cord so we could reposition her next to me instead of right on top of me, and another contraction later he picked her up so I could move better. I got situated on my hands and knees and was still so frustrated at my lack of mobility. I only had two contractions in fifteen minutes and moved to standing beside the bed but could hardly stand on my own, I pushed long after the next contraction ended. I didn't know what to do, how to push, how to move. There was so much pressure, I was so uncomfortable, and so tired.

"I don't want to stand anymore! Where can I go?" I just cried. I wanted more contractions, more help with my pushing. I flopped onto my back on the bed. Another contraction came and I finally felt progress- little toes stuck out of me and with that push, his whole foot and ankle came. Chris told me to push up toward the ceiling and that helped. Watching the video now, you can see his little toes waving in the air. Arlo was beside the bed and whispered, "Mama, why are there toes?", having just watched his sister's vertex birth.

I pushed, and pushed, and pushed, and cried. "I'm so tired. I just want to pull him out. Should we, Chris? Should we just pull him out? I just want to pull him out and hold him!" I sobbed.

"Every mama feels this way, even when babies are head down. You're doing this. Tap into your strength. You're doing this," she said and his other toes appeared. More pushes and more crying and his bum and scrotum were there too- he was trying to come out in a jack-knife position with one leg straight and his other bent. They put baby girl on my chest to try to stimulate some contractions; I was pushing without much help of my worn-out uterus. A few more pushes and his second leg came down and I made some progress moving his body, but his legs were limp and Chris decided to help me get him out. She expertly maneuvered him, bringing each arm out and tucking his chin. His cord was still pulsing and his heart was beating but he was pretty floppy. She gave him a few puffs of oxygen and he responded well, starting to gurgle and protest, and within one minute she handed him to me to rub and love on. Relief.

"There's two babies, Mom!" Arlo noticed and we all chuckled at the comic relief after a tense few minutes and a long couple hours. It had been 85 minutes between babies, 85 minutes of pushing with everything I had in me, following 39 weeks of giving everything I had. I was overjoyed to meet my babies but mostly I was just so relieved to be done.

"David, bring her here. Bring Sister here. I want both of them." He laid her on my chest and I lost it. The tears rolled and rolled as I breathed in my two babies, "I've been waiting for this for so long."

They latched and I rested, but not for long. I knew the next part would be the hardest yet. I have a history of tricky placentas and we had worried these would

follow suite. I was bleeding and they weren't detaching. We waited as long as we could before the midwife tried to manually remove them. The worst pain of my life, with a hand up inside me. I screamed. They didn't budge.

We made the decision to call an ambulance. I was feeling fine but we knew I'd need surgical help to get them out. I was mad- so mad. I just wanted to get tucked into bed with my babies. I knew all along that this would be a very possible scenario and I chose a home birth with that knowledge that home seemed safest for my babies but the hospital might be safest for me. We'd even joked that maybe I could have the twins in the hospital parking lot and walk inside for the placenta delivery. I knew it was coming and here it was and I was mad. I trusted Chris, though, and knew she was not intervening without reason. The paramedics were so nice- impressed I'd just had twins at home and also clueless- they asked if I needed them to help me onto the stretcher because I had an epidural. "We don't use epidurals at home, sir- I'm just really exhausted."

I remember the crisp October air as they rolled me down the driveway like it was yesterday. It felt amazing. I felt amazing. I did it! A strange feeling to be so proud and relieved and so mad to have to be leaving my babies and a little worried about how this would all transpire. The paramedic was kind and chatted with me while he started an IV for some fluids and called ahead to the hospital. We got there so quickly and then we waited. Nurse after nurse and resident after resident filed in to come tug on the cords hanging out of me, rub my belly, and scratch their head over what to do. I was fading at this point- "There's another gush," I'd call out, "and another." I knew I was bleeding heavily. "Please just take me back for a D&C. My midwife already tried all of this. I need to be put under before I pass out." I lost far more blood at the hospital than I had at home while they stood there questioning my midwife's competency.

Soon I was waking up to David and my sister and our twins- all wrapped up and dressed. She'd even wet nursed each of them while I was under sedation for the surgery. My placentas were out and now I was done. The hospital stay was exhausting. They harassed us for not admitting the twins as patients. I got no rest and was tired beyond belief. I had an IV in the crook of my elbow that they refused to move for 24 hours and I couldn't bend my arm to latch the twins on. I received two blood transfusions and was feeling pretty good after that. I was

already losing fluid I had retained in my legs. I had the sweetest nurse the next day, just before discharge, who rubbed special homeopathic cream on my tailbone and helped me shower. It was a whole day before they had names. We chose Joy Dawn- Joy because we loved the name and the virtue, and Dawn after my maternal grandpa Donald and my cousin Jennifer Dawn, and Robert DeLon, Robert after my own dad and Papa- we'd call him Robby, and DeLon after David's middle name and his dad's first name. They were so precious together- so unsettled until they were nestled beside each other.

The story obviously doesn't end there but I'll wrap it up. The following days and months are a blur. We had seven children under seven. I nursed constantly, rotating babies all night while I tried to sleep. It was a juggling act of feeding big kids and diapers and school and housework and our friends and family and our God got us through. As I write this so close to their first birthday, I feel a bit traumatized and I realize that might seem trite. As it was happening, I wanted nothing more than to escape. To either pause time so I could catch my breath or to just fast forward to when it would be over. The crying, the exhaustion- I had no idea how much work two babies would be. I said so many times that I would never choose it- that I had been so naive to hope for twins of my own someday. I'm still reeling from it all, though maybe not drowning now. We're afloat and we love our babies so much- we love their twinhood and their differences- the privilege of witnessing the relationship they have with each other. First birthdays have always been a big deal for me but this one, this one seems beyond words. Relief, sorrow, longing. Gratitude.