

Talia Laine Mitchell
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A Home Birth with Nanci Stanley



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I was told 10 years ago that I would never be able to have children due to idiopathic hypothalamic dysfunction. I was 18 years old and I had no plans for marriage or starting a family at the time. Yet, this news was devastating for the hopes that I had to one day be a mother who would experience pregnancy, labor, and parenting. Fast forward 9 years from those doctor's appointments and disappointments: I married an amazing man and we found out just 7 months after our wedding day that I was pregnant...God had indeed done more than we could ask or imagine!

It was all surreal: I never imagined my body in a pregnant state so *everything* was a surprise. We had never discussed what type of medical care that we would choose when pregnant because we were already prepared to pray about adoption. So, when the test came back positive for pregnancy, we started asking LOTS of questions. *What was the most natural way to have a child? How could we navigate a hospital birth when we only had private insurance which does not provide for maternity care?* More importantly, *who would we trust to answer all of the curiosities we had about the birth experience (hospital, birth center, or home births).* My naturopathic doctor recommended we watch a movie (*The Business of Being Born*) which was helpful but also led to more questions. So, at 6 weeks pregnant we started an adventure of interviewing professionals and talking with friends to learn more about our options.

After visiting a birth center in our area and interviewing a midwife there, we were convinced that the Midwife Model of Care was a good fit for our desires to 1) have a natural, unmedicated, non-induced labor and 2) have the chance to utilize the Bradley Method for labor and delivery where my husband would have a very active, pivotal coaching role. We asked one very important question that day: *what was the advantage of a birth center vs. home birth?* The midwife's response very helpful: *Not much at all. I'd have all of the same equipment, supplies, and assistance at a home birth but the birthing center makes it a little more convenient for a midwife because they don't have to travel to/from the client's home.*

We left that birth center *considering* the idea of a home birth but not fully convinced it was a fit for us. (I had worked in a hospital for years and was simply not convinced yet that it was safe or wise to deliver at home). The next day, we went to meet with Nanci Stanley for a free consultation and this "sealed the deal" for us: Nanci answered all of our questions, discussed the safety statistics for home births, described her actions during very complicated deliveries in the past, and provided a caring conversation for us as we made a difficult decision. I left that day knowing I wanted HER to deliver our baby and knew I could get used to the idea of delivering at home if she was the one who would be there!

Every appointment was informative, helpful, and practical. Nanci was available to answer my "first time mom" questions and discuss risks vs. benefits of certain screenings, labs, and tests. We attended all of our appointments in her office and would then stay afterwards for the classes (cloth diapering, Bradley Method, baby wearing, etc) offered by Nurtured Family. We felt like we gained a community and mentors with the staff and people there.

8 months later we found ourselves fully prepared to have a home birth: I had passed the 37 week mark for Nanci being able to do the birth at our house. Our birth kit supplies were waiting and ready to be used. We had done all of the exercises, visualization, and classes that we could do. Being a first time mom, I fully expected to go at least 8-10 days past my due date. However, on the day our daughter was due (Friday, January 24th, 2014) I started to feel a little different. I had lost my mucous plug the day before, but as Nanci had shared with us prior, this was NOT a good indicator that labor would be soon...in fact, I was aware that it could still be days before I would have any indications of labor. On Friday afternoon, I took a bath to relax and felt a little trickle of water run down my leg as I was drying off. "Just bath water," I told myself. Surprisingly, I didn't feel ready to go into labor as I wanted more time to read and finish my Bradley Method book. I shared the information with Nanci, though, and she let me know if it was my water breaking, I would need to take necessary actions to stimulate labor within 24 hours to prevent infection (e.g., go for a walk, pump my breast, etc). She offered to provide an amnio swab so that we could know for certain; however, I did not want to sit in Friday after work traffic that evening to get to her SO we decided to work backwards: we went for a 1.5 mile walk (in the 20 degree weather!) and then planned to go to Nanci. Courtney, an apprentice midwife who was with Nanci at the time, graciously offered to drive the swab to our house. When we tested, it was negative. I was not in labor.

So, we left to go pick up Thai food (I was craving curry of all things!) and ate it while watching a movie. At that point, I started having some slight "menstrual-cramp" like pains in my lower abdomen that were uncomfortable but not excruciating. About an hour into the movie, I had

to lay down to get comfortable and then starting having diarrhea every 30-60 minutes. I have had a LONG, frustrating history of gastrointestinal dysfunction (irritable bowel syndrome, a twisted portion of my sigmoid colon, etc) so the discomfort was bothersome but not anything that made me think, "I'm in labor". That is, until we started timing the "episodes" and realized they were coming every 7 minutes 30 seconds and lasting for about 40 seconds each time. Hmmm. Maybe there was a pattern here?!?! So, we decided this was a false labor that many women talk about and we would use it as an opportunity to practice our labor plan. My husband, Bryan, coached me through "riding out the waves" of discomfort and I meditated on scriptures that I had written down for the birthing time. We finally decided to try to get some sleep, so I laid down at about 11pm only to wake up every 7-10 minutes, feeling like I needed to go to the bathroom. I paced the bathroom floor between the waves of discomfort and worked on my breathing. Bryan texted Nanci to keep her up to date, but when she asked us if I was having contractions, we both said no because this felt nothing like the "tightening from the top of your abdomen to the bottom of your pelvis" type pain other women had described. At 7am in the morning, I did lose the rest of my mucous plug, this time with bloody tinge, and so we let Nanci know. She offered to come by at 9:30am on her way to another appointment near our neighborhood "just to check" me and provide some peace of mind that things were normal.

When she walked into our house at 9:30am, she heard my groaning pains in the bathroom and immediately knew I was in real labor! (Oh the disadvantages of being new to this pregnancy and mom thing! I just assumed I was having bad GI symptoms from the curry at dinner.) Bryan was trying to set up the birthing pool to help with my lower abdominal

and back pain that had increased over the last hour. I had also just “leaked” all over myself again and, when I did another swab test to check my waters, it was black and positive this time. So, Nanci offered to check me to see if I was dilated. Sure enough, she could feel the baby’s head and told us that I would have this baby in the next 1-2 hours. What?!?! I was shocked. I asked Nanci if, “It was about to get bad now?” to which she replied, “The worst part is already behind you...you did that by yourself last night!” Nanci checked me again and, to her surprise, received a splash of water all over her clothes when a second compartment to my water bag popped on her. Oops. I was so thankful to have a female midwife at that moment as we both giggled at the scene.

When I started to feel more pressure in my vaginal area, Nanci looked at Bryan and told him to “abandon the birthing pool idea” as “this baby was coming” and the pool was still only 1/4 of the way full with warm water. We’d just have to wait until our next birth to use the pool. Nanci and Bryan worked to prepare the bed, supplies, and area for labor while I worked through another contraction. At 10 am, I felt the need to push because the pressure was so intense and Nanci encouraged me to push “down and out” while I was to groan or scream “down and out” so as to provide increased strength to the push and not waste energy. Little did I know that Nanci, like most midwives, was allowing me to do spontaneous pushing (pushing when my body felt the urge to push and in the way that felt right to me!) .The pushing pain really felt more like relief than pain as I could feel progress with even just one push. After one or two pushes, our baby girl’s head started to crown and my best friend (a massage therapist who I had planned to have there during the second stage of labor!) and Courtney, the midwife apprentice, walked in

the door to see me pushing again. As the head crowned, Bryan provided Nanci with warm washcloths which she used to place on top of and underneath the birth canal. She then took olive oil in her gloved hands and used the warmth and oil to stretch my area which reduced the risk of tearing. As she did so, she noticed that our girl's right hand was up by her face, creating some intense pressure for me. So, Nanci gently pulled her hand above her head and through the canal before my final (only fourth) push which moved her head out of my body. One more gentle push and her long body graciously fell into Nanci's hands. Nanci immediately placed her bluish body on my chest while the cord was still pulsating. The scene was SO different from what I have seen in hospital settings: no one was slapping her on the back or suctioning to get her to cry. She was awake and alert in my arms, breathing well despite her lack of crying. Bryan and I cuddled with her as Nanci rubbed the white vernix into her skin and massaged her feet to stimulate her circulation. After a few seconds, I unknowingly pushed out the placenta (really, I was so wrapped up in the baby on my chest that I lost all perception of pain or sensation below my belly button). After some time, Bryan cut the umbilical cord and we wrapped our daughter, Talia Laine Mitchell, in a warm towel to increase her body temperature. This was the moment when I looked around the room, held our precious baby and realized: *I just gave birth in my home, in our bed, in comfort. Wow. Wow!*

The next hour or two were a euphoric blur. I was assigned to urinate (which surprisingly took some time to do!) and even had to take a brief shower to get things going. Bryan stayed with Talia in our bedroom while Nanci preformed the newborn APGAR tests, weighed her (7 lbs 10 oz), measured her, (21 inches long, head 13.5 inches), provided a Vitamin K shot and eye ointment, and took a sample of her blood by heel prick.

When I returned to the room, the room was cleaned up, the bed made, and our daughter washed and dressed. I laid down in a clean bed to nurse our daughter for the first time. To my surprise, she latched on immediately and fed for 10 minutes while my best friend fed me scrambled eggs and toast. Again, I looked up at Nanci, my husband, and the other ladies and realized what had just happened: I had delivered my daughter at home in safety and comfort...and *she* was fine! *I* was fine. My mom (who was supposed to fly in days before until we rescheduled her flight, thinking I'd be delayed in labor) arrived at 2pm that afternoon to hold her granddaughter and take care of me during the time of healing.

Nanci remained available for the next week as questions came up regarding my recovery, Talia's feeding, and everything that new parents wonder when welcoming a tiny baby into their home. Nanci promptly answered our questions and remained available by phone, email, and text that weekend even before she came back for the 2 and 5 day check-ups at our house.

I know that this is not everyone's experience nor do I think that a home birth and/or midwife is the best fit for everyone. For us, though, it was the BEST possible choice we could have made for my non-complicated, non-high risk pregnancy. Nanci Stanley's knowledge, experience, and nurturing personality made the birth adventure precious, treasured, and safe.