

Birth report

Friday, September 15th, 2023

I am currently in the 41st week of pregnancy, two days past the estimated due date of September 13th. Since the summer holidays, I have been practicing daily meditations and hypnosis techniques in preparation for the birth. My dear and skilled doula, Melanie, introduced me to Hypnobirthing and we did a quick childbirth preparation course together before the summer holidays, for which I am very grateful.

I may not be practicing the "official" Hypnobirthing, but Melanie is showing me some good breathing techniques, and I am really drawn to Kristin Graf's approach, "Die Friedliche Geburt" (the peaceful birth). Not only does it allow me to connect with the unborn child daily (which is so valuable in the hectic routine with a toddler!), but also taking these little moments of relaxation for myself is beneficial.

I have listened to many episodes of "Die Friedliche Geburt" podcast. It has been not only informative but also encouraging and helpful. I am looking forward to the birth of our second daughter with so much excitement. Since the birth of our first daughter was a quite difficult experience for me (a fast, extremely painful initial stage due to panic, followed by an epidural, and ultimately delivered with forceps as she was in the posterior position...), it was important for me to mentally prepare better this time.

Although our baby has been in a breech position since the beginning and doesn't seem to be turning anymore, we have decided on a natural birth. We have such a knowledgeable, experienced and amazing doctor by our side, who did a fantastic job during the first birth (it would have likely resulted in a C-section otherwise). Somehow, the breech position feels "right" for my baby, and I have no ambition to do all the recommended exercises to try to get the baby to turn. When the doctor mentioned a few weeks before the due date that the baby was already too low for an external version, I knew that our little one wanted to come into the world with her bottom first.

Our doctor had thoroughly discussed the upcoming birth with me. He took the time to explain the risks as well as the benefits of a natural breech birth. There are several factors (such as the position of the baby in breech, it being a second birth, personal motivation, and the doctor's experience) that support the attempt of a vaginal birth. And so, my husband and I decided to go for it.

Now, the extremely hot late summer days are taking a toll on my energy, and I am starting to feel impatient. The fear of induction or the baby growing too big for a breech birth is slowly but surely gnawing at me. Additionally, it was mentioned that the amniotic fluid is on the lower side, and the possibility of inducing before the due date has been brought up, but fortunately, my gynecologist found a good reserve of amniotic fluid in the recent ultrasounds.

Nevertheless, the worries are still there. That's why I am feeding myself with a lot of positive podcast episodes from "Die Friedliche Geburt" that align with my concerns. Also I'm practicing the meditations daily. One particular English birth meditation is incredibly helpful and puts me in a trance state within minutes. I have become conditioned to this pleasant British female voice and I also use a scent anchor (rosemary oil), which works wonderfully. During CTG appointments or at the pool, I practice the hypnosis techniques, and also before bedtime in the evenings. During the day, I often find myself falling asleep, so I have to practice not falling asleep immediately, but rather staying in that in-between state before sleep comes. In this context we speak of alpha and theta waves.

Back to September 15th. In the morning, I had a CTG at the doctor's office, and it was unremarkable. However, the baby was not very active, despite having some glucose and gently shaking my belly. Baby girl prefers to have her party in the belly late at night when mommy wants to sleep... Since the gynecologist is away, the medical assistant said that he would get in touch if he were not satisfied with the CTG, and I would need to come in again.



Later in the morning, I go to the thermal baths with a close friend who will be the future godmother of my little one. I feel slightly nervous because I wouldn't be able to hear my phone if my doctor were to call. But everything will be fine, I'm thinking.

Being heavily pregnant, I enjoy the warm water, which gives me a sense of lightness and relieves my tired bones.

Now I am lying in the saltwater pool, going to my "safe place" internally, and speaking to my unborn child, telling her that this weekend would be a good moment to be born. Not only would it be easy to arrange care for our older daughter and dogs, but the timing with my partner's paternity leave and the autumn break would also be ideal. Moreover, I simply feel ready, and everything seems aligned. I tell her how much I am looking forward to her and how excited I am to finally hold my little darling in my arms.

My friend and I leave the thermal bath, and by 4 p.m., I am back at home with no signs of labor.

I scroll through Instagram and stumble upon my doula, Melanie, who is jogging nearby. She sends me a video on WhatsApp with the comment, "A little foresight for you." On her Instagram story, she writes that she has to go back home because she is on call, and I respond that she doesn't need to hurry. Oh, how wrong I am...

No more than an hour later, I start feeling the first surges (contractions). I am not entirely sure, so I quickly text my sister around 6 p.m. that something might be happening. Soon after, I start tracking the contractions on an app, and I call Melanie and my husband, who is currently picking up our daughter from his parents' house. I also call my mother to see if she can take our daughter in case the birth really begins. Even though I tell her not to come just yet (since it's a 30-minute drive), she decides to come anyway upon the advice of my father (thank goodness she did!).

My husband is a bit annoyed that I told him not to take the dogs to his parents' house for the weekend, as I wanted them around for comfort (cue the release of oxytocin). I couldn't have known that labor would start just a few minutes after he left... So, he starts making his way back home, and my in-laws pick up our daughter. I notice that the surges are coming in short, regular intervals, and in the meantime, I've started playing my favorite hypnosis audio. I called the midwives at the hospital and gave them a heads up for our arrival at around 8 p.m.

Now that the logistical aspects are taken care of, my focus is on the baby and the birth.

Melanie had mixed a beautifully scented oil for me, which is meant to help with anxiety and support the surges. I massage it into my lower back and feet.

The surges come regularly, and I can sense that it's starting exactly like my first birth. The significant difference, however, is that I am able to relax, and I don't perceive the surges as pain, but rather as waves that I can breathe through using the practiced techniques.

When my husband comes home and starts loading everything into the car, I feel relieved. My daughter joins me on the bed. I feel a deep sense of calm and anticipation. We cuddle and talk for a bit, but I try not to let myself be distracted and keep the hypnosis playing in my headphones. How exciting it is, soon my little girl will become a big sister. It's a special moment, savoring the last few minutes before so much changes. She is excited about it too, as she was the one who said, "Mommy, there's a baby in your tummy," even before I knew I was pregnant...

Then, my husband takes her out of the room as the surges start coming more frequently.

He meets my mother at the front door. Before the birth, we had agreed that he would handle all the organizational aspects and external communication as much as possible, so that I could fully focus on the birth. However, I go downstairs briefly without saying much, hug my daughter and (visibly moved) mom, and then go back to my bed and my hypnosis.

I soon realize that things are progressing at a rapid pace, and I indicate to my husband that we should make our way to the clinic.

I let Melanie know that she should go directly to the clinic instead of coming to our house, as I can sense that time is running out. However, I remain very calm and focused on myself and the baby. This calmness becomes a bit of a hindrance for us because my husband doesn't fully grasp the urgency of the situation.

He calmly takes the dogs out to the backyard to relieve themselves, and it feels like an eternity to me as I kneel on the back seat of the car, with my meditation playing in my ears, but feeling somewhat uncomfortable due to the heat in the car and waiting for my husband. He thinks that I am still in my bed.

After what feels like an eternity and countless surges (about 20 minutes), I finally grab my husband's attention with an aggressive "We need to leave NOW!!" He quickly gets into the car and starts driving.

During my first birth, I was screaming and moaning in the passenger seat, but now I remain relatively calm, breathing through each surge on the back seat (still kneeling on the floor, upper body on the seat). My husband grumbles about the traffic and drives with a sense of urgency. I tell him to drive more calmly and without the constant comments, as it distracts me from my hypnosis. Because as soon as I'm out of it, the surges start feeling like pain again.

At around 7:45 p.m., we arrive in the parking lot of the hospital. The surges are coming relentlessly and getting more intense. As I step out of the car, I am unable to get back into hypnosis. The change of location and the walking make it impossible. However, I continue to focus on my breathing, standing there groaning and breathing loudly with my husband in front of the elevator. A man, startled by our presence, graciously allows us to take the elevator he had summoned and decides to wait for the next one.

Somehow, I have a sense of déjà vu from the birth over three years ago. Due to the lockdown at that time, we couldn't enter the building and had to wait for a security officer, while I experienced intense surges right in front of the entrance and ended up vomiting. Thankfully, I'm spared from that experience this time around. I'm also glad that the people around me don't have masks on this time.

Upon reaching the top floor, postpartum women with their babies and visitors look at us, slightly startled but encouraging (or at least that's how I remember it; everything was happening very quickly). As we walk down the hospital corridor, I suddenly feel my amniotic fluid gush out. Overwhelmed by the surges, I'm relieved when the midwife runs towards me and greets me. I urgently express the need to use the bathroom, my panic evident as the sensation becomes extremely uncomfortable. So, I start walking towards the bathroom, but the midwife takes my hand and leads me directly to the birthing room, where there is also a toilet.

Now, everything becomes quite hectic, and I don't remember many details. I sit on the toilet, still wearing the headphones with the hypnosis playing, trying to get back into a relaxed state, but I am unable to do so. I sit there for what feels like an eternity. At some point, I must have become quite loud, as the midwife seems concerned. She hasn't had a chance to examine me yet, so she comes into the room. She quickly puts the CTG monitor around my belly.

I look at her with panic in my eyes because when I wiped, I saw that it was filled with meconium, the baby's stool. After all, the baby is coming with its bottom first, and it seems like the pressure is pushing it down already. In that moment, I can tell that the midwife realizes how far along the birth is progressing. She helps me make my way to the bed in the birthing room. I feel a wave of relief knowing that Melanie has already arrived. Even before reaching the bed, the surges continue relentlessly and with great intensity. I see that the birthing pool is being filled with water, as I had expressed my desire to use water for pain relief beforehand (although in the case of a breech position, water birth is not an option at the very end).

I let the midwife know that the pain is getting intense and that I would like an epidural. I take off the headphones now, as it's impossible to get back into the hypnosis state. "First, we need to check how far along you are," she says. The midwife is kind and despite the hectic circumstances, she exudes a calm, warmth, and confidence. That's the art of being a midwife. "You're at eight centimeters, we're beyond the point where an epidural is an option. The baby is coming," she tells me. I keep asking where our doctor is, and she reassures me that he is on his way. I can only remember bits and pieces of this part of the birth.

I know that I had the following thoughts: "I have to go through this without pain medication, help!! There's no turning back. How am I going to manage with a breech birth if my doctor isn't here? What if something goes wrong and we put the baby at risk?! Why on earth did I decide against a c-section!?"

However, this phase is very brief (probably the so-called transitional phase) because immediately after, the urge to push becomes overwhelming and the pushing contractions take over. I keep expressing that I can't do this, that the doctor isn't here yet, and that I don't want to do it now. I try to hold the baby back, almost as if I could stop the birth (how silly is that, thinking one can stop a childbirth... but it's an exceptional state of mind!). The midwife instructs me to get on all fours, but I refuse. I'm scared, lacking strength, and my main intention is to stop the birth from happening.

My husband, Melanie, and the midwife support me with all their strength.

Melanie points out that I can hold my husband's hands at the head end of the bed. That feels comforting. Just like during our first birth, my husband radiates a sense of calm and composure (except when driving...). I believe he is inwardly amazed and filled with a certain reverence for the birthing process.

In that moment, I'm grateful that everyone around me seems so composed because I feel vulnerable and panicked.

Then, Melanie says the decisive sentence that encourages me to give it my all and let go internally: "It's not the doctor who will bring your child into the world, but you, you can do it!"

Suddenly, another midwife appears next to us, whom I hadn't even noticed before. I can only vaguely recall her introducing herself and attempting to insert a venous access. However, I'm already in the midst of the expulsion phase (a terrible word), and it's impossible for me to keep my arm still.

The pressure in my pelvis is a force of nature, and I let out screams that seem to come from another world. It's not pain, but rather this primal power, and that's how it sounds as it escapes me. It overtakes me a few times - and I remember very little of the rest.

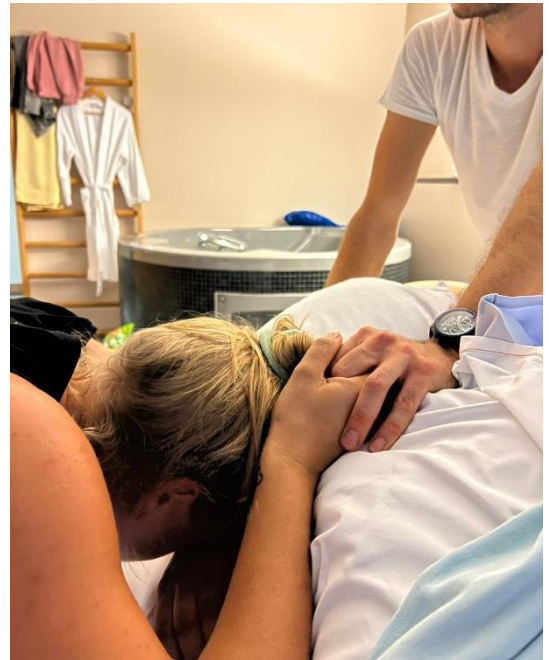
First, the baby's bottom with its body emerges, followed by the head with another surge, surprisingly gentle amidst the raw power. It happens so quickly, and suddenly our baby girl greets the world, after just under 20 minutes in the birthing room.

I can hardly believe it and I cry with happiness and pride. I did it, she did it. The venous access wasn't placed, and the birthing pool isn't even half full, but our baby is here. Melanie tells me to look down so that I can see my baby. And there she is, so small and perfect.

For a brief moment, the world stands still. The midwives quickly clamp and cut the umbilical cord, checking to make sure everything is alright. The initial readings are not optimal; the baby was likely quite stressed from the rapid pace. She is given a few breaths with a bag and mask. But everything is fine, and shortly afterward, I am allowed to hold her.

In the meantime, I see that my doctor arrives in the birthing room, sanitizes his hands, and when he sees the baby, I notice a slightly disappointed expression. He had mentioned during the prenatal checks that he was looking forward to the birth. One Sunday afternoon, while I was lying on the grass at the pool, he even texted me his personal number, telling me to contact him on that number if anything happened because he was away and had a longer journey. What a great doctor!

Unfortunately, in the end, it didn't quite work out, and yet I'm glad that he is here now. He examines the baby while the midwife and doula guide me through delivering the placenta. Blowing into an empty bottle doesn't have the desired effect yet, and I no longer feel any contractions. I complain that now that the birth is over, I still have to "work" again. With my foot in the midwife's hand and pushing with all my strength, a gush finally brings out the placenta. It's a fascinating organ indeed!



My little one is back on my chest now, and my husband and I are completely smitten. She is so delicate, with such a beautiful little head! It reminds me a bit of babies born via C-section, perhaps because her head didn't have to find its way through the birth canal, but rather her bottom (laughs)!

The doctor stitches a small vaginal tear (incomparable to the first birth with an episiotomy), but he numbs the area since I didn't have an epidural this time. It does hurt a bit, and once again, I complain, half laughing and half serious, that I've already given birth and that the ordeal should be over. The same goes for the venous access being inserted after the birth.

But to be honest, the "worst" ordeal comes in the form of afterbirth pains! Especially when the baby latches on for the first time and during the following few days of nursing. With every feeding, I need pain medication. The afterbirth contractions are more painful than the opening phase of labor, probably because I'm not in a trance-like state during breastfeeding. Melanie suggests going into hypnosis while nursing, but I forget to do it every time as I am too focused on the baby. The happiness hormones indeed help to mask the pain quite well, and it's not too long-lasting anyway. With my first daughter, I didn't experience this as much, but I'm told that afterbirth pains increase with each child. Well, thank you for that!

Back to the birthing room: My husband and I enjoy the cuddle time with our newborn wrapped in blankets. People congratulate us, and we bask in the happiness. However, I am quite shocked by the speed at which our little one arrived, and I express this again and again. I can hardly believe it. You prepare for months for the birth, and yet it is such a sudden and surprising event!

My husband brings me my well-deserved sour apple rings, and I feel well cared for from all sides. It's a wonderful feeling. Even Melanie knew that I enjoy sour sweets and brought me some.

I am so grateful that I had a beautiful birth experience, despite the shock towards the end. After a certain period of processing, it feels somehow reconciling and helps me to process the birth of our first daughter as well.

When I am allowed to take a shower, I feel relieved and overjoyed. It's simply incredible how easily one can get up and walk after giving birth. That's when I'm grateful again for choosing against a C-section.



The healing process is incredibly fast and smooth. I feel that the hypnosis has helped in this regard as well. The frequent connection with the unborn child through hypnosis has given me such familiarity with the baby. I feel an immediate, deep love for my child, which took time to develop with my first baby. I believe it also has to do with the fact that I am already a mother and not taking on a completely new role.

Having already experienced the postpartum period, it is not the same emotional challenge for me.

I am enjoying the first few days in the clinic immensely. A private room with excellent food, wonderful nurses, and a relatively easy baby - it couldn't be better! Breastfeeding is going well, although just like her sister back then, the little one has a strong latch and occasionally pinches, ouch! However, I am determined to make it work without having to use nipple shields this time. The perseverance has paid off.

Now our sweet little one is three months old. Breastfeeding is going well, and I can truly enjoy it this time. The deep bond, the nights without having to get out of bed and on-the-go feedings, it's wonderful and convenient!

Our baby is an uncomplicated ray of sunshine and sleeps luxuriously, just like her big sister did back then. In the evenings, she craves a lot of affection and loves being carried (in the football hold or with a baby carrier). But once she falls asleep, she does so deeply and for a long time.

Recently, she has realized that there is a world outside of Mom's breast and she also finds the bouncer and playmat amazing. She can watch our Australian shepherds (both of them also very much in love with the baby) and her older sister wonderfully from there.

I look forward to everything that is yet to come, and yet I could cry when I already have to sort out the first set of clothes. Please stay little for a long time, you wonderful gift from heaven. We love you.

