

Birth of Robert Wayne Klemm, III

August 12 we had our 41 week visit with Sandra. I was between 1 and 2 cm, and about 50% effaced. She told me not to expect a baby in the next three days, but surely in the next three weeks. She knew that I didn't want intervention to bring labor before my body and baby were ready. She mentioned a few safe homeopathics that I could consider if I decided I wanted to try them at some point. These wouldn't artificially induce labor, but would help my body correct any hindrances to the natural start of labor. Because Robert had an upcoming business trip in a week and a half, we decided to give it a try. I took two does of cimicifuga that evening.

Later that night I had suspected I might be in labor because I was getting a bit uncomfortable and had to get out of bed. I sat on the birth ball, listened to a worship CD, and piddled around on the computer. At 12:30 I knew I was in labor. Contractions were consistent and getting more uncomfortable. Robert and I discussed beforehand at what point he wanted me to wake him to let him know I was in labor. He asked me to let him know as soon as I knew. Reluctantly I woke him around 1:30. I told him I was doing fine getting through the contractions on my own, and that he was welcome to go back to sleep.

About 15 minutes later contractions had definitely picked up. I was vocalizing and walking through them. I tried sitting on the birth ball and also laying down, but both positions increased the pain. Robert called Sandra just to give her a heads up that I was in labor. I emailed Donna, our dear friend and prearranged labor/birth caretaker of the girls. I was afraid of waking her so I sent her an email to call me if she happened to wake up and check her email. At this point contractions were about 3 minutes apart but lasting only 20-30 seconds. Sandra told Robert that she thought I was in prodromal labor and the baby was getting into a good birthing position. She said it could be a while. She told him to call back when the contractions spaced out to five minutes apart but were lasting 50 seconds. Sandra recommended that I take something to help me sleep for a while. I took three Hyland's Calms tablets and tried to lay down. I instantly stood back up and continued walking through the contractions to make myself more comfortable. I stood at the end of the bed holding on to the foot board as I yawned and tried to steady myself. The Calms were certainly working but I couldn't bear to lay down. At that point I regretted taking the Calms! I tried getting in the bathtub to relax a bit, but that was also uncomfortable. Robert reminded me that I didn't have to stay in if I didn't want to, so I got out. He continued to be my support, physically and mentally as we labored through contractions over the next couple of hours.

Emily came in our room around 2:30 and asked in a cheerful voice, "What's going on in here?" and by her tone she surely knew what was going on. We told her that I was in labor and that the baby would be born relatively soon. She was very excited. She laid down on the floor watching me with her chin propped up on her hands with elbows on the floor. It was the cutest thing. She asked if I was having "distractions", her word for contractions. Robert took her downstairs to get the tv on for her.

I decided to get in the shower. It really helped but I felt like I couldn't breathe because the air was so humid. We have a small separate shower stall and cooler fresh air doesn't circulate well in there. I had to get out so I didn't feel I was suffocating. Robert later told me he thought I made a lot of progress while in the shower. Around 3:00 am Robert called Sandra to

tell her that contractions hadn't spaced out, were still three minutes apart, and were lasting 50 seconds. Sandra asked to talk with me and I did for a very brief minute or so before handing the phone back to Robert, saying I was done talking. At the same time Donna called. As she asked if she should come over, I was very indecisive. When I told her the spacing of the contractions, she told me she was headed over. Meanwhile Sandra was asking Robert if she should come over. When he asked me, I wasn't sure and said that we still had so many things to do. I was referring to wiping the birth pool with a bleach solution, laying drop cloths, and making the bed. I had needed Robert up to this point so he hadn't been able to do those things. She told Robert that she would really like to head over since it would take a little bit for her to arrive, and that if I didn't feel I was ready for her that she would wait in another room. We agreed that she could come over.

My memory of things that happened next are fuzzy. Sandra came in but I didn't really pay much attention at all. Robert continued supporting me through contractions, and she didn't get in the way of that. She prepared her supplies for the birth. After that Sandra asked if I wanted an internal check. Again I was very indecisive fearing that she would tell me I was only three centimeters. I wasn't sure how much longer I wanted to labor. I realized the information gained through the exam would be helpful, so I agreed. She asked if I wanted to lay on the bed or the floor and I laid on the floor thinking I didn't want to climb up into our rather high bed. Much to my surprise, I was 7 cm and about 80% effaced with a bulging bag of water. Sandra asked if I wanted Robert to start filling the pool, and of course I didn't know. She told him to go ahead and told me that it would take a while to fill. It didn't take long for me to wish it was filling faster. I remember telling Robert several times that there was a kink in the hose making it fill slower, but he reassured me that there wasn't. Sandra took over labor support while Robert was busy filling the pool. I got in once it was ready.

After getting in the pool I finally had a little longer between contractions and was able to rest a bit. The contractions weren't necessarily less painful, but I did have that extra rest between them. I was sitting in the pool with legs out straight in front of me and my hands behind me for support. This might not have been the best position, but at that point it seemed like the only position. Around 7:00 am Kylie woke up and opened the bedroom door. Without saying a word, she gently closed the door. Donna met her at the top of the stairs. Kylie told her all about Mommy being in the water. Kylie knew what was happening and wasn't concerned at all. After a while I remembered seeing birth pics of women kneeling in the pool with arms over the edge for support, so I got into this position.

Sandra's assistant Paula, an experienced midwife, arrived. Sandra very quietly briefed her on the labor. Paula was wonderful about simply being in the background and not trying to take a place as co-midwife. Contractions were increasing and my vocalizations were certainly getting louder. Donna said when Emily did hear sounds coming from upstairs, she said "My mom is working hard up there!" I was mouthing things during labor and at one point Robert told me not to bite the pool as I was mouthing the top edge. They asked if I wanted a washcloth to bite, but I decided my finger would work fine. Sandra had me feel inside and I felt something smooth and firm. She told me this was the bag of water. I checked it every few contractions and didn't feel it moving down any. I began begging Sandra to break my water thinking that might relieve some of the pressure and help me get past that point.

Sandra encouraged me to try pushing during a contraction just to see if that felt better. I don't remember if it felt better, but I think the change in vocalizations and thinking that it would make things feel better led me to continue pushing gently through a few contractions. Sandra checked again and I was about 9.5 cm but had a stubborn cervical lip. She tried to push it back during contractions but that wasn't working. Finally she told me that she would try to push back the cervix and if I pushed a bit the water would probably break. If it didn't, I could get out of the water and she would go ahead and break it for me. Thankfully it did work and out gushed my amniotic fluid. This felt better! There was very light meconium discoloration to the fluid, but nothing she expressed concern over. She told me to stop pushing and breathe through the contractions to keep my cervix from swelling. This was hard to do, but the thought of that happening scared me. I didn't want to go backwards from my progress and prolong labor. A few contractions later Sandra told me I could remain in the pool or get out and try the McRobert's position, laying flat on my back with my legs pulled back, and she would try again to push back the cervical lip.

I decided things in the pool had stalled out so I would try getting out. I guess the act of getting out of the pool and getting into bed helped the cervical lip. After a couple of contractions I was very confused as to whether I was supposed to be breathing through or pushing. Sandra told me I could push whenever I felt like it. Relieved, I began pushing. I began to fear that I wasn't making progress and that this baby would get stuck in the pushing phase just as Emily had done. Baby's heartrate was steady through it all. Sandra jokingly commented that he must be sleeping and not realize that he was being born. She told me to reach in and feel the baby's head. I hadn't had the opportunity to do this with my other children. I asked if it was "that crumpley thing" and she told me it was. That was encouraging. She had me hold my legs back to help direct my pushing and keep me focused. Soon after, I felt a mild ring of fire, but more intensely I felt that I was "going to rip apart". I began giving myself perineal support and Sandra took over that part. She told me I wasn't tearing apart. I supported myself around the baby's head, trying to help it out. The head came out and I quickly felt the rest of baby somersault out of my body. Robert was there catching the baby. He came fast and strong, and it truly felt like he did flips as he came into the world. Such relief and awe as Robert and Sandra quickly placed him in my arms. They put a blanket over him to help him stay warm on my chest. I reached down to make sure I felt boy parts since no one had mentioned it. The room was dimly lit and quiet as he came into the world gently after only 15 minutes of pushing. My placenta flowed easily with the next contraction. It was huge! After the cord stopped pulsing, they asked if I wanted to cut the cord, or if I wanted Robert to do it. At that point I was tired and holding my baby, and told them I didn't care and that Robert could do it. I was bleeding quite a bit so Sandra asked Paula to give a pitocin injection to help the uterus contract so the bleeding would stop. Baby still hadn't cried and I was asking if he was ok. Sandra reassured me that he was just fine. At this point Paula came over to help with the baby and Sandra focused on taking care of me. Paula tried to stimulate baby and make him cry, but he was just sleepy and content. Sandra brought over a little oxygen mask for him to help him "pink up" since he wasn't taking those big crying breaths. That helped. He still didn't cry, but he was looking better. Finally he did give a weak cry.

I couldn't believe we had just birthed a baby without complications, without medications, and in our own home. I was absolutely amazed. Several times I thought, but never said, "just take me to the hospital". At the same time I realized I could never get myself anywhere with those contractions, and even if I did, I wouldn't make it to the hospital. I knew it was just the very normal thoughts that happen during transition so even in the moment I wasn't concerned about saying I couldn't do it and thinking I just wanted to go to the hospital for pain relief. I just couldn't believe that I had done it! My third birth saw all my heart's desire for birth come to fruition. I didn't have a c-section as with Emily, I didn't have an epidural as with Kylie, and finally I had the home birth that I had wanted for so long.

Without any rush, baby Robert and his Daddy went over to the scale with Paula. He weighed 8 lbs 5 oz. He was 20.5 in long. Head and chest circumference were both 13 in. He was born August 13, 2008 at 7:54 am.

I did have some superficial tearing, and Sandra sutured when I was ready. During that time I told Robert he could take the baby downstairs so the girls could meet their new baby brother. They were anxious to come up and see Mommy, so I took a shower and got ready for them to come up. They were instantly in love with baby Robert and wanted to hold him. Sandra quietly cleaned up while we bonded as a family of five.

Sandra went above and beyond our expectations. We had experienced birth with two other midwives, and in both cases things didn't go quite the way we hoped. Sandra was professional and took all steps necessary to ensure a safe pregnancy and birth, while remembering and respecting our wishes. She handled all situations without causing fear or doubt in my mind. She was positive and encouraging at every prenatal visit, and I always felt better about myself and had renewed confidence after visits. Visits were never rushed, and she always took time with the girls even when that meant watching a puppet show before she left. During birth, she allowed Robert and I to labor without interference. She was right there to offer support and guidance when we looked to her for that, but Robert was still my primary support person. This is exactly what we wanted. Finally I am able to walk away from a birth with no regrets or negative feelings. Home birth was my heart's desire and Sandra made sure it happened as beautifully as possible.

Other memorable things from the pregnancy and birth:

Emily: "the baby is going to be born on Daddy's birthday cake"

"if I don't get to catch the baby, how will I ever learn to be a midwife?"

Kylie: (regarding the baby being named Robert) "does this mean I will have two Daddies?"

The time Sandra spent with Emily, our budding midwife, to explore the placenta, amniotic sac, and umbilical cord while I rested.

Moving from Houston to Jacksonville and back to Houston in my third trimester, and seeing how God orchestrated every aspect of that situation.

