

## Gwendolyn Strmic's Birth Story

My first pregnancy was so wonderful :) My due date was 1/16/12, just three days after my sister-in-law's due date! I had very, very few complaints. Unlike most women, I didn't experience any morning sickness. I didn't have many aches or pains either.

Despite having preexisting type 1 diabetes, I was really hoping for a homebirth and found a midwife who was legally able to work with me. She requested I see an OB as well for co-care. Dr. Medchill was recommended to me, and I was very surprised by him. He spent more than enough time with me during my appointments answering questions and discussing my wishes in case my baby needed to be born at the hospital. He helped me manage my blood sugars and insulin requirements without sending me to a perinatologist since I was worried about having too many extra tests done during the pregnancy.

Unfortunately however, the pregnancy ended much sooner than I ever expected.

Saturday, October 8, 2011 - After a nice day mostly running a few errands with my dad, I came home and laid on the couch for about an hour waiting for my husband, Andrew, to get home from work. When he arrived, we greeted each other and he took a shower. While he was getting dressed, I got up from the couch finally and walked towards the kitchen. While looking through my pantry, I realized that my underwear felt kind of wet. I thought to myself, "Did I pee? No... Did my water break?" I pulled up my dress to check, and was alarmed to see quite a bit of blood. I was only 25 weeks and 5 days at this point. I called to Andrew and when he saw the blood he got scared. I went into the bathroom and asked him to bring me my fetal doppler I had used during my midwifery apprenticeship. Baby sounded perfect and I called my midwife. I didn't seem to be *bleeding*, but I knew I was going to need to be checked at the hospital. I called my OB next and we decided to head to St. Joe's.

On our way to St. Joe's, Andrew and I stopped at Jason's Deli to pick up dinner to bring with us. I listened to baby's heartbeat every few minutes during the drive and baby continued to sound perfect - I felt very reassured and the bleeding had definitely slowed or stopped. Once we arrived at the hospital, I was taken back to triage which was pretty empty that evening. A resident did a speculum exam and said he saw a bit of blood and thought it looked like my cervix was dilated to about 1cm. The monitors were picking up some contractions while I was there and that concerned the doctors. After a few hours, the resident was finally able to do an ultrasound to check my placenta. We knew the placenta was posterior, but we wanted to make sure it wasn't lying too close to the cervix since that can cause bleeding in pregnancy. He didn't find that to be the case, and although he wasn't able to see to be certain, it looked like I may have had a placental abruption.

The contractions were sporadic, but often enough that my doctor (who called me on the hospital phone) thought it would be best to be admitted and try magnesium sulfate. Once I was taken back to my room, things started to happen. A nurse came in to start an IV and I started to become overwhelmed. The magnesium sulfate was given in a large bolus initially which makes your eyeballs feel like they're burning. It lasted about 20 minutes and then the slow drip began which wasn't so bad. I was given a shot of steroids to help baby's lungs develop in case baby was born early. Then, because I was Rh negative, we decided to have Rhogam administered. This was a really hard decision for me because we were planning that week to have my husband's blood tested. If he was Rh negative as well then I wasn't going to need Rhogam at all; but since this was happening on a weekend and because of the urgency of the situation from the bleeding among other reasons, I consented to the Rhogam. I was also started on antibiotics.

After all the poking and burning pain, I was finally able to "rest." The next two days I stayed in the hospital on the magnesium which made me start to feel weak when I would get up to use the restroom. I had an expert ultrasonographer check my placenta again but she didn't find anything. We assumed at this point that I mostly likely did have an abruption. By Monday, there had been no more bleeding still and the contractions had subsided enough that I was able to go home on bedrest. I still contracted when I would get up to use the bathroom or sometimes just for no reason. Otherwise, things seemed to be ok.

On the 17th (27 weeks gestation), a week after coming home, I had been logging when I felt tightening and contracting since the night before. It seemed like it was probably more than I should be having and I wanted to show my OB at my next visit to see what he thought. However, around 11am I started to feel like I was contracting more frequently and they were somewhat uncomfortable. I called my midwife after about an hour and filled her in. She agreed that I was having too many contractions (I think I had maybe three during our phone conversation) and I knew I was going to need to return to the hospital.

My mom was on her way over to clean my apartment since I was on bedrest, and when she arrived I told her that I needed her to take me back to the hospital because I was contracting too much. I took a shower and remember having at least three contractions. Another while we were walking to the car, about three or four during the drive to the hospital... They weren't exactly painful, but definitely uncomfortable.

While I was in triage at the hospital, I continued to contract but was still only dilated to 1cm (same as the first hospital stay)... My OB came to my bed and we decided to try an oral drug that can sometimes help stop preterm labor. It maybe helped for half an hour, but then the contractions picked up again. He thought it would be best again to be admitted to get back on the magnesium sulfate. I had another IV inserted and another bolus of magnesium (burning eyeballs!!). I continued to feel uncomfortable contractions consistently for another day and a half.

Late in the evening on the 18th, I finally got my husband to talk baby names with me since it seemed like there may be a chance baby could come early. He had told me a few months earlier that he didn't want to discuss names until two months before my due date! After what seemed like forever, we agreed on a girl first name and then he told me he was too tired to continue. He and I both tried to get some sleep around 1am.

Within an hour or two, I woke up feeling another contraction. While laying in bed, I realized that they seemed to be coming even more frequently and they were definitely causing a lot of discomfort. I called in a resident after a while who decided we should wait for my OB to arrive in the morning. I spent the next few hours managing until Dr. Medchill showed up. We decided to try some morphine to see if that would help my uterus to relax. I was still hooked up to the magnesium but he didn't want to increase the amount unless we absolutely had to.

After I took the morphine, I had about ten VERY strong contractions, so it obviously wasn't helping much. I called in a resident to check my cervix because I was convinced they were doing something. I was still at 1cm (and that made me relieved). My OB came back into my room and suggested that we increase the magnesium since we didn't really have any options left. The magnesium increase did help a little. The very painful contractions subsided a bit so now they were only moderately uncomfortable again.

My husband left that morning to get some things done at home, and while I was in my room alone I started to feel sorry for myself. I thought I was going to be laying in that hospital bed for the next ten weeks of my pregnancy, hooked up to drugs, AND feeling contractions the whole time... I decided to call my good doula friend, Michelle, and she was able to come by and visit for a while since she was in the area already. She spent an hour talking with me about everything that I had been through and giving me encouragement. She prayed over me and I felt a tear land on my head towards the end of the prayer. I felt a release afterwards, very peaceful. We decided that I was going to eat some lunch after she left and then sleep for a while since I hadn't gotten much rest since arriving at the hospital.

Just before Michelle left, I got up to use the restroom and noticed some blood in my urine. I told the nurse and then said goodbye to Michelle. The nurse helped me get back in bed and began hooking me back up on the monitors. Then I felt something flow out of my vagina. I immediately said to her, "I think I'm bleeding..." She said she would put her gloves on and check. When she first looked, she couldn't tell and went to get another pad. She asked me if I thought my water had broken and I said, "Oh, I guess that would be better!"

When she was changing the pad, she said that yes, I was bleeding. Then she got another nurse. They both assessed and confirmed the bleeding. I knew that I was going to need a c-section. The contractions had caused my placenta to abrupt again, only this time I was hemorrhaging a lot. I could feel the blood oozing out in small gushes, and later learned that I had lost about 700cc. I called Andrew right away and told him to come to the hospital. Staff started swarming into my room. Someone began checking my vitals, another person gave me a special liquid to drink since I had been eating that morning, a nurse drew my blood...

Then the resident that I liked the least came in and said she needed to do a speculum exam. I was wondering what she was expecting to see other than a lot of blood. After she finished the exam, she said she needed to check my cervix. It felt like she shoved her fingers up inside me as far as she could :( She said I was dilated to 3cm. Then, my OB came in and said, "It looks like we need to do a c-section..." I could tell he was disappointed for me since he knew how much I was wanting a natural, drug-free birth. I told him that I was aware of needing the c-section, and everyone continued to prep me for the surgery.

I remember that Michelle had JUST left so I grabbed my phone and called her hoping that she was still in the parking garage. I said, "I'm bleeding! Please come back! Please come be with me!" I knew Andrew was not going to make it in time so I was hoping Michelle would since I was all by myself. I never really panicked though when I realized

I was bleeding, I felt so peaceful from her visit with me. Also, I could hear baby's heartbeat on the monitor and it sounded great.

I was wheeled into the OR. It was very bright, but I could hear some rock music playing so it definitely helped keep me at ease. I was expecting to be given general anesthesia because of everything happening so fast. However, I think because of baby's heart rate sounding good, my OB may have decided that there was time for a spinal. I didn't realize this until someone told me to curl up on my side. I was pretty nervous about getting the spinal and I was still having contractions. Luckily, a nurse sat next to me and held my hand while it was administered. I kept thinking, "Please don't paralyze me!" I felt a tingling, shooting pain down my left leg while it was being put in and told the anesthesiologist. He adjusted the needle and then finished.

When I was rolled back onto my back, I felt a tingly sensation traveling up my body, followed by numbness. I knew that some women feel like they're not breathing sometimes, so I just kept reminding myself that yes, I was breathing. I looked up at a bright light above me before the surgery, and saw that just past the light was a mirror. I decided to keep my eyes closed after that because I didn't know how I'd react later to seeing myself being cut open. I just laid there trying to listen to the music playing in the background.

I heard someone say "11:58" and thought that they must be starting. It didn't seem long after that that my doctor then said, "It's a boy!" I was surprised at how fast it happened that I asked him what he said. He again said, "It's a boy!" and I felt very happy. I knew Andrew was going to be very happy that he had a son. I heard people say "12:01" over and over and realized that must be what time my baby was born. I didn't expect to hear my baby cry because of how premature he was, and I'm pretty sure they didn't show him to me, although I had my eyes closed still. I knew they were going to be working hard on him.

I continued to lay there with my eyes closed trying to listen to the music and relax for the rest of the surgery. After a while, I asked Dr. Medchill if he was sewing me up, and he said he was and that he was almost done. Then it was over. I was wheeled out of the OR feeling pretty sedated (even though throughout the surgery I was fairly alert - I didn't realize until later that I was given Demoral). My husband, Andrew, Michelle, and my other friend Nichelle (an OB who I had worked with at the birth center) were all there afterwards giving me love. Andrew had arrived just when they were taking our son out of the OR to the NyICU. He was able to be with him and took pictures that he showed me when I was being wheeled to my room. Michelle had called Nichelle after I told her I was bleeding. Andrew and Nichelle just happened to take the same elevator up together but it took them a minute to recognize each other.

Once I was back in my room, a lot of my family and a few friends came to see me. I just remember feeling kind of drugged, as if I had just woken up from general anesthesia. Michelle stayed with me until later in the evening and did her best to keep things from getting too overwhelming with all the visitors. Andrew was able to bring back one person at a time to see our son in the NyICU.

Around 6pm or so, the lactation consultant came to my room to get me started with pumping. Michelle stayed until just afterwards when I was wheeled to another room which was closer to the NyICU. On my way there, they wheeled my bed into the NyICU as close as they could to my baby's isolette. I was able to reach inside and touch his hand. I remember seeing him, but I was so tired. Andrew took a few great pictures though of my hand with our baby's hand. I was able to see him the next day around noon when I was a bit more alert. And I was able to hold him for the first time a few days later. He was so light!

My recovery in the hospital was not so easy. I actually had symptoms of a uterine infection about two days after birth. We kind of think I may have contracted an infection sometime following the initial placental abruption, and that it caused me to have the preterm contractions. I also learned that most of the time with premature cesarean births that doctors are not always able to do a low transverse incision. Lucky for me, the contractions I had been having made my lower uterine segment thin out enough that Dr. Medchill *could* do a low transverse incision on my uterus. I think he also considered that I would be devastated to not be able to attempt a VBAC if I had a classical (vertical) scar. I stayed at the hospital for five days after the surgery.

It took a couple days for Andrew and I to choose our baby's first name, and when I knew I was going to be holding him for the first time, I made Andrew sit down and choose his middle name with me. During my 19 week ultrasound, our baby had his mouth open the whole time, so the name Jaron, which means "singing" seemed perfect :) We choose Malachi for his middle name, meaning "messenger."

Jaron Malachi Strmic was born at 27 2/7 weeks gestation on Wednesday, October 19, 2011 at 12:01pm. He weighed 2lbs 8oz and was 14 inches long.

Overall, the hospital experience was not as bad as I thought it would be. I really loved my doctor, and the nurses and other staff treated me very well. It helped that I was admitted that week or so before the birth because I was able to feel comfortable just being in the hospital and got to know the nurses and residents who cared for me.

I could write another story probably three times as long as Jaron's birth story just on his stay in the NyICU. In summary though, he was in the hospital for almost 10 more weeks (came home the day after Christmas) and is doing very well. He has ONLY had breastmilk (no formula supplements or fortifiers AT ALL - practically unheard of with premies) and currently weighs over 10 pounds!

This continues to be a very challenging road, but now that he is exclusively breastfeeding I am finally seeing some light and joy. I am looking forward to more of his smiles and I hope someday he is proud of himself for being such a strong baby and overcoming so much :)

