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Marc and the midwife get the birth pool ready

BY CAMILLA RANKIN

Home, sweet home

Home births are not everybody's cup of tea, but Victoria Bruce's three left her feeling all powerful, all woman. She shares the birth of her third child



Dad, Marc, helps Victoria through a painful contraction

“I WENT INTO LABOUR WITH Lexi at about 3:30am and for once, I was ready and had been for ages. James, my first child, was born three weeks early – I had no idea what to expect and the midwife only arrived 10 minutes before he was born! My second child, Luke also arrived three weeks early, after a day of racing around hiring birth pools and getting nappies. At least with his birth we managed to fill the pool and both my midwife and doula laboured with me, while James raced Nemo around in the water. So, when Lexi was actually on time, I had convinced myself that she was overdue – like all pregnant mothers in the middle of summer.

I called my midwife Karen, and she asked if she could bring along a camera crew who had missed a home/waterbirth and needed one for an antenatal video. Here’s the thing about a woman in labour: she’s not exactly thinking straight. So the camera and lights arrived and I provided the action.

The pool was set up in our lounge. The room is big and has doors that open out onto the garden and the fish pond. The dogs wandered in and out, the cats sat on the couch watching sagely, and James and Luke played underfoot. I remember sitting on the stairs as Karen walked in and when she asked how I was doing, replying that I had forgotten how incredibly painful contractions were, and was it too late for a surrogate? The camera crew was blissfully unobtrusive and I honestly forgot that they were there until friends of mine started seeing the video at their own antenatal classes! (Not something you particularly want your boss to watch).

James and Luke occupied themselves building a bridge with the couch pillows from the couch to the pool, and my sister-in-law kept an eye on them. Karen and Sally, my doula, had given me excellent advice with Luke and said not to scream as it would upset the children. Strangely enough, focusing on that control really helped and I did the “Kate Cruise silent birth”. It was important to me that my other children were there. I wanted >



Midwife, Karen talks Victoria through another contraction



Victoria relaxes in between contractions



Baby Lexi's head begins to emerge

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them to understand and feel a part of something so big and natural. I didn't want to disappear into a hospital and then come home three days later with a baby. I needed them to understand that they were a part of the family and this was their sister. Marc, my husband, was present at all the births and by Lexi's he was quite cool, calm and collected about setting the pool and organising things and staying out of my way. He was amazing and a centre of nonchalant ease while all around descended in chaos.

My labour went very fast and there was a terrifying moment where Karen couldn't hear the heartbeat. I gave one almighty push, one of those that threatens to rend you in two, and Lexi swam into the water. She was tiny, with blue eyes and black hair. Marc came in to cut her cord and she was bundled up and cuddled by two big brothers, who were totally in awe of her from the word go. Both James and Luke were incredibly protective of their sister, but also needed to be cuddled up with their mom for their own special time. For a long time, I'd put Lexi to sleep with Luke in his bed and the two would cuddle up. Even now they are incredibly close.

I wanted to have home births because I hate hospitals; they inspire fear in me. I wouldn't say home births or waterbirths are the best, but they worked for me. Labour is much easier if the mom is relaxed and I couldn't relax in a hospital. Some women would feel terrified giving birth at home and find that the array of hospital machines that go ping give them a feeling of safety. I loved having a waterbirth and being at home. I felt that I was doing what I was meant to and it was natural and perfect. A hospital would have made me feel like a patient and disempowered when I most needed to feel the the opposite.

Lexi's birth was by far the easiest for me, I tore slightly, but everything went very smoothly. Lexi was born at ten to seven in the morning and at half past seven, I loaded the car with my very new newborn and her brothers, and took the boys to school. YP ”



Baby Alexandra makes her grand entrance



Victoria meets her third child, Alexandra (Lexi)



Dad, Marc does the honours of cutting the cord



Midwife, Karen weighs newborn Lexi



Lexi says her first hello to her happy family