

# Birth Story

Category: Birth

written by Pamela Adelstein | December 22, 2024

When my now-grown children were babies sleeping, my husband and I quipped as drunken smiles spread across their faces, "Womb." When their sleepy smiles faded and they whimpered and pouted we commented, "Birth canal."

As a family physician who has "delivered" hundreds of babies (medical speak for attending a birth), I consider myself well appraised of the uterus and vagina of a person in labor. I have wiped away blood, amniotic fluid, meconium, vomitus, stool and urine. I have touched tissues and instrumented bodily orifices.

I birthed my babies at home—intentionally—and I delight each year in sharing my children's birth stories with them on their birthdays. With the passage of time, the details I share with them have shifted. On my younger child's third birthday, I attempted to convey awe and wonder: "I pushed three times, and you were born!" To my shock in their sweet baby voice they replied, "I don't like the pushing part." This year, on their twentieth birthday, we shared a good laugh about that.

My mother shared details of my birth story. Being 1971, she was given "twilight sleep" during labor, and immediately after I was born, I was whisked off to the nursery. My mother received hospital-recommended medication to suppress lactation so I could be fed new-fangled formula. This sanitized, fluid-free birth was further etched into my memory with my frequent perusals of my birth book. Hospital bracelets, my lock of hair, the photo of my smiling mother, wheeled out of the hospital with me swaddled in her arms – how I loved these artifacts as a young girl.

Years later, as a mother and a physician, a disconcerting thought arose: My mother pushed me out of her vagina. Yuck! I had no desire to imagine either of my parents' physicality in this way. Yet I could not un-see what I had envisioned. The intimacy of this physical connection, while obvious and universal, felt viscerally overwhelming. Additionally, imagining the vulnerability and helplessness of my newly birthed self was deeply unsettling.

Since these thoughts, I have briefly paused before gleefully launching into my children's birth stories on their birthdays to wonder if they will someday have a similar revelation about their birth. Will these stories, which are my deep joy, become their revulsion? Some years they roll their eyes and rush the birth story along. Perhaps this stems from a kernel of such understanding.

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