

There Is No Easy Way to Give Birth

Category: Birth

written by Mary Janicke | December 14, 2024

My first child was born in a U.S. Naval hospital. There were no childbirth classes to attend in those days, so my sister lent me her nursing school text book on labor and delivery. I read it every night but still was not prepared for what was to come.

One morning in early June, I awoke to find myself having contractions. At first I thought *this isn't too bad*. Soon they became more frequent and more intense. I would freeze, paralyzed with pain. It was time to go to the hospital. My husband, a Navy JAG officer, drove me to the hospital, checked me in, and left. The Navy at that time did not allow husbands to stay with their wives during labor. They told him they would call him once the baby was born.

I was taken to a room to be prepped and checked. There was enough dilation for me to stay, so they shaved my pubic hair, a practice that has thankfully been abandoned. Then they took me to a room and put me in a crib-like bed with the sides up, leaving me to moan and groan on my own. Every so often someone would come in to check on me and listen to how loudly I was groaning. Not loud enough they would say and then leave me to suffer. An eternity of pain went on and on. I would grab the bars with each contraction and yell out a prayer.

When it got dark and there was still no news, my husband started to get worried. He knew the commanding officer of the hospital, so he called him to ask what was happening. The commanding officer roused my OB/GYN out of his bed and ordered him to go and check on me. Our daughter was born at twelve minutes after midnight. Suddenly, all the pain was forgotten.

My husband was released from active duty two weeks after our daughter was born. I had a second daughter a few years later and then, after another few years, a son. Each time I got a little better at birthing. I was never again left to suffer unattended. I have forgotten the pain from my first labor and delivery but not the sense of abandonment.

Mary Janicke

Houston, Texas